

How to Make Outdoor Play Spaces More Inclusive

Playgrounds offer many chances for children to play freely, in ways that promote motor, sensory, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Children with disabilities may not be able to access many playgrounds in the same way as their peers, which means they might miss these opportunities. A few thoughtful changes may increase opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in playground play.

Things to keep in mind when designing an outdoor play space...

- Ensure entrances and pathways are clear, flat, wide, and firm.
- Add rails to both sides of stairways, steps, and ramps.
- Provide ramps/mats for uneven surfaces (ex. threshold ramp).
- Make sure there are spaces children can play independently.
- Provide equipment appropriate for children with a range of different abilities.
- Make sure children of all abilities can access shaded areas.
- Clearly mark any surface change (ex: use brightly colored tape to show steps, ledges, or danger zones like the swings).
- Label different areas of the play space with words, photos, and braille.
- Place protective coverings over any points or edges to prevent injuries.
- Proper installation of equipment is essential.
- Make sure the play space is enclosed.
- Follow ADA standards for play areas.



Include families of children with disabilities in the design and selection of any new playground equipment.



Consider Installing Adapted Swings:

- RelaxSling
- Full Support Swing
- Saucer Swing
- Wheelchair Platform Swing - check compatibility with power wheelchairs



More Ideas:

- Offer games and activities near or on the ground such as an imaginary play area with an open side (a playhouse, pirate ship, or drive-through window), wind chimes or other outdoor musical instruments, four-square, a race track, or many other options.
- Include play activities that involve multiple senses (textures, sounds or music, interesting visuals, etc.).
- Add a raised sandbox that a wheelchair can pull up to.
- Add a playground communication board (ex. Communication Board Playground).



Funding Opportunities Related to Inclusive Playgrounds:

- Great Outdoors Colorado funds outdoor recreation projects, including the School Yard Initiative, which aims to improve school playgrounds
- Daniels Fund supports initiatives designed to provide people with disabilities "access to life-altering, durable equipment that maximizes their independence and quality of life" and quality educational experiences for all children
- Buell Foundation funds initiatives in programs that have "demonstrated success in helping children thrive," with emphasis on supporting healthy development of very young children
- DonorsChoose allows teachers to launch campaigns related to a need within their class/school and donors can give directly to their project

Disclaimer: many of these funding opportunities are highly competitive and may not be the right fit for every child care program. Please do continued research to ensure funding opportunities match your program's needs and goals.

- KABOOM! Grants fund community-driven projects to build or improve playgrounds in partnership with local nonprofits
- James M. Cox Foundation gives grant funding to community projects in priority areas, including Early Childhood Education and Empowering Families for Success and Health
- Meet me at the Park Play Spaces is a partnership between the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and The Walt Disney Company to help local Parks and Rec Departments create more inclusive parks for children with disabilities. Consider partnering with your local parks and rec department to improve accessibility at community parks for children in your program

Resources & References

- Rocky Mountain ADA: Accessibility Guide for Playgrounds and Play Area Surfaces
- Article on Evidence-Informed Recommendations for Designing Inclusive Playgrounds
- Canadian Standards Association: Standards for Children's Play Spaces and Equipment
- Playground Grants
- Disability Law Colorado: The ADA and Child Care
- Commonly Asked Questions about Child Care Centers and the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Project Include Website



DISCLAIMER: This guide is for educational purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement of any products or services.