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## Background

Experts in children's mental health and development are urging the government to prioritise children's social and emotional wellbeing when easing lockdown and re-opening schools (Play First, 2020).

In the short term, they suggest less focus on educational attainment and 'catch up', and greater focus on encouraging play to support social and emotional wellbeing. With social distancing still in place, this document shares some thoughts on how to provide your child with social play opportunities given the current restrictions.

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## Why it matters

Play is an essential part of children's development. During crisis, play can also have a therapeutic role. It can help children to heal, and to feel a sense of normality and joy. Some children might have time, space and permission to play during lockdown, and might be playing with siblings and parents. This may not be possible for some children.

Children have a want, need and right to play. It is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children also have the right to express views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have these taken seriously.

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## Play with peers

Children have been unable to play in person with friends since March. Social interaction with peers happens primarily via play. Not having this might mean that children feel lonely, isolated and sad. When talking with children, it can be helpful to acknowledge these feelings, empathise with them, and talk about how together you can feel a little better again.

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## Protective factors

Play is a way for children to:

- Stay emotionally healthy
- Stay physically active
- Relax and forget about worries
- Make sense of new experiences and changes
- Cope with feelings that are difficult or frightening.

Playing can help children to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness. It helps in the moment and the longer term.

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## Ideas to consider

- Can you provide time, space and permission for your child to play every day? It might only be a small space but do they have permission to make a mess and noise?
- Can your child play outside when it is cold/wet if they want to?
- What, how, where and with whom does your child most like to play? What's possible now and what can you plan?
- *Continued in next box...*



## Importance of Play

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## Signposting

Play First [letter to government ministers](#) and [associated article](#)

International Play Association (IPA) <http://ipaworld.org/resources/for-parents-and-carers-play-in-crisis/>

Play Wales website, including [Top Tips](#) and [a collection of play related articles and blogs](#)

You could also get in touch with your child's school if you would like to discuss more about supporting your child's play and social and emotional wellbeing.

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- When lockdown eases, can favourite activities be adapted slightly?
- Are there types of play your child enjoys with low levels of physical contact? (e.g. running, dancing, storytelling, making music, playing alongside and chatting with own set of toys/materials)
- If in school, who are they in a small group with? Can you keep to this social bubble when playing outside of school?
- If playing with others, can you find ways to keep risk low (e.g. wash hands, physical contact for only short periods)
- Are there ways for your child to socially connect with a wider group of children (e.g. via video calls/games, letters).

Contact details: If you'd like to discuss further please contact the Educational Psychology Service (EPS@salford.gov.uk or educationpsychology@tameside.gov.uk)