



# The Playwork Principles – an overview

The Playwork Principles establish a professional and ethical framework for playwork and must be seen as a whole. The Playwork Principles underpin every aspect of playworkers' work. They define the playwork approach and provide a shared understanding of what playworkers do.

The Playwork Principles describe what is special and unique about play (Principles 1 and 2). They provide a working definition of play and why it is different to other behaviours. They also describe the playwork approach and point of view when working with children and young people (Principles 3 to 8).

The Playwork Principles are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

It is vital that playworkers share a common understanding so they are all able to recognise and describe play behaviour and decide how to respond. This common approach or viewpoint helps to say what the playwork profession is and does.

### Are principles just rules?

Although there are some similarities, principles are not rules. Principles are sometimes described as a philosophy or ethos, and in this case they cover the beliefs and working practices that make playwork different from other professions.

### History

Before the Playwork Principles there were the Playwork Assumptions and Values, which were developed during drafting of the Playwork National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the early 1990s. During the 2002 review of the National Occupational Standards for Playwork at level 2,

playworkers who were consulted saw the need to revise them.

In the meantime, in Wales we realised that what was said in *The First Claim ... a framework for playwork quality assessment* (Hughes 2001) did not match with the Assumptions and Values for Playwork. In late 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government gave Play Wales money to lead a UK review and consultation on the Playwork Assumptions and Values. Leading play and playwork organisations across the UK agreed to contribute to the process.

There were three phases of consultation with playworkers and others who had an interest. A scrutiny group of experienced playworkers and playwork trainers from across the UK was recruited to act as an honest broker overseeing the consultations through which the Principles were developed.

The group evaluated the consultation responses and revised the successive drafts of the proposed Principles to best represent the majority view. The Playwork Principles were signed off as fit for purpose and subsequently endorsed by SkillsActive (the Sectors Skills Council for Playwork) in 2005.

## Ownership

The Playwork Principles are not fixed in stone and they do not belong to a particular organisation or person – they belong to all playworkers; the profession as a whole.

The Playwork Principles are held in trust for the UK playwork profession by the Scrutiny Group.

They represent the beliefs of people in the playwork field and can be changed (through consultation) if enough of us feel they are out of date or don't meet our needs.

## Issues

One issue that has raised concerns equal opportunities and the fact that no explicit mention is made of disabled children.

This does not mean disabled children were not considered during the writing of the Principles or that they are covered by a different set of Principles. On the contrary much time was devoted to considering issues of discrimination.

Where the Playwork Principles refer to children and young people, they mean all children and young people whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need.

All the Principles apply to all children and to all playworkers. We cannot pick and choose – they exist as a body of beliefs that are applied together.

For more information about the inclusion debate in relation to the Playwork Principles visit: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/inclusiondebate](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/inclusiondebate)

## The Playwork Principles

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.



## Ethics and playwork

The term ethic has come to mean ‘a rule of conduct, a moral code, moral values, principles or standards.’ Ethics refer to morality; the sense of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. In playwork terms, principles are a moral guide to the relationship between the playworker and others. The Playwork Principles are, the ethics or moral guide of the playwork profession, but of course they are not the only ethics that might influence what we do in our lives.

Examples of the three main types of ethics:

- **Personal ethics**  
‘I do this as I believe it is the right (true) thing to do.’
- **Professional ethics**  
‘I do this because I believe it is my duty.’
- **Global ethics**  
‘I do this because I believe it will result in a better world.’

‘From a playworker perspective the Playwork Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork’.

This means that they describe the approach and frame how to think about working with children as professional playworkers. However, we should recognise that we might have a different set of ethics that we use in our personal life.

Our culture, home experience and social upbringing all influence our own set of ethics. It’s important to look at what informs our personal ethical standpoint as there is a possibility it might conflict with the professional ethical standpoint we are being asked to agree to at work.

Also, in a world where there are many competing agendas that have an impact on children, the nature of playwork and its growing professional status mean it has become more important than ever that there is an agreed code of practice for playworkers to protect children and young people using play services as well as to define the duty of the professional.

For more information about the Playwork Principles visit: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples)

## Reference

Bob Hughes (2001) *The First Claim ... a framework for playwork quality assessment*. Cardiff: Play Wales.



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