

Health play staff

Health play staff support children through therapeutic play. This helps to make their healthcare experience enjoyable and reduces anxiety and the risk of psychological trauma.

Working life

Whether you are a health playworker, assistant or health play specialist, you'll work with children and young people when they access healthcare services in different healthcare settings. Play is the way you'll build relationships with children and help them have the best possible experience during a hospital visit or procedure.

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As a health playworker or play assistant, you'll provide therapeutic play opportunities for children and young people in hospital or attending a hospital or clinic.

As a registered health play specialist, you'll use play as a therapeutic tool to help children understand their illness and treatment and work with other healthcare professionals to prepare children for treatment and engage them during difficult procedures. You'll also lead the health play service, managing health playworkers and play assistants.

Apprenticeships logo

Most health play staff work in hospitals, either in outpatient or inpatient departments. Some work in hospices and other community-based settings. Some health play specialists work with children in their homes.

Pay and benefits

Most staff working in the NHS are paid on the Agenda for Change ([AfC](#) ^[3]) pay system. As a play assistant, you will typically be on [AfC](#) ^[3] band 3. As a health play specialist, you will be on band 4 or 5 (as a senior health play specialist) and with further training and experience, you could apply for more senior positions.

Health play staff in the NHS work standard hours of around 37.5 a week. Terms and conditions will usually be different for health play staff working outside of the NHS.

Entry requirements

You could enter a role as a play assistant with a relevant childcare qualification at level 3. Experience of working with children will be an advantage.

- [Find out more about volunteering and gaining experience](#) ^[4]

Most employers expect health play specialists to be registered with the [Society of Health Play Specialists](#) ^[5]. To register, you need a foundation degree in healthcare play specialism. This is a two-year part-time course. To get onto the course, you usually need

- a childcare qualification at level 3 or above
- GCSEs (or equivalent) in maths and English
- at least two years' experience of working with children (paid or voluntary)

Courses are a mix of practical work and theory. If you are not already working in healthcare play, you need to arrange a placement during the course.

A level 5 apprenticeship standard for health play specialists has been approved for delivery. To get onto a degree apprenticeship, you will need to apply for an apprentice position with a health care provider. You can search for vacancies on the [NHS Jobs website](#) ^[6] and [Find an Apprenticeship website](#) ^[7]

Personal characteristics and skills needed

Health play specialists need to be

- interested in working with children
- imaginative and fun
- caring and kind
- approachable and reassuring
- able to deal with other people's emotions (both children and adults)
- willing to work with parents and carers
- health and safety conscious
- aware of child protection and safeguarding

You'll also need

- excellent communication skills, including listening, with adults and children
- good organisational skills
- good observational skills

Training and development

Play specialists who are registered with the [Society of Health Play Specialists](#) ^[5] have to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. You could become a senior play specialist, responsible for a team. You could apply to train as a healthcare professional such as a nurse or occupational therapist.

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Other roles that may interest you

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