



OPAL Loose Parts Guidelines

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 is not a toy or a specific piece of sport equipment.

Natural Loose Parts (see list B) is any moveable natural material that children can transport, mix, construct with or incorporate into their play.

The five rules of loose parts are

1. **Plentiful**; large quantities, many items (4 per child)
2. **Accessible**; always available, got-out and put-away by children, available across the whole environment
3. **Varied**; lots and lots and lots of different stuff and material
4. **Safe-enough**; regularly checked, monitored and disposed of
5. **Replaced**: you will need to keep replacing and refreshing your loose parts

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

Before putting into the play environment:

- All scrap should be checked that it is safe enough to play with. Pockets, bags etc should all be cleared out, cable 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, i.e. wooden items. If they have become rough, sand before use.
- Create a broken-zone' and encourage children to put broken items in it
- Stop and think, 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 pencil - writing low risk , stabbing - high risk!'

During play:

- Inform the participants that as some items are heavier or long, 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 benefit-risk discussions with children about safe-enough use
- Play fighting should follow scrap-on-scrap principles if allowed
- Be clear of the purpose when intervening in play.

After play:

- Children should tidy up. Five minute warning, everyone pick-up three things, throw them into the play-store or the broken zone
- Whilst tidying up take stock of all the loose parts and identify any breakages, damage or dirt which 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

Fabricated	Sources
Astro Turf Off cuts	Landscapers
Boards, Old Cabinet Doors, Panels	Parents, trades people
Bread, milk, bottle and grocery crates	Traders
Brief cases	Parents, charity shops
Buggies, push chairs	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	Scrapstores, 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, 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 Internet
Ropes	Ships Chandlers, Internet
Small Children's Bike Wheels, wheels	Parents, DIY stores, internet
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	Internet, 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

Natural	Source
Branches and stick	Parents, Local woodland, tree surgeons

Feathers	Internet
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
Pine cones	Woods and Forests
Play Bark/ Woodchip	Landscape Suppliers, Play Companies
Sand (Washed dredged not 'Sharp')	Builders Merchants, Landscape supplies
Sea Pebbles	Landscape suppliers
Shells	Sea side
Varied Aggregates, slate, flint, clay	Landscape supplies, Specialist Aggregates
Water	Sky (not the company!), Tap
Wood Off Cuts	Carpenters, Builders, Woodworkers

Building your own Loose Parts Storage? Go tough - big and not fussy!

Follow these golden rules;

1. Go as big as you can - around the size of a shipping container as a guide
2. 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.
3. Make sure the doors can be secured open.
4. Quality - Don't buy flimsy domestic products. They will not last and will not stand up to hundreds of hours of school use.
5. Storage should be either in big stable type bays or tubs or dustbins that can be pulled out.





6. Sorting and categorising should be kept to an absolute minimum or tidy up time will be longer than playtime!
7. Access should be DDA compliant
8. Put your storage somewhere where tidy-up will be made easier
9. Your storage will have very heavy foot fall around it - don't put in on grass.
10. Have a 'wet side' and a 'dry side' for fabrics and plastics. Keep some things nice for the better weather!
11. Do you need planning permission? If you decide to ask your local planning dept 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 on the internet.