

Playwork NOS – GLOSSARY

This table sets out the glossary for the 2026 playwork NOS

Term	Definition
Accessible	<p>An accessible play space is a space which is barrier-free, allows users access to move around the space and offers participation opportunities for a range of differing abilities. Not every child will be able to actively use everything within an accessible play space. Accessibility relates not just to the space itself, but also in how people might reasonably reach the space from their own home.</p>
Additional support needs	<p>Additional support needs refers to the extra or different support that a child or young person may require, at any time, to participate, learn, develop, and thrive alongside their peers.</p> <p>A child may have additional support needs because of a wide range of factors, including (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disability or long-term health conditions • neurodivergence or learning differences • social, emotional or mental health needs • trauma or adverse life experiences • family or caring circumstances • barriers created by the environment, systems or attitudes • temporary or changing situations (e.g. bereavement, transition, illness) • <p>Importantly, a child does not need a medical diagnosis to have additional support needs, and those needs may be short-term, intermittent or long-term</p>

Analyse	Breaking down and interpreting information
Anti-discriminatory language	Current and relevant terminology including; equity, equality, diversity, inclusion, inclusive practice, anti-discriminatory practice, anti-racist practice, social justice, rights, poverty, neurodiversity, neurodivergence, additional support needs, unconscious bias.
Asset based approach	An approach that recognises, values and builds on children’s existing strengths, capacities, play skills, interests, identities and ways of being, rather than focusing on deficits, needs or what children are perceived to lack.
Barriers to play	Barriers to play will be experienced by all children in different ways and at different times. For some children, perhaps because of their age or because of complex additional support needs, more adult assistance may be necessary to support their right to play in a nurturing and responsive way. As playworkers we should aim to be proactive and preventative as well as reactive in removing barriers
Behaviour you find challenging	This terminology is used instead of ‘challenging behaviour’ as the emphasis should be on the adult understanding their responses to children’s behaviour in order to support the child to feel secure in their setting.
Childhood development	Refers to childhood development relevant to playwork
Children's Rights	Refers to ALL children's rights
Continuing Professional Development	Informal and formal CPD. Also know as professional development, continuous or ongoing professional development.

Communication	Refers to non-verbal and verbal communication. Includes non-verbal communication where the cause is a condition or impairment.
Community Partners	The wide range of individuals and organisations in the community that playwork settings may be required to work with. Including local government, voluntary organisations, community groups, businesses, parents and other community members.
CPD Strategies	A range of different CPD strategies including; reading, training, visiting other settings, webinars, supervision, online forums, podcasts, qualifications, reading newsletters, job shadowing
Benefit-risk assessment	A process of risk assessment focussed on determining whether the benefits of a particular activity outweigh the residual risks of harm. This is being used in line with the ISO standard, it is also widely referred to as risk-benefit assessment, and occasionally risk-benefit analysis
Children/ children and young people	The legal definition of a child is up to the age of 18. Whilst some practitioners may also use young people, teenagers or other terms for older children, for the purposes of the NOS, the term child/ children refers to all children up to the age of 18.
Colleagues	Other adults that you work with outside of your immediate team.
Contemporary frameworks	Legislative, theoretical, policy and evaluative frameworks relevant to play and playwork practice
Dietary requirements	Requirements for a specific diet which may be due to cultural or religious requirements, preferences, allergies or other reasons.
Disabled children	Under the social model of disability, a disabled child is a child who has an impairment or condition and is disabled by barriers in society, rather than by their impairment itself.
Dynamic benefit-risk assessment	Active ongoing benefit-risk assessment of situations as they occur – usually taking place as a mental rather than a written process. This is

	linked to playwork intervention and various models of dynamic benefit-risk assessment.
Environment (play environment)	The total context in which play takes place, including physical space, social relationships, emotional atmosphere, cultural expectations and the presence and behaviour of adults
Equality, diversity and inclusion	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is an umbrella term that brings together three interconnected principles which guide how organisations, services and practitioners ensure fairness, respect, access and belonging for all people. In some instances 'equity' is also used as an addition, or alternative, to equality.
Evaluation	Evaluation in playwork is part of the reflective process of making judgements about the value of playwork practice, environments and interventions, based on observation, reflection and feedback, in order to support and improve children's freely chosen, self-directed play. Evaluation can be short or long-term
Facilitate	In respect of playwork practice, 'facilitate' means to support, protect and enhance the play process by creating and maintaining the conditions in which children can play freely, without directing, controlling or imposing adult agendas on their play. Facilitation is deeply rooted in the Playwork Principles.
Inclusive	An inclusive play space provides a barrier-free environment, with supporting infrastructure, which meet the wide and varying needs of every child. All children will enjoy high levels of participation opportunities, equally rich in play value.
Inclusive Playwork Practice	Inclusive playwork practice is an approach to playwork that actively removes physical, social, cultural, attitudinal and organisational barriers

	<p>so that <i>all</i> children and young people can access, participate in and shape their own freely chosen play, in ways that respect their rights, dignity, individuality and agency.</p> <p>Inclusive playwork practice is underpinned by the Playwork Principles and recognises that inclusion is not about making children fit existing provision, but about adapting environments, attitudes and practice to meet children where they are.</p>
Loose parts	Loose parts include the provision of a wide range of natural and manufactured materials that can be used to build, create, destroy and be imbued with imaginary qualities, as part of children’s play.
Materials	The physical items that children interact with during play, they include loose parts, natural elements and everyday objects.
Neurodivergent	Minority neurotypes can include conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyscalculia, dyslexia and Developmental Coordination Disorder and can also be described as neurodevelopmental conditions. Collectively people with minority neurotypes are referred to as neurodivergent.
Neurodiversity	Neurodiversity refers to the fact that not all brains think or feel in the same way and that these are natural human differences. Neurodiversity refers to everyone.
Observation	In playwork, observation is the intentional, reflective process of watching, listening to and noticing children’s play, the play space and interactions, in order to understand the play process and use that understanding to support, protect and facilitate play.

	Observation in playwork is not about assessment or judgement, but about understanding play from the child’s perspective so that practitioners can respond appropriately.
Organisational Framework	Refers at Playwork Manager level to the policies and procedures of own setting and the importance of viewing and reviewing these as a whole.
Parents	Adults with responsibility for the children including parents, primary caregivers, carers, kinship carers, biological parents, person with caring responsibility.
Play Behaviours	Play behaviour is often described as the observable actions, expressions, and interactions that children engage in when they are freely choosing and directing their own play. It reflects their internal motivations, creativity, and responses to their environment
Play bias	Play bias refers to the conscious or unconscious assumptions, preferences, or value judgements that influence how adults perceive, enable, restrict, or respond to children’s play.
Play cycle	Theoretical model that describes the process of play as articulated by Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else, in the 1998 Colorado Paper.
Play needs and preferences	Play needs refer to the fundamental biological, psychological and social requirements that must be met through play for children’s health, wellbeing and development. Play preferences refer to the individual interests, choices and forms of play that children are drawn to at a particular time.
Play Policy	Setting policy document that should include setting approaches to play, the playwork approach, children’s rights, risk management and other relevant information.

Playwork Approach	Playwork is a unique approach to working with children of all ages in a range of settings. The key purpose of the playworker is to support and facilitate play as described by the Playwork Principles.
Playwork constructions	Constructions that are facilitated by playworkers providing the resources, loose parts and tools for children to create large or small, temporary or semi-permanent, structures such as platforms, go karts, tipis, sandpits or dens
Playwork Practice	This refers to practice as informed and underpinned by the Playwork Principles, Playwork theory, observations, interactions and reflections on own and others' playwork practice
Play spaces	Play spaces are the spaces that children create, claim, adapt and use for play within an environment, with or without the support of adults. Play spaces are not fixed or pre-defined areas; they are formed through children's play actions, relationships and meanings, and may be temporary, shifting or symbolic rather than permanent physical locations
Playwork Manager	Member of staff that oversees the work of playworkers and support playworkers. Playwork Managers may also have varying roles in agreeing and managing budgets, overall running of a playwork setting and policies and procedures.
Playwork setting	Any setting for children where the playwork approach can be applied – this includes adventure playgrounds, youth clubs, schools, out of school childcare, childminders, day nurseries, peripatetic playwork, open access playwork, prisons, hospitals and more
Playworker	Member of staff who works to facilitate children's play in line with the Playwork Principles. May work unsupervised as part of a wider team and have various responsibilities within that team.

Professional practice	An understanding of how to operate as a professional including the importance of a professional demeanour, working to deadlines, responding to communications and presentation.
Reflection	The intentional process of thinking critically about one's playwork practice, observations, decisions and interactions, in order to understand their impact on children's play and to inform future practice.
Reflective practice	Playworkers thinking deeply about what they do to identify what they do well and what they could improve to enhance their professional practice. It is an ongoing process and can happen before, during and after practice.
Risk	An evaluation of a hazard and its likelihood of causing harm.
Risk Management Policy	Policy that articulates the setting approach to risk management and may include reference to dynamic benefit-risk assessment, the importance of risk taking in play and written benefit-risk assessment.
Safer Recruitment	May also be known as Safe Recruitment and refers to DBS checks, following up on references and other practices that support the recruitment process. Guidance varies across the four nations.
SLLRRRP	Reflective practice model for dynamic benefit-risk assessment – refers to Stop, look, listen, reflect, react, reflect, practice
Support playworker	Member of staff who works to facilitate children's play in line with the Playwork Principles. Works alongside playworkers, under supervision.
Staff	Throughout the NOS the term staff refers to staff within the setting whether paid or unpaid and may have a number of different roles (including non-playwork roles).
Supervision and appraisal	Supervision is a regular, planned process that supports employees to reflect on their work, manage responsibilities and wellbeing, and maintain safe and effective practice. Appraisal is a formal review of an employee's performance over a set period, used to recognise achievements, identify development needs and agree future objectives.

Team	People that you work closely with within own organisation towards a shared objective
Trauma Informed Practice	Trauma-informed practice is an approach to working with people that recognises the widespread impact of trauma, understands how trauma can affect behaviour, relationships and wellbeing, and actively seeks to avoid re-traumatisation by creating environments that are safe, respectful, and empowering
Unconscious bias	Unconscious bias refers to the automatic, unintentional assumptions, attitudes or stereotypes that influence how we perceive, understand and respond to other people without conscious awareness.
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
Wellbeing	State of being comfortable, healthy or happy.

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