

The Smartkidz Ethos

Our underpinning philosophy comes from the PARS model which is based on the philosophy of the adventure playground pioneers from the 1950s/60s. At Smartkidz we believe that children should be children and have the opportunity to decide for themselves how they spend their time at our clubs. We believe that children are the experts in play and as far as possible should be given time and space to make their own decisions about how they play, who they play with and long they play for.

Our understanding of play is defined by the Playwork Principles (2005)¹:



“Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.”

At Smartkidz we therefore support and facilitate children’s play without directing or controlling it.

The Smartkidz Environment

Our outdoor area has been modelled on the original adventure playgrounds from the 1960s. Lady Allen of Hurtwood, one of the adventure playground pioneers, defined these as follows:



“a playground where children are provided with miscellaneous equipment, often waste material, from which they may contrive their own amusement.”²

We have added ropes swings, climbing nets, fire pit area, loose parts (crates, tyres, wood, old bikes, drainpipes, pallets, and ropes) which allow children to take part in a range of different play types (Hughes, 2002³). We also offer experiences that children may not have come across before, from climbing high, lighting fires, using tools, playing outside in a variety of weathers, and playing in the dark.

Our indoor space also aims to offer as many opportunities as possible for children to explore and create on their own terms. We offer loose parts (Nicholson, 1971⁴) for the children to use for their own purposes and children make their own choices about how they use the space and materials.

The PARS model includes a range of theories and methods, which help us to evaluate the outdoor and indoor space according to children’s needs. Our staff continuously evaluate and adapt according to a range of PARS theories, what is or is not being used and what the children want or suggest. This often involves making risk-benefit assessments to decide whether to, for example, add additional

¹ PPSG PLAYWORK PRINCIPLES SCRUTINY GROUP (2005) The Playwork Principles.

² ALLEN, M. & NICHOLSON, M. (1975) *Lady Allen of Hurtwood Memoirs of an Uneducated Lady*, London, Thames and Hudson.

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HUGHES, B. (2002) *A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types*, London, PlayEducation.

⁴ NICHOLSON, S. (1971) How not to cheat children - the Theory of Loose Parts. *Landscape Architecture*, 62, 30-35.

materials to the setting or to remove equipment which is too dangerous. Children also regularly adapt the outdoor and indoor spaces themselves which increases their sense of ownership and belonging in our clubs.

Role of adults at Smartkidz

At Smartkidz we use the PARS model of playwork practice (Newstead, 2016⁵). Decisions about whether to intervene or not are continuously being made at all times within our settings using the PARS model. This often means that it looks like our staff are standing around doing nothing! In fact, they are using 'containment', where they are assessing whether intervention is really in the children's best interests. Our staff have all been trained in making these judgements using the PARS model. Staff only intervene if they feel that they need to from a **safety** perspective, an **operational** perspective (i.e., snack, lunch or parent pick up) or to give a child **help or support** (physical or emotional), where needed. PARS Techniques are used by our staff to decide if intervention is needed, with the majority of these Techniques being carried out without the children noticing. Our PARS practitioners make decisions about whether to intervene in children's activities on a minute-by-minute basis, according to individual situations as they occur. Sometimes our staff will decide that it is in the children's best interests to make decisions and solve problems for themselves, where they judge the children capable of doing so. This means that in our clubs, children are often given time to sort out disputes between themselves, assess risk for themselves or just given space to enjoy time on their own. In this way we enable children to develop independence, resilience and above all, a sense of freedom and opportunity to enjoy their childhood without the pressures of the adult world.

Supporting and facilitating play

At Smartkidz we support and facilitate children's play without directing or controlling it. This means that we:

- Provide an environment which offers children a range of play types, including risky play.
- Provide a range of equipment, resources and activities on a daily basis which frequently change according to children's needs.
- Encourage children to request additional or alternative equipment as they choose, and if a request must be refused, explain why.
- Respect children's wishes not to engage in specific activities or with certain children.
- Make outdoor play available every day unless the weather is particularly bad.
- Encourage children to change both the indoor and outdoor environments to suit their own play needs.
- Offer occasional structured activities on a free choice basis that enable children who choose to do so to develop their knowledge and/or skills in a specific area.
- Allow children freedom of creative expression, particularly in artistic or creative play.
- Interrupt and intervene in children's self-directed activities only when necessary.
- Wherever possible, warn children in advance when time is running out.
- Allow children not to be visible to adults at all times (although all children are always within hearing range of staff).

Risk in Play

Smartkidz Play and Learn believe that activities that contain a higher level of risk are important for children to take part in to help children grow, learn, and become independent in assessing risk for themselves. At Smartkidz we therefore allow children to assess the risk of activities themselves and

⁵ Newstead, S. (2016). Deconstructing and reconstructing the unorthodox recipe of playwork. Unpublished doctoral thesis, UCL Institute of Education, London, UK.

staff members support children with this when necessary. We often talk to children about risk and hazards in the club and get them involved in helping with the club risk assessment.

We believe that the children should feel empowered in the decision process of setting boundaries. We feel that this way the children are more inclined to take notice of the boundaries instead of seeing the boundary as more of a challenge set by adults, which they should attempt to overcome!

As a club we allow children to access a range of different weather conditions including rain, snow, heat, ice, and winds. We will make decisions about the safety of the children based on weather conditions as they occur. We expect children to bring suitable clothing for the weather.

Some of the activities we provide for the children to access risk in play are:

- Tree climbing and climbing nets.
- Fire making - including cooking over open fires.
- Woodwork and using tools such as bill hooks, loppers, sheath knives, bow saws and mallets.
- Activities with bricks
- Activities involving glue guns, spray paint and other solvent resources.
- Playing near and around lakes, ponds, rivers, and the sea (on trips)
- Use of sharp kitchen equipment and indoor cooking activities.
Whittling

To ensure that children remain as safe as possible whilst using tools, we have a Tool Use policy.

Tool Use Policy

At Smartkidz children may take part in activities that use tools. The Club Leader will use their professional judgement to decide when the group or individuals are ready to use tools and then introduce these tools slowly throughout the programme. All children will be supervised when using tools and the ratio will depend on the group's ability and experience in using the tools. If the sessions involve tool use, then a Level 3 Forest School Leader will be present, and tools will be checked before use. All children will be given a "tool talk" before they are allowed to use the tools.

Within the tool talk the children will be told:

- The parts of the tool (handle, blade, sheath, cutting edge, blade cover)
- How the tool should be carried.
- How the tool should be used.
- Where the tool should be stored.
- What Personal Protective Equipment should be worn while using the tool.

Children MUST take responsibility in using tools. An adult will support any children who do not show a good level of responsibility at first. However, if they are then unable to use the tools appropriately, they will be stopped using the tools until they are ready to be re-introduced.

Policy created and adapted with support from Dr Shelley Newstead- Creator of PARS Playwork.

This policy was adopted by: Smartkidz Play and Learn	Date: 1/11/2017 Date reviewed: 20/11/2018 Date reviewed: 16/08/2019 Date reviewed: 14/08/2020
To be reviewed: 14/08/2021	Signed: 