



Media Release

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Scaredy cats, or confident kids? Balancing risk and responsibility key to challenging the 'cottonwool culture'

Amid debate about the constraints our risk-averse society places on children and concerns about the possible impact on their ability to assess and take risks as adults, key thinkers and practitioners come together in Stirling on 7 October to look at perceptions of risk and how understanding risk and responsibility is vital in building confident children.

Key themes of *Children, risk and responsibility: encouraging confidence in a risk-averse society*, organised by Children in Scotland and Play Scotland, include why it's important for children and young people to experience risk; how best to support them; and the role of Health and Safety. Workshops will look at positive alternatives to overprotection and suggest practical ways to combat the cottonwool culture.

Speakers include Minister for Children and Early Years Adam Ingram; Director of the Children's Services Regulation for the Care Commission Ronnie Hill; and Tom Hodgkinson, author of *How to be Idle*, *How to be Free* and *The Idle Parent*. The conference will also hear from Neil Blake and Rachel Cowper of Inspiring Scotland, the agency charged with implementing the Scottish Government's new £4 million 'Go Play' programme.

Adam Ingram said:

"Having the chance to play and interact is part of growing up and by helping our young people explore the world around them through play we can promote their physical development, imagination and confidence while enriching childhoods and embedding skills that last a lifetime. There is a cotton wool culture that has developed over time in Scotland which is why we are leading a national debate around sensible approaches to play and risk through our Early Years Framework. Just last month we announced a £580,000 campaign to encourage parents to have fun with their children from birth, stimulating them through playing, talking and reading to them and this conference will also help us work together to give our children the best possible start in life."

Author Tom Hodgkinson said:

"Mums at the school gate repeat the mantra: 'you can't be too careful these days'. What I want to say is, you *can* be too careful these days. We must let the children go, so they can play and simply be. Otherwise we will create a generation of scaredy cats with no courage

or confidence. This may be good for business – after all, anxious people make the best consumers – but it is most decidedly not good as far as our mental health goes.”

Neil Blake of Inspiring Scotland said:

“Free play makes a tremendous contribution to children having a happy and healthy childhood. As well as being fun it improves their physical and mental health, and helps them learn to interact and negotiate with other people, assess risks and build confidence in their own abilities. This makes them more likely to grow into happy and healthy adults who can make the most of their lives.

“The Go Play programme will develop the play sector, increase the provision of stronger play services, and develop new and creative approaches in Scotland. Inspiring Scotland is delighted to be working in partnership with the Government to strengthen the voluntary sector's response to issues that affect people across the country.”

Notes to Editors

1. *Children, risk and responsibility: encouraging confidence in a risk-averse society* is being held at King Robert Hotel, Stirling on Wednesday 7 October 2009 beginning at 9:15 am.
2. **Children in Scotland** is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children's sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk.
3. Children in Scotland is committed to creative play and making more effective use of the outdoor environment, whether urban or rural, as a space for play and learning. For more information on Children in Scotland's work in this area contact Karen Mountney, Head of Programme and Practice Development, at kmountney@childreninscotland.org.uk.
4. **Play Scotland** was formed in 1998 to make the child's right to play, underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a reality in Scotland. Its mission is to increase awareness of the importance of play to the development of children and young people in Scotland; and to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland have equal access to diverse and quality play opportunities that meet their individual need. Its priorities are lobbying for a play policy and a strategic approach to play in Scotland; developing resources to support the play sector; workforce development of the playwork sector; and research into play provision. For further information visit www.playscotland.org.

For further information contact Tracey Francis at tfrancis@childreninscotland.org.uk or on 0131 222 2419