



#PlayToday

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promoting the value of play

PLAY NEEDS OF CHILDREN

This developmental perspective on planning outdoor play spaces is a guide only. Children need to be observed to indicate their individual needs and skill levels and to have environments modified or equipment provided to meet those needs.

0-2 YEAR OLDS

0 - 12 months

- become upright and mobile;
- enjoy 1:1 interactions with an adult;
- become aware of sensory stimuli sounds and movement;
- begin to sit, crawl, and stand up;
- learn to clamber over low objects;
- copy adult's actions;
- attention focuses on simple events eg..wind in the trees.

12 months - 2 years

- increasingly upright and more active;
- enjoy
 - imitative play/pretend animal play;
 - throwing but with little control;
 - climbing in and through;
 - filling, emptying and carrying;
 - toppling, pulling and pushing;
 - learning meaningful words;
 - playing in sandpits;
 - pushing trolleys and wheeling prams; and
 - collecting things.

Play area required:

- *Babies and toddlers require playspaces which offer challenge and excitement, and activities appropriate for their stage of development;*
- *Toddlers need level spaces clear of trip hazards to run and move, given that they have little control when running and little sense of direction so they are more likely to bump into obstacles;*
- *Careful layout of equipment is essential given that young children are less able to forecast consequences. For example, they may move into the path of a swing as they don't understand that it will return;*
- *Babies and toddlers learn through sensory exploration and many materials are mouthed. Grass is therefore a safer surface than bark or mulch and is also safe enough for any 'tumbles' as falls are basically ground level.*

Note: All children are vulnerable in the outdoor environment to UV radiation from the sun. Extreme care and careful planning of both the environment and the program is essential to ensure children's safety. Babies and toddlers particularly require quality shade provision in outdoor playspaces.

2-YEARS

- are establishing autonomy, they want to be independent but still want an adult close by;
- use aggression (hitting, pushing, biting) to try to solve problems;
- engage in parallel play i.e. side by side with another child;
- often move as a group - all into the sand pit, then all on the climbing structure;
- are developing imitative role play - mothers and fathers;
- are refining locomotor skills - walking action develops and they can now run;
- enjoy physical play - climbing, chasing balls and balloons, rolling, kicking and throwing balls, walking up and down steps, and can manage a small slide;
- use wheeled toys;
- enjoy manipulating small objects and filling containers;
- are interested in birds, insects, flowers and animals.

Play area required:

- Level, grassy areas where mats can be spread and children can crawl in comfort, scramble and pull themselves up and which provides a soft landing for early walkers. Older children can use this area for running and chasing bubbles;
- Some smooth pathways with non-abrasive surfacing are needed for wheeled toys.(children will have lots of falls);
- Planting to provide sensory experiences such as smell, listening to leaves, feeling different textures of foliage and opportunities for children to enter and explore. This needs to be primarily low-growing, so children can see care givers easily when seated;
- Overhead structure (pergola or tree) for hanging mobiles or wind chimes;
- Some gentle slopes will add to interest and help develop physical skills;
- Flat surfaces for setting up tables & chairs and dolls beds;
- Small sand pit for one or two children as well as a larger one for the whole group;
- Small swings, recognizing that children will still run in front of and behind moving swings;
- Climbing area with soft-fall and movable equipment;
- Alcove areas landscaped into gardens or fences where small groups can play;
- Frequent perching areas for adults to sit with children or with small groups for songs, conversations, to discuss a creature found in the garden or simply to be close enough to respond to children's needs without intruding in their play; and
- Enclosures for pets.

3-5 YEARS

3 YEARS

- are beginning to interact and will engage in basic socio-dramatic play for short periods, and focus on domestic play;
- can use wheel toys with pedals;
- enjoy climbing and often uses this as a measure of self (look at me!);
- can manage a small slide;
- enjoy sand and water;
- can pour and fill;
- enjoy hauling - filling bags & baskets and removing contents to another place or simply carrying it around.

4 YEARS

- can share & negotiate;
- are inquisitive;
- test adult limits;
- direct most language to other children;
- include violence in play;
- show interest in natural science and how things work;
- play more fantasy and abstract socio-dramatic play themes;
- have basic ball skills of throwing, catching and hitting with bat;
- can participate in group games and activities.

5 YEARS

- like to help and do real work;
- prefer co-operative play;
- are physically poised and controlled;
- like to test out skills and do stunts;
- experience change in physical skills -girls develop precision/boys develop speed and strength;
- enjoy fact finding and collating information;
- value group acceptance;
- enjoy constructions and models that are realistic;
- end-product is now important;
- master ball games;
- enjoy games with rules.

Play Area Required:

- A variety of levels and different ways of getting up and down;
- A variety of surfacing materials;
- Flat surfaces suitable for large block constructions;
- Small areas for 2 -4 children to play with sensory materials or imaginative play props;
- Variety of climbing, sliding, swinging equipment on impact absorbing surfaces. This activity will take up a reasonably large space. Movable equipment is preferred; A large grassed area is valuable for free running, ball and other organised games;
- Smaller areas for groups of 3-6 children to work together on co-operative play projects and for dramatic play;
- Low growing plants which create barriers, pathways and private spaces for small group play or for music, drama, science or language experiences to happen outdoors;
- A large sandpit and a separate digging patch, both with water available where groups of children can work together on play projects;
- Views of the outside world and what is happening within the local area;
- Spaces to ride bikes;
- Natural environments to provide cubby, camping play opportunities where children feel can play alone -as well as attracting birds and insects to provide a range of sensory experiences throughout the year;
- An amphitheatre for whole group gatherings, drama, gymnastics or circus performances;
- Vegetable and herb gardens; and animal enclosures.

6 - 8 YEARS

Children at this age are continuing to refine fundamental movement skills. They are in need of flexible space to engage in both boisterous activity and quieter small or individual group experiences after a day of classroom participation.

- Climb confidently, want to master new skills and are prepared to take risks;
- Manage ball games of kicking, batting and catching a ball;
- Enjoy games with rules but have difficulty losing;
- Are energetic and active, can run or walk for long periods, find sitting more tiring than running;
- Consider peer group important - cliques or clubs often form but prefer own gender;
- Have increased interest in the world around them;
- Enjoy group activities and are able to play co operatively;
- Use adults as supporters rather than carers.

Play Area Required:

- Climbing equipment;
- Gymnastic type attachments - trapeze swings, horizontal ladders or Roman Rings;
- Staging areas for dramatizations and competitions;
- Space for team games;
- Space and equipment for "real" work.

8 -12 YEARS

Children at this age are increasing in their interest in competition, sport and energetic activity. They are in need of flexible space to engage in both boisterous activity and quieter small or individual group experiences.

Play Area Required:

- Challenging climbing equipment.
- Challenging gymnastic type equipment.
- Space for team games.
- Space for quiet activity.

Playgrounds which provide a satisfying range of settings for play for students of different ages and interests are likely to reduce the number of conflicts. Children are likely to be easier to manage, vandalism is likely to be reduced, and the positive spin-offs include benefits to the students' self image and to the image of the school in general.

When planning contemporary play spaces, it is important to provide play experiences that will enable all children to play together.

Barbara Champion
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