



How to run a Toy Swap event

What is a toy swap?

A toy swap is a cashless alternative to finding new toys for your kids while helping to reduce waste; at the same time, they're an opportunity to clear out your pile of unwanted toys. People can donate a toy their child no longer needs in exchange for picking another toy for free, although those who arrive without any toys should not be excluded from choosing a new one as they will help to limit the amount of toys left over at the end.

Toy swaps can be as structured or unstructured as you want. Some people just run them for around a dozen friends, while others open them up to the whole community. In order to avoid a free-for-all, you might want to allocate tokens or establish an order. It's even possible to allocate each person a number that allows them to take turns choosing a toy – and give them the option of 'stealing' a toy from the person ahead of them! A lot depends on who the audience is and how many you invite. Remember that toy-swaps and other give-and-take events are a good way to encourage local people to meet so it is good to provide chairs, tables and refreshments if possible.

TOP TIP

A ready-made market is great idea for toy swapping. If you have a school, scouts/guides or new mums group locally you should involve them in swap. Arrange it for a time that works for them.



Why run a toy swap?

Toy swaps are a great way both to bring people together and to remind everyone that what may be waste to one person may be happily reused by somebody else – meaning less useful stuff ending up in the bin. It also means less on your pocket, since it is estimated that in the UK the average spend per child on toys is £294 annually!

What things do I need?

- A practical venue, taking into account numbers of people you might expect, that is easy to find or often used by the community.
- A 'staging area', where toys can be checked as they come in.
- A list of items that cannot be accepted, disclaimers and safety guidance (see below).
- 'I'm taken' stickers, if you are going to allow people to pick their goods up at the end.
- Tables and chairs for the parents so they can sit down and chat, as well as tables to display toys.
- If you decide to admit children, it is a good idea to provide some toys and a soft play area.
- Refreshments (depending on the venue).
- If you decide to include electrical toys then you would need a qualified PAT tester - which might carry a cost.

Running the session

Before the event:

Where and when

Think carefully about the venue and the time of day. Saturday mornings are almost certainly the best bet but don't rule out an evening toy swap – it could be more straightforward to time your toy swap so that children are not involved (especially as they may not want to see their old toys being given away!). Alternatively, organising a toy swap to fit in with the nearby school run or directly involving the local school might work well. Aim to run the session for a shorter period – no more than three hours. That way, you avoid the risk of people not showing up with any toys until several hours in!

Boundaries

Decide early on where your boundaries will lie: how 'used' can the toys be? Is there a limit to the types of toys you will accept? Toys need to have been cleaned before you will accept them and this should be stated in any publicity material.

You will need to let people know beforehand which items cannot be accepted. Your list should be advertised along with the event details and will look something like this:

At the event the following cannot be accepted:

- electrical items
- toys with cords over 30cm
- car seats, baby slings or other safety equipment
- food items, such as baby milk formula

Managing risk

In order to protect yourself, you should display a disclaimer that might use similar wording to:

"Persons taking part in a toy swap event do so at their own risk. [Your organisation] accepts no responsibility for items swapped and gives no warranty as to the condition, suitability or provenance of any item swapped. Please take all reasonable measures to check the condition, suitability and provenance of any item swapped for your own protection. [Your organisation] accepts no liability for any claim or loss resulting from any transaction taking place at the toy swap."

Consider insurance – if you are holding your event in a public building such as a village hall, church or school, it is likely that your event would be covered but you should check this is the case.

If you are taking photos during the event, remember that you would need parental consent if you are going to share any photographs of children. A sample photographic policy and consent form from the Safe Network website is included in this pack (see *Resource C*), along with toy safety advice for parents and toy cleaning guidance (*Resources D and E*).

It is important to make sure that you are covered against any legal implications. The 'CE' mark is a declaration of conformity with the essential safety requirements of the Toy Safety Regulations and should be on all new toys. You would need to check that this is the case with any toys you pass on.

On the day:

1) Getting started: organising your volunteers

Make sure all your volunteers have read the relevant legislation and are aware of how you want the event to run. Allocate jobs to your volunteers as follows:

- Greet people, take toys to the staging area and allocate tokens – one per toy they bring in.
- Manage the staging area - taking toys, checking they are clean and categorise them in whichever way seems most appropriate: for example, educational toys on one table, soft toys on another, larger toys at one end of the room.
- At the 'paying station', remember to monitor the quantity of toys that passes through your hands during the event.

If you are serving refreshments, some volunteers should take charge of this too – but don't forget to offer cups of tea to your volunteers!

2) The swapping – 2-3 hours

Once you've got your staging area, display tables, paying station and refreshments set up then you'll be ready to open up. It's a good idea not to allow anyone to take toys until 15 minutes into the session so that everyone gets an equal chance to look.

After this time, people are free to 'pay' for their chosen toys by handing over their tokens at the paying station. Encourage people to stay and chat over refreshments while the toy swap continues.

3) Weighing up the benefits

As well as taking the tokens at the pay station, and if you can, weigh the toys each person is taking away with them so that you know how much has passed through your hands during the session. This will add weight when you report your success to us!

4) Packing away

It is quite likely that you will have some toys left at the end of the session. Decide before your volunteers disappear what you intend to happen with these. The best thing to do is probably to bag up the toys and take them to a local charity shop. You may prefer to list them via your nearest Freegle group, Freecycle or suchlike.

- Be at the door to greet people, take any extra items and allocate tokens – one per item of clothing they bring in.

If you are serving refreshments, some volunteers could take charge of this too – but don't forget to offer cups of tea to your volunteers!

Further information and support

Find your nearest **Freegle** group at <https://ilovefreegle.org/groups/north-west> where you can list excess toys for free.

Information about donating to charities can be found at <http://www.recyclenow.com/re-use>

A sample photographic policy and consent form can be accessed on the Safe Network website: http://www.safenetwork.org.uk/resources/Pages/policies_and_procedures.aspx

<http://www.toysadvice.co.uk/second-hand-toys-what-are-rights.html> gives advice on second-hand toys and the law.