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Advice for loose parts & natural resources in the playground:

Congratulations if you have purchased loose parts and natural resources. These should give years of open ended joy, creative thinking, enabling a broad range of children to assess risks and benefits and create some wonderful, playful and memorable experiences.

Loose parts represent anything that could be played with by a child. This means that the sky is pretty much the limit.

Recycled loose parts are a great solution for schools as the resources used are cheap, varied, unusual and help to reduce waste going into landfill sites. Once you start looking at waste/seconds as potential playthings, it's amazing how much of it there is and how much children enjoy playing with it! Simon Nicholson wrote about the theory of loose parts back in 1971. He noted that: *'In any environment both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.'*

So according to the theory, a greater variety of objects and materials to hand will multiply the possibilities for play potential - with the child being stimulated in a variety and combination of ways. Children play with far more imagination and flexibility with loose parts that are lying around compared to specially designed play equipment. Loose parts lead to children developing greater flexibility in their play and being more flexible and adaptable in their thinking.

Use of loose parts holds unique risks, as by their definition they are open ended, creative and open to a wide interpretation of uses. This is the same as any everyday equipment not designed specifically for play.

As with any new piece of equipment or new children using existing equipment, a risk benefit assessment needs to be undertaken and rules for use clearly communicated to ensure maximum fun in the safest way.

Source:- playengland.org.uk, & creative star



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Checklist

It is advisable to have some safety guidelines for using loose parts. A generic example is provided here from guidelines produced by playengland.org.uk When using loose parts the health and safety considerations are simple and practical.

Loose parts checklist before play:-

- ✓ All loose parts should be continuously checked that it is safe enough to play with. A good look over should do it.
- ✓ With more unusual items, it pays to run your hands lightly over surfaces and bend and wiggle bits to test if they are going to flake, fracture or break.
- ✓ Ensure that all part edges and surfaces are smooth – free from splinters for example on wooden items. If they have become rough, sand before use or leave out of play.
- ✓ Things don't have to look perfect and faults can often be remedied by sticking a bit of fabric plaster or strong tape over them just so they're out of harms' way.
- ✓ With natural rustic products keep checking for splinters, sand / treat accordingly if required. Once their natural decomposition is under way don't miss the chance to use them for bug houses and/or whittle them into other uses/products- perhaps the children could suggest.
- ✓ During our summer months and 'hot weather' days remember that mirrors & metal loose parts equipment are conductors of heat and therefore a potential fire and burns risk. Ensure that this type of equipment is not left in direct sunlight for prolonged periods of time and perform regular checks on its surrounding equipment/area as well as its temperature to the touch.

During play:

- Inform the participants that as some items are heavier or long, they should not be carried or held above head height and that some should ideally be moved using two people to ensure that no injuries occur.
- Point out obvious specific risks relating to individual products and rules of use.
- Identify which products may need higher levels of supervision and store them in an area to be treated differently.
- If you are using outdoor products be aware that the risk will increase relating to certain weathers such as increased slippiness, manage accordingly.
- Loose parts like all products offer opportunities that children will play in unusual ways with products, be sure to create a framework of understanding with regards to climbing, balancing, building to ensure the children play safely.



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- Ensure an adequate level of supervision and skill of supervisor is risk awareness trained

After play:

Whilst tidying up take stock of all the loose parts and identify any breakages, damage or dirt which needs to be rectified before your next play.

Note: Playing with these resources is a superb opportunity to explore and discuss risk with kids so that they can learn how to better assess risk for themselves.

We advise you assess whether your loose parts to be used need to be under the direct supervision of an adult.

Managing risk generally

Managing risk in play provision.

Guidance, which is endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive, shows how current risk-assessment practice takes into account the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences, including the risks.

It starts from the position that, while outside expertise and advice are valuable, the ultimate responsibility for making decisions rests with the provider.

The full implementation guide is written for those responsible for managing play provision, and for those involved in designing and maintaining such provision.

The general approach should also be useful for those who manage other spaces and settings where children play.

To download Managing risk in play provision: Implementation Guide, visit

www.playengland.org.uk/managingrisk



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