

Every voice counts:

Asking children about play in WA

A guide for trusted adults supporting children's participation



Children have valuable perspectives on their lives, their play and the communities they live in. To help inform the WA Play Strategy, we want to hear directly from children about what play means to them, what they enjoy, and what helps or gets in the way of their play.

Why children's voices matter

The WA Government wants to better understand how children experience play across Western Australia. As part of the WA Play Strategy, we are inviting adults who live, work, or spend time with children aged up to eight years to help us listen to children's ideas and knowledge about play. We want to hear about what play means to them, what they enjoy, and what helps or might limit their opportunities to play. Children's experiences and ideas are valuable. By listening to their voices, we can make better decisions about how to support play and create environments where all children can learn, grow and thrive.

Play is an important part of childhood and is recognised as a right for all children.

The WA Play Strategy aims to support opportunities for children to play and to help create environments where play is valued and accessible. This work aligns with Australia's commitment to children's rights and participation in decisions that affect them, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Early Years Strategy 2024-2034.

Children have valuable perspectives on their lives, their play and the communities they live in. Listening to children does not mean asking them to make adult decisions. It means giving them opportunities to share their experiences and views, and making sure that the policies and programs that affect them take those perspectives into account.

Play in children's everyday lives

Childhood looks different for each child. During a typical week, children may spend time in a range of places, including home, early learning services, school, outside school hours care, community activities, and with family members. Children's experiences can vary depending on their age, interests, relationships, and the communities in which they live. For example, growing up in a regional town may offer different experiences from growing up in metropolitan Perth.

Rather than relying on adult assumptions about children's lives and experiences, this survey is an opportunity to hear directly from children themselves. We want to learn about when and where children play, who they spend time with, and the activities they enjoy. These insights will help build a richer understanding of childhood across Western Australia.

Children are experts in their own lives. While adults make many important decisions on children's behalf, we cannot fully understand their impact on children's experiences unless we take the time to listen to them.



Every voice counts

We want to hear from children all over WA, including children living in regional and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, children from different cultural and language backgrounds, and children whose voices are not always heard.

Children are active participants in their own lives. We want every child to have the opportunity to take part in ways that suit their age, interests and preferred way of communicating. Inclusive approaches help ensure a wide range of experiences are represented.

Being a good listener

Young children communicate in many ways, including talking, drawing, movement, gestures, facial expressions, and interactions with the people and materials around them. Listening well means slowing down, paying attention to different forms of communication, and allowing children's ideas and interests to guide the conversation.

Children are more likely to share their thoughts and ideas when they feel comfortable and supported. This survey is guided by the Australian Government's Voice of Children Framework, which highlights the importance of trust, safety, accessibility, and genuine opportunities for children to have a say. Parents, family members, educators and community members all play an important role in supporting children's participation. Children often feel most comfortable sharing their experiences and opinions in their home language and with trusted adults who know them well.

Listening safely and fairly

Children's participation must always be voluntary and follow Western Australia's child safe standards. Children should be given a simple explanation about why they are being asked for their views and how their ideas may be used. If you are not the child's parent or guardian, you will also need to explain this to them and get permission from their parent or guardian. The child must also agree to take part. A child's decision must always be respected. If a child says "no", walks away, seems uncomfortable, or shows that they no longer want to participate, they should not be pressured to continue.

Children need to feel physically, emotionally and culturally safe when sharing their views. Adults involved in the consultation should be aware of their responsibilities for children's wellbeing, and know how to respond appropriately if a child raises concerns about their safety.

What to do

A summary of what to do is provided in the Listener's Guide on page 8.

1. Get ready to listen

There is no single 'best' way to consult young children. The most effective approaches are often part of everyday activities. Drawing together, talking in the sandpit, going for a walk, or sharing a play experience can all provide meaningful opportunities to hear children's views. Finding a place to 'anchor' can help create the conditions for these interactions to happen naturally. An anchor point is a familiar place where the child and adult can focus together with few distractions.

Before you begin, think about where the child or children are most likely to feel relaxed and engaged for a few minutes.

A good anchor point is a familiar place or activity that helps a child feel comfortable and relaxed. It will vary depending on the child's age, interests and experiences.



2. Check the child wants to take part.

Once you have found a good place to anchor, explain that you would like to learn about their experiences of play. Ask if they are happy for you to share their ideas with others and let them know you will write down some of what they say. Only continue if they agree.



Drawing with children

Drawing is often used to help young children share their ideas, particularly those aged 3 to 8 years. If a child would like to draw while sharing their ideas about play, you may find the template on page 10 helpful for capturing their drawings and comments.

Using the template is completely optional and is simply provided as a starting point.

Children are free to choose whether they would like to draw and what materials they would like to use.



3. Listen in - Start the conversation.

Start by asking, "Tell me what you know about play," then follow the child's lead. Explore where they play, who they play with, what they enjoy doing, and what could make play better for them. The aim is to understand their views, not to look for specific answers.

4. Keep the conversation alive

You can ask gentle questions from the Listener's Guide on page 9 to help the conversation flow and check that you and the child are understanding each other. When the child is ready to finish, thank them for sharing their ideas.

5. Make notes

Take notes while you are talking and record any significant comments the child makes about their play, using their exact words where you can.

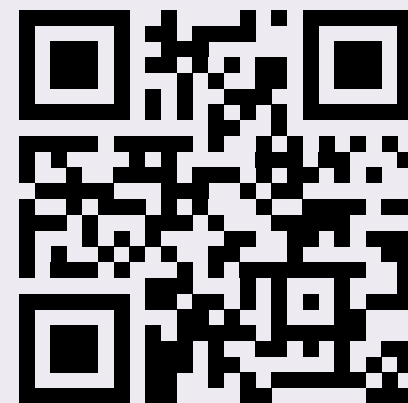
6. Photograph with permission

If the child has drawn, made or played with something while you were spending time together, ask them if you can take a photo. Proceed only with the child's permission. Photographs must not identify the child.

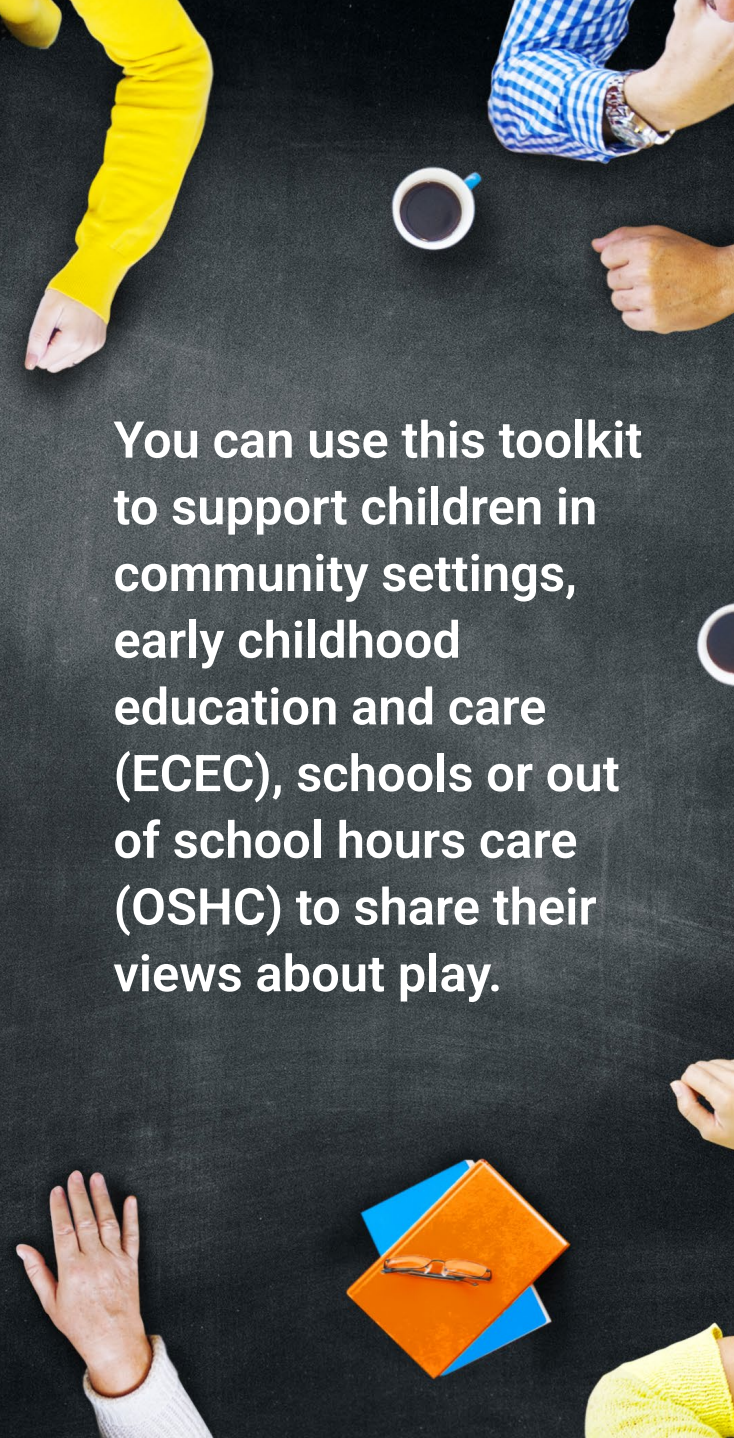
To finish...

7. Share their views

Complete the online form to share what the child told you about play. Scan the QR Code or click on it to share and upload.



All submissions will be included in the consultation, but they must not identify any child. Please check that names, faces and other identifying details have been removed before uploading.



You can use this toolkit to support children in community settings, early childhood education and care (ECEC), schools or out of school hours care (OSHC) to share their views about play.

You can use this toolkit to support children in community settings, early childhood education and care (ECEC), schools or out of school hours care (OSHC) to share their views about play. If you are planning to listen to children in your community setting or workplace, you might need to access the appropriate consent processes for your setting. A template you can edit to collect parent or guardian consent is available on the [Toolkit webpage](#).

Importantly, listening to children's perspectives – whether individually or in a group experience – requires you to gain agreement of each child individually before you proceed.

1. Explain the project.
2. Explain they can stop without getting into trouble or disappointing you.
3. Ask if they agree to participate – this could be a verbal, 'okay', or non-verbal 'thumbs up'.

Please refer to the [Commissioner for Children and Young People Participation Guidelines](#) for more information.

**Every child's voice matters.
Every child's right to play matters.**

Thank you for making children's voices count in Western Australia!

Thank you for taking the time to listen to children and support their right to have a say in matters that affect them. By participating in this consultation, you are helping ensure that children's experiences, ideas and insights inform the ongoing development of the WA Play Strategy and future decisions about play opportunities across WA.

We are committed to finding ways of sharing what we learn and how children's contributions have helped shape future planning and decision-making with the children themselves. When children can see that their ideas have been listened to and acted upon, participation becomes meaningful and trust grows.

By listening carefully to the children in our lives, we can help create a Western Australia where every child has the opportunity to enjoy a happy, healthy childhood through play.

If you would like to be notified when the WA Play Strategy is launched, [sign-up here](#):



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Listener's guide: Engaging children up to 8 years

1

Get ready to listen

Spend a few minutes with the child in a place where they feel safe, relaxed and comfortable.

Pick an activity the child enjoys doing with you. It can be as short as 5 mins or as long as needed.

DRAW



MAKE



PLAY



RELAX



SNACK



2

Check the child wants to take part

I'd like to learn what play is like for you.

Can I write down some of the things you tell me?

Is it ok if I share your ideas with other people?

Only continue if the child says or shows they are willing. Explain they can stop at any time and won't get into trouble.

3

Listen in. Start the conversation

Tell me what you know about play

It's okay to simplify the language you use, point to things and use your own words to make sure the child understands what you are asking.

Older children can be invited to draw what they know about play. Younger children may prefer to 'show' you or share what they know in other ways.

4

Keep the conversation alive

Listen Be patient, avoid 'teaching', and take notice of their response. Try not to suggest answers.

Invest Acknowledge their responses and show you are interested and curious about their views.

Verify Check that you understand what they mean. Ask, "Do you mean... Do I have that right?"

Explore Pull some 'threads' in the conversation to find out more.

When do you usually play?

What do you usually play?

Where do you usually play?

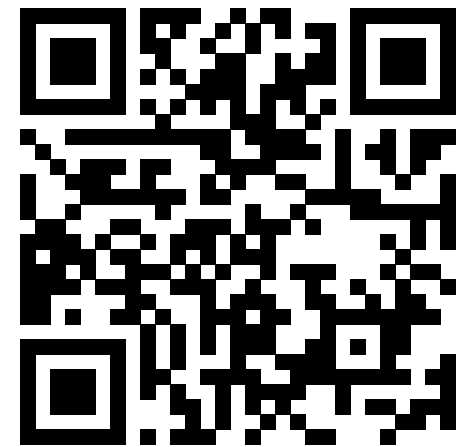
Who do you usually play with?

What would make play better for you?

7

Share their views

Complete the online form to share what the child told you about play. Scan the QR Code or click on it to share and upload.



All submissions will be included in the consultation, but they must not identify any child. Please check that names, faces and other identifying details have been removed before uploading.

5

Make notes

Write down any significant comments the child makes about their play, using their exact words where you can.

6

Take a photo

If the child has drawn, made or played with something while you were spending time together, ask them if you can take a photo. Proceed only with the child's permission. Photographs must not identify the child.

Remember to follow the child's lead. When they're ready to move on, thank them for sharing their ideas!

1

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2

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Don't forget to take a photo!