

# The Newcroft Club

The Newcroft Club Ltd registered with Companies House No.15051190

Newnham Croft Primary School, Chedworth Street, CAMBRIDGE CB3 9JF

## NEWSLETTER: March 2026



[thenewcroftclub.co.uk](http://thenewcroftclub.co.uk)



I (Sadie) recently enjoyed the most exciting opportunity: to attend the 23<sup>rd</sup> National Playwork Conference, held annually in Eastbourne, over 2 days. This year there were over 50 sessions grouped into different categories including: Playing in Policy, Inclusivity and Equity, Play in The Digital World, Doing Right by Children, Anarchy, and Playwork Advanced Thinking. With so much on offer I was totally spoilt for choice!

Having always been passionate about the importance of play, particularly the ways in which the Playwork approach supports healthy personal, social and emotional development in children, I eventually decided to attend various sessions on topics focussed on research around play and mental health. At the top of my list were 2 different talks by Professor Peter Gray whose inspiring book “Free to Learn” was gifted to me whilst running Harmanli Refugee Camp Play School many years ago.

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Hearing Gray speak about how far we have come from what he termed a “biologically normal childhood” was fascinating. He has worked with anthropologists studying hunter gatherer tribes around the world (whose lives are closest to what is “biologically normal” for humans) and found that their children live their lives almost completely free of adult control – and that the children spend all their time PLAYING. This distance from adults enables the children to learn from each other, and he notes that the children “learn better from children than from adults: authentic communication; courage; creating and understanding rules; building on the skills of the adult culture; getting along with others as equals.”

Gray spoke about how we have, “over decades, deprived children of freedom to be children” and how this decline of normal childhood has led to an increase in levels of anxiety, depression and suicide. Of the many studies he referenced, one looked at what effect doubling the amount of playtime for children during the school day would have: After just 2 months of this introduced routine, the levels of cortisol found in their hair samples had HALVED!

He concluded that:

“Play makes children happy; deprivation of it makes them depressed.

Play is how children satisfy the three basic psychological needs essential, for all of us, for mental wellbeing – autonomy, competence, relatedness.

Play promotes courage and an internal locus of control, essential to meet the challenge of life with equanimity.”

This notion of play promoting courage came up in almost every session I attended. Speaking about “Curiosity in Play”, Mick Conway said that we are “doing ourselves a disservice” in terming such play ‘Risky Play’. He prefers the term “Epistemic Curiosity” as he believes that children are not seeking out RISK, they are in fact exploring “uncertainty”.

Similarly, whilst speaking on “Risk Taking in Play: Mental Health and Anxiety”, Helen Dodd referred to “Adventurous Play”, as she maintains that the word ‘Risky’ implies ‘Hazardous’. Dodd is passionate about the importance of Adventurous Play “as a mechanism for reducing risk for childhood anxiety” and believes that children need Adventurous Play to develop a “coping template”, and a tolerance of uncertainty. She says they need to have opportunities to feel the physical signs of anxiety: sweaty palms/ butterflies/heart racing etc, in a safe, joyful, setting so that they aren’t panic inducing in themselves, or viewed as negative feelings. She shared lots of evidence from research into play proving that more child-led adventurous play, preferably outside, decreases the risk of children developing anxiety disorders, and supporting better mental health in general.

At The Newcroft Club we are lucky to have the expansive outdoor play space of our “Big Playground” and we see, on a daily basis, how much the children benefit. We watch them test their strength and capabilities as they try out new experiences like roller-skating or jumping out of the highest treehouse; we also observe how children tend to assess risk for themselves - for instance by starting to climb a tree and keeping to the lower branches at first, or by starting off slowly and then gradually increasing speed when driving the go-karts. Actually, there are countless examples of children exploring uncertainty and developing courage through adventurous play at The Newcroft Club!

My attendance at the Playwork Conference was funded by the brilliant Cambridgeshire HAF Team, and I cannot thank them enough!

Did you know that we are a HAF provider?

The HAF Programme provides funding for eligible families to attend Holiday Clubs/Activities during the Christmas, Easter and Summer Holidays. See their website for more information, and please do share with anyone you know who may be eligible:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/holiday-activities-and-food-programme>

### **Staffing:**

It is wonderful to have Ruby back at work again following her trip to India where she volunteered at a school for deaf children, and now it is Lizzie’s turn to take a Gap Year break. Lizzie will thankfully return as bank staff and cover for the month of April when Maureen will be on leave. We have recently welcomed Olivia and Tintin to the team as well, plus Maya who volunteers for two afternoons a week.

Please see the Staff page on our website for more information about our staff team.

### **Spare Clothes:**

We keep a small selection of spare clothing at the club. If your child has borrowed some of our spare clothing (you will always be informed), please don’t forget to return the clothing to us as soon as it has been washed. We have a few pairs of our spare trousers missing currently!

### **Extracurricular Clubs:**

Please remember to let us know if your child will be attending any of the extracurricular clubs organised by the school next term, before coming to Afterschool Club. Children in Years 1 to 6 make their own way to us after school, and after these clubs, so we need to know what time to expect their arrival.

### **Absence:**

If your child will be absent, please let us know before the start of the session. This includes absence due to a child being collected from school during the school day/absence due to holidays taken during term-time. The school does not communicate absence with us, and searching for missing children takes a lot of time during the busy start of an Afterschool Club session.

### **Club Policies and Procedures:**

Maureen is in the process of conducting the annual review on our Policies and Procedures. There are over 30 in total so any queries you may have regarding procedures or policies should be covered. We keep a hard copy file in the Community room, and parents are welcome to request to see it. You may also request that we email you a particular policy should the need arise.

### **Fee Increase:**

Due to increasing costs, from September 2026 our fees will be increasing to:

Afterschool Club: £16 per session

Holiday Club: £43 per full day/ £33 per half day

### **Holiday Club:**

Thank you to everyone who has made a booking for our Easter Holiday Club next week, we are now fully booked every day and looking forward to all the Spring and Easter themed crafts and cooking.

Booking for our Summer Half-Term Holiday Club and our Summer Holiday Club, will go live at 8am on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April. Dates for our Holiday Clubs can be found on the Booking page of our website:

<https://thenewcroftclub.co.uk/booking/>

**Please note that we will be closed between Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> August and Friday 7<sup>th</sup> August.**

We require 2 weeks' notice for cancellation of a Holiday Club space.

### **Afterschool Club Availability:**

We currently have a few spaces available on Mondays for Years 2 to 6, please let us know if you are interested in adding Mondays to your booking or would like to swap to a Monday. Maybe your child has a friend at school who would like to join them at Afterschool Club on Mondays?!

We also have space on Mondays and Wednesdays for Reception and Year 1.

Thank you for reading!

Best wishes,

Sadie and Maureen