

# Loose Parts Play



Loose parts play is all about the power of open-ended resources. That is, items that leaves the choices up to the children not the adults. Loose parts resources are not pre-designed and have multiple ways you can use them. They are open ended, meaning there should be no obvious, prescriptive use.

## The Background of loose parts

The theory of loose parts was first proposed by an architect: Simon Nicholson back in 1971 who believed that it is the loose parts in our environment which power creativity. *“the creativity – the playing around the components and variables of the world in order to make experiments and discover new things and form new concepts,”* Simon Nicholson

## What are loose parts?

- Loose parts are materials/resources that are available to children that can then become available to children that can then become anything they wish to create and make, from a robot to constructing a den;
- Loose parts can be used freely to explore, create and develop curiosity and imagination;
- Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart and put back together multiple ways;
- Loose part materials have no directions and instructions, children can make their own decision about how to use them;
- Loose parts can provide great sensory play experiences.

Loose parts play involves using a wide selection of everyday objects and materials to create, build, invent, experiment and play with. Loose parts play can contribute to development of children’s creativity, exploration, imagination, learning and most importantly fun.

Children and young people will play with loose parts in different ways depending on their age, ability and stage of development. Babies and Younger children will start by holding items and exploring by trying to put them in their mouths. Care must always be taken when using loose parts with our youngest of children, ensuring the materials available to them cannot be swallowed.

Children playing with loose parts will support them to discover more about their world by learning about natural and man made materials with different textures, shapes, colours and properties. It can also help support with all areas of Learning for example; early counting, sorting, hand-eye coordination, grouping, patterns, extend language and literacy.

## The benefits of loose parts play

- Boosts creative thinking by exercising the imagination;
- Improved pro-social behaviours e.g. negotiating, compromising, leading, resolving conflict, collaborating etc;
- Breaks down barriers of gender, ability, age, background etc;
- Positive emotional wellbeing;
- Ability to manage risk;
- Encourages more physical activity;
- Develops physical literacy from jumping, balancing;
- Develops fine motor skills;
- Wellbeing is positively influenced by fresh air, physical movement and natural light.

Loose parts play can promote lots of different play, including: symbolic, locomotor, creative, exploratory, communication, object, mastery, deep, dramatic, imaginative, rough and tumble, social, fantasy.

Loose parts play promotes storytelling with peers and adults when materials are used as props to engage in rich conversation. Children describe and extend their vocabulary as they manipulate and find new objects of interest to play with and encounter.

*“Loose parts supports children’s sense of belonging, their inclusiveness, their willingness to take risks and their passion- all critical elements in social and emotional development”* Daly and Beloglovsky 2015

Loose parts play can be used as a starting point for learning across all curriculum areas and links to many characteristics of learning.

## Tips for introducing loose parts play

- Decide on your focus, small parts for indoors or larger resources for outdoors;
- Carry out a risk benefit assessment/risk assessment;
- Consult and educate staff, parents and carers;
- Plan for sustainability and maintenance;
- Consider storage;
- Establish roles, responsibilities and routines;
- Consider when children will have access to resources;
- Start small with a limited range of resources and introduce them gradually.

For further information see the document: Loose Parts Play – A toolkit by Theresa Casey and Juliet Robertson which is available from the ‘Learning Through Landscapes’ website ([www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk))

## Loose Parts play resources/material lists

<p><b>Natural loose parts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acorns</li> <li>Bamboo</li> <li>Earth</li> <li>Feathers</li> <li>Leaves</li> <li>Mud</li> <li>Pinecones</li> <li>Pebbles</li> <li>Sand</li> <li>Shells</li> <li>Sticks</li> <li>Stones</li> <li>Tree stumps</li> <li>Twigs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Building materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cable ties</li> <li>Guttering</li> <li>Gravel</li> <li>Hammer and nails</li> <li>Hose</li> <li>Milk crates</li> <li>Paint brush</li> <li>Planks of wood</li> <li>Sand</li> <li>Tarpaulin</li> <li>Tyres</li> <li>Washers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Wood</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building blocks</li> <li>Curtain rings</li> <li>Dolly pegs</li> <li>Drift wood</li> <li>Pastry brush</li> <li>Spoons</li> <li>Sticks</li> </ul>	<p><b>Metal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Baking trays</li> <li>Bottle tops</li> <li>CDs</li> <li>Cooking utensils</li> <li>Muffin tins</li> <li>Spoons</li> </ul>
<p><b>Household items</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basin</li> <li>Basket</li> <li>Blankets</li> <li>Buckets</li> <li>Cardboard</li> <li>Clothes pegs</li> <li>Foam sponges</li> <li>Ice cube trays</li> <li>Lampshades</li> <li>Lego</li> <li>Magnets</li> <li>Potato masher</li> <li>Pillows</li> <li>Sheets</li> <li>Sieve</li> <li>Shoe polish tin</li> <li>Trays</li> <li>Vinyl records</li> <li>Washing up brush</li> </ul>	<p><b>Creative and messy play</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beads</li> <li>Bottle tops</li> <li>Cardboard boxes</li> <li>Cotton wool</li> <li>Corks</li> <li>Glass stones</li> <li>Glue</li> <li>Googly eyes</li> <li>Glitter</li> <li>Greetings cards</li> <li>Paint and brushes</li> <li>Pipe cleaners</li> <li>Pompoms</li> <li>Sponges</li> <li>Wrapping paper</li> <li>Yoghurt pots</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sensory items</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cotton wool</li> <li>Hessian</li> <li>Netting</li> <li>Ribbon</li> <li>Silk</li> <li>Shoe laces</li> <li>Tin foil</li> <li>Velcro rollers</li> <li>Wool</li> </ul>	<p><b>Other ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chalk</li> <li>Plastic bottle and tops</li> <li>Hula hoops</li> <li>Wallpaper samples</li> <li>Straw bales</li> </ul>

## Loose parts outdoors

Playing outdoors enhances learning and is fundamental for children and young people to thrive in health, wellbeing and development.

Having daily opportunities for outdoor loose parts play with access to nature, all year round in almost all weathers, is just as important as access to indoor loose parts play.

Outdoor loose parts play works equally as well as indoors. A range of loose parts objects can be used in many different ways outside – for building, den-making, story creation, art, science, and many, many other ways as well.

Benefits of outdoor loose parts play.

- Children have fun and develop important social skills, and building relationships with their peers;
- It improves the physical health of children and young people by increasing involvement in physical activity;
- Promotes mental, social and emotional wellbeing;
- Builds children and young people confidence in their own abilities;
- Helps children to learn how to manage their own risks;
- Helps to boost creativity, imagination and understanding of the outdoor world;
- Being outdoors allows children to experience choice, risk and challenge.

Some excellent outdoor loose parts include some of the following:

- **Boxes** – These may be wooden, cardboard or similar. Ideally wooden boxes should be strong enough to be stood on;
- **Crates** – These are a fantastic resource that will last a very long time. Beg or borrow from places like dairies, or from local shops. Or you can buy them from educational catalogues. They are excellent for building walkways, dens, and general construction
- **Tyres** – Again these can be sourced very cheaply, if not for free. Garages or tyre companies are the place to ask for them. You can get tyres of different sizes, and its great if you can. A selection of car tyres, bicycle tyres, truck tyres, and even potentially bigger would be perfect. Tyres are great for building, rolling, vehicle role-play and many more things
- **Tubes** – If you know a plumber then happy days! Scrapyards are another possibility for this kind of resource. Tubes are great for water play, and can also be used to roll things down. They can take on all sorts of roles in children's open-ended play
- **Wheels** – This could be things like tricycle wheels, or wheels off old bikes. Parents may be happy to donate some things from this list, and these could definitely be one
- **Sheets** – These can be used in all sorts of ways. Great for mark-making with loose parts (such as used different objects to paint with on the sheets). They are also excellent for building dens, and using them in construction
- **Tree logs** – Great for climbing, building and using as pretend vehicles (to name just a few ways). They could be found in a forest.
- **Wooden blocks** – Big wooden blocks provide all manner of open-ended learning experiences. Great for enhancing role-play and small world experiences, building, or simple representative play.
- **Planks** – These are great for making all sorts of weird and wonderful walkways, towers and the like. They are great used in conjunction with crates, boxes, gutters and other things
- **Pipes** – This is another one that could be sourced from scrap yards, builders yards, a local plumber, or any other range of sources.
- **Large sticks** – A very simple resource, but one of the most popular amongst children, and something that can be used in a staggeringly large number of ways.
- **Gutters** – These are fantastic for all sorts of open ended investigating and testing experiences. Roofing companies may be able to provide some, or keep some for you next time they remove some old ones from someone's house.