
PLAYGROUND SOLUTIONS

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Guidelines for Preschool Playground Design

No unsafe piece of playground equipment is worth a child's long term health or their life! Children's play is rich and complex. Play equipment is only a small part of what children need on a playground.

Hire a CPSI (Certified Playground Safety Inspector) to assess your current playground. Their report gives you the information you need to create a safe environment. Consider how to refurbish or recreate your playground in a way that supports children's growth.

Child Development on the Playground

This brochure gives examples of playground equipment; play spaces and props/toys for activities that will support the social, emotional, cognitive and physical growth of children. As you read through this list you will see that some items appear on more than one list. Consider these popular items as a starting point for your playground. Choose ideas that support your program goals.



Social Development

Cooperative projects, problem solving, planning;

- Sand, Mud, Water, Natural Materials
- Construction areas covered with safety surfacing large enough to accommodate groups of children.

Cooperative Games, experimenting with games, obeying rules;

- Open space for children to move freely without interfering with others. (A good rule of thumb is to leave one third of your playground space open.)

Group exploring;

- Areas of the playground where children can feel like they are adventuring while still visible to a practitioner.

Dancing, Mimicking;

- Outdoor stage for dramatic play.
- Outdoor electrical outlet for a tape player.

Singing, Creative Noise Making;

- Spaces where children can express themselves freely without interrupting others.

Verbal Communication Listening;

- Quiet places to get together and talk
- Talk Tubes.

Sharing, Interpersonal Caring;

- Playhouse, Car, Fire Engine, Bushes grouped to create a "House".
- Props to support house play.

Fact Learning, Displaying-Explaining, Questioning-Investigating, Ordering-Arranging, Experimenting with objects;

- Natural Materials.
- Weather instruments.
- Animals, Insects, Birds.
- Shovels.
- Child sized hammers with protective goggles.
- Dirt.

Group Fantasy Play;

- Play structure, thematic play structure.
 - Play house
 - Outdoor Stage.
 - Natural materials and man made loose parts.
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E motional Development

Homemaking;

- Playhouse or other small enclosed space placed next to sand play and water play.
- Pots, Pans, Dishes.

Creative Self Expression;

- Large surfaces for writing, drawing, painting.
- Tables for messy play.
- Water, Clay, Paint, Chalk, Flour, Brushes.

Solitary Play;

- Swings
- Cozy area for sitting and observing.
- Toy cars, people and animals.

Risk Taking;

- Age appropriate playground equipment.
- Adventuring places.

Music Making;

- Outdoor musical instruments.
- Toy instruments.

Group Participation;

- Open space for group games.
- Balls, jump ropes, parachutes.

Role Playing;

- Outdoor stage.
- Outdoor playground equipment that promotes fantasy play.
- Toy microphone, bubbles, scarves.

Rebuilding, Reconstructing;

- Open space with safety surfacing to allow for construction play.
- Outdoor Blocks, Tires, Planks.

Fantasy Play;

- Thematic play equipment.
- Natural and man made loose parts.
- Low bushes for creating “away places.”

Ordering Activities, Handling Objects;

- Natural Materials.
- Small toys.

Experimenting;

- Sandbox, Mud box, Water Table.
- Buckets, sieves, funnels, shovels.

C ognitive Development

Listening;

- Being outdoors provides the opportunity to listen to and identify the sounds of the natural and the man made environment.

Problem Solving;

- Construction area with large outside toys.
- Sandbox, Mud box, water table with tools for creating.

Observing – Inter-Group;

- The outdoors is the perfect place for children to sit and watch what other children do. Part of the growth process is observing what others do and then deciding whether you are capable of doing the same thing.

Observing – Natural Processes;

- Gardens to plan, plant and tend.
- Bird: feeders, baths, blinds.
- Butterfly Bushes.
- Tools to dig with and find bugs.

Using Tools

- Child sized real tools.

Making Things;

- Construction area with large outside toys.
- Natural materials.
- Sandbox, Mud box or digging area.

Matching, Naming, Identifying;

- Organized outdoor classroom activities which teach about the natural and the man made world.

Spatial Orientation;

- Equipment and natural materials that allow children to explore their bodies in relationship to space.
- Drawing, Writing;
- Painting panels.
- Hard Surfaces for writing with chalk.

Exploring;

- “Away Places”
- Digging areas where children can dig by themselves or with a friend.

Experimenting Socially;

- Equipment that supports group play.
 - Play spaces that support group play.
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Cognitive Development

- Loose parts both natural and man-made that support group play.
 - Creative self expression;
 - Outdoor stage.
 - Playhouse.
 - Open space for freedom of movement.
- Rhythmic Movement and Rhythmic Noise Making;
- Outdoor Stage.
 - Outdoor electrical outlet.
 - Open space.
- Imagining, Symbolizing;
- Outdoor stage.
 - Playhouse.
- Reading, Solitary Play;
- Quiet, away corners.
 - Outdoor books.
- Manipulating;
- Play equipment that really works like sand diggers and water pumps.
- Measuring;
- Play equipment and loose parts that encourage measuring like sand, water and containers.

Physical Development

- Climbing, Rocking, Swinging, Spinning, Sliding, Balancing, Crawling, Jumping, and Hanging;
- Play equipment that provides opportunities for these activities.
 - Natural features that allow opportunity for these activities.
- Rolling and Tumbling;
- Hills within the play space.
 - Open space.
- Pushing and Pulling;
- Wagons.
 - Early walking toys.
 - Wheelbarrows.

Physical Development

- Riding;
- A surface that allows wheeled toys (used with helmets as appropriate.)
- Hopping, Skipping, Running, Throwing, Catching, Walking, Drifting;
- Parachutes.
 - Hula Hoops.
 - Open Space.
 - Surface that allows game lines to be created.
- Building;
- Safety surfacing without play equipment on it to allow children to create their own climbing structures.
 - Large outdoor blocks, tires, and planks.
- Collecting, Distributing, Arranging, and Ordering. Feeling, Handling;
- Loose parts of all sorts with an emphasis on natural materials.
- Hiding;
- Low bushes.
 - Play equipment with hidey holes.
- Manipulating, Molding;
- Mud, Sand, Water.
- Sitting;
- Benches, Tables.
 - Tree stumps.
- Digging;
- Gardens.
 - Sandbox, Mud Box.
 - Open area where it's OK to dig.
- Seeking;
- Play equipment or natural features that provide children with a sense of height.
- Climbing;
- Build a small hill within your play space.
 - Build in changes in elevation; steps, ramps, low retaining walls.
 - Create an amphitheatre with seating that will double as a climbing experience.
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Physical Development

- Climbing (cont'd);
- Provide natural materials for climbing like boulders and tree trunks.
 - Tunnels provide a simple, versatile climbing experience.
 - Large construction toys allow children to build their own climbing structures.
 - Remember to provide safety surfacing for all climbing experiences that take children off the ground.

Children need and love to climb but climbing doesn't have to be in the form of an elaborate play structure. The list above includes just a few ideas to consider for climbing that won't break the bank.

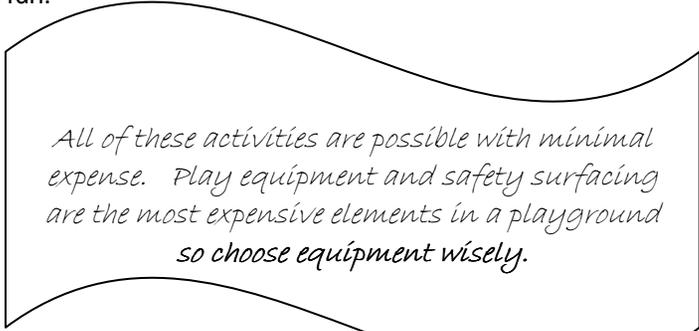
There are themes and ideas that repeat themselves throughout this list;

- Open space.
- Fantasy play.
- Exploration.
- Creation.
- Natural materials.
- Loose parts.
- Movement.

Be creative; look for resources and ideas within your community.

- Create a playground committee and have a brain storming session.

Create a playground that you and your children will find stimulating and fun.



All of these activities are possible with minimal expense. Play equipment and safety surfacing are the most expensive elements in a playground so choose equipment wisely.

Bibliography

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