

LONDON
PLAY



A guide to play streets



The London Play Streets project is funded by the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities programme. Working across 12 London boroughs, in areas which stand to reap the greatest benefits, London Play is helping residents bring their streets alive with play. The aim? To spark nothing short of a London play street revolution.

Find out if we can help you - call 0203 384 8510 or email info@londonplay.org.uk
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DID YOU KNOW?

The first play streets started in New York city in 1914¹



WHAT is a play street?

Play streets simply give children the chance to play freely and safely on their doorstep - by neighbours agreeing to temporarily close their street to through traffic.

Sessions usually last for between two and five hours and can be held weekly, fortnightly or monthly; on week days after school, or during weekends. It is up to you and your neighbours to decide.

My kids still talk about “the day we closed the road and played games with all our friends, without any cars coming,” and cannot wait until the next time.

Tina, Camden



DID YOU KNOW?

Some 80 per cent of public space in London is made up of streets.²

We've helped lots of people set up play streets, so we know they mean:

- More active, happy children (with friends next door).
- Friendlier, safer communities (where people know their neighbours).
- Regular opportunities for everyone to have fun.

WHY start a play street?



HOW to get started

Play streets make play on the street a regular event. But it's a good idea to begin with a one-off 'trial' play street session so that everyone knows what they're signing up for - and sees for themselves just how brilliant play streets are!

Here's how:

- Chat to a few neighbours - what do they think of the idea?
- If it sounds like they're up for it, flyer the whole street and invite everyone to a meeting. On the street is ideal but you could also use a local school or community centre.
- At the meeting, agree on a date and timings for your trial.

LONDON PLAY CAN HELP!

We can go with you to meetings, answer questions, offer advice, supply materials, help approach your council and, depending on where you are, maybe even help with funding. Just get in touch.

- Contact the council and ask how to go about applying for your street to be closed for the trial. In some boroughs you can do this online.
- Once the council gives the go-ahead, meet again with your neighbours to make a plan. Decide what needs to be done in advance, confirm who will be around on the day and how they'll be involved.
- Put posters up on the street to promote your play street session.
- Keep talking to your neighbours and get the children you know excited and involved.
- Wait expectantly for the day to arrive...

WHAT to do on the day

DID YOU KNOW?

London is home to more than 1.6 million children³

It's not complicated to make a play street happen: close the road - let the children play - open the road again.

- Confirm with neighbours who is doing what (and when) before closing off the street. The main role for adults during the session is making sure that someone is always available to talk to motorists at both ends of the street.
- Put 'road closed' signs at either end of the street (usually provided by the council).
- You don't need to provide anything; children will bring out bikes, scooters or anything else they want to play with. But you could consider leaving out cardboard boxes, chalks, ropes, old sheets etc.



*There is no shortage of parents to steward the road closures and it has been very enjoyable. We have provided small play items such as soft balls, ropes, boxes - but mainly the children seem to bring their own bikes etc to the road and enjoy playing together.
Lucy, Waltham Forest*

WHAT to do on the day

- Open up your street and see it come alive with play. Talk to your neighbours. Have a cup of tea.
- Before the end of the session, tidy up a bit so you are ready to re-open the road on time.
- Once everyone has had a chance to reflect on a successful trial, decide between you how often you want future play street sessions to take place.
- Apply to your council for a regular play street order.

WHERE else are there play streets?

DEVONSHIRE ROAD, ENFIELD

'Road Closed' says the sign. Silence; no more unwanted cars on this residential road. Gradually, people take over the street. The adults lean by the walls, beginning to chat. Some are sipping tea. Less cautious, the pre-teens have loaded their water pistols and are chasing each other in and out of gardens. Young children are on scooters or plastic ride-on cars. Others chalk on the pavements and the road in bright colours.

Soon, and – despite occasional interruptions for cars walked out of the street – there are 30 kids of varying ages wide-eyed and alive; packs race on two, three or four wheels whilst others skip, chalk, chase and squirt. Adults watch, talk; some scooter.

Before we know it, we're pulling back the barriers and removing our signs. Another great play street session, over, and we are already looking forward to the next one.

Richard Crutchley, resident



SWIFT ROAD, ORIEL ESTATE, HOUNSLOW

Three enthusiastic residents on the Oriel Estate took the lead in organising their first play street session, opting for a street party to kick things off. It wasn't clear - before the day - how enthusiastic other residents would be!

But once the bunting was up and the music was playing, more and more people came out of their flats; one with a barbecue, another with face paints, several with food to cook or drinks to serve at the makeshift bar manned mostly by the children.

There was dancing and singing from the adults, while children played with bits of clay, rope and chalks that had been left out for them to use.

By the end of the session everyone was on a high. Adults said they'd had a great time and would like to do it again. The children didn't want it to end.

*Do we have to finish at six? I want to do this forever.
Child, 10 years old*



QUESTIONS we get asked

Do we need permission?

You need to apply for a road closure order from your local authority (usually the transport and highways department). London Play can help, and put you in touch with the right person. A few streets can't be closed because they are on a bus or emergency route or similar, but most residential streets will be eligible.

How long does it take to get a road closure order?

It depends on the council. It could take as little as four weeks - but eight weeks is more usual and it can be longer.

How often, and how long are play street sessions?

It is up to you and your neighbours but usually they run for between two and five hours - either weekly, fortnightly or monthly - after school or during weekends.



What about my car?

People can leave their cars parked in the street. Residents who need to use their car during a session are simply escorted in or out at walking pace by an adult.

What support is available?

London Play wants to help residents launch play streets in their neighbourhoods. We can provide advice, ongoing support and training (for example in first aid or road safety); and hope residents will want to inspire and recruit others to launch play streets in neighbouring areas.

As for funding - councils or local businesses are worth approaching as they often have small pots of money available for community events. London Play also has funds available to support play streets in some areas - give us a call and find out if we can help.

Are play streets just for children?

In our experience everyone gets something out of a play street, even those who had doubts to begin with.

Children get time and space to play but play streets also offer residents of all ages a great reason to get out and get to know each other.

Do we need insurance?

You shouldn't need it. Just make sure that parents, carers and residents understand they are responsible for their own safety and that of their children. If your council insists then get in touch with us.

What if people object?

It is not unusual to encounter one or two people who are initially resistant to the idea of a play street – but in our experience they normally come round once they see it in action. Offer to address their concerns openly and honestly. If you need help, contact us at London Play.

What about unwanted visitors?

We have never heard of unwanted visitors being an issue. If anything, play streets mean that people know more of their neighbours and therefore make it easier to spot outsiders.



Will it be noisy?

The noise of cars will be replaced with the sound of children playing and people enjoying themselves.

What if it rains?

Rain – and even snow – can add to the range of play possibilities on a street. Children will play outside in all weathers if they are dressed for it and allowed to.

Can we take photos?

Talk about this with your neighbours in advance and agree whether photos can be taken; as well as how they can be used. Send your best pictures to us at London Play and we'll use them to promote even more play streets!

With the road closed at each end, it took a while... but from quite early on the children realised that they had the road to themselves - for the first time in their lives!

Dave, Croydon

PLAY STREET OF THE YEAR Could you be next?

In 2014, London Play added an exciting new category to its annual adventure play awards - especially for play streets.

The children of Redston Road in Haringey made a fantastic film about their play street to enter the awards, and won! The recipients of the inaugural Janet Dalglish London Play Street of the Year won a cash prize to fund a street celebration to mark their win.

We're really chuffed by our prize and the kids had a blast at the awards. It was lovely to see what others have been up to and very inspiring.

Lesley, Haringey

If you'd like to enter next year's awards, please get in touch. And to stay in the loop, make sure you become a member of London Play, sign up to our newsletter, follow us on Twitter and like us on Facebook. You'll be happy you did!



USEFUL STUFF to help you plan

London Play has developed some useful templates that can help with planning your play street.

The following resources can be downloaded from our website www.londonplay.org.uk

- Play street flyer/poster
- Sample resident letter
- Risk/benefit form (don't worry we can help you complete this)
- Access for cars: what to do.

Here are some links to other websites with resources and useful information:
www.playingout.net
www.streetsalive.org.uk

I haven't any children of my own but I am delighted to see so many children playing out together!

Mary, Hounslow



DID YOU KNOW?

An ICM UK-wide poll in 2010 revealed 81% of adults believe playing out improves community spirit.⁴

We have been supporting and promoting the development of play streets in London since 2008.

We also promote children's right to play, campaign for more and improved out-of-school play services for children and young people across London, and support anyone - individuals, community groups or organisations - who provides play in the capital.

We create more opportunities for children to play outdoors by working with communities to design and build nature play areas.

WHAT is London Play?

London Play is a small charity that strives to get more children in London playing out more often.



If you support children's right to play, why not join us?
Becoming a member is free to people living or working
in London. Outside London you can still become a
supporter. Sign up at www.londonplay.org.uk

References

- 1 New York Times, 1914
- 2 Roads Task Force report, Transport for London, July 2013
- 3 Trust for London, Childcare Report 2014
- 4 ICM UK-wide poll for Playday 2010, Play England

Photographs: Devonshire Road, Enfield (pages 7, 13, 14 - Phil Rogers); Rommany Road (pages 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9 & 11 - Henry Gorse), Lambeth; Canning Road, Islington (this page); and Roxwell Road, Hammersmith and Fulham (back cover - Catherine Masser).

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