



Frequently Asked Questions

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. This means that, unlike a generation ago, children are simply not getting enough everyday active play time. Street play is very different. Firstly, it is literally on the doorstep so children can play 'semi-supervised' whilst parents get on with other things. This allows for more unstructured, child-led play. 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 and form friendships with 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!

This is a major inconvenience for me as a car driver, why should I let it happen?

It really shouldn't be a major inconvenience as residents can still drive in and out during the session if they need to, just at walking speed to make it safe for everyone. For those not living on the street, it will usually only mean a tiny addition to journey times – we have no specific right to drive down a particular street. Most sessions only last an hour or two and take place before rush hour and at weekends. If you do have concerns, do talk to the organisers about them and hopefully you can reach a solution. You may well find it easier than normal to park on the street, since only residents will be allowed in and out during the sessions.

Will you still 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.

This is going to have a negative impact on my business, why should I let it happen?

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 residential 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 an ideal situation and is not a long-term solution. In some very quiet streets a road closure might not be necessary in order for children to safely play in the road. However, the danger from fast-moving traffic is one of the main reasons that children don't play outside nowadays. In many residential streets, cars – both parked and moving – dominate to such an extent that play becomes impossible. In this instance, closing the road to through traffic and having stewards in place provides the reassurance parents need to allow their children to play out while still allowing residents car access. Playing out sessions can be a first step towards changing attitudes about the place of cars in residential streets. 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 a playing out session bring lots of children to my street from elsewhere?

Each playing out session is organised by residents and only publicised through flyers and posters on their own street and, sometimes, immediately neighbouring streets. They are for the children to have a chance to play right outside their front doors and not designed to be public 'events'. However, it should be remembered that the street is a public space, so it is not possible or desirable to try to exclude people coming in from outside. It is very unlikely that you would have more than a few families joining in from other streets as the main 'draw' for children and parents (as opposed to going to the park) is having direct access to your own house and toys, and getting to know your neighbours.

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 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 the space in the way they need to. Often, playing out sessions are only an hour or two long and take place once a week at most. 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 nervous 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 hundreds of sessions that have taken place and would not expect the level of risk to be much greater than if children were scooting, skating or cycling on the pavement past parked cars. Parents are responsible for their children during playing out sessions 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 an event with a road closure and normal circumstances. Playing out sessions are a good opportunity for parents to talk to their children about road safety and the danger of traffic but also to observe what streets could be like if traffic was less dominant and begin to think about ways to slow cars on their street.

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. A playing out session 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 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.