

Guidance on starting estate play sessions

What are estate play sessions?

In several estates in Hackney, parents have come together to organise regular play sessions in public spaces like paved areas or green spaces.

How they work:

- The sessions are organised by parents living in their estate.
- Children bring out their own toys – eg soft balls, scooters or bikes.
- Hackney Play Association's Play Streets project, funded by Hackney Council, can also supply a kit box with skipping ropes, bats and balls etc.
- Parents are responsible for their children, as on any other day
- Sessions might run for a few hours - weekly, monthly or less often so that children get to play on the estate safely and neighbours come together.



Hackney Play Streets is a project by:

Why run estate Play Sessions?

1. Children get to play out more, be active and have fun.
2. Youngsters also get to meet and make new friends
3. Parents have an opportunity to meet and chat too – which they often tell us helps boost their sense of community.

For more on the benefits of street play go to: <http://playingout.net/why/10-good-reasons/>

Case study – Woodberry Down Estate

Jackie Myers, a mum of two from the Woodberry Down estate in Hackney, organises monthly play sessions from spring to autumn.

“Our play and chat sessions have been a great way to bring the community together for a couple of hours each month. We’ve done it for the last two years. Hackney Play provided us with a play box with outdoor toys and some children come along on their bikes and scooters.

“We do it in a paved area between the reservoir and the flats near a water feature, which is ideal for the children to play around. The children come with their parents. They skip, they chalk and play ball games – whatever they fancy on the day. It’s a safe way for children to play together and the parents get to have a chat too. We’ve got regular families who come along but also people just turn up when they see what’s going on – which is great. I advertise it with posters in the local community hub, and on lampposts and notice boards, and also on a Facebook group for parents in the estate!”

How to get started

Step 1: Talk to neighbours and consult on the idea

It is a really good idea to informally consult with others living in the estate so that it encourages more people to get involved.

We at Hackney Play Streets offer help with this process, for example we can chat through ideas on how you might consult, help with photocopying or laminating posters, and we offer hands-on support like supporting you at a meeting if you have one, and by coming along to your first couple of estate play sessions.

Ideas on ways to consult

Here are some ideas of approaches you could use.

- Chat informally with other parents and residents on your estate whenever you get the opportunity! For example this could be if you see people walking about or at local play areas
- Try sitting outside near to your flat block or house with a cup of tea whilst your children play on the pavement – people may well stop and chat - and this can be a great way of getting to know more neighbours.
- Think about holding an informal meeting with other residents to discuss the idea – you could advertise the meeting via posters in any community spaces or on notice boards. It could take place in a community space, in a play space, at a local café or if you feel comfortable doing it – in your home. (See more information on holding a meeting below.)
- Flag up the idea on any appropriate social media forums – e.g. some estates have parents Facebook group.
- Talk to the residents committee to see if they can help – they may have any ideas on how to build support and communicate to residents.
- Chat to the local housing officer – they are often quite accommodating. In some estates they have helped get posters up and get the message out through group emails etc.
- Do a letter drop of properties – and/or a physical door knock to introduce yourself and the idea. Of course if the estate is very big, doing a letter drop might not be practical. But you could just aim for a block of properties nearest to where you think you might run the sessions. Knocking on people's doors may seem daunting. However residents who've done it are often pleasantly surprised at how enjoyable it can be. You get to chat to neighbours you may have seen around but never spoken to. We recommend doing it in a pair or group of you, so you can support each other and to share the load.

If you hold a meeting

The key benefit of having a meeting is it can help build support by bringing interested people together face to face, and also gives people a chance to ask questions.

At the meeting you could start by introducing yourself and the idea, why you think it would be a good thing to do. You could mention how lots of streets and estates in Hackney have been running street play sessions, and that people taking part have said they are really enjoyable and beneficial to children and grown ups alike – making areas feel friendlier and safer.

Then it's a good idea to open things up to a general discussion and see what people think. If there seems to be interest in the idea, things you might want to cover could include:

- Where you could do it in the estate – remember you could rotate the location, and don't necessarily have to settle on one place.
- The day, timing and frequency of the sessions – in our experience monthly might be a good starting point, but if there is a lot of enthusiasm to do it more often, then go for it! Popular timings have been Fridays early evening – e.g. 4-6pm, or Saturday or Sunday afternoons.
- Try to gather contact details from people at the meeting. You might want to set up a Facebook group or email group for easy communication.

Try to get help from others to can share tasks. These might include: helping to publicise the sessions – e.g. putting up (and taking down) notices/posters around the estate; storing the box of kit that Hackney Play Assoc provides; doing a basic risk/benefit assessment; and just helping to spread the word generally.

Choosing the location for the estate play sessions

Here are some things to think about in relation to the location of your estate play sessions:

- Doing it on paved areas as opposed to grass can sometimes work well as this allows for chalking and also means there is less likelihood dog poo to remove (if dog poo is an issue in grassy areas where you live).
- You might also want to choose somewhere close to your home so that it's easier to go back and forth if you need something.
- Remember you can always change the location going forward. Look at the first time as a try-out, which can be tweaked as you go along.
- In the planning phase, we would also be happy to come and meet you /other parents at your estate to look around possible areas and help you decide.

Step 2 - Planning your first session

A month before (if possible):

Tell us Let us know when you plan to run your first session and we will do our best to come along and support you.

One to two weeks before:

Publicise: Put up posters around the estate on notice boards or attach to lampposts with ribbon. You can download our poster template from <http://www.hackneyplay.org/playstreets/handy-tools/> or you could make your own. Remember to have a line on the poster saying words to the effect of: 'Parents are responsible for their children as on any other day – please accompany your child/children to the play session.'

Also think about reminders on appropriate social media, aimed at parents, or at local nursery or school notice boards, as well as at the community centre or hall if you have one locally. Join the Hackney Playing Out Facebook group – and you can post here. Also keep reminding neighbours with children whenever you see them around the estate, and get other parents to do the same!

A few days before:

Taking steps to manage risks: Do a simple risk assessment downloadable from <http://www.hackneyplay.org/playstreets/handy-tools/> and it's also a good idea to bring a small First Aid kit in case of any minor bumps or scrapes.

Reminders: Do a final push on publicity, e.g. emailing or text friends you know in the estate, asking the tenants and residents group (if there is one) to send a reminder to their email group; make sure posters are still up around the estate; tell any parents you see!

Step 3 – Attending your first estate play session

- Invite your children to bring one or two simple things to play with and also encourage them to share! Bring out the estate play box (which is on wheels for easy mobility!)
- You might want to also bring some light snacks and water and encourage others to do the same.
- Arrive a few minutes early so that you're settled and prepared.
- With other parents - do a quick walkabout to check for any obvious hazards. Unfortunately dog mess is one thing you might need to deal with, so bring small carrier bags and hand wipes.
- Be friendly when other families arrive – especially if you don't know them.
- You may find people standing a distance away, hesitating to join in – keep a look out for this and say something like: *Hello we're just having a little play session here for families – come and join us!*

- Before people leave remind them when the next session happens and see if you can get others to help – e.g. could someone put up the flyers.
- You might want to consider getting everyone's email or mob and setting up a Whats app group, or email group or Facebook page as a means to remind people each time and share ideas.



How to encourage play!

In short – children know how to do it, you don't need to do anything special like organise activities or games. In our experience children will quickly find ways to play with very simple toys when given positive encouragement to do so!

Toys that work particularly well in estate play sessions we've attended have included skipping ropes, chunky chalk and bat/ball games (included in the box of kit provided by Hackney Play Association). Children often bring their own scooters and bikes. Sometimes younger children may bring boxes of Brio/building blocks or push along cars etc – just encourage your children to bring along what they want. It may vary each time.

Remember to encourage everyone to clear up any rubbish at the end. You may find people don't want to finish, and that's fine – there is no need to usher anyone away. Just let them know you are leaving and if you are keeping the play box, ensure that the gear is collected back up inside.

Frequently asked questions

1. **As the estate play sessions involve children, do I need to have an enhanced DBS check (disclosure and barring check)?**

To our knowledge enhanced DBS checks are not needed for people organising estate play sessions. This is because your role is about encouraging parents to bring out their children to play together at a set time under parental supervision. You are NOT providing childcare. Furthermore your role is occasional and does not involve unsupervised access to children. We advise you make clear on all publicity that parents are responsible for their children.

2. **I'm worried that some neighbours might complain about children playing near their properties.**

It is possible that some residents may have reservations about the estate play sessions – but we often find this may be because they misunderstand or simply need more information about what is happening. In this scenario, taking the time to chat through their concerns face to face in a friendly open way, inviting them to ask questions, may well help. Explain that the sessions will be low key, with children skipping or chalking, that parents will supervise children, and it will be just be for a few hours.

It might be worth trying to get them to think about when they were young playing out – e.g. say I don't know if you remember playing out as a child what kind of things did you like doing? This might connect them back to happy experiences and help them better understand the benefits of the sessions.

Playing Out offer some really helpful responses to potential objections here: <http://playingout.net/why/possible-concerns/> Some of the questions are more related to play streets or 'playing out' sessions where the road is shut for play – but many are applicable to estate play sessions.

What if the weather is bad?

With our climate, this could well happen! But rest assured children generally won't mind being out in rain or colder weather; so long as they are dressed appropriately it can be lots of fun. If there are extremes of weather e.g. very hot or freezing conditions, you could simply shorten the session, or if really awful you might just have to cancel.

3. **What if children come along without parents? What if they misbehave?**

Some children may well arrive unaccompanied, particularly if they are used to playing outside in the estate independently. It's important to be aware that you are running the session in a public space where children are entitled to play on any day or time. For this reason your starting point should always be around including as much as possible. If there are several other parents present, having a few children there unaccompanied should not cause big problems.

That said, if lots of children are coming unaccompanied, it could become difficult because it creates a sense of extra responsibility on parents that are there. One way to address this might be to explain to the children that the sessions are meant for parents/carers too and could they go and ask their parents to come out. You could have spare flyers for them to pass on which make it explicit that the sessions are aimed at families with parents supervising their own children.

If children's behaviour causes serious issues, you should not hesitate to intervene, calmly but firmly. Playing Out - the national organisation advises: "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."

4. Do I need to get permission from the tenants and residents association

You do not need to get permission from your estate's residents so long as the play session is taking place in a public space. Children have a right to play out in their neighbourhood. All you are effectively doing is coordinating a group of parents to come together with their children at a set time, it is not an event or anything needing special permission. We do advise talking to/consulting with the tenants and residents association because they may have useful information or contacts to help and also may be able to give you other support.

Also it's worth knowing that many social housing providers recognise the benefits of children playing out in estates and are starting to become more active in promoting play. Hackney Housing, for example, the biggest social landlord in Hackney, has identified that supporting children's rights to play out as part of its strategic priorities.

5. How much money does it all cost?

Play is free and the sessions should not cost anything; they are designed to be self-sustaining. We will provide a box of basic play equipment to start you off, and families bring their own toys from home. The only potential cost is for printing – but we can prepare you a set of reusable flyers and print letters should you need them. Also the tenants and residents group may have access to a printer, which you can ask to use. Sometimes people bring out food or drinks to share (e.g. a thermos of tea, fruit or biscuits) but the point is it's optional and this should not involve having to buy in food in specially.



Support from the Hackney Play Streets project

We can provide free support for anyone who wish to start estate play sessions on your estate. If you are interested in the idea, please get in touch with us for a start-up chat.

- We can assist with consulting with neighbours, including attending a residents' meeting, advising on the location of the sessions, printing and laminating posters, advising if you hit any barriers e.g. with housing officers or residents groups.
- With notice, we can attend your first estate play session.
- We provide you with a play box (worth around £100), which contains outdoor play materials like skipping ropes, balls etc – example shown below.
- We offer ongoing support when you're up and running.

Contact us: Allison.vitalis@hackneyplay.org or Playstreets@hackneyplay.org.



Key links:

Hackney Play Association: www.hackneyplay.org/playstreets

Playing Out: www.playingout.net - the national organisation supporting anyone interested in supporting children to play out where they live

Hackney Play Streets is a project by:

