



Schools Play Advisor  
Ingrid Wilkinson

# Improving children's health and well-being through play



# Parents Information Presentation

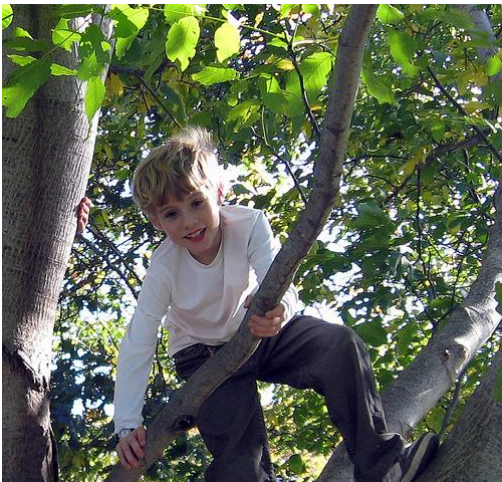


## Introduction to OPAL

- Changes in childhood
- Why is play so important?
- What is OPAL?
- What will it mean for my child?
- What you can do to support OPAL



Lets think play.....10  
years old.  
Where were you, who  
were you with, what  
were you up to?



Childhood has changed....  
children have not!

# Changes to childhood and the impact!

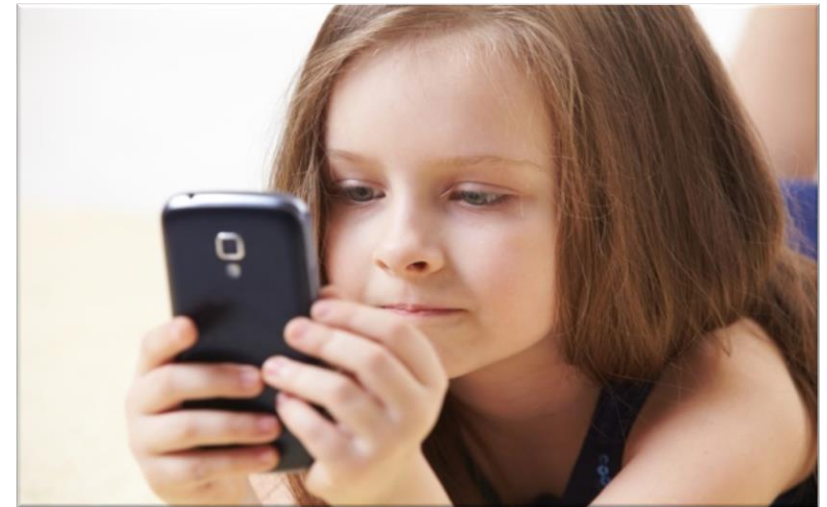


Obesity



Mental health Problems

Play deprivation



Lack of Resilience

No risk management

copyright OPAL CIC Inability to regulate emotions

# Key Facts



## Mental Health

We have the worst rate of mental health problems in children than ever before



Significant increase in self harm and mental health disorders



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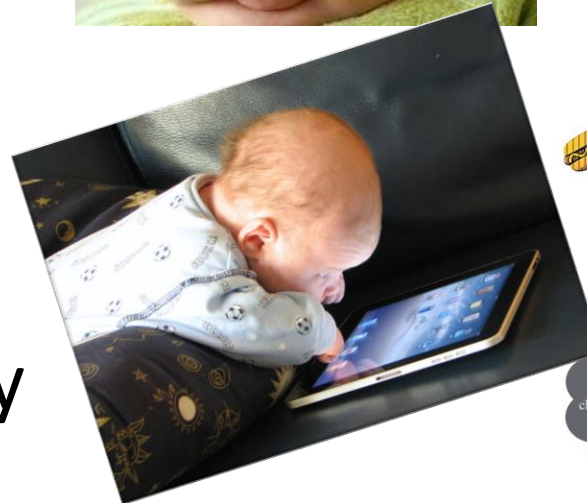


# Key Facts

Physical – We have an obesity epidemic!

Reception – 1 in 5 overweight  
Year 6 – increases to 1 in 3

- Inactive
- Poor diet
- Technology
- Transport
- Lifestyle
- Lack of free play



# Play Deprivation



What happens when children do not have sufficient play opportunities:



- Poor concentration levels
- Poor cognitive development
- Poor social skills
- Poorer chance to develop emotional intelligence, independence, self esteem and confidence
- Poor community cohesion
- Poorer ability to deal with stressful or traumatic situations
- Poorer ability to assess and manage risk

# What play can do for children



- Letting children go out to play is one of the best things that parents can do for their children's health

University College, London, 2004



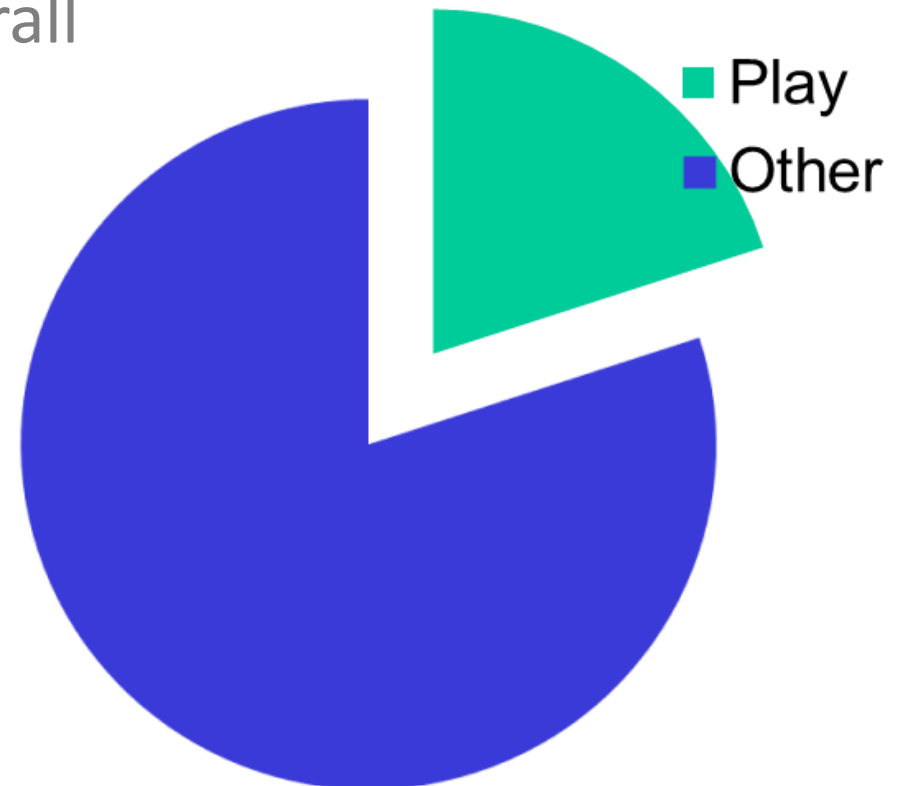
Play is 20% of a child's school life – lets make the most of that time!



# School's play a key role!



- Playtime makes up 20% of school life
- Per year - 231 hours, 37 days, 7.4 weeks...or 1.4 years overall



**We are going to make 20% of that time into amazing playtimes every single day for all of our children.**

# Play has a very large role in how the human brain develops

Play provides the brain building blocks that will set them up for the rest of their life. Children :

- gather information about the world
- master the use of their bodies
- learn social skills
- pick up every little detail to do with fitting into the culture that surrounds them.



Children are learning sponges





# Benefits of Play

- strength and endurance
  - whole body co-ordination
  - emotional attachment
  - emotional and social skills
  - hand-eye co-ordination
  - thinking, reasoning, problem-solving and creativity
  - early language development
- communication skills
  - literacy
  - numeracy
  - artistic creativity
  - narrative skills
  - social and group work skills
  - understanding rules
  - social skills
  - discussion skills
  - mental representation

**self-regulation:** the ability to be aware of and regulate one's own cognitive and emotional mental states, behaviour and activity.

**RESILIENCE**

# Child at play.....do not interrupt!

Understanding what play is, is so important!



## For a child

- Discovery
- Repeating
- Mastery
- Fascination
- Awe
- Learning
- Making sense of.
- Concentration
- Focus



## For an adult

- I could help them
- I've got a good idea
- They could do it better than that
- They're going to struggle with this
- Its too dangerous for them
- They're too small to do that

**Do not disturb...brain in development!**

# How can we best support play?

- offer a safe learning environment – IMPROVE SPACE/ACCESS
- let children follow their own play urges – POLICY/PLANNING
- support them without interrupting - COMMUNICATION
- watch and wait as they discover, invent and explore – RISK BENEFIT APPROACH
- UNDERSTAND the play process – KNOWLEDGE/EDUCATION

Take a strategic approach



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Create sustainable change in culture and practice





Risky play  
combines  
fun and  
stress  
.....  
turbo  
charging  
brain  
development

Who can ride a bike?  
What's the first thing  
that happens when you  
start to learn this skill?

# RISK & PLAY

**When you take a risk,  
your brain changes.**

Do you remember climbing to the top of a tree? Or swinging as fast as you could until you felt like you might fall off? These risks are more than fun – they help brains develop. **Risky play combines fun and stress – turbo-charging brain development.**

It can be stressful to climb to the top of the tower if you haven't done it before but learning to handle that stress will make you more resilient under future pressures.

**Risky play also develops your executive function, the parts of your brain in charge of decision-making.** Deciding whether or not to jump off something tests the limits of judgement. The only way to learn to make decisions is by practicing making decisions.

**And scrapes are the vivid way you need to improve your** . Thankfully, you'll get better and your brain have developed from the experience.

**BUILD** your brain.

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Risky play also develops your executive function, the parts of the brain in charge of decision-making...the only way to learn to make good decisions is by practising making decisions.

Safe-guarding and personal risk assessment

## CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH SEPTEMBER 2012

*Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'.*

### STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE MEANS

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

# Risks of 'risk-free' play



- Scaredy-cats
- All work and no play
- Boredom
- Listless, no learning
- Lack of control
- Unprepared for life...now and in the future
- Incompetence



# Benefits of 'risk' in play



- Reduces risk of obesity
- Improves physical health and development, gross and fine motor skills
- Resilience and capacity
- Social skills – team leader
- Inspires creativity
- Confidence in learning and self esteem
- Competency





**ARTICLE 31**  
United Nations  
Convention on the  
Rights of the Child  
(UNCRC)

The child has the right  
to leisure, play and  
participation in cultural  
and artistic activities.



# OPAL – Outdoor Play and learning

## **School Improvement programme for Outstanding Playtimes!**



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# OPAL Social Enterprise Company

## Highlights



- San Francisco –World Forum Foundation Keynote - 2012
- New Zealand – Early Education Council Keynote – 2013
- Dubai – Oasis Early Education – Play in Early Years - 2013
- Istanbul – International Play Association – Keynote – 2014
- UK – International Play Work Conference – Keynote – 2015, 2016, 2017

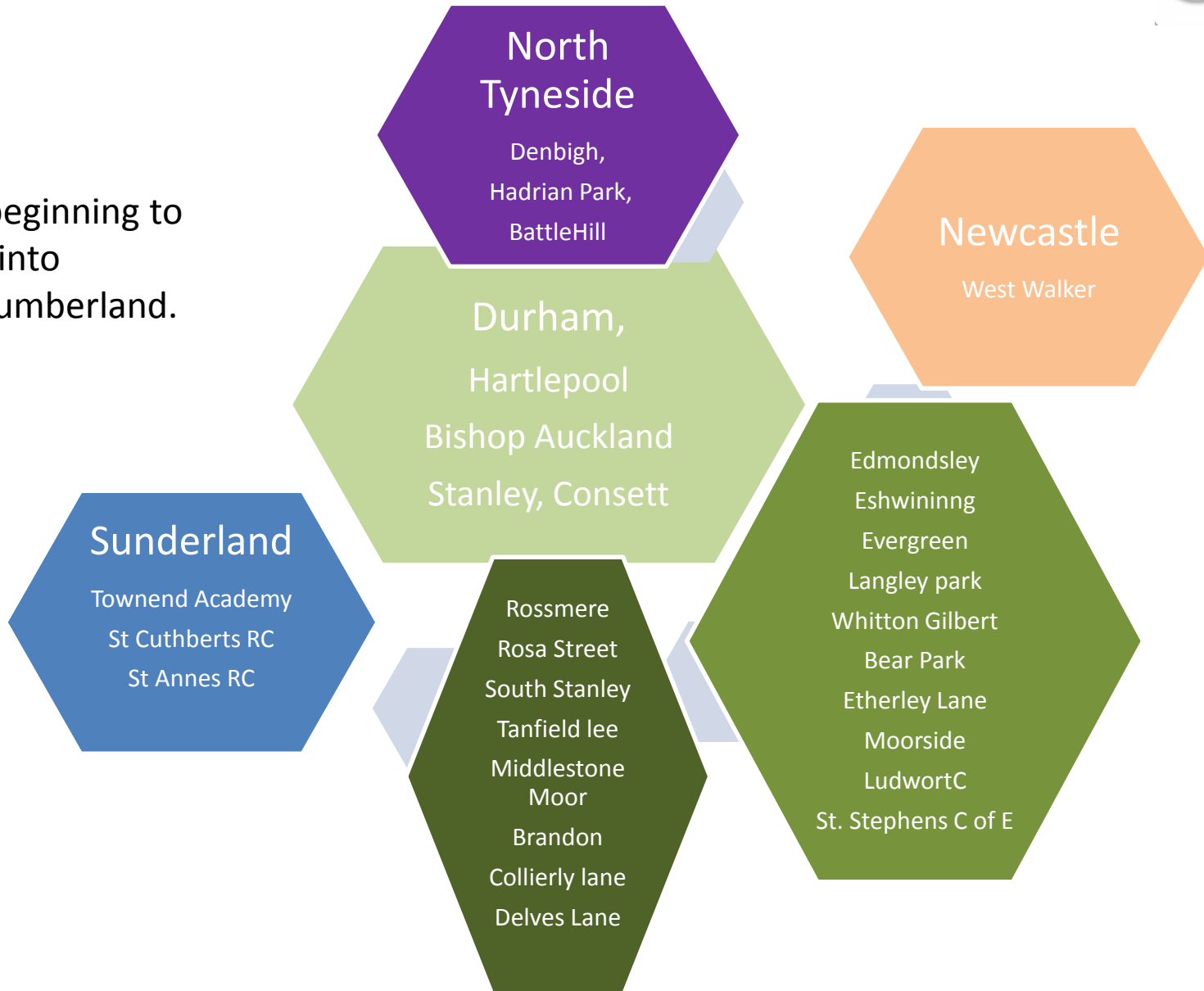
OPAL works with schools across the UK including:

- London, Essex, Devon, Somerset, North Somerset, Glos, South Glos, Scotland, Lincs, Tyneside, Liverpool, Kent, Hamps, Manchester, Sunderland, Durham, Newcastle
- OPAL is currently supporting development of the OPAL programme in Paparangi New Zealand, Toronto Canada, Perth Australia and working to help establish an new NGO 'Play Nigeria.

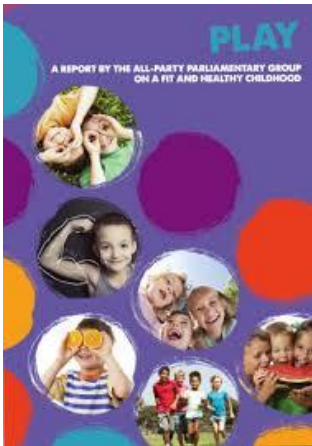


# OPAL North East

Now beginning to  
move into  
Northumberland.



# About us



**PLAY IN EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING**

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# What does an OPAL school look like?



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**Messy, creative, inclusive and much more!**



If we never took a risk our children would not learn to walk, climb stairs, ride a bike or swim: business would not develop innovative products...scientists would not experiment and discover, we would not have great art, literature, music and architecture.



Children's play is enriched by what is provided and the space in which they play.....



Some children benefit from modelling and being offered ideas, others do not need this.

**When children play anything is possible!**

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**Physical, fun and challenging!**

There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing



OPAL schools overcome challenge and ensure enriched play opportunities can be achieved for all children



Every child is included in OPAL

# OFSTED and OPAL

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The playground is a hive of activities and no one is left out. Pupils support one another when someone is hurt and the high level of integration cuts across age group and ethnicity. Pupils are extremely proud of their OPAL, which they contributed to developing. They see the OPAL as an integral part of their school, a development that was justly given a platinum award for inventiveness'

Kender Primary OFSTED 2016



# OPAL programme impact



1. Accidents and incidents are down 90%
2. Children are playing much more creatively
3. We (Supervisors) enjoy our jobs much more
4. The children are forming much wider social groups
5. We don't have children who are not engaged
6. Post lunch lessons have gained 10 minutes teaching time
7. The atmosphere is much more fun and less stressful

*Stowford Primary School, Nov 2014*

# Testimonial – Head Teacher 2016



*'OPAL has revolutionised our play at lunchtime. From being football dominated we now offer an exciting, creative, physical environment which has something to offer everyone. Children are now highly active and interactive; challenged both physically and mentally. There is high quality role play, greater integration across the school and so much creativity. You can build a den, play in the mud kitchen, chat in the stilt houses, swing on the tyre swings, enjoy a picnic, dig to your heart's content - the possibilities are endless and our children love it.'*

*Kay Hemmings, Head Teacher, Tanfield Lee, Durham*

# What does this mean for my child?

We would like play in our school to become a freely chosen activity which your child will find satisfying and enjoyable. It will provide them with an opportunity to use their intuition, be physically active, be creative, make their own decisions, be outdoors and overall have fun.





# How can parents support OPAL?



- Provide loose parts
- Provide wellies, suitable clothing/waterproofs
- Be tolerant - mud, dirt etc
- Recognise the benefits of OPAL to your child's health and well-being



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# Provide loose parts!

- What's in your loft.....maybe really useful!
- Who do you know....plummer, brickie, water board, sign writer, office...what waste might they have?
- Most things offer tremendous play value





**A strategic school improvement programme  
supporting  
school improvement through play!**



**OPAL supports senior managers to create  
sustainable change in culture and practice.  
Once you become an OPAL school you will  
remain one!**

# Thankyou so much for listening



Check out our website: [www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)

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