

## **Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis Play: Rights and Practice—A Tool Kit for Staff, Managers and Policy Makers**

Martin King-Sheard and Marianne Mannello, Edited by Theresa Casey (2017)  
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The main objective of the Access to Play in Crisis (APC) tool kit is to provide a practical document for those who work with children in challenging circumstances or situations of crisis (humanitarian, natural and man-made disasters) to support children's opportunities for play. The premise for the tool kit is based on the Child's Right to Play (article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), which bookends the document (introduction and final page) and clearly underpins the content throughout. The tool kit has a total of 26 tools (13 for staff, nine for managers and four for policy makers). This document has the potential to be an effective tool and comprehensive guideline across cultures for adults who have a presence in the lives of children and to further understand adults' role in supporting every child's right to play, regardless of the circumstance.

The authors outline a compelling rationale at the outset to underscore the fundamental importance of play in children's lives with suggestions on how to use the tool kit and indicators for adults' roles and responsibilities. This is an effective way to introduce the resource as it informs the reader immediately of the nature of the tool kit and its variety in application. After the introduction, Section 1 begins logically with information for all those working in crisis situations and then provides more specific information in sections written for staff, managers, and policy makers, respectively. Section 1 highlights play as every child's right, its importance within the context of crisis, the optimum environments in which children should be afforded quality play experiences, specific challenges to playing, and the play rights of children with disabilities. The inclusion of the note on terminology with regards to "disabled children" (the UK social model focusing on social forces rather than individual traits) is a pertinent point to highlight. The APC tool kit is intended for an international audience, and this note is a pro-active acknowledgement that this terminology has the potential to be problematic depending on the reader's location. For further information on the "person-first language" commonly used in North America and Australia, see Peers, Spencer-Cavaliere and Eales (2014).

The authors provide an extensive Section 2 specifically for staff working with children in crisis, which could be entirely relevant for staff facilitating play in non-crisis situations as well. The authors should be commended for this informative section highlighting many valuable playwork practices empowering practitioners to do the important work of play, while supporting a child-centered focus rather than an adult-imposed agenda. The tool kit appropriately outlines much of the background needed to realize the value of play in situations of crisis as children will often process the events in their current circumstance through playing. In my work

supervising undergraduate students during play facilitation service-learning experiences in various parts of the world, we have been witness to the tremendous healing effects of play for children in challenging situations. Even here at home in Canada at a local playday designed to facilitate opportunities for children undergoing displacement from their community ravaged by wildfires in Alberta, we saw children playing feverishly, building cardboard homes and cities, with labels such as, "my new home." Parents stood by, supported one another and observed as their children processed the cruel reality of losing their homes and the uncertainty of never returning to their city, or life as they knew it. This APC tool kit has real-world practical advice that would have been directly relevant to the play leaders during this disaster, and thereby affirming their actions as they facilitated a meaningful and rich play environment, assisting in the children's healing process. As Sturrock and Else (1998) suggest, "It is the act of playing that has the healing inherent in it" (p. 9).

Staff Tool 2, "The role of adults in supporting play in situations of crisis," offers precise ways that leaders can support play while being mindful of the level of intervention, which is a key concept in play facilitation. It is crucial that leaders not only recognize how inappropriate intervention can adulterate children's play, but how the "low intervention, high response" approach (NPFA, The Children's Play Council, and PLAYLINK, 2000, p. 16) reminds leaders to support rather than direct children, which results in richer, more authentic play potential. Children are the experts in their play and we must resist the urge to teach, coach, change or take over when children play.

It was perceptive of the authors to recognize in Staff Tool 3, "Responding to children's play: Play cues and responses," that responses to play cues can be, and most often are, received from other children in addition to adults. It may be of particular interest to the potential audiences using the tool kit to acknowledge the critical idea that the nature of play is cyclical, and that play cues, responses, and the play frame are situated within the larger play cycle. The motivation to play, the play drive or metalude (Sturrock & Else, 1998; Kilvington & Wood, 2011), set up the play cycle in which cues and returns are housed, which may be useful for the play leader know. Staff Tool 4, "Types of play," briefly mentions that there are 16 types of play (as defined by Hughes, 2002; 2006) and while the tool kit uses Hughes' play taxonomy and describes 10 of these types, it could provide a more complete picture of play types used in playwork and give information for play leaders to further explore. The other tools in this section provide an extremely valuable resource for front-line staff to use as they reflect on their own practice and spend time daily supporting children who play in crisis situations.

With practical guidance and theoretical backing, the next main sections for managers and policy makers are invaluable toward providing support and ensuring the implementation of services for children in situations of crisis. It is an encouraging step toward making rich play opportunities a reality for so many communities experiencing challenges to actualize article 31 of the UNCRC, protecting and providing for every child's right to play. The use of case study examples in the policy-makers section conveyed a particularly vivid snapshot of

actual scenarios around the world to illustrate successful models of provision. This is extremely helpful, and hopeful.

It has long been established that playwork is a valuable intervention for children experiencing the effects of crisis in their lives. As demonstrated by the classic study and playwork intervention with abandoned Romanian children beginning in 1999 and continuing today (Brown, 2014), children in extreme situations of neglect benefited from therapeutic play intervention, and in fact experienced the most powerful healing factor by playing with each other. The APC Tool Kit provides an essential guideline for all those who work with children in crisis, at all levels, and offers a "life line" to those committed to the ideals of quality play in children's lives. As a child advocate and post-secondary teacher of an experiential learning play program, I appreciate the depth and relevance of this resource and observe so many relatable uses in my current work. I am sure other readers of this tool kit will find it helpful and applicable in their own situations. A practical tool kit such as this is much needed in order to apply knowledge and research and realize the results of our shared goal: every child's right to play.

Review by Mary Ann Rintoul

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