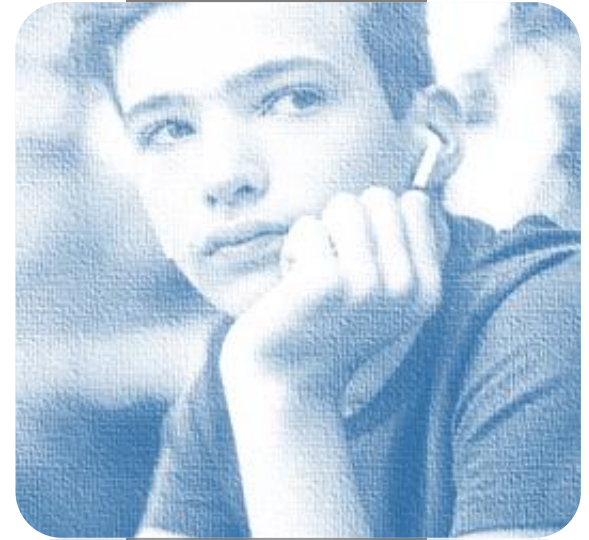


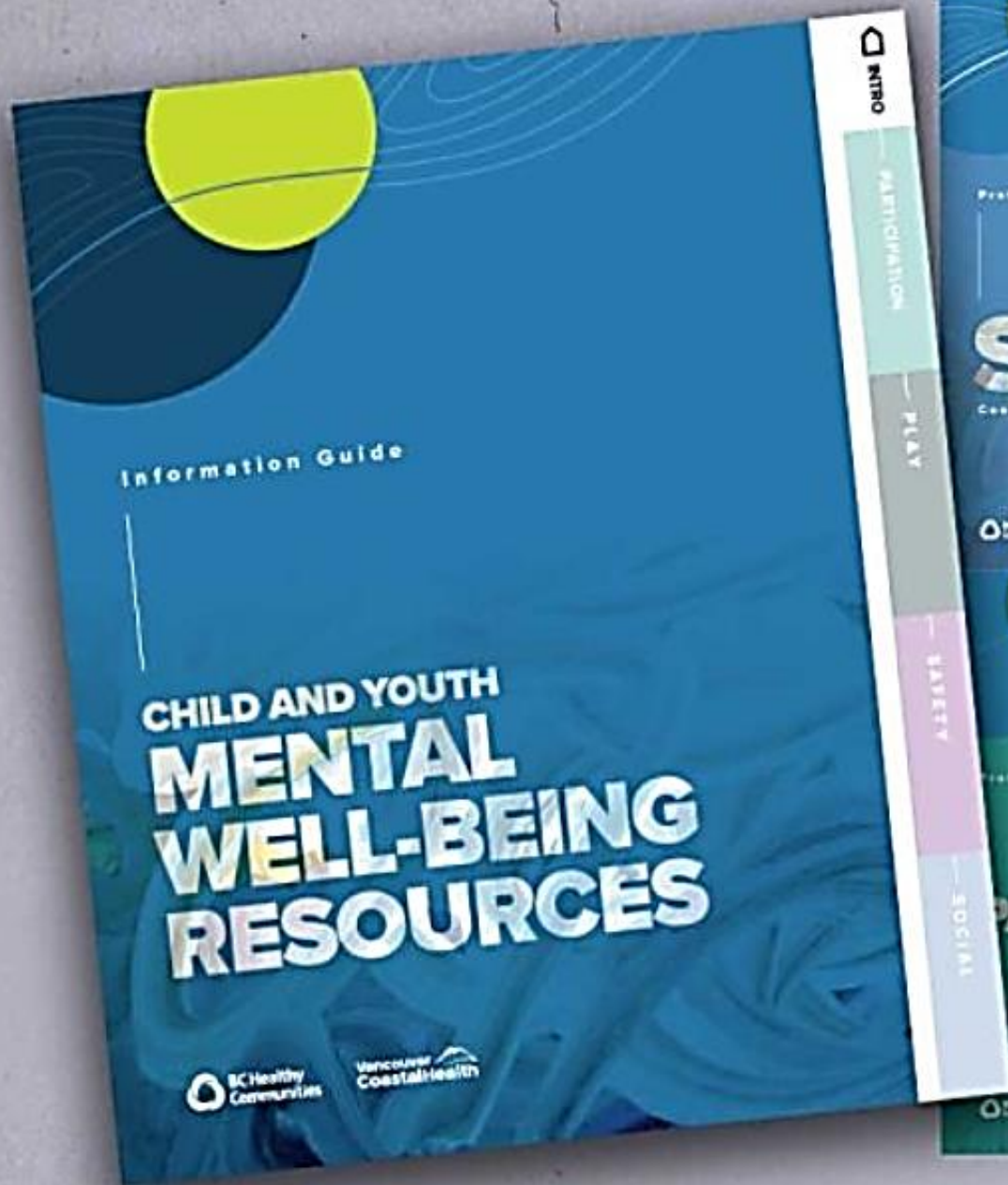
Guides for Local Governments Promoting the Mental Well-Being of Children and Youth

**MDI Webinar
HELP**

June 13, 2024

A collaboration between:





Guides to help local governments promote the mental well-being of children and youth

5 guides:

- Introduction
- Four protective factors

<https://bchealthycommunities.ca/index.php/child-and-youth-mental-well-being-resources/>



Why we created the guides

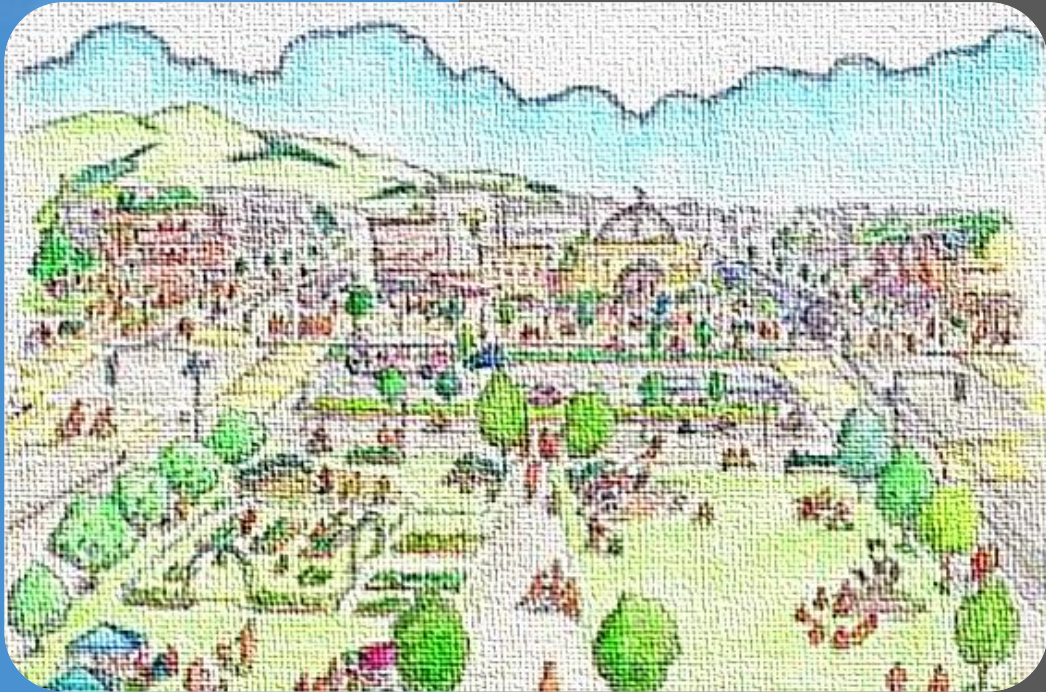
- For decades, child and youth mental well-being has been getting worse -- the pandemic exacerbated it and the result was an increase in media attention, public awareness, and research on this issue.
- The pandemic highlighted key ingredients that helped to protect children and youth. *(e.g., those who spent more time outdoors fared better in mental well-being)*
- The pandemic showed the correlation between the weakening of protective factors and poor mental well-being in children and youth. *(e.g., those whose social connections weakened reported lower levels of mental well-being)*

Many of these key ingredients and protective factors are influenced by domains that are under the purview of local and regional governments.



No one agency is going to fix the national mental health crisis.

A whole of society approach is needed with upstream action.



Local governments hold significant power, influence and responsibility for the environments in which children and youth grow up and experience on a daily basis.

Many local governments are taking some action in this realm (*e.g., they offer access to community centres*).
The opportunity is to promote more positive change by **increasing strategic intentionality and striving to push beyond status quo.**

Two-page infographic on how local governments influence child and youth mental well-being – based on a 300+ page draft report (VCH, 2023)



Local government actions influence child & youth mental wellness

Mental wellness is multi-dimensional



Vibrant communities need thriving children & youth

Young people in VCH (and elsewhere) need support.

child social-emotional development
 $<50\%$ in grades 4 through 8 are thriving
 $<30\%$ of teens report high mental wellness

Mental wellness affects child development and their future ability to participate fully in society.

Environments support children & youth to thrive



Amenities & Activation

Why? Places to gather, do, learn

What? Parks, plazas, footpaths, green space, streetscapes, child care centres, community centres, venues, and libraries

How? Maintained and activated with affordable programs, events, and outreach



Community Planning

Why? Independence, participation

What? Neighbourhood design, connectivity and walkability, transportation and traffic, safety, housing, and public spaces

How? Official community plans, growth strategies, transportation plans, and sustainability plans



Social Planning

Why? Opportunities to develop

What? Child and youth/wellness strategies, community grants, social services, programs, policing and safety, and child care services

How? Action plans, community partnerships, and networks



Organizational Development

Why? Skills, contribution

What? Participatory planning, youth budgets, inclusivity, employment, internships, volunteerism, and mentorships

How? Budgets, youth advisory councils, policies, staff upskilling and support, communications, and local businesses

Leverage local government assets to promote child & youth mental wellness

Reduce risk factors and increase protective factors

Social Connectedness & Belonging

psycho-social health

Social connectedness and belonging develop through personal relationships, connection to community, and feeling accepted and included

Create opportunities with welcoming multi-functional public spaces and events.
 Provide childcare and program options that engage all ages of children and youth.
 Ensure access with options for independent mobility and transportation.
 Model inclusivity, mobilize resources, host groups and facilitate mentorships.

Quality play consists of a mix of indoor and outdoor, supervised and independent, free and structured, and solitary and social activity

Create and maintain spaces for all kinds of play, not just in designated play places.
 Consider how age, preferences, time, cost and inclusivity affect participation in play.
 Ensure access to play through independent mobility, itself a form of play.
 Offer childcare or programs for children of staff to have opportunities to play.

Play

growth and development, stress relief and exercise

Safety

security, connection and control

Safety includes both actual and perceived physical, psycho-social and environmental safety in all settings

Create public & private, indoor & outdoor spaces that are safe for young people.
 Address bullying, abuse and all forms of discrimination and support caregivers.
 Allow risk but control traffic, pollution, noise and psycho-social hazards.
 Implement policies that respond to global threats like climate change or violence.

Participation involves thinking, feeling and doing for sustained, meaningful contributions to society

Create welcoming spaces and enable youth-led initiatives.
 Offer programs to build skills and mentorships for all ages and abilities.
 Include all ages of children and youth in planning and decision-making.

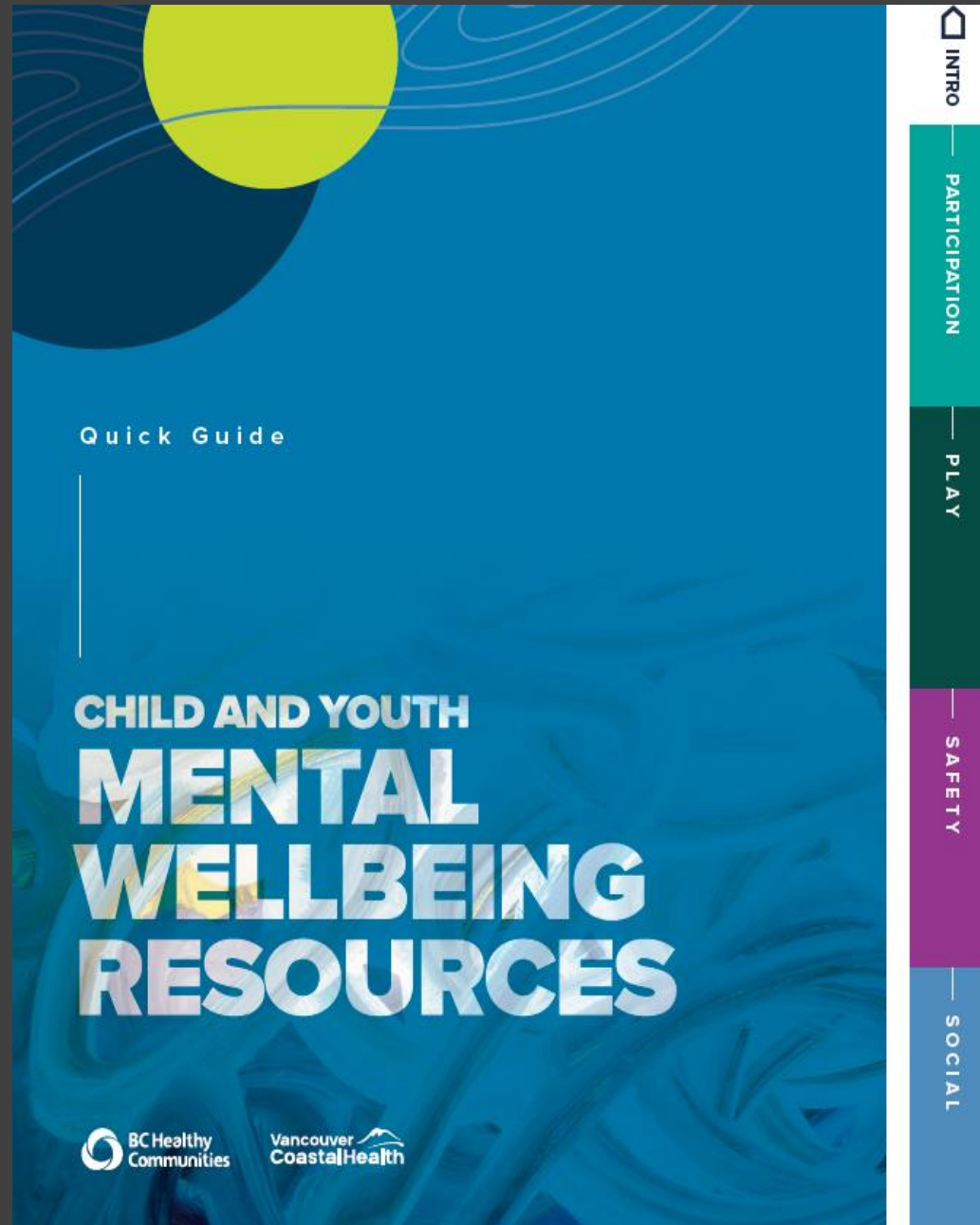
Participation

learning and feeling valued and connected

More info More details

Uses the same 300+ page draft VCH report to create guides with sections on:

- Introduction
- Four Protective Factors:
- Participation
 - Play
 - Safety
 - Social Connections & Belonging



Partnership between Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and BC Healthy Communities

<https://bchealthycommunities.ca/index.php/child-and-youth-mental-well-being-resources/>

Purpose of the guides



Created for local governments to:

- **Build awareness** of how local governments impact the mental well-being of children & youth.
- **Strengthen understanding of why it is important** to improve child & youth mental well-being.
- **Provide examples** of what local governments are doing to improve the protective factors that promote child & youth mental well-being.
- **Strengthen commitment** to children & youth.
- **Stimulate discussion.**
- **Inspire action.**

A few key points about the guides



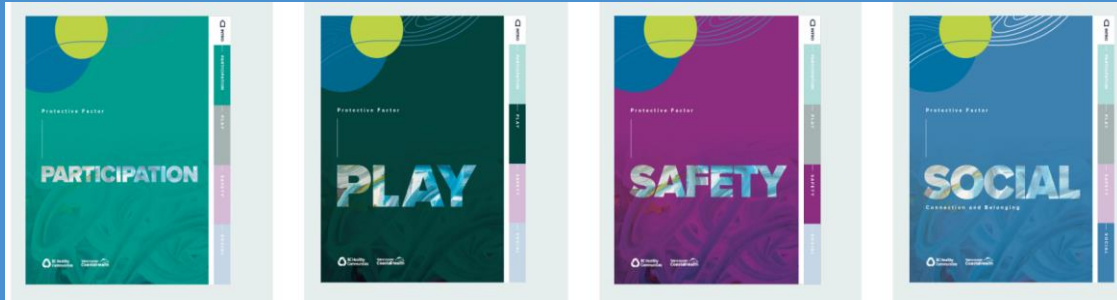
- Created with input from local government staff. *(5 engagement sessions over the course of a year)*
- Stays in the realm of mental wellness (not mental illness).
- Focuses on existing assets and levers that many local governments already have.
- Upstream action within local government scope. *(i.e., this is not about downloading from other levels of government)*
- Highlights how local governments benefit.

INTRODUCTION GUIDE



- **Where to start** (*e.g., articulate a commitment to children & youth; create a profile of child & youth mental well-being; create a profile of the protective factors*)
- **Existing levers that local governments have that can be used to impact child and youth mental well-being.** (*e.g., planning and design; infrastructure like streets & sidewalks, amenities, opportunities to participate*)
- **How local governments benefit from strengthening child & youth mental well-being** (*e.g., research shows the links between a strong sense of belonging and lower rates of problematic [“anti-social”] behaviour.*)
- Links to issues that local govts are seeing on the ground – e.g., crime rates; homelessness; graffiti; litter; vandalism; drug use, etc.
- **Closing the gaps** – notes that some population groups experience lower rates of mental well-being and/or challenges re: the protective factors.
- Provides some info on certain pop groups (*e.g., females; non-binary, etc.*)
- **The importance of quality adults** – underscores the strong, positive impact of this on child and youth mental well-being and provides some examples of adults in local govt who young people interact with (*e.g., planners, engineers, elected officials, etc.*)

PROTECTIVE FACTOR GUIDES



- These guides are not meant to cover all of the protective factors of child and youth mental well-being. *(e.g., none of the guides talk about sleep or nutrition)*
- They focus on factors that proved to be protective during the pandemic and/or that were impacted by the pandemic
AND for which there is strong research evidence
AND that might fall within the realm of environments that local governments influence.
- They include three age cohorts: 0-5; 6-12; 13-18-year-olds.

Each guide has sections on:

**WHERE
TO
START**

Gives a snapshot of ideas that local govt could do to strengthen the protective factor *(e.g., Play - create spaces for all kinds of play, not just in designated play places)*

WHAT

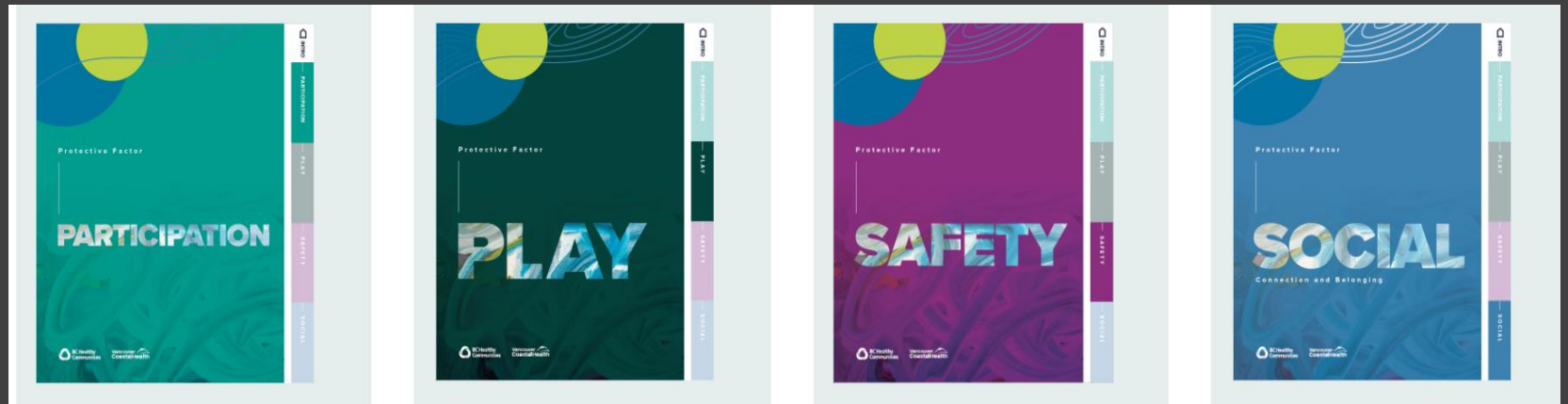
Brief overview of what the protective factor is *(e.g., Safety is a diverse concept – from neighbourhood safety to racism to global threats)*

WHY

What the research evidence is on the impact of the protective factor on child & youth mental well-being.

Protective Factor Guides

Each guide has a section on:



HOW

- **Actions local governments have taken to support the protective factor** – not meant as prescriptive or to provide “the” answer. There is no one answer.
- This section is meant to **stimulate thought and action** -- actual actions need to fit the local context and push beyond what is status quo for that local context.
- **The actions are examples of what local governments from outside of BC have done to build the protective factors.**
- **Diverse info & examples of actions** – to illustrate the variety of ways that action can be taken, urban & rural examples, and ideas for different age cohorts.
- **Examples that have substance behind them** (*e.g., lots of information, evaluation and/or the action has endured over time*)

WHAT

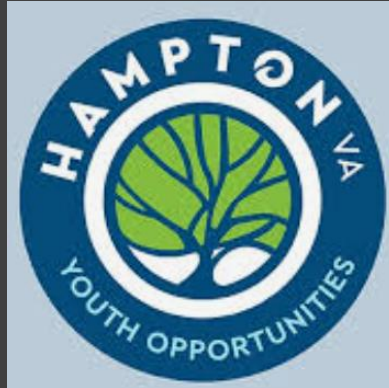
Participation involves thinking, feeling and doing for sustained, meaningful contributions to society.

WHY

There is ample evidence on the positive effects of participation on child and youth well-being (e.g., self-esteem sense of purpose, hopes for the future, etc.). Conversely, poor quality and inauthentic opportunities for participation can have a negative impact on young people's sense of agency and autonomy.

HOW

City of Hampton (Virginia, US) civic engagement – Youth Planners Program



- **Youth Planner Program:** Established in 1996. Two positions for high school students to work 15 hours/week for 2 years with the Planning Division and liaise with the Hampton Youth Commission.
- Each municipal document has a section written by the youth planners and focused on young people's strategic issues.
- **Examples of other City of Hampton youth participation opportunities:**
 - **Youth Commission:** 20 to 30 high school students appointed by the City.
 - **Summer Youth Employment Program** – 10-week program for 16-24-year-olds.
 - **Hopeful Hampton Ambassadors** – 12-week initiative for 16-19 year-olds to earn money, create events, and bring awareness to the impacts of youth violence.
 - **Youth Grant Program** for youth-led initiatives

Middle Development Instrument Indicators

- I believe I can make a difference in the world
- I try to make the world a better place
- Optimism
- Empathy
- Prosocial behaviour
- Out-of-school activities (e.g., youth organizations, working, volunteering, wish to be doing [working or volunteering])

WHAT

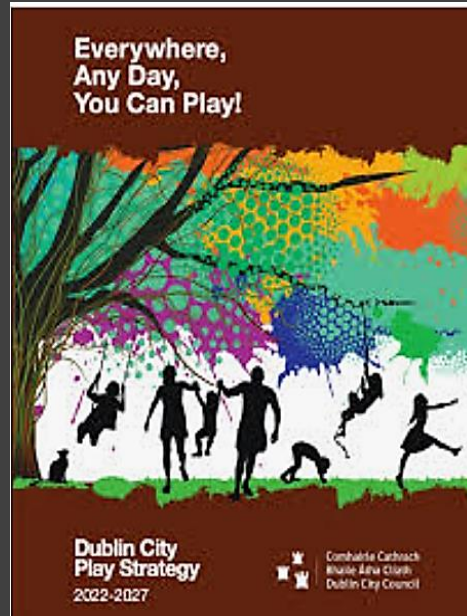
Play includes a wide range of activities from sports, games and music to beach days; It can be guided, supervised and scheduled or it can be unstructured “free” play. Highlights: nature and independent mobility.

WHY

Strong links to brain development, stress relief, physical activity. Highlights the importance of unstructured play and risk in play to brain wiring and mental well-being.

HOW

City of Dublin's Play Strategy: “Everywhere, Any Day, You can Play!” ➤ **Helps to realise the vision for Dublin as a Child Friendly and Playful City**



- **Extensive strategy (126 pages):** based on evidence and underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's Article 31 (child's right to play)
- **Key concepts acknowledged in the strategy:**
 - Play as biological and psychological element of child dev.; a necessity to support their well-being.
 - Encompasses the age range: 0-18 years
 - Comprehensive understanding of what play is and how it occurs (i.e., it is not narrowly defined as playgrounds)
- Includes **“monitoring the overall performance of the City of Dublin in providing and supporting a broad range of opportunities of play for its youngest citizens”** (e.g., via Play Sufficiency Assessments of the public realm, etc.)

Middle Development Instrument Indicators

- **Physical activity 60 min/day**
- **Travel mode to school**
- **Out-of-school activities** (e.g., organized & informal sports, play at park, wish to be doing [physical and/or outdoor activities])
- **After-school places**

WHAT

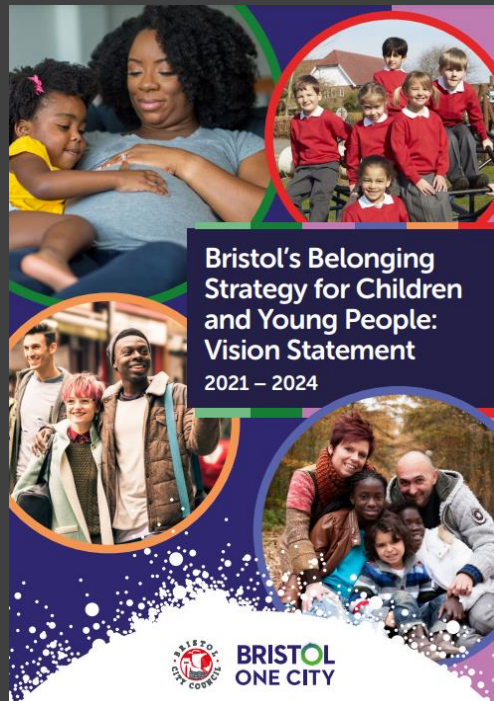
In the early years, social connection is most reliant on a strong attachment to caregivers. As children age, their social environments expand to include peers, childcare providers, educators, mentors and other members of the community.

WHY

Relationships are a strong predictor of children's well-being throughout the life course, impacting lifelong health, success in education, occupational attainment and job performance.

HOW

City of Bristol (UK) Vision: to be a city where all children & youth feel at home and feel that they belong



➤ **Intersects with other City initiatives:**
“Fostering Friendly Bristol”, “Thrive Bristol”,
“Children’s Charter”

➤ Strategy overseen by City of Bristol’s **Young People’s Partnership Board** (1 of 6 City thematic boards) – central function is to ensure that consideration for children and youth remains at the heart of the One City priorities and actions.

➤ **Bristol One City Plan Goals & Timelines 2023-2050** (30 pages) – e.g., for 2023-24: “Children & Young People” – “make a real difference to the city’s communal spaces and streets so that they are more welcoming and everyone feels safer”

➤ Monitored via the City of Bristol’s **One City Goals Dashboard** (“children & youth” is a search term for the indicators)

Middle Development Instrument Indicators

- **Connection to adults in the neighbourhood**
- **Connection to peers**
- **Peer belonging**
- **Out-of-school activities** (e.g., socializing with friends, wish to be doing [friends & playing])
- **After-school places** (e.g., library, friend’s house)



**Still have questions or
need more information?**

Contact info:

**Lianne Carley
Senior Policy Lead
Healthy Public Policy Unit
Vancouver Coastal Health**

lianne.carley@vch.ca

BC Healthy Communities
bchc@bchealthycommunities.ca

