Wild About Play
Research Report

Children’s Survey
Playwork Research Questionnaire
Environmental Play Research Questionnaire

October 2005
Martin Maudsley and Hilary Smith
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Wild About Play working in partnership with DevonPlay and with funding from ‘Better Play’

Wild About Play
Playwork Partnerships
University of Gloucestershire
Francis Close Hall
Swindon Road
Cheltenham
Glos. GL50 4AZ

Tel: 01242 532 949
Fax: 01242 230 413
Email: wap@playwork.co.uk
Website: www.playwork.co.uk/wildaboutplay
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1. Preface

Wild About Play is a networking project based in the South West to support, develop and promote environmental play opportunities for children to play freely in and around natural outdoor environments (wild spaces). Wild About Play is co-ordinated by Playwork Partnerships, in collaboration with Devonplay and funded through Better Play.

The overall project aim is to support, develop and promote environmental play in the South West. The project has 5 specific objectives:

1. To create a South West network of organisations and individuals involved and/or interested in environmental play for children, incorporating both playwork and environmental organisations.
2. To research and document examples of successful environmental playwork, and assemble principles of best practice.
3. To identify training needs for playworkers, and others, to develop knowledge and skills to enhance their provision of environmental play for children in and around their settings.
4. To produce targeted information and resources to support environmental playwork, and disseminate good practice through training seminars, publications and websites to meet their training needs.
5. To liaise with a range of key national and regional environmental organisations who work with children in the outdoors to share ideas, knowledge and practice on how to jointly develop environmental playwork in the South West.

What is environmental play?

Environmental play is defined here as opportunities for children and young people to play freely with, in and around natural environments. Environmental playwork supports, facilitates and provides appropriate settings for such opportunities.

Environmental play specifically focuses on children’s interactions with natural elements and spaces, wild spaces, as opposed to artificial play areas, which provide a context, physical space and inspiration for different types of children’s play.

Environmental play encompasses the value of personally directed, child-centred, freely chosen play. However, it was thought that children and adults (playworkers, environmental workers, parents etc.) might require encouragement, information and training to overcome fears or apprehensive attitudes towards environmental play.
This report details the three areas of research that the project has undertaken to explore these important issues and identifies key action points and recommendations for the future.

2. Summary

Objectives and Methods
The purpose of the Wild About Play research programme was to identify:

- the current extent, nature and aspirations of children’s environmental play; and
- the needs, experiences and ideas of adults working with children to support environmental play.

This report also details research that the project has undertaken to explore issues around providing opportunities for children to play outdoors and identifies some headline conclusions and potential action points for the future.

The information gathering took place between May 2003 and October 2004 and included the views and experiences of both children and adults working in the fields of playwork and environmental work within the southwest region. The research was split up into three discrete sections, each with a tailored questionnaire. In addition, key people working in environmental play development were consulted to identify what potential barriers and bridges exist within environmental play provision.

The first questionnaire focused on the views and experiences of children. It was pictorial in design to facilitate easier engagement with children and was based on a similar questionnaire developed by Lily Horsemara of Herefordshire Nature Trust’s WildPlay project (see the Best Practice section). An accompanying information sheet for adults gave instructions on how the questionnaire could be successfully used with children to maximise the usefulness of the responses. A blank questionnaire and the accompanying information sheet can be found in the Appendices section.

The second questionnaire focused on the views and experiences of adults working within the play and playwork field. The final questionnaire was targeted at adults working in the environmental field. These questionnaires can also be found in the Appendices section.

Key findings from the Children’s Survey
A total of 104 responses were received incorporating even numbers of both girls and boys. They covered the whole age range — under 4 to 14 and over — with the largest proportion of responses from children aged between 5 and 10 years.
When asked to indicate where they play, children identified the beach (72%) and the park (71%) as their top responses.

The high response to parks highlights the value of these public green spaces for children’s play, and may indicate that for many children parks are local and accessible. Research has shown that 40% of users visit parks every day and 70% get there by walking.¹

The high response to beaches could be due to the fact that the information was collected from children living in the southwest who might have higher than

average access to beaches. However, it is not clear from this survey whether children chose the beach because they go there often or because when they go to the beach play is the principal activity.

• 57% of children said they played in their garden and 46% said that they played in or around the home – surprisingly not higher. (NB: the questionnaire did not give a pictorial representation of the inside of a house). There is growing statistical evidence that children spend increasing amounts of time inside the home, which may be at the expense of time spent playing outside. For instance research cited by Learning through Landscapes\(^2\) found that nearly half of seven to twelve year old children in the UK spent more than three hours watching television per day.

• Less surprising were the results that showed that only 18% of children played in the street, 13% by the shops and 7% in the city. This ties in with the research undertaken by Thomas and Thompson\(^3\) that reported that children identified the street as a dangerous place to play. Similarly, Barnardo’s and Transport 2000\(^4\) found that children believe speeding, dangerous driving and busy roads stop them from playing outside. Their report also suggests that traffic is also a major reason why parents don’t allow their children to go outside to play.

• 46% of the children surveyed played in woodland and even less for fields, rivers or hills, perhaps indicating that play in highly natural areas (wild spaces) is relatively uncommon.


b) How children play outdoors

- When asked how they play outdoors, the largest proportion - 75% of the children surveyed - indicated that they played with water. This may largely reflect children’s instinctive playfulness around water outdoors. However, the illustration connected with this option on the survey showed children playing at the beach, which once again may imply children’s association of the seaside with free play.

- Similarly, relatively high proportions of children stated that they played outdoor games (66%) and relaxed outdoors (57%), illustrating the value of outdoor environments for varied and contrasting types of play.

- Predictably the numbers of children who said that they currently make and cook on fires was the lowest: just 28%. In contrast, 42% of children, the highest response, said that this was something that they would like to do. This provides evidence to support Guilbaud’s sentiments that play provision is not currently
meeting children’s needs in facilitating opportunities for children to experience fires.¹

- Less than 50% of the children surveyed said they make and build dens, explore nature or climb trees – activities that are inherently part and parcel of children’s free play in wild spaces.

**Key findings from the Playwork Research Questionnaire**

A total of 130 completed questionnaires were returned and analysed. This questionnaire was designed specifically for people working with children aged 5 to 15 years, with knowledge and/or experience of the principles of playwork.

**a) Wild spaces**

- 30% of respondents said that they had no access to wild spaces for play at their setting, with a further 25% stating that they had no access within walking distance. Furthermore, of those with access to wild spaces less than half (45%) of the respondents reported that children use them every session or often for play. This equates to a substantial proportion (nearly 70%) of play settings surveyed without regular provision for children’s play in wild spaces.

- When asked which elements of wild spaces children use most often for play, the highest percentages were for trees and shrubs (68%) and paths and cleared areas (62%). 55% said they used managed grassland (parks and open spaces), which again endorses the value of such public green spaces. The most commonly cited ‘other’ element here was sand, which ties in with the large proportion of children indicating they play at the beach in the Children’s Survey.

**b) Outdoor play types**

- When asked how children currently use outdoor spaces for playing, based on play types as identified by Hughes⁶, the top results were: 72% for rough and tumble play and 69% for social play. This perhaps highlights children’s desires to be able to interact freely and physically with each other – often prohibited by the restrictions of indoor spaces.

- **Deep play** was understandably the lowest play type recorded (23%). Deep play is likely to have the highest health and safety risks associated, and by its very nature may largely take place away from adults. Interestingly, **creative play** was also

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rated relatively low (25%), which given the creative stimulation offered by wild spaces may be regarded as an unrealised opportunity.

c) Barriers to environmental play

- **Health and safety** (45%) and **parental fears** (40%) were recorded as the biggest barriers or disincentives to providing children with environmental play opportunities. Litigations over accidents are highly publicised and rises in insurance premiums are becoming increasingly prohibitive.\(^7\)

- A low proportion (13%) of respondents cited limited personal knowledge of natural environments as a barrier for providing environmental play. Correspondingly 76% said they were fairly or very confident about running or supervising environmental play sessions. Many playworkers still have strong motivational memories of outdoor play experiences from childhood, and the experience of the *Wild About Play* network suggests that there is a genuine enthusiasm for working outdoors with children, both within the region and nationally.

d) Improving environmental play provision

- Despite fairly high existing knowledge, the most popular choice for improving confidence amongst respondents was **training**, with 72% of all respondents specifying this option. Furthermore, 90% said they would be likely to attend environmental play training offered within the region.

- Of the 13 different themes for training suggested in the questionnaire, the most popular were: environmental games, exploring nature (mirroring the results from the Children’s Survey), managing risks outdoors (linking to the cited barrier of health and safety) and physical outdoor play.

- The least popular training theme noted, with 43% of positive responses, was **making and using fires**. Bearing in mind that, from the Children’s Survey, less children were using fires than would like to, and that adults cited health and safety as a high disincentive, it is likely that adults are currently under-confident about facilitating ‘making and cooking with fires’ with children.

- In addition to training, the next highest response for improving confidence was **support from parents, staff and the wider community**. Other comments included the need for government acknowledgement of the necessity for risk taking in play. This underlines the ongoing need for effective promotion of the

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benefits and values of environmental play, alongside development and demonstration of good practice.

- A large majority of respondents (74%) said they would like to participate in a network for environmental play; with meetings, newsletters and publications and resources being the most popular services for the network to provide. This need has already been partially met by the initiation of the Wild About Play network. However, such a network needs to be sustainable beyond the timescale of its initial funding. Now that training needs have been identified there is a strong case for coordinated and targeted training provision (see the Training section).

Key findings from the Environmental Research Questionnaire

This questionnaire was developed as a direct result of the limited numbers of Playwork Research Questionnaire responses we received from adults working with an environmental context. The questionnaire was adapted to increase its relevance to the target audience, especially in relation to understanding of children’s play. 43 completed questionnaires were received and analysed.

a) Work roles
- 84% of respondents said that they had access to wild spaces - higher than in the Playworkers’ Survey (70%). More specifically, 65% stated they had access to woodland, a high quality play environment.

- The majority of respondents (70%) stated that this was in an environmental education context. 49% said that they currently facilitate free play to some extent. However, a large proportion (88%) said they would be interested in developing greater use of wild spaces for children’s play. This seems to highlight the increasing move away from purely education-orientated programmes run by environmental education centres, and a growing interest in the importance of play within environmental education.

b) Value of play
Respondents were given an open-ended opportunity to state what they thought the value of outdoor play was for children. Responses were subsequently categorised into seven main headings:

| Positive relationship with the natural environment | 21% |
| Physical health and exercise | 19% |
| Psychological well-being including self esteem and confidence | 17% |
| Education, learning and skills | 15% |
| Overall development | 13% |
| Just good fun | 9% |
Given that most respondents were from an environmental background, it is not surprising that the most popular response was “enabling children to have a positive relationship with the natural environment”. However it is worth noting that a high value was also placed on outdoor play for physical health and exercise and the psychological well being of children.

“Just good fun” had a low response percentage (9%), which may indicate a lower value placed on the inherent ‘play for play’s sake’ attitude more prevalent amongst those within the playwork sector. Also, children’s play for enjoyment may be harder to justify within environmental education work roles.

c) Barriers to environmental play

Respondents to this questionnaire were asked to detail what they saw as being barriers or disincentives to providing outdoor play. As with the results to the Playworkers’ Questionnaire, parent’s attitudes and fears (51%) and health and safety (39%) were the most commonly cited barriers. However, here the order is reversed with health and safety distinctly lower than for playworkers (58%). This may be accounted for by a greater experience and confidence in working in outdoors with children and/or different expectations regarding activities by parents and carers.

d) Improving environmental play provision

A high proportion (72%) of all respondents said that they were fairly confident or very confident about supervising environmental play sessions, but substantial numbers (53%) said that training would improve their confidence.

A large majority of respondents (84%) said they would be likely to attend training events on environmental play. The most popular themes chosen were facilitating child-centred environmental play (60%), creative play (56%) and setting up environmental play opportunities (51%).

As in the Playworkers’ Research Questionnaire, the next highest category was support from parents, staff and the wider community would also help. A significant proportion (42%) said that greater personal experience and awareness of children’s play would improve their confidence. This offers possibilities that skills sharing with playworkers, either informally at joint meetings or more officially through work exchanges, could meet an existing need regarding good practice in environmental playwork.
• 38% of respondents said that they would be able or willing to provide outdoor spaces for children to play, and furthermore nearly two thirds of respondents said they would be willing to jointly organise and run environmental play opportunities with local play projects. This offers great encouragement for developing productive methods of joint working across playwork and environmental sectors.

• Finally, as with playworkers a high number (79%) of respondents said they would be likely to participate in a network for environmental play with the most popular services being network meetings, publications and resources and websites. Many individuals from environmental organisations are already part of the Wild About Play network, eg park rangers, environmental educators and Local Nature Reserve managers. There is potential to actively develop the range of organisations included (eg National Trust officers). However, the objectives of a wider environmental play network should be clearly stated to ensure that agreed core values are maintained whilst widening membership and participation.
Results from focus group consultations
We had consulted with several experienced practitioners and play development workers during the course of the project. These occurred at specific events, namely: Playwork Partnerships AGM in Taunton, 2003, Bend in the River conference in Devon, 2004, Wild and Away conference in Gloucestershire, 2004 plus two meetings in Cornwall, 2004. The following notes constitute a summary of the ideas and information provided by attendees in response to being asked two main questions concerning the current state of environmental play in the region. This represents qualitative data on personal experiences and views, with no quantitative indication of respective priority or emphasis.

The participants were first asked to consider their own childhood memories of outdoor play, which provided a useful starting point for consideration of opportunities and restrictions for children today. Although not quantitatively documented, the extent, frequency and diversity of free play in wild spaces without adult supervision was a striking and ubiquitous feature of the recalled childhood memories of participants.

a) What barriers prevent children from playing outdoors in natural environments (wild spaces)?

The range of perceived barriers to children’s outdoor play was varied. They can be grouped under three main headings:

1) Reduced access to wild spaces
2) Negative attitudes from adults and children towards wild spaces
3) Indoor attractions

i) Space and access

Sites
- Less physical space available for children’s play (eg less playing fields)
- Limited choice of sites
- Less naturalistic sites
- Sanitisation of play spaces
- More urbanised and restricted farm land
- Funding

Accessibility
- Locality – wild spaces too far from where children live
- Transport to wild spaces
- Conflict with other uses of outdoor spaces (eg sport, dog walking)
- Lack of suitable access for disabled people
- Lack of right equipment
- Bad weather (although this could be considered an attitudinal barrier!)
- Ofsted regulations regarding outdoor sites for school and play settings

ii) Attitudes and Fears
**Parental fears for children’s safety**
- Long distances between home and outdoor play spaces
- Traffic on the way to and around outdoor play spaces
- Stranger danger
- Anxiety about children being outdoors
- Lack of knowledge of the outdoors

**Non-parental adults attitudes to children outdoors**
- Concerns over vandalism of buildings and outdoor spaces (eg parks)
- Fear of children who are ‘hanging out’
- Anti-child culture
- Lack of training for children’s workers especially in socially deprived areas

**Children’s attitudes towards being outdoors**
- Personal safety and fear of outdoors in general
- Fear of dogs
- Fear of bullying from older/other children
- Lack of previous experience, knowledge or understanding of wild spaces
- Lack of confidence / motivation
- Peer pressure

**Societal attitudes**
- Policies regarding children outdoors
- Media hype
- Safety and litigation
- Perception of risk
- Rural / urban divide
- Conforming to urban life and culture
- Cultural gaps / patterns
- Age limits from institutions for children’s outdoor activities and travelling
- Relative values (eg children’s free play versus organised sport)
- Changes in family structures
- Life/work/play balance

**iii) Indoor attractions**
- Entertainment technology: TV, video, PCs, play stations etc.
- Improved indoor facilities in homes, schools, leisure centres and play settings
- Peer pressure to take part in indoor activities
- Hobbies are not practical or physical anymore
- Less self-motivated creative outlets — children need to be ‘entertained’
b) What bridges can be built to allow more environmental play opportunities?

**Strategic, national**
- Lobbying government
- Challenging litigation concerning outdoor spaces
- Guidelines for practitioners
- More funding for environmental play provision, including from Lottery sources
- Funders to see and experience the value of environmental play in practice
- Promote health advantages of outdoor play
- Research and documentation regarding the issues around outdoor play
- Identify and promote child-friendly public open spaces
- Use media to advertise positive news and success stories
- Start introducing outdoor experiences early, from pre-school
- Consistency and sustainability in environmental play provision
- Recognise and extend what is successful: play in the park, city farms, community gardens, forest schools, living streets, adventure playgrounds etc.
- Inform policy makers and planners about the principles of environmental play
- Influence and inform Ofsted training and standards for outdoor play

**Practical, local**
- Education and information for parents and carers about the (real) risks facing children outdoors and the benefits of playing outside
- Sensitive and effective risk assessing, including by children themselves
- Changing apprehensive attitudes and fears amongst adults and children
- Appropriate information, ethos and guidance at the start of each session
- Training for adults who work with children to increase skills and confidence
- Experiential outdoor events for parents and families
- Building relationships and sharing ideas between playwork and environmental organisations
- Provide transport to sites for environmental play
- Promote exciting alternatives to indoor activities
• Choice of options regarding outdoor play
• Creating environmental play spaces and introducing environmental elements into existing areas
• Make use of micro-environments for environmental play
• Building confidence for children to enjoy using wild spaces
• Work with schools – playgrounds, break times, structured play
• Appropriate and regular adult supervision outdoors (eg play rangers)
• Provide resources for environmental play, including specialist equipment and where necessary protective gear
• Active involvement of all involved
3. Children’s Survey.

The children’s survey was developed from an original questionnaire designed and developed by Lily Horesman at the WildPlay Project at Herefordshire Nature Trust. The aim of the survey was to collect information about where and how children play through an accessible form. The initial picture tried to capture a broad landscape that a wide range of children could identify with. However, on receiving feedback on the form, it is acknowledged that the illustration fell short of this aim and did not necessarily represent the neighbourhoods, homes and environments of all children.

The survey was piloted in the Bristol area and after the pilot a set of guidelines were drawn up to aid adults in their facilitation of the survey. Over 500 paper copies of the survey were distributed across the south west region via the Better Play projects network, the Wild About Play steering group and the South West Play Forum. In addition, the survey and guidelines were available for download and completion via the Wild About Play website.

A total of 104 surveys were returned for analysis, some fully completed and some partially completed. All percentage data below is representative of the numbers of answers to each individual question.

1. Who are you?

The survey gathered basic data about the children completing the form. It invited children to indicate their age and to complete a picture of themselves to illustrate if they were a boy or a girl.

46% of the respondents were girls and 45% were boys. 9% of respondents did not indicate if they were a girl or a boy.

49% of all respondents were aged between 5 and 7 years and 25% were aged between 8 and 10 years. There was a general balance between responses from boys and girls in the different age groups.
Girls and boys

Ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Boy</th>
<th>Girl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 and over</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2. Where do you play?
Children were asked to colour in the places where they play on the picture below.

Areas of the picture were categorised and used to interpret the data collected.

The figures in the chart overleaf indicate that a large proportion of the children said that they play at the beach and the park – 72% and 71% respectively.

57% of children indicate that they played in their garden, 49% in the school playground, 46% said they played in the woods or around trees and 45% indicated they played at home.
Where children say they play

- Hills
- School playground
- School
- River
- Field
- Woods
- City
- Beach
- Park
- Outside house
- Shops
- Street
- Tree
- Garden
- House

%
3. What and how do you play?

This question used a series of illustrations to find out from children the types of environmental play that they currently engage in and the things that they would like to do.

The majority of response to this part of the survey indicated that the children completing the survey were already engaging in different types of environmental play. 75% of all respondents said that they played with water whilst 66% and 57% of children respectively said that they currently played and relaxed outdoors. A much smaller group of children, 28%, said that they currently make and cook on fires whilst 42% said that this was something they would like to do.

Of the children who said that they currently make and cook on fires, the distribution of ages and genders reflected those of the overall sample of respondents. Older children were not noticeably the ones who were undertaking this type of play.
4. Anything else
Finally, children were asked if there was anywhere else outdoors that they played or anything else that they enjoyed doing outside. Children were invited to draw or write their responses.

1. I collected frogs from the school pond and put them back afterwards
2. I like to swim in normal water not salt water
3. Mostly I like to be outside
4. Picture – beside bars/cage?
5. I have a garden
6. I don’t like parks because I don’t feel safe in them. I love water. I like climbing trees and reading in them.
7. Picture – Football pitch x2
8. Adventure, ambulance things
9. I like playing in the tree house
10. Swimming
11. Picture – bed
13. Picture?
14. Swimming
15. Loads of fireworks shows
16. Fishing, swimming
17. Picture – swing
18. Riding bikes and scooters, lots of sports, digging holes for dens, building bike ramps
4. Playwork Research Questionnaire.

The playwork research questionnaire was designed specifically to gather the views and training needs of people working face to face with children aged 5-15 years.

The questionnaire was distributed to delegates at the 8th South West Play Celebration held in June 2003 and to other practitioners within the region via workshops, seminars and the Wild About Play web site.

A total of 130 questionnaires were returned and the responses compiled and presented within this report.

1. What is your organisation type/role?

Within this question, respondents were able to tick more than one organisation type/role. 34% of the respondents detailed that they worked within 2 or more organisation types/roles. The majority of responses were from people who work in holiday playschemes and after school clubs. There were minimal responses received from people within Environmental organisations, Park and Play Rangers and, as a result, the Environmental workers questionnaire was developed to address this imbalance.

44 respondents said their organisation role/type was ‘other’. These included:
• 18 people with a developmental/training role working within organisations such as play associations, EYDCPs and the Children's Fund.
• 11 Preschool/Nursery/Early years/Family Centre workers
• 15 with a variety of roles including Forest School leader, Playbus worker, museum officer, freelance playworker and nature reserve liaison officer.

2. Do you have access to wild spaces for play at your setting?

![Pie chart showing 70% Yes and 30% No.]

Just over two thirds of respondents said that children had access to wild spaces at their play setting, whilst a third said they had no access.

3. Are there other accessible wild spaces within walking distance of your setting?

![Pie chart showing 25% Yes and 75% No.]

75% of all respondents said that children had access to wild spaces within walking distance of the setting.
4. How often do children at your setting use wild spaces for play?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every session</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data shows that around 45% of respondents thought that children at their setting use the wild spaces available to them every session or often. A further 36% thought that children used wild spaces for play sometimes.

However, taking into consideration that 75% of children had access to wild spaces and of that 75% only 81% of children use wild spaces for play, this indicates that only 60% of children, just over half, are using wild spaces for play.
5. Which elements of wild spaces do children at your setting currently use for play?

This question enabled respondents to tick as many elements of wild spaces as they thought applicable.

The most popular elements of wild spaces used by children were thought to be trees and shrubs, paths and cleared areas and managed grassland (parks and open spaces).

![Bar chart showing the percentage of children using different elements of wild spaces.]

Additionally, maybe not surprisingly for respondents in the south west region, sand was noted as the most popular ‘other’ element.
6. How do children currently use these spaces for playing?

For this question, Hughes’ (1996) Taxonomy of Play Types was used to categorise different types of play that children may demonstrate within outdoor spaces.

Notably the most common play type observed by respondents in wild spaces was that of rough and tumble play, closely followed by social play. Creative and deep play were less common although reasons for this cannot be deduced at this time but could be associated with barriers such as health and safety as identified in responses to question 7.

‘Other’ uses identified were largely activity based and included mountain and BMX biking, sport and football.

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7. In your view, what barriers or disincentives are there to providing opportunities for environmental play at your setting?

Health and safety and parental fears/attitudes were seen as the biggest barriers or disincentives to providing opportunities for environmental play. In addition to the barriers offered, the most common other barriers noted were that of staffing, linked closely to Ofsted requirements and funding, and time available during the session.

Other responses included:
- “Complaints from neighbours, too much noise, damaging trees (even though this is not the case)”
- “No tree climbing allowed”
- “Governments attitudes and fears & schools having to follow tight H & S etc procedures”
8. As an individual, how confident would you feel about running or supervising environmental play sessions?

Only 21% of respondents said they would be apprehensive or unwilling to supervise environmental play sessions whilst 76% said they were fairly or very confident.
72% of the respondents noted that training would improve their confidence in offering environmental play sessions. 45% and 41% of respondents respectively thought that support from parents/staff/community and equipment and resources would also help.

‘Other’ ideas to improve confidence included:
- more sharing workshops
- knowledge of - accessible spaces, activities, local resources
- understanding consent from parents
- Government acknowledgment of need for risk taking in play
10. Would you be likely to attend training seminars on environmental playwork within the region?

An overwhelming 90% of respondents said that they would be likely to attend training seminars on environmental playwork within the region.

11. If yes, what specific environmental playwork topics/themes would be most useful to you?

A – Physical outdoor play
B – Making and using fires
C – Wildlife encounters
D – Wild foods
E
F
G
H – Water play
I – Setting up envir. play opportunities
J – Creating/managing wild spaces
K – Facilitating child-centred envir. play

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E – Exploring nature   L – Managing risks outdoors
F – Environmental games  M – Practical demonstrations of spaces
G – Environmental art  N – Other

There was a fairly even distribution of popularity for topics offered with environmental games, exploring nature, managing risks outdoors and physical outdoor play being the most popular. Making and using fires was least popular and ‘other’ suggestions included:

• Camping
• Group work
• Bringing nature to the people
• Community participation

12. If you would be interested in helping to provide training in environmental playwork, please indicate your area/s of interest/expertise.

16% of respondents said they were interested in helping to provide training in environmental playwork and areas of expertise included:

• Building and cooking on fires (experience through guides)
• Bushcraft
• Camping
• Consultation
• Creating wild spaces
• Creative play
• Den building
• Environmental playwork course
• Forest school leadership
• Medicine wheel
• Nature walks
• Outdoor adventure
• Outdoor pottery
• Rock climbing
• Wild foods
• Wild sculptures
13. Would you be likely to participate in a south west regional network for individuals/organisations interested in environmental playwork?

74% of respondents said they would be interested in participating in a regional network focusing on environmental play.

14. If yes, which of the following would you like the network to provide/operate?
Of the 74% of respondents who said they would be likely to participate in a network, 59% said they would like the network to operate meetings. A further 59% of those who said they would like the network to operate meetings said they would prefer these to be quarterly.
5. Environmental Research Questionnaire.

The Environmental Research Questionnaire was designed specifically to gather the views and training needs of environmental practitioners within a variety of different organisations.

The questionnaire was distributed via park ranger and Wild Life Trust networks, through events and via the Wild About Play website.

A total of 50 questionnaires were returned, 7 of which were identified as duplicates and therefore not included in the final data analysis.

1. What is your organisation type/role?

As in the previous questionnaire, respondents were able to tick more than one organisation type/role. 28% of respondents detailed their organisation type/role as covering 2 of more of the options given.

Overall, 51% of respondents detailed that their organisation type/role fell into one of the options given. Of the 53% of respondents who detailed their organisation type/role as ‘other’, 25% of them described it as having an environmental/outdoor focus. Other organisation types/roles described included:
• Community Parks warden
• Council Wildspace Project
• Council Countryside department
• Environmental Campaigner
• Environmental conservation and community development
• Environmental Playwork/Development/training
• Green Scheme – Part of SMBC Environmental Services
• Local nature reserve, community reserves officer
• Outdoor centre
• Play Ranger

2. Do you own (or long-term lease) outdoor green spaces?

42% of respondents confirmed that they either owned or long term leased outdoor green spaces.
3. Do you have other access to outdoor green spaces?

84% of respondents said that they had to access outdoor green spaces. 80% of respondents described these spaces in detail and an overview is given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of outdoor green space</th>
<th>Percentage responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woodland</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and gardens</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassland</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakes and ponds</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadow</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature reserves</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasteland (disused railways, quarries)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaches and Dunes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillside</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivers and streams</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracks and paths</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetland</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Do you or your organisation work with children outdoors as part of your core role?

93% of respondents said that they or their organisation worked with children either regularly or sometimes. Only 1 respondent said that they never worked with children.
5. In what capacity do you work with children?

- Environmental Education
- Practical conservation
- Structured recreational activities
- Community events
- Facilitating free play
- Other (please specify)

70% of respondents said that their, or their organisations, work with children was in the area of environmental education. Of the 21% of respondents who said that they worked in an ‘other’ capacity with children, 55% of these respondents had described their organisation type/roles as not in the environmental/outdoor area.
6. How often do you facilitate children’s play outdoors?

Less than 50% of respondents said that they facilitated children’s play in the outdoors either always or often. 35% of respondents said that they sometimes facilitated children’s play whilst 12% said that they never facilitated children’s play outdoors.

The organisation types/roles of the 16% who said that they never facilitate children’s play outdoors, or gave no response, were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation type/role</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental action/conservation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Farm/Community Garden</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside department</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park ranger</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental campaigner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Would you be interested in developing a greater use of outdoor green spaces for children’s play?

- No response
- Unsure
- Yes
- No

88% of respondents said they would be interested in developing greater use of outdoor green spaces for children’s play.

8. In your view, what do you think is the value of outdoor play for children?

88% or respondents answered this question and responses are listed below.

1. Fresh air and exercise away from the TV + playstation.
2. An excellent way of acquainting children with the natural environment and encouraging them to explore it without it feeling like a structured educational activity. Too many children that I encounter are afraid of many things in the natural environment.
3. It’s the best, and it’s surpassed by nothing else.
4. Essential to their emotional and physical health and well being.
6. Helping to develop an understanding, enjoyment and care for the natural environment.
7. Developing confidence and opportunity to face situations of risk and deal with them responsibly.
9. Gets them outside away from computer games TV etc. Natural exercise and freedom.
10. Vital to their development both physical and psychological.
11. Wider understanding of the world and how we fit in. Children can feel more free and can get stuck into mud and bugs and fun.
12. Discovery.
13. Connect to natural elements/environment, space.
14. It has a limitless value in teaching children about all aspects of free play. For me, the most important value is that of personal risk and safety since the outdoor environment holds many more opportunities for learning and development in this area.
15. Respect for environment, release of energy, experience of elements.
17. It is important for children to experience the elements so they can understand better the harmony of nature. With the right direction use this in their life.
18. Social interaction, co-ordination, fresh air, imagination, connection with nature, body movement, kinaesthetic, exercise, empowering.
19. Essential to balanced healthy development.
20. It’s incredibly important.
21. Playing with the elements. Experience the natural environment in all weathers and getting 'dirty'.
22. Freedom to imagine, create, explore.
23. Superior Child Development.
24. Very important, more time spent out than in!
25. To experience a stimulation, exciting environment for children.
26. Chance to get dirty! Encourage imagination, improve confidence, social/peer interaction, physical activity, fresh air and exercise. (If I can give a child the chance to have a "bit" of the freedom and fun I had when I was growing up then I’ll feel like I’ve achieved something).
27. Positive feelings, release of tension/energy, exercise, exploration of local area, use of imagination, making friends, creativity.
28. Allows children to express themselves. Gives children the opportunity to get out of the classroom. Permits children to explore and learn about the natural environment.
29. Very valuable in helping to develop an appreciation of the environment and ways to interact and use it.
30. Informal learning and gaining new experiences.
31. It is fresh and fun, increases imagination and problem solving. You can make as much noise as you want to.
32. The value of outdoor play is that it provides exercise and is a fun way of learning about the environment, without even realising they are learning sometimes.
33. I think it gives children the chance to do something constructive. By providing them with something to do you are taking them away from destructive behaviour.

9. What barriers or disincentives are there to providing opportunities for outdoor play as part of your organisational work/role?
The chart below details the responses to this question. The biggest barrier that respondents detailed was that of parent’s attitudes and fears. Over 50% of respondents considered this to be a barrier. Other barriers high on the respondents list were health and safety – 39% and finances 37%.

Other barriers noted included:
- Difficulties promoting events
- Lack of time in a structural programme of activities
- All are beginning to be overcome thanks to the training and support of Wild About Play
- Ratio of adults to children goes down by 1/2 ie from 4:1 to 2:1 not possible to have this ratio most days as lots of children at the Nursery and only just enough staff
- Lack of staff to assist
- Children's attitudes/fears
- Funding is difficult for 'play', with educationally focussed orgs/stakeholders
- Having sites to a base level/quality that can facilitate/access env. play.
- Transport funding
- Litigation
- Personal inhibition

10. As an individual, how confident would you feel about running or supervising environmental play sessions?

72% of respondents felt that they were fairly confident or very confident about supervising environmental play sessions. 21% of respondents said that they were
apprehensive about running or supervising environmental play sessions whilst 7% said they were unwilling.

Of those who said they were unwilling, one specifically detailed a commitment to work with the local authority to support any projects that the Borough Council Ranger service wished to organise.
11. What would improve your confidence?

- Training: 53% of all respondents said that training would improve their confidence in running or supervising environmental play sessions.
- Support from parents/staff/community: 47% said that support from parents/staff and community would help.
- Greater personal experience and awareness of children's play: 42% said that greater personal experience and awareness of children's play would improve confidence.

12. Would you be likely to attend training events on environmental play?

84% of respondents said they would be likely to attend training events on environmental play.
13. If yes, what specific environmental play topics/themes would be most useful to you?

A The value and importance of play
B Facilitating child-centred environmental play
C Setting-up environmental play opportunities
D Creating/managing outdoor play spaces
E Managing risks outdoors
F Practical demonstrations
G Play types
H Physical outdoor play
I Creative play
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>J</th>
<th>Fantasy/imaginative play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Social play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Fire play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Explorative play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Object play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Wild foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the topics and theme offered to respondents were popular with 60% of respondents saying that B-Facilitating child-centred environmental play would be the most useful.
Other topics and themes suggested included:

- Bringing the natural world in i.e.: where natural space is not available, what can we do to involve children in nature still?
- Survival Skills
- Co-operative games
- Science in the outdoors for teenagers (& primary)
- Networking
- We work with 'disaffected youth' and low confidence youngsters mainly. We want to make an enclosed play area, designed by children.

13b. Would you be interested in helping to provide training for others in environmental play?

33% of respondents said they would be interested in helping to provide training for others.

If yes, in what areas?

- Environmental Art, Climbing, Den Building
- Early Years
- Earth Education, Story making, Environmental Art, Willow and found materials
- Story telling, story sharing, story making, story wars
- Risk & Play, Community Play Rangers – lessons & practice
- Recycling workshop
- We are currently writing/developing a basic environmental playwork course
- Consultation and participation
- Use of scrap - "big things"
• Env. Art, ceremony, celebrations, survival skills and wild foods, plant ID
• Env Play, forest schools, site design & infrastructure, adding value to env. Play projects and programs in urban greenspace, playschemes funding, training for playworkers
• Wildlife gardening

14. Would you be able/willing to provide an outdoor space for groups of children to play?

38% of respondents said they would be able or willing to provide outdoor spaces for groups of children to play.
15. Would you be willing to jointly organise environmental play opportunities with a local play project?

65% of respondents said they would be willing to jointly organise environmental play opportunities with a local play project.

16. Would you be likely to participate in a network for individuals/organisations interested in environmental play?
79% of respondents said they would be likely to participate in an environmental play network.

17. If yes, which of the following would you like the network to provide/operate?

How often?
63% of respondents said they would like the network to provide network meetings, the most popular interval being quarterly (58%). 49% of respondents said they would like the network to provide publications and resources.
6. Key conclusions and recommended actions from this research

- Some outdoor areas are currently well used for children’s play notably beaches and parks. Parks, as widespread features, are particularly good starting points for encouraging outdoor play and developing more varied free play opportunities.

- Other wild spaces are less intensively used for children’s play, eg woodlands and rivers, resulting in a corresponding paucity of naturalistic kinds of play such as den-building and tree climbing.

- Streets and areas near heavy traffic are not considered safe for play either by children themselves or parents, and motorised traffic is acknowledged as a significant barrier to outdoor play. Promotion and development of Homezones⁹ and similar traffic management initiatives are needed.

- When children are outdoors a wide range of play types is supported, particularly physical, fantasy and social play types. Water play is popular amongst children and can be facilitated easily at almost any outdoor setting.

- Fires are wanted by children, but currently under-provided for in play settings. Adults may be reluctant to use fires, but have some responsibility to help children develop positive relationships with fire. Appropriate training, procedures and information can help.

- A substantial proportion of playwork settings are currently not providing children with regular opportunities for environmental play. A combination of different measures may be needed for this to change:
  - Relevant training for individual playworkers and others.
  - Support, procedures and information for developing good practice.
  - Partnerships with owners and managers of appropriate wild spaces.
  - Affordable transport to and from wild spaces.
  - Information and education for parents, staff and other adults about the benefits, principles and practice of environmental play.
  - Links to national and local government initiatives, eg Every Child Matters¹⁰, health strategies, community programmes and Parish plans¹¹.

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⁹ www.homezonenews.org.uk
¹⁰ www.everychildmatters.gov.uk
¹¹ More information from the Countryside Agency (www.countryside.gov.uk)
• Health and safety issues are repeatedly cited as disincentives to environmental play provision. Need to:
  − circulate accurate research and factual information on risk;
  − develop and share best practice guidelines;
  − influence organisational policy.
• Training in the principles and practicalities of environmental playwork is needed for practitioners, but should also reflect existing knowledge and skills, and be targeted to help overcome identified barriers.
• There exists a demonstrably high degree of enthusiasm, motivation and skills amongst playworkers and others who work in natural environments with children. This should be recognised, celebrated and harnessed to ensure continuing development of environmental play in the region and beyond.
• Productive partnerships between workers from playwork and environmental sectors have huge potential to provide mutually beneficial outcomes. In particular, playwork projects may gain increased access to wild spaces and practical outdoor skills. Environmental workers may gain ideas and skills relating to facilitating free play at their settings. Potential working relationships may range from informal networks to organised work exchange programmes.
• Continued support through a regional environmental play network is needed and recognised by practitioners. There is also a need to link with other relevant networks, eg for environmental education, park rangers or Forest Schools.
• Work to ensure outdoor play environments, particularly naturalistic ones, are given priority and appropriate guidance within planning and land-management agencies.
• Government and other funding, eg through Big Lottery sources. This should include support for continuation of existing successful projects and for developing quality outdoor play environments.
• Sustained and coordinated lobbying of government, local authorities and relevant organisations on the issues around children’s outdoor play, such as litigation issues and sensible insurance provision.
• National and local campaigns to highlight the values, benefits and need for quality environmental play provision for all children throughout the UK.
7. Appendices
Where do you play?

Children’s survey.

A ‘Better Play’ funded project.

An environmental playwork project supporting, developing and promoting opportunities in the South West for children to play freely with, in and around natural environments.

Better Play, a partnership between Barnardo’s and the Children’s Play Council with lottery ‘good causes’ funding from the New Opportunities Fund.
Where do you play?

Colour in the places where you play on the picture below.
What and how do you play?
1. Look at the pictures below and colour in the pictures that show things you like to do when playing.
2. Tick the boxes to show if it is something you do now or something you would like to do.

- **Making and cooking on fires.**
  - Do now
  - Would like to do

- **Making & building dens.**
  - Do now
  - Would like to do

- **Collecting and eating wild foods.**
  - Do now
  - Would like to do

- **Playing outdoor games.**
  - Do now
  - Would like to do

- **Exploring nature.**
  - Do now
  - Would like to do

- **Playing with water.**
  - Do now
  - Would like to do

- **Climbing trees.**
  - Do now
  - Would like to do

- **Relaxing outdoors.**
  - Do now
  - Would like to do
Who are you?
Finish off and colour in either the girl or boy below. Colour or tick the box to show your age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>under 4</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>14 +</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anything else?
Is there anywhere else outdoors that you play or anything else that you enjoy doing outside? If so, draw or write it here.

Thank you for completing our survey. Please hand it to your playworker or return it to us at the address below.

Wild About Play Playwork Partnerships, University of Gloucestershire, Francis Close Hall, Swindon Road, Cheltenham, Glos. GL20 7RP
For further information visit: www.playwork.co.uk/wildaboutplay.htm or email wap@playwork.co.uk

 Acknowledgements: With thanks to Lily Horseman at the WildPlay Project, Herefordshire Nature Trust, for permission to use her original ideas.
Wild About Play - Guidelines for children’s survey

This survey is designed to explore children’s attitudes and ideas towards playing outdoors; where and what they like doing. On the whole the sheet is highly visual and hopefully self-explanatory. There is not necessarily a right and wrong way of doing it, but some guidelines are given below. Some children may complete the survey very quickly; others may take more time giving more detailed responses or just enjoying the process of colouring. The options are purposefully quite structured to make the analysis of completed surveys easier, but any additional contributions are very welcome.

“Where do you play?”

- The large picture consists of a variety of outdoor habitats where children could conceivably play. They are asked to colour in the areas where they would most like to play. To be meaningful this is best if restricted, i.e. colour in the three areas you like to play best. Alternatively children could colour in the areas they want and then number the order in which they rate them as places to play.
- There is some flexibility in the level of specificity of colouring (e.g. which part of the park they like best), but in general it’s the overall habitats that are important: garden, park, street, seaside, river (freshwater), school ground, countryside (field) and woodland. Hills could also conceivably be included.

“What and how do you play?”

- Again individual pictures can be coloured in to represent the outdoor play activities that children like doing best.
- In addition, they can use the tick boxes to indicate their answers, differentiating between what they already do and enjoy and things they have not yet done but would like to try.
- Again, if children colour-in all the boxes, then some indication of order of preference for activities would be additionally helpful.

“Anything else?”

- This section is optional for the children to make any other comments about their experience of playing outdoors. It is potentially very useful for us, as it comprises an open-ended forum. Words or pictures are equally appropriate.
- Alternatively the playworker may like to record, with permission from the child, any comments made whilst completing the survey.

Martin Maudsley
Playwork Partnerships 2003
Wild About Play Environmental Playwork Research Questionnaire

Wild About Play – A ‘Better Play’ funded project
An environmental playwork project supporting, developing and promoting opportunities in the South West for children to play freely with, in and around natural environments.

1. What is your organisation type/role:
   a. Holiday playscheme  
   b. After-school club  
   c. Open-access playground  
   d. Environmental organisation  
   e. Youth group  
   f. Adventure playground  
   g. Play ranger  
   h. Park ranger  
   i. Other (please specify)  

2. Do you have access to wild spaces for play at your setting? (‘Wild spaces’ - largely unstructured natural areas e.g. woodland, grassland, parks, heathland, commonland, community gardens, scrub, waste ground etc.)
   a. Yes  
   b. No  

3. Are there other accessible wild spaces within walking distance of your setting? (If no, please go to question 7.)
   a. Yes  
   b. No  

4. How often do children at your setting use wild spaces for play?
   a. Rarely  
   b. Sometimes  
   c. Often  
   d. Every session  

5. Which elements of wild spaces do children at your setting currently use for play?
   a. Paths and cleared areas  
   b. Managed grassland  
   c. Rough grassland  
   d. Trees/shrubs  
   e. Natural loose parts (e.g. logs)  
   f. Boundaries (e.g. hedges, walls)  
   g. Dense vegetation  
   h. Secluded areas  
   i. Bare earth/soil  
   j. Water  
   k. Other (please specify)  

1. Continued overleaf…
6. How do children currently use these spaces for playing?
   a. Exploratory play (e.g. catching insects) □
   b. Creative play (e.g. wood sculptures) □
   c. Mastery play (e.g. making fires, den-building) □
   d. Locomotor play (e.g. tree climbing) □
   e. Rough and tumble play (e.g. tag) □
   f. Symbolic play (e.g. using sticks as swords) □
   g. Fantasy play (e.g. ‘bear hunting’) □
   h. Imaginative play (e.g. pretending to be a tree) □
   i. Communication play (e.g. singing, poetry) □
   j. Social play (e.g. hide and seek) □
   k. Deep play (e.g. balancing high in a tree) □
   l. Object play (e.g. using tools) □
   m. Other (please specify) □

7. In your view, what barriers or disincentives are there to providing opportunities for environmental play at your setting?
   a. Lack of suitable sites □
   b. Site security □
   c. Health and safety □
   d. Insurance □
   e. Limited personal knowledge of natural environments □
   f. Finances □
   g. Access for disabled users □
   h. Transport □
   i. Children’s attitudes/fears □
   j. Parents’ attitudes/fears □
   k. Other (please specify) □

8. As an individual, how confident would you feel about running or supervising environmental play sessions?
   a. Unwilling □
   b. Apprehensive □
   c. Fairly confident □
   d. Very confident □
9. What would improve your confidence?
   a. Personal experience of natural spaces
   b. Support from parents/staff/community
   c. Financial support
   d. Awareness of appropriate sites
   e. Training
   f. Equipment/resources
   g. Other (please specify)

10. Would you be likely to attend training seminars on environmental playwork within the region?
   a. Yes
   b. No

11. If yes, what specific environmental playwork topics/themes would be most useful to you?
   a. Physical outdoor play (e.g. tree climbing, den building)
   b. Making and using fires
   c. Wildlife encounters (e.g. bug hunts, pond dipping)
   d. Wild foods (e.g. fruit picking)
   e. Exploring nature with children
   f. Environmental games
   g. Environmental art
   h. Water play
   i. Setting-up environmental play opportunities
   j. Creating/managing wild play spaces
   k. Facilitating child-centred environmental play
   l. Managing risks outdoors
   m. Practical demonstrations of environmental play spaces and practices
   n. Other (please specify)

12. If you would be interested in helping to provide training in environmental playwork, please indicate your area/s of interest/expertise.
13. Would you be likely to participate in a SW regional network for individuals/organisations interested in environmental playwork?
   a. Yes  
   b. No

14. If yes, which of the following would you like the network to provide/operate?
   a. E-groups  
   b. Newsletters  
   c. Websites  
   d. Publications and resources  
   e. Network meetings

   *indicate how often:* monthly  quarterly  termly  annually

15. If you would like to find out more about the Wild About Play Project and be added to our database, please complete your details below.

Name:  Organisation:  
Address:  
         
Post code:  
Tel:  Email:  

Please add my details to the *Wild About Play* database. I understand that personal data held is done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Signed:  Date:  

Any additional comments:

---

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return to:*

Wild About Play Project, Playwork Partnerships, University of Gloucesterhsire, Francis Close Hall, Swindon Road, Cheltenham, Glos. GL50 4AZ  
Tel: 01242 532 949  Fax: 01242 230 413  Email: wap@playwork.co.uk

Better Play, a partnership between Barnardo's and the Children's Play Council with lottery ‘good causes’ funding from the New Opportunities Fund.
Environmental Play Research Questionnaire

Wild About Play – A ‘Better Play’ funded project
An environmental playwork project supporting, developing and promoting opportunities in the South West for children to play freely with, in and around natural environments.

Wild About Play is seeking to work co-operatively with existing environmental organisations to enhance children’s play in outdoor, natural environments. This questionnaire will provide useful information on how best to take this forward.

1. What is your organisation type/role:
   a. Environmental education
   b. Environmental action / conservation
   c. Environmental science
   d. Environmental youthwork
   e. Landowner / site manager
   f. City Farm / Community Garden
   g. Community development
   h. Park ranger
   i. Other (please specify)

2. Do you own (or long-term lease) outdoor green spaces? Yes / No

3. Do you have other access to outdoor green spaces? Yes / No

   If yes to either 2. or 3., how would you describe the space and its natural elements? (E.g. managed woodland, open grassland)

4. Do you or your organisation work with children outdoors as part of your core role?
   a. Never
   b. Rarely
   c. Sometimes
   d. Regularly

5. In what capacity?
   a. Environmental education
   b. Practical conservation
   c. Structured recreational activities
   d. Organised events
   e. Free play
   f. Other (please specify)
6. How often do you facilitate children’s play outdoors?
   a. Never  b. Sometimes  c. Often  d. Always

7. Would you be interested in developing a greater use of outdoor green spaces for children’s play?
   a. Yes  b. Unsure  c. No

8. In your view, what do you think is the value of outdoor play for children?

9. What barriers or disincentives are there to providing opportunities for outdoor play as part of your organisational work/role?
   a. Lack of suitable space  h. Access for disabled users
   b. Site security  i. Transport
   c. Health and safety  j. Staff/management attitudes/fears
   d. Insurance  k. Parents’ attitudes/fears
   e. Limited personal knowledge / experience of play
   f. Finances  l. Not part of core organisational functions
   g. Not educational  m. Other (please specify)

10. As an individual, how confident would you feel about running or supervising environmental play sessions?

11. What would improve your confidence?
    a. Greater personal experience/awareness of natural spaces
    b. Greater personal experience/awareness of children’s play
    c. Support from parents/staff/community  d. Equipment/resources
    e. Financial support  f. Training
    g. Other (please specify)
12. Would you be likely to attend training events on environmental play?
   a. Yes  b. No

13. If yes, what specific environmental play topics/themes would be most useful to you?
   a. The value and importance of play
   b. Facilitating child-centred play
   c. Environmental play types
   d. Setting-up environmental play opportunities
   e. Creating/managing outdoor play spaces
   f. Managing risk and safety outdoors
   g. Practical demonstrations of environmental play spaces and practices
   h. Physical outdoor play (e.g. tree climbing, den building)
   i. Creative play (e.g. environmental art)
   j. Fantasy/imaginative play (e.g. ‘dragon quests’)  
   k. Social play (e.g. environmental games)
   l. Fire play (e.g. campfire cookery)
   m. Explorative play (e.g. bug hunts, pond dipping)
   n. Object play (e.g. using tools)
   o. Wild foods (e.g. fruit picking)
   p. Other (please specify)

If you would be interested in helping to provide training for others in environmental play, please indicate your area/s of interest/expertise.

14. Would you be able / willing to provide an outdoor space for groups of children to play? Please give details…

15. Would you be willing to jointly organise environmental play opportunities with a local play project?
   a. Yes  b. No

3. Continued overleaf…
16. Would you be likely to participate in network for individuals/organisations interested in environmental play?
   a. Yes   b. No

17. If yes, which of the following would you like the network to provide/operate?
   a. E-groups
   b. Newsletters
   c. Websites
   d. Publications and resources
   e. Network meetings

   indicate how often: monthly   quarterly   termly   annually

18. If you would like to find out more about the Wild About Play Project and be added to our database, please complete your details below.

   Name: ____________________________  Organisation: ____________________________
   Address: ____________________________
   Tel: ____________________________  Email: ____________________________

   Post code: ____________________________

Please add my details to the Wild About Play database. I understand that personal data held is done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

   Signed: ____________________________  Date: ____________________________

   Any additional comments:

   Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return to:

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