



# Inclusive Play



Children benefit from being outside, interacting with their environment, learning from nature and developing through play. However, children's environments have changed dramatically: there are fewer natural environments and increasingly parents discourage outdoor play. This makes it even more critical that available provisions cater for all children,

young people and families by following an inclusive approach.

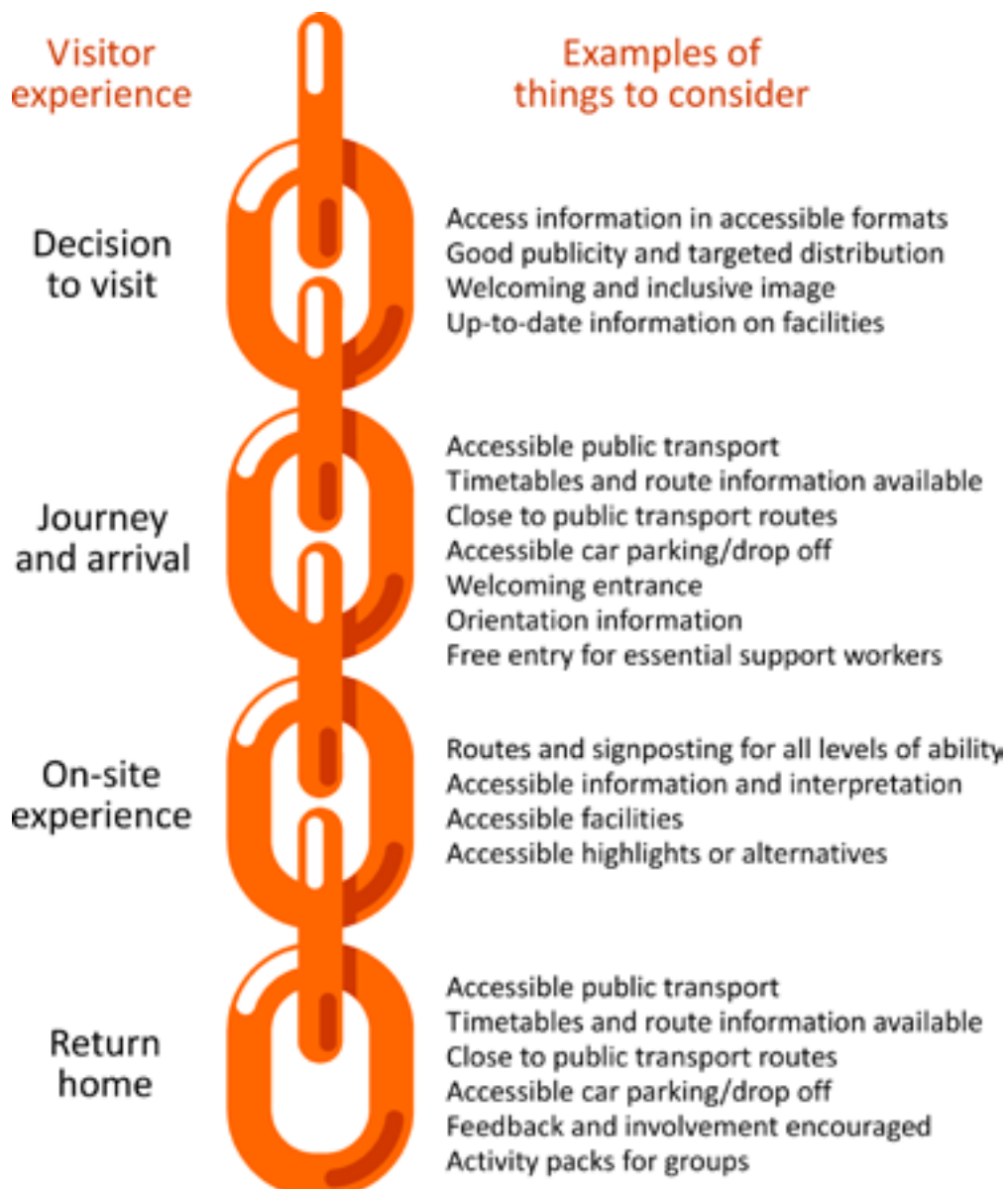
Creating places that are truly inclusive is also important for the understanding of diversity. By ensuring that children, young people and adults can all socialise, play and be part of a community enables them a greater awareness and understanding of the needs of different people.

## Inclusive design

- considers at every stage the needs of different groups to avoid excluding particular people.
- is aware of the diversity of visitors and staff, and how different people access the world around them.
- is a people-centred approach that encourages participation and involvement to create varied, sensory rich opportunities for everyone to engage with their environment.
- encourages a move towards designing play opportunities, facilities and services that reflect our diverse population, creating more exciting and engaging experiences for all.

Inclusion and involvement should be considered at every stage of the development process, from planning through design to installation, evaluation and maintenance.

Current building regulations and the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) should be seen as a *minimum* requirement and organisations should strive to exceed them wherever practical. Inclusive design is challenging. It is impossible to design everything for everyone, and at times there might be a need for exclusive designs that cater for a specific group of people, for example Braille. The ultimate aim is that all visitors feel they have an equality of experience and are not excluded from opportunities during their visit.



## The Access Chain

The Access Chain has been developed by the Sensory Trust, to simplify the process of joining up access work. By thinking of access as a chain of events, it becomes apparent that failing to provide for every link in the visitor experience can mean that the visit may end with the visitor feeling frustrated, or, more likely, the visit may not happen at all.

## Who are we designing for?

The beneficiaries of inclusive play and its outcomes include,

- ▣ local communities,
- ▣ visitors to the facilities who will directly experience the inclusive play opportunities that are developed,
- ▣ play professionals who will have shining examples of good practice and creative play provision to talk about and learn from.

Within these groups it is important to consider the diverse range of individuals involved.

Projects should target the whole community including those groups who are at risk of exclusion through age, ethnicity, social or economic circumstance or disability. This is why an inclusive approach to all aspects of the design is imperative. Following an inclusive approach will create a transferable model that demonstrates inclusive play provision and associated facilities to create a better quality, integrated all round experience.

## Work with your community

To ensure your play facility can engage with the widest possible audience it is crucial that they are involved in the development process.

When engaging people, it is important to employ an effective mixture of techniques and activities that put people at ease, that are fun, and locations that



are accessible. This will enable people who find conventional consultation processes threatening or exclusive to share their ideas and opinions about your proposals. Involving local communities in projects is essential to ensure that projects are sustainable beyond the development phase. Projects that have community input have more chance of success, less problems with vandalism and maintenance and there are fewer 'white elephants'.

It is essential that community input should be seen as an on-going part of the development work. Involvement should occur from the very beginning and contact maintained throughout the life of the project. Simply arranging for a community group to rubber-stamp a finished design or plan is not community involvement.

This part of the process can often appear daunting, especially when considering groups with extra needs, and this often results in them being overlooked. It is not necessary to feel this way and inclusive solutions for involving people can always be found through conversations with group leaders or by working with organisations that can help facilitate engagement.

Working with a range of people with disabilities can highlight issues and opportunities that will affect all the people who will use your facility, and will benefit everyone.

# What should you expect?

Responses to design briefs will need to demonstrate that the following groups and activities have been considered. This list is not intended to be exhaustive; it should be seen as a starting point. The overall aim is to ensure that all children have access to an

equal quality of experience. It is important to note that this doesn't mean that every bit has to be accessible to everyone, but it does mean that it all needs to add up to a great experience for everyone.

## Children with mobility impairments

- Children using wheelchairs that wish to engage in physical activities
- Children that might use a wheelchair for some of the time but be able to engage in physical activities
- Children with reduced mobility that might use walking aids rather than wheelchairs

Will also benefit children with health conditions that result in low strength and stamina

## Common issues and things to consider

### Children can get there

Can a child using a manual wheelchair or a powered mobility vehicle get to the play area? Are there any potential barriers on the approach or around the play area such as kerbs, narrow paths, steep slopes, gutters etc?

### Children can take part

Can a child using a manual wheelchair or a powered mobility vehicle take part in the play activities (climbing opportunities, swings, slides etc)?

Can disabled children play alongside non-disabled children?

Are the path surfaces and routes in and around the play area suitable for wheelchairs and children using walking aids? Are they level? Are there viable alternatives to areas of loose sand, gravel, or wood chip?

Is there enough space in the play area and around the play equipment so that a wheelchair user would not feel "in the way"?

Do the activities challenge children with mobility impairments, e.g. by creating physical activities that focus more on upper body motor skills?

### Opportunities to rest and observe

Does the seating provide spaces for wheelchair users? Have you thought about the needs of parents who are wheelchair users?

Is there shade/shelter to protect from strong sunlight and exposure to inclement weather?

Not all play activities need to be physically demanding. Are there opportunities for creative and exploratory activities?

## Children with sensory impairments

- Children with no vision
- Children with low vision who can distinguish colour, contrast, patterns
- Children with hearing impairments

## Common issues and things to consider

### Encourage exploration through all the senses

Does the play opportunity appeal to the senses including sight, hearing and touch, exploring colour, pattern, texture, sound through the different senses?

Will it engage a child with no vision? Will it engage a child with low vision, for example, by providing things to explore through touch, reflected light or strong colours and contrast?

Do materials offer a mix of interesting textures, shapes, solidity, weight, flexibility and temperatures to touch? Do they offer interest through sound and vibration?

### Provide a range of activities

Do activities encourage children to develop cognitive skills like cause and effect, co-ordination, dexterity and agility?

Does the play area include planting that stimulates the sense of smell, hearing and touch?

## Children with learning difficulties

- Children with learning disabilities
- Children with specific learning difficulties like dyslexia
- Children with behavioural issues

Will also benefit children who do not have English as a first language

## Common issues and things to consider

### Accessible information

Is there a way of avoiding using signage? If not, do signs include symbols and or pictorial images to make them accessible to children who cannot access text?

Does the space use symbols in its information and interpretation?

### Adults can join in

Are there activities that adults with learning disabilities can join in with?

Is the design easy to understand in terms of getting around and using it?

### Provide a range of opportunities

Will children have a choice of busier, more active areas and quieter spaces?

Is there scope for including natural boundaries that help reduce the tendency for young children and some children with behavioural issues to wander off?

## Children with mental health problems

### Common issues and things to consider

#### Provide a range of play activity

Is there a choice of different types of activity and space, for example, quieter vs active, enclosed vs open spaces?

Does the space offer 'time out' opportunities?

## Family groups, parents and siblings with disabilities

### Common issues and things to consider

Family groups are able to access play areas, to support their children. Disabled and non-disabled siblings can play together

Can all family members access, understand and enjoy the opportunities on offer?

Can a parent using a manual wheelchair or a powered mobility vehicle access the play area? Can they get alongside activities and equipment to support their children?

Is there accessible space where parents can watch over their children?

Does the play equipment allow mixed ability siblings to play together and be engaged through a variety of activities?



The Water Maze at Hever Castle in Kent allows participation by all ages and abilities



## Other things to consider

- Is there a balance of play opportunities on the site? - there are many different types of play, active physical, quiet, creative, noisy, messy, free, abstract, musical, group, individual, games. How does what you are planning fit with what else is on offer?
- Is the location accessible? Can people get in to access the play opportunities? - there is little benefit in an accessible play area in an inaccessible location. How far away are the toilets and changing facilities? How far is it from accessible parking?
- Does the location offer an equality of play opportunities for children (and adults) of all abilities? Is it fun for all?
- Is there plenty of seating and shelter, for children and for family groups?
- Are the play opportunities challenging for different abilities? Will they hold the interest of children of different ages?
- Have you consulted with children and families? How will you find out if the opportunity for play is successful? – consulting with people that will use the area is essential; just as important is evaluating a design after people have used it.
- If you are using a freelance designer have they understood the brief? Do they understand the requirements of inclusive play?
- Is the planned play opportunity appropriate for the location? Does it connect with the local community and its stories?
- Think beyond simply installing play equipment. Be creative. Design creative, natural play.

## Further reading

***Inclusion by Design*** - a guide to creating accessible play and childcare environments  
(Clare Goodridge 2008 Ed. Philip Douch) [www.kids.org.uk](http://www.kids.org.uk)

***Developing accessible play spaces*** – A good practice guide. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/131049.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/131049.pdf)

***Design for play*** – A guide to creating successful play spaces. Play England. [www.playengland.org.uk/Page.asp?originx\\_2757hp\\_70994779705616h30y\\_2008630728a](http://www.playengland.org.uk/Page.asp?originx_2757hp_70994779705616h30y_2008630728a)

***Managing risk in play provision: Implementation guide***. Play England. [www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-play-provision-guide.pdf](http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-play-provision-guide.pdf)

***Going places!*** Ensuring the play and youth strategies deliver for disabled children and young people.

[www.edcm.org.uk/pdfs/going\\_places\\_briefing.pdf](http://www.edcm.org.uk/pdfs/going_places_briefing.pdf)

***Can play will play*** – Disabled children and access to outdoor playgrounds.

[www.fieldsintrust.org/downloads/can\\_play\\_will\\_play.pdf](http://www.fieldsintrust.org/downloads/can_play_will_play.pdf)

***www.sensorytrust.org.uk*** – for advice and guidance on inclusive design

***Grounds for Sharing: a guide to developing special school sites***. Jane Stoneham. Learning through Landscapes.

[www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/publications/grounds\\_sharing.html](http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/publications/grounds_sharing.html)

***Accessibility for the Disabled - A Design Manual for a Barrier Free Environment*** [www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/index.html)

***Department for transport inclusive mobility guide***.

[www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/peti/inclusivemobility](http://www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/peti/inclusivemobility)

***Bodyspace*** – Anthropometry, ergonomics and the design of work. Stephen Pheasant.  
– for all of the detail, measurements and dimensions of people and wheelchairs

The Sensory Trust promotes and supports the creation and management of outdoor spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, regardless of age or ability.

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