



How to organise playing out sessions on your street – a step by step manual



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Introduction

Welcome!

This is a step-by step guide to organising ‘playing out’ or street play sessions, based on the experience of parents and residents across the UK.

This manual (also available to download from our website, with [clickable links](#)), together with the [‘4 steps films’](#) on our website should cover what you need to know, but if you have any questions, please feel free to [contact us](#) via phone or email.

There are also lots of useful things, like template letters, which you can download from our website.

What is ‘playing out’?

In June 2009, two Bristol neighbours, Alice Ferguson and Amy Rose, came up with the idea of short, resident-led road closures simply to allow children to play out freely on their own street and for neighbours to meet. They called the idea ‘playing out’ – it has also been called ‘street play’ or ‘play streets’. The idea has spread, transforming hundreds of street communities across the UK.



Amy and Alice

The main features of the ‘playing out’ model are:

- Organised by residents on their own street
- Free play – not organised activities
- Temporary road closure
- Short, regular sessions
- A catalyst for change

Why should I do it?

This is a safe, simple way to let your children and others on the street play out together on a regular basis. We know, through personal experience and academic research, that it has many benefits, including:

- Children are physically active (up to five times more than normal)
- Children make friends on the street
- Children gain skills and independence
- Neighbours meet and get to know each other
- Your street feels safer and friendlier
- You gain confidence through taking action to change things



And, of course, it is joyful! But ‘playing out’ is also part of changing things in a deeper, longer-term way. Seeing the street filled with children is a powerful thing and can really start to shift the way people think about their right to play out in streets and public space. By taking action in this way, you are part of a growing grassroots movement towards children regaining the freedom to play out every day.



How long will it take?

You will need a bit of time and energy. The whole process, from having the idea to the first session, takes around 2-3 months. But please don't let that put you off – the work can be shared and much of that time is simply waiting for the council to give permission!

Before you start

Making your street a place for play is quite a radical step and it helps to have some moral support. If you know any neighbours already, it is worth talking to them before putting the idea out to the whole street.



Step 1. Talk to neighbours and set a date

The first meeting.

Invite your neighbours to an informal meeting to discuss the idea. This ensures that everyone feels included from the start and can raise any questions or concerns.



Choose a place, time and date that will be convenient and comfortable for people. A local pub, café, someone's front room or even out in the street, all work well. You can adapt the *meeting invitation* from our website and talk to people in person. Before the meeting, check the application process in your area as councils have different procedures – you can find out more from our [website](#) or call your council directly.

The aims of this first meeting are to:

- Share the playing out idea and generate enthusiasm for it.
- Discuss any questions or concerns.

And if there's enough interest:

- Choose your dates/times.
- Agree who will do what.

Share the playing out idea

The main aim of this meeting is to propose and discuss the idea. You may want to show the video from our homepage or ask people to share their own memories of playing out to break the ice. This will no doubt generate some lively discussion about street play and related issues. Some people may have questions or concerns, which need to be heard. See [Possible Concerns](#) at the end of this manual.

If there's not enough interest, it may be best to leave it for now and try again later. If you have no response at all, look on the website at [Easy and Effortless things](#). You are not alone in wanting your children to feel a sense of freedom and independence and you can still be part of trying to change things. Some streets have found a street party or [Big Lunch](#) to be a good starting point, or you may have your own ideas!



Set your dates

If people are up for it - well done! Now you can set your dates. Road closure applications take around 4-6 weeks to process, so take this into account. Think about how often you'd like to close, and for how long for and how much of the road. Don't be over ambitious! If there are some concerns or objections, you might want to do a one-off session to test the waters.

We started by doing sessions after school, to boost the idea of it being a normal part of everyday life, but weekends are also fine – whatever suits you and your neighbours.

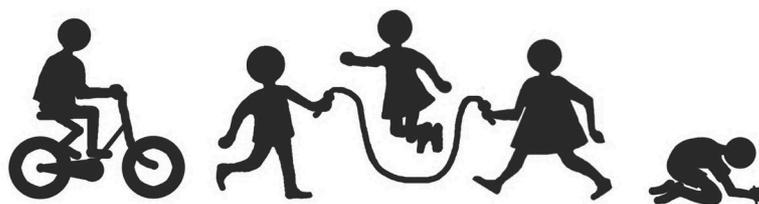
Roles and Responsibilities

Share the work! Discuss the roles below and see whether they appeal to anyone. Aim to get as many people as possible to commit to helping, so you don't find yourself carrying the whole thing alone. Rotating and/or sharing the main organiser role is also a very good idea.

Organiser(s): The main driving force and coordinator of the playing out sessions – probably you! This might sound daunting but you just need commitment and enthusiasm.

Stewards: Responsible for making the space safe – so crucial. On most streets, you need two reliable adults at each 'vehicle entry' point, so the more stewards you can recruit the better.

Helpers: Helpers are mostly needed to help with publicity and other odd-jobs such as designing flyers and sourcing/collecting signage or other 'kit'.



Step 2. Get permission and support

Applying for a road closure

This project began in Bristol, using the council's 'street party' procedure to have one-off sessions. Then, in response to demand from residents, the council pioneered the 'Temporary Play Street Order' (TPSO), letting you apply for a whole year's worth of weekly or monthly sessions. Many other councils have now followed suit – see our [local authority directory](#) to find out where yours is up to. If you get stuck, see our [FAQs](#) or [contact us](#) for advice. Getting a local councillor on board is a good start. If you need more help from us on getting the council to agree to a TPSO, please contact us and we can send you our Activator Guide. We also have a toolkit for councils.

Leeds City Council

Application Temporary Play Street Order

TOWN POLICE CLAUSES ACT 1847 - SECTION 21

Important – please read carefully!

1. Please use this form only if you wish to apply for a temporary Play Street road closure Order. This Order will permit you to close a road for the purpose of children's play at no more than weekly intervals and for a 12 month period from the Order start date.
2. We must receive your application at least 6 weeks before the date of the first event otherwise we will not be able to process it. To avoid disappointment please hand deliver or send your application by recorded delivery as lost or late applications are your responsibility and will not be processed.

Example of Temporary Play Street Order application form

As well as filling in a form, you will need to formally consult with everyone on the street. Where the council provides a template letter, we advise accompanying it with a *friendly cover letter* explaining why you want to do it and reassuring people they will still have car access to their street. Some councils may ask you to gather signatures in support of the idea, which could be an opportunity to talk to people face-to-face.

Recruiting stewards and other volunteers

Playing out sessions are *only* possible with volunteer support. Asking neighbours to do leafleting and other jobs is a good way to involve others, particularly those without young children.

You will need **at least two** stewards for each vehicle access point throughout the session (one to stay put and one to walk in front of cars). We have found it's best to ask people directly, rather than just sending out a general request. You might want to print out the *steward sign-up sheet* from our website and get people to commit in writing. Stewards need to be reliable and confident, particularly on streets that normally have a high volume of traffic. Their position is the main place of potential danger or difficulty because it is the interface with cars. Any stewards with very young children should ensure someone else takes responsibility for them. There is more detail about briefing the stewards in step 4.

About being an organiser on your own street

“The hardest part of organising the event was being ‘visible’ on my street and realising that not everyone agreed with what I was trying to do. In my job I’m used to dealing with difficult situations, but on my own street it felt more personal. Having said that, I felt on a real high afterwards and even people who had been uncertain beforehand came out and were supportive”

Lucy, Bristol resident

It is not unusual to feel uncomfortable or have mixed feelings about your role. You are challenging the status quo. Where possible, share the responsibility and the sense of achievement that brings. Remember that it is a community effort, so try to create opportunities for people to contribute their own ideas, skills and strengths. Most people will appreciate and support what you are trying to do!

Objections and concerns

Sadly, not everyone likes the idea of children playing in the street. In general, the best policy is to avoid confrontation and seek to hear and understand their side. They may have simply forgotten their own childhood, or they may have valid concerns. Look through our [Possible Concerns](#) and [contact us](#) if you’re stuck.

Other Support

Remember that the Playing Out network of active residents is available for peer-support and advice. You can contact those [near you](#) via the map on our website, and/or join our national [Facebook group](#). Some areas even have local Playing Out groups – or you could set one up! [Contact us](#) to find out more about setting up a group or becoming a local ‘activator’, helping to spread the idea beyond your street.

A note on insurance and liability...

See our website for advice on [insurance](#). Most streets don’t get it, and most councils don’t insist on it. In general, the best way to prevent being held liable for anything that goes wrong is to make sure you do everything in a responsible way, prepare well and encourage everyone to be respectful about other people and property. Try to generate a sense of shared responsibility for making sure the sessions are safe.

Risk Assessment

This is worth doing and just involves listing any potential risks (e.g. cars leaving the street without warning) and deciding what you can do to reduce that risk. Once you have done this, bearing in mind there is no such thing as a ‘risk-free’ environment, it is a good idea to weigh up the overall risk against the potential benefits of going ahead. We have a [template](#) you can use, but every street is different so you still need to adapt it or do your own.



Step 3. Tell everybody and get ready

Publicity

Designing and delivering letters, posters and flyers is perhaps the main work of organising playing out. The good news is that these jobs are easily delegated. There is usually a 'design-whizz' on the street and children enjoy the job of putting leaflets through doors. We recommend keeping publicity within your own street and perhaps a few directly neighbouring streets, to avoid promoting it as a public event.

Now is the time to talk up the first session with everyone you see on the street. You may be pleasantly surprised at how people light up at the mention of street play. It is a great conversation starter - people (of a certain age) enjoy sharing their memories and it reminds them what an important part of their childhood this was.

Ask people to put a poster in their window a couple of weeks beforehand to show their support for the idea. You could also send out email and text messages to neighbours leading up to the day. You are welcome to use and adapt the templates from our [website](#), or make your own. It is important to state clearly on all publicity that **parents are responsible for their own children during the sessions** and that cars can only come in and out escorted by a steward at walking speed.



Signs and cones

Check with your council about the requirements for 'Road Closed' and other signage. Some councils will provide signs, while others ask you to arrange your own. You also need to think about physically closing off the width of the road, using cones or barriers. It is important to make sure whatever you set up meets with legal requirements and clearly and effectively stops cars and bikes from coming through without permission.



Get the local bobby on board!

A tiny minority of car drivers (and even some cyclists) react angrily, aggressively or dangerously to being asked to take a different route or drive at walking speed. For this reason, it might be a good idea to invite your local PCSO or Beat Manager to your sessions. They should see this as a good opportunity to engage with the community and it sends a message to drivers that the road closure is legitimate and enforceable. In Bristol, the local police force has been extremely supportive and a briefing about Playing Out has been passed on to all beat managers, so they are aware of the scheme and its benefits. If you do have any issues with dangerous driving or other unacceptable behaviour on the day, take as many details as you can and contact 101 straight away to report it.

Things to have to hand on the day

Even though everyone is responsible for themselves and it's not an 'event', it's worth having a first-aid kit to hand. Other useful things are thermos, umbrellas and chairs (for stewards). You may also want to have some [Playing Out leaflets](#) to give out to curious drivers or passers-by.

Toys, Games and Equipment.

One aim of 'playing out' is to enable free, child-led play, so you shouldn't need to buy or organise anything special. There is real value in free play as it encourages resourcefulness and creativity. Often people bring out chalk, long skipping ropes, paddling pools, bikes, scooters, stilts, hoops, bubbles and more. Unless you notice something unduly risky (e.g. hard cricket balls!) in which case you may need to calmly intervene, you can probably relax about this side of things.

What if it rains?

Many streets have pressed ahead and played out in the rain, snow and sleet. In general, this seems to add to the fun from the children's point of view, so it is really a question of whether the adults are happy to stand out in it or not! If you do decide to carry on in bad weather, just be aware of any extra hazards, like the possibility of bikes skidding. And follow up with a nice hot drink.



Documentation

Consider how and if you want to document your first session. Photos are fantastic for sharing the idea via local newsletters, noticeboards or social media. You could also film neighbours sharing memories of their own childhood. Always make sure you get consent (and parental consent for children). Please also share any documentation or feedback with us if you have permission to do so – it all helps to encourage others and show the real benefits of street play.



Step 4. Play out!

What to expect on the day

Finally the day has come! Well done for getting this far. You may feel excited, tired, or even a little nervous. This is all normal. You will be glad when it's under way. You have done everything you can to let people know about it so you can only wait and see who comes out to play.

Briefing the stewards

Arrange to meet and brief the stewards about 15 minutes before the session starts. We take this bit really seriously because stewards need to be alert to cars and clear about their role, which is to:

- keep children within the closure
- politely divert 'through' traffic
- safely escort residents in or out of the street



Ask them to read the *steward briefing* or read it aloud. You can be quite formal with this so there is no room for confusion. If there are two shifts, they will then be responsible for briefing their replacement.

Stewards wear hi-vis vests and a 'lanyard' with a whistle, [steward briefing](#) and phone numbers for the organiser and council contact. They should be safely behind the road closure point (i.e. not in the live carriageway) but in view of oncoming traffic, the closure area and other stewards. The organiser and stewards should agree who will look out for drivers wanting to leave the street and how this will be managed. On a long stretch of road you will probably need a 'floating steward' as well as those at each end.

Closing the road

Once briefed, the stewards go to each end of the street and put the signs and cones/barriers in place as simultaneously and safely as they can. Once in place, the stewards should not leave their posts except to walk cars in and out. Make sure you have a clear signal for when the street is fully closed and safe for play e.g. three blows on a whistle.



Dealing with cars

With drivers, try to be both friendly and clear! After the road is closed, if a car wants to go through, they can't, as the road is legally closed. Stewards should all know the best alternative route for directing through traffic. If, on the other hand, a resident or visitor wants car access in or out, the procedure is:



- Get clear agreement from the driver to wait and be escorted in. You can only give access if you have this agreement.
- Warn everyone in a loud and clear voice (or whistle) that a car is coming through and wait for the road to be clear of children and obstacles.
- Gain eye contact with the driver and remind them to drive behind you at walking speed.
- If/when you feel it is safe, one steward should let the car through and then replace the barrier while the other walks in front of the vehicle to a parking space. Once the engine is off, call out “safe to play!” (or whistle).
- Thank the driver and return to the closure point.

Only ever try to deal with one car at a time. The steward who remains behind at the closure point will need to hold back anybody else who wants car access.

If a driver wants to leave the street, talk to them and agree which way they will be going out. Then follow the procedure above in reverse.

Difficult drivers

This is a rare but serious area of risk, so be prepared. If a driver becomes difficult or challenges your authority, you and the stewards will need to use your judgment in the moment and trouble-shoot as best you can. Avoid arguments and confrontation and prioritise the safety of all the participants. Remember that people may have all kinds of reasons for their reaction and try to remain calm, courteous and assertive. Reassert the legal status of the closure and the fact that it is temporary. If a driver becomes confrontational, your co-steward should quietly alert the organiser and any nearby parents to ensure children's safety. The stewards' briefing will have the contact number for the council that you can offer if a driver wants to talk to an official. In the extreme situation that a driver behaves dangerously, dial 999 (or 101 if the immediate situation has passed).

Having a good time while managing the session

The organisers are in effect, like the hosts. People are responsible for themselves and yet you are bound to feel somewhat responsible for the event overall. So you strike a balance. You have every right to let a child or parent know if you think they are acting dangerously or disruptively. Likewise, you will want to relax and enjoy it with your neighbours. By all means do, but keep an eye out, particularly on the stewards. Use your judgment; it is unlikely that you will need to intervene with anything except the occasional steward no-show or at worst, a difficult driver.

Watch for elderly neighbours or people from other streets who come out to have a look and enjoy the afternoon. They will be happy for you to introduce yourself and have a chat. These conversations can be the most rewarding thing about the sessions.

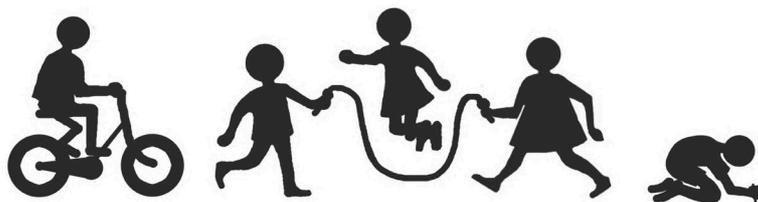
Clearing up and re-opening the road

About 10 minutes before re-opening the road one steward from each end walks up the road towards each other, telling everyone that the road will be reopening shortly – ask that they start clearing things away. Pick up toys, chalk etc. as you go and encourage others to do the same.

Once everything is cleared away, the two stewards should go up and down again calling something like, “onto the pavements now please, we are reopening the road.” Use whistles to gain attention, and a clear and loud voice – but try to stay warm and friendly! This is also a time to remind parents to make sure their children understand the difference between a playing out session and normal circumstances. You might need to be quite firm to make sure parents realise that cars may now be coming through at speed and it is their responsibility to keep their children safe. Getting their verbal agreement is useful to reassure yourself that you have ‘handed over’ responsibility.

Once you are sure everyone is off the road and parents have control of small children, aim to open the road closure points simultaneously to avoid any cars getting stranded in the middle. After taking away the signs the stewards can then do a final ‘sweep’ of the road, walking down the carriageway from each end and meeting in the middle, to make absolutely sure everyone is safely off the road before traffic starts coming through. If they do this, the stewards should be aware they are walking in a ‘live carriageway’ and keep themselves safe.

If you find the return of the cars really hard to bear, remember that what you have done is a first step towards a longer-term change of attitude about roads and street space. And start to think about your next step!



After the event

Well done!! Now is the time to sit back and enjoy your achievement. Within a few days, send a thank you message to everyone involved. If possible, include a photo or two. You might want to record some of your thoughts and feelings at this time. These may include ideas you have had for future events or activities for your street or community. Writing and images have a lot of power and help you to communicate your ideas to other people. When the dust has settled, we really encourage you to take some time to celebrate your achievement in some way.

You and the future of playing out

Please do email us with any questions or concerns you might have or if you need any moral or practical support. Also, let us know how you get on with using our materials. We would appreciate any feedback you have and wish you all the best with playing out.

We'd love to hear about your experience, either via email or social media. Your observations, ideas, feedback, testimonials, photos, memories of play will help us grow this movement. If you feel able, please also add yourself to our [online map](#) so other people locally can contact you for a bit of friendly help and advice. Your tweets, blogs, email, website and Facebook mentions, and of course, telling your neighbours about playing out will be much appreciated and go a long way towards activating street play as a normal part of daily life. Thank you!



Playing Out Checklist

First steps (At least 2 months before first session)

- Talk to your neighbours about the idea to see if they would be interested. If so:
- Set a date and venue for the first meeting.
- Read up on street play and Playing Out. [Inspirations and Ideas](#) page on our website is a good starting point. Contact your local council to find out about the application process in your area, you could also find out what else is going on in your area using the map on [playingout.net](#).
- Let us know you are thinking of going for it! We'll do what we can to support you. Join our Facebook group for more ideas and inspiration.

10-14 days before first meeting

- Adapt and print out the [Neighbour Meeting Invitation](#)
- Distribute invitations through letterboxes
- Plan for the meeting using the manual.

At the first meeting

- Talk through the idea to your neighbours.
- Share memories of playing out, hopes, ideas and concerns.
- Assess interest and set a date for your first playing out session (and subsequent sessions if applying for repeat closures).
- Decide who will do what (including who will make the formal application).
- Collect contact details (use the [steward sign-up](#) if it helps, or start an email list)

During the week following the meeting

- Send an email to everyone who came to the meeting to thank them for coming, review any decisions made and roles agreed and the proposed dates for your sessions

6-8 weeks before your first playing out session

- Apply to your council for the road closure(s) and make sure you follow any requirements for consultation with your neighbours
- Start to recruit stewards and volunteers
- Respond to any objections and concerns that arise from the consultation. See [Possible Concerns](#) or contact us if you want any help with this!

Check how you will find out about approval (some councils may only let you know the week before)

2 weeks before your first session

- ❑ Distribute posters to neighbours for display in windows.
- ❑ Once you have had confirmation from your council, let everyone know it is going ahead and remind them of the dates. You can use the [confirmation flyer](#) as a template.
- ❑ Confirm stewards.

1 week before your first session

- ❑ Put up council Road Closure Notices where this is required.
- ❑ Make arrangements for your road closure signage and any other materials you want to have on the day - hi-visibility vests etc. We can supply a Playing Out kit box, contact us for more info.
- ❑ Print out copies of the [Steward Briefing](#) (two for each closure point) and become familiar with it.
- ❑ Do a risk/benefit assessment

On the day

- ❑ Make sure you have everything you need ready to go
- ❑ Verbally brief the stewards and get them to read the [Steward Briefing](#).
- ❑ Close the road (following the procedure in the manual) and play out!
- ❑ Pass around a mailing list to neighbours at the event.
- ❑ Talk to neighbours, collect memories, take video and photos.
- ❑ Make sure everyone knows the road is going back to 'normal' and open the road safely.

In the week or so following your event

- ❑ Email us or join our [Facebook group](#) to let us know how you got on!
- ❑ Celebrate the achievement with your neighbours, children, helpers, volunteers and stewards. Consider inviting them to have a look at the [Playing Out website](#) and [Facebook page](#) or sharing their feedback with you.
- ❑ If you have a local newspaper, consider sending a photo and a short piece about your session. If you are happy to, offer your support and contact details to other streets wanting to encourage street play, and direct them to the website.

WELL DONE EVERYONE!!

Common concerns about playing out

These are some of the most concerns and objections that have come up in relation to playing out – and our responses. Do let us know if you come up against any others and we'll do what we can to help. In general, it's good to try and listen to people's concerns and deal with them constructively wherever possible. Appealing to people's own childhood memories of playing out can be a good way in.

Why do children need to play in the street when there are parks nearby?

Parks are great for family outings and for older children who can get there independently but for younger children, it usually involves a special trip, organised and supervised by adults. Street play is very different. Firstly, it is literally on the doorstep so children can play 'semi-supervised' and can come and go independently. Secondly, children playing together on their street helps to build a sense of community and belonging, which in turn makes your street a safer and friendlier place.

Why can't children just play in their own back gardens?

In cities, if you have a garden at all, the space is limited and the experience isolated. Street play is a way for children to meet other children on their street, who they may not come across normally (they may be at different schools or of different ages). It also provides more space and freedom to move. Big-rope skipping, hopscotch, roller-skating, cycling and scooting are all generally impossible to do in a tiny back garden!

Can I still have car access to my house?

Residents can still drive in and out during the session if they need to, just at walking speed to make it safe for everyone. You may actually find it easier than normal to park on the street, since there will be no through traffic. For those not living on the street, it will usually only mean a tiny addition to journey times. Most sessions only last an hour or two and take place before rush hour and at weekends.

Will you let visitors/deliveries through?

Yes. Stewards will ensure that all drivers wanting to drive down the road are aware that through traffic is not allowed but if a delivery needs to be made or someone is visiting, the steward will escort the driver at walking pace to their destination.

I have a business on the street. What about parking for my customers?

As part of the application process, everyone within the closure area should be consulted. If you are outside the closure area talk to the organisers about your concerns, in an open neighbourly way – there is usually a way around things if you really need access to parking for your customers, although please remember there is no right to parking on a public highway, even for residents. There is strong support for children's right to play out amongst parents and grandparents in particular, so you might even find that by being accommodating or offering support you improve your business image and get new customers!

Aren't roads just for cars?

The idea that residential streets are just 'roads' i.e. places simply to drive and park cars has crept up on us gradually and has now become an accepted fact. Up until the 1970s, street play was common. 71% of adults played out in the street or neighbourhood as children, compared to only 21% of children today (Playday poll, 2007). The street is our main public space in the city and the place where a sense of community can be created. Playing out is partly about challenging the perception that streets are nothing but highways and demonstrating their possibilities as social spaces for everyone.

Why do you need to close the road? We just played out as kids.

Times have changed. Streets are much more traffic dominated and it is no longer normal to see children out playing as it used to be. Having to organise an official road closure in order to use the street in this way is not a long-term solution. In some very quiet streets children can and do still play out naturally. However, in many residential streets, cars - both parked and moving - dominate to such an extent that play becomes impossible. In this instance 'playing out' sessions provide a temporary solution and show what is possible. Ideally, our streets would be spaces where cars and people of all ages can coexist happily. This is the long-term goal of Playing Out.

Won't playing out bring lots of children to my street from elsewhere?

Playing out is organised by residents and only publicised through flyers and posters on their own street. It is a chance for children to play right outside their front doors and not a public 'event'. Streets are public spaces, but it is very unlikely that you would have more than a few 'outsiders' dropping in, as the main attraction is being able to play outside your own home.

I'm worried that the noise made by children playing outside will disturb me.

Our experience is that streets are quieter during playing out sessions than when open to traffic, to the extent you are more likely to hear birdsong! Some people would also say the sound of children playing is a wonderful thing and something we no longer hear enough of. In cities we all need to live alongside each other and tolerate a reasonable amount of noise from other people's activities. Even those who don't drive have to live with traffic noise. Children cannot be contained within houses, cars and designated 'play areas'. The city is theirs too and it is their right to use public space. If there is a persistent problem with neighbours complaining about children making an unreasonable amount of noise, it may be appropriate to organise a street meeting to discuss it and try to reach a solution everyone is happy with.

I am worried about my car being damaged.

If you are very nervous about damage to your car, you may wish to park it elsewhere during playing out sessions. However, we have heard of very few incidents of damage in the thousands of sessions that have taken place and would not expect the level of risk to be much greater than on a 'normal' day, with cars, lorries, cyclists and pedestrians passing through. Parents are responsible for their children during playing out but any adult who sees a child causing damage should talk to them or their parents about it. The organisers and stewards will do their best to ensure that children play safely and responsibly.

Who is going to pay if my property gets damaged?

In terms of damage to property (including cars), the liability situation is no different with a road closure than under normal circumstances i.e. people take responsibility for their own actions. Parents will have ultimate responsibility for their own children and residents will need to resolve any issues between each other and their insurers.

I don't like the idea of children playing unsupervised. Who will make sure they don't get up to mischief?

'Getting up to mischief' is a part of childhood we all remember, but so is being told off by adults other than our own parents! It is made very clear that parents are responsible for their own children during sessions, but if any adult sees children playing out on the street seriously misbehaving or causing damage or injury they should take responsibility to speak to them or their parents about it in a reasonable way. Being kept in check by other adults in our community is an important learning experience.

Won't it encourage children to think the road is a safe place to play under normal circumstances?

We have had many conversations with parents about this and there is a strong agreement that even young children can understand the difference between a 'playing out' session and normal circumstances. There should be a clear signal that the road is 'safe to play' and parents will ensure children understand that things are 'back to normal' once the session is over. Playing out sessions are also a good opportunity for parents to talk to their children about road safety and the danger of traffic.

I haven't got young children and this idea makes me feel excluded from my own street.

We need to remember that for the vast majority of the time, children may feel excluded from this space right outside their homes. Playing Out is just a very small way to redress the balance. Organisers should make sure that residents of all ages feel welcome to be out on the street and sessions don't just feel like family events. Equally, no one should feel any obligation to 'join in' if they don't want to. At some sessions, older residents or those without children have helped to steward or just enjoyed sitting out, meeting neighbours and sharing memories about their own childhood play experiences. Parents may wrongly assume that those without young children won't be interested in being involved, so do make it clear to them if you want to be. Your support will certainly be welcome!

What other benefits are there to playing out?

As well as safer streets, another key factor in enabling street play is parental permission. Parents feel anxious about allowing children to play on the street for all sorts of reasons and often feel unsure about the cultural acceptability of letting kids play out on the street. Playing out sessions are a chance for parents to get together and support each others' desire to let children play out. See '10 good reasons' for more detailed information about the benefits of street play.



10 Good Reasons for Street Play

1. Children need to play. It is vital for their physical and emotional development and for their social learning. It is also a human right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. Play England defines play as “what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons”. This implies a degree of freedom and independence, which cannot be satisfied by organised or over-supervised play.
3. Children like to play near home and have traditionally done so. A 2007 poll found that 71% of adults played out on their street every day compared to only 21% of children today. (Play England). The main reason cited for not playing outside was traffic.
4. Children need space to play energetically. Many homes do not have gardens and in cities these tend to be small. Parks are great but many children don't have independent access to these so the street is the obvious place for everyday play.
5. Playing in the street increases community cohesion and brings neighbours of all ages together by providing a sense of common space and shared ownership. It can engender a sense of collective responsibility and thereby increase the safety of the neighbourhood.
6. It enables children to meet and develop friendships outside school and also increases contact between children and adults, helping to build up familiarity and trust.
7. Through dealing with situations that arise independently, children can learn valuable social skills and gain understanding about the world around them.
8. Playing in the street allows for 'semi-supervised' play. Parents can get on with housework or looking after other children in the house while allowing children to play outside. Children are far more likely to play outside every day if allowed to play outside their home, rather than relying on parents to take them somewhere.
9. The street is the “starting point for all journeys” (Tim Gill, 2007) and the ability to play independently in the street is a first step towards greater independent mobility around the neighbourhood – to visit friends, go to the park or walk to school.
10. Streets constitute the vast majority of public space in the city. To see them only as places to drive and park cars is to massively undervalue them. Streets can and should be places where people can sit, talk, read, play and walk – and even sing and dance if they want to! The only way this will happen is if we start to use them differently.

