

LOOSE PARTS GUIDANCE AND OBS ACTION PLAN

What are loose parts?

Loose parts are any materials that can be easily moved, combined and incorporated into children's free play.

Fabricated loose parts (see list A) are anything man-made that are not toys or specific pieces of sports equipment.

Natural loose parts (see list B) are any moveable natural materials that children can transport, mix, construct with or incorporate into their play.

The five loose parts rules are:

1. **Plentiful:** large quantities, many items (four per child)
2. **Accessible:** always available, got-out and put-away by children, available across the whole environment
3. **Varied:** lots and lots of different stuff and material that can be used in lots and lots of different ways
4. **Safe-enough:** regularly checked, monitored and disposed of when no longer safe
5. **Replaced:** you will need to keep replacing and refreshing your loose parts.

Loose parts are such an essential element of all play environments that they will require their own loose parts action plan (see template at the end of this document).

Health and safety when using loose parts:

When using loose parts, the health and safety considerations are simple and practical.

Before putting loose parts into the play environment:

- All scrap should be checked to ensure it is safe enough to play with. Pockets, bags etc should all be cleared out, cables cut off etc.
- 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 not rough, ie wooden items. If they have become rough, sand them before use.
- Create a 'broken-zone' or source a large bin for broken items and encourage children to put broken items in it.
- Stop and think about what concerns you have about risk. If you think an item is really dangerous then don't use it. If you need to negotiate with children to manage risk then

inform children and staff about high and low risk uses of the items (eg pencils – writing is low risk, stabbing is high risk!)

This tidy-o-meter records how well tidy up has gone. OPAL recommends not more than four minutes of playtime should be used for tidy up. Lots of greens get bonus playtime. Lots of reds mean a one-day closure of the loose parts store. Orange brings a discussion to the play assembly.



During play:

- Inform children playing with items that are heavy, large, or long that 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.
- Good playwork practice will always involve discussions with children about risk-benefit and safe-enough use.
- Play fighting/rough and tumble should follow scrap-on-scrap principles if allowed. Scrap on scrap principles are: 1) Select items thoughtfully. 2) Make sure all participants consent. 3) Only hit scrap on scrap. 4) Keep checking other participants are happy.
- Be clear of the purpose when intervening in play. Think about the Playwork Principles and the different intervention styles.

After play:

- Children should tidy up. Give a five minute warning, everyone picks up three things and throws them into the play store or the broken zone.
- While tidying up, take stock of all the loose parts and identify any breakages, damage or dirt that needs to be sorted out before next playtime.
- Issues of dispute and difficulty eg tidy up, safety and sharing are learning opportunities and should be discussed in play assemblies and circle times.

(List A) Fabricated loose parts

Fabricated	Sources
Astro turf off-cuts	Landscapers
Boards, old cabinet doors, panels	Parents, trades people
Bread, milk, bottle and grocery crates	Traders
Briefcases	Parents, charity shops
Buggies, pushchairs	Parents
Cable drums	Trades people
Cardboard boxes	Trades, deliveries, parents
Carpet samples	Carpet shops
Carpet squares	Carpet shops
Cuddly toys	Charity shops
Fabrics – all shapes and sizes	Parents, jumble sales, charity shops. fabric shops, markets
Foam pipe covers and noodles	Plumbers, pound shops
Guttering	Trades people, suppliers
Hoses	DIY stores, parents,
Keyboards	Computer companies, parents
Metal pots, pans, trays etc, especially catering sizes	Caterers, parents, Gumtree
Nets: fishing, cargo, football	Scrap stores, internet, football clubs
Office removal crates	Tea Crates Ltd, office movers
Old clothes, jackets, overalls, hats, bags	Parents, jumble sales, charity shops
Old household appliances, hoovers, fax machines, microwaves etc	Parents
One-ton dumpy bags	Builders

Pallets	Builders and builders' merchants, stores, parents
Phones	Phone companies, parents
Piping, gas, water and drainage	Trades people
Planks – decking, scaffolders (need sanding) (1m-2m)	DIY, builders' merchants, carpenters, builders
Plastic chairs with no legs	Schools and offices
Plastic road barriers	Highway firms, Border Barriers Ltd
Plastic trugs and bins	DIY stores and online
Ropes	Ships chandlers, online
Small children's bike wheels, wheels	Parents, DIY stores, online
Small wheely bins	Online
Sofa and chair cushions	Parents
Steering wheels	Scrap dealers
Suitcases – all sizes	Parents, charity shops
Tarps	DIY and building merchants
Traffic Cones	Online, highway companies
Tubes of all kinds	Parents, trades
Tyres; car, go-kart, motorbike, cycle	Garages, Qwick Fit, etc
Waterproof cot mattresses	Parents
Wooden block and off-cuts	Carpenters, builders

(List B) Natural loose parts

Natural	Source
Branches and stick	Parents, local woodland, tree surgeons
Fruit	Fruit trees
Grass	Plants
Leaves	Plants
Logs	Firewood companies, local authority, tree surgeons
Mud	Nature, landscape suppliers, builders' merchants
Pea gravel	Builders' merchants, landscape suppliers
Peat	Garden centres
Pinecones	Woods and forests
Play bark/woodchip	Landscape suppliers, play companies
Sand (washed dredged not 'sharp')	Builders' merchants, landscape suppliers
Sea pebbles	Landscape suppliers
Shells	Seaside
Varied aggregates, slate, flint, clay	Landscape suppliers, specialist aggregates
Water	Sky (not the company!) or tap
Wood off-cuts	Carpenters, builders, woodworkers

Loose parts store

If you want to buy an OPAL-designed schools' loose parts store you can do so through the catalogue company TTS. You will find details of this on the TTS website and in this e-pack (Doc 6A6 and 6A7). If you choose to sort out your own storage the guidance below will help.

When building your own loose parts storage go tough – big and not fussy!

Follow these golden rules:

- Go as big as you can – around the size of a shipping container as a guide.
- Big doors are a must on the long side. Two sets of bi-fold doors are best so the long side of the storage all opens up.
- Make sure the doors can be secured when open.
- Buy good quality domestic products. Flimsy products will not last and will not stand up to hundreds of hours of school use.
- Storage should be either in big stable-type bays, tubs or dustbins that can be pulled out.
- Sorting and categorising should be kept to an absolute minimum or tidy up time will be longer than playtime!
- Access should be Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA) compliant.
- Put your storage somewhere where tidy up will be made easier.
- Your storage will have a very heavy footfall around it – don't put it on grass.
- Have a 'wet side' and a 'dry side' for fabrics and plastics. Keep some things nice for the better weather!

Do you need planning permission? If you decide to ask your local planning department they may be helpful or may tie up your project in a long planning process. Clear guidance on the positioning of outbuildings for schools is not easily available online.



OPAL has teamed up with the UK's largest school supply company, TTS, to ensure all schools can access loose parts storage designed

to OPAL's specifications. There are three sizes and the TTS price includes installation, as long as a flat tarmac area is available.

Note: Unlike the photos do not site your store on grass!



Loose parts action plan	
Criteria	Actions and responsibilities
Intake – how will you create a continual flow of loose parts into school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations from parents and connections to businesses (eg tyres) • Requests on fortnightly newsletters
Holding – where will donations go on arrival and before checking?	Storage outside reception area for donations
Safe-enough checking – who will check donations before children play with them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play leaders • Sit manager (for any that can be fixed)
Child accessible storage – how will children access and put away loose parts themselves?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large loose parts are left out in crates for easy access on the playground and on the field • Some lose parts are accessible on shelves (calm corner) • Some lose parts stored away in sheds but left out for children to access in smaller tubs
Dynamic management – how will you manage unexpected risks as they arise during playful use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play team being vigilant • Play guardians notify the Play team
Monitoring – how will you ensure items are still safe-enough?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play team monitor as they put the equipment away. •
Removal and disposal – how will damaged items be repaired or removed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any loose parts that can be fixed are stored outside of reception area • Unsalvageable loose parts are put in the large school bins

Loose parts safe-enough guidance

In all cases, talking with children in play assemblies and in the playground is an essential part of the risk management process.

Items	Risk	Management
Suitcases	Being locked in Suffocation	Remove or break lock Make holes in airtight cases
Buggies and pushchairs	Finger traps on folding	Cable tie open
Tyres	Puncture, cuts, crushing	Reject tyres with exposed wires, check for nails and remove. Don't roll very heavy tyres
Pallets	Splinters Scratches and punctures Sharp wood Crushing	Select quality pallets. Children sand down rough pallets (sanding is only needed on particularly rough pallets or when there is part of one that has become splintery). Remove exposed nails with pliers as soon as exposed. Don't use very heavy pallets apart from on flat ground.
Bags, clothing	Hidden hazardous items	Check all pockets and compartments.
Electrical items, Hoovers, etc	Suffocation from cords	Cut off all electrical cords.

Other	Puncturing	Remove pointed items and items with very sharp edges or those that will shatter.
	Cuts	Assess risk of fingers getting stuck, remove items if risk is too high.
	Entrapment or strangulation	Remove thin wires, cords and strings. Keep rope play in view and use thicker ropes (see Doc 6.6 rope play guidance). Don't wrap materials/ropes around necks.
	Poisoning	Check and wash out donated containers to ensure that pupils are not exposed to hazardous chemicals eg oil, weedkiller.