

## 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 over time, the areas available have grown smaller and time, safety and access have reduced the amount of outdoor play that children can access, especially independently. This can be impacted even further when children need more specific play environments.

This makes it even more important to create available provisions that cater for all children, young people and families that follow 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.

### Creating inclusive play

Inclusive play opportunities 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 must 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 may also spend time out of their wheelchairs
- 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 to accommodate a wheelchair user?

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, exploratory and sensory activities?





## Children with visual and hearing 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
- Children with Sensory processing disorder
- Children with Autism

It 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?



## 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 to wander off?

Are there opportunities to over stimulate and under stimulate different senses?

## 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, space for groups and to be alone?

Does the space offer 'time out' opportunities? Space where you can see the rest of the site, who is there and moving around?

#### Family groups, parents and siblings with disabilities

### Common issues and things to consider

#### Family groups can 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?

## 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.
- 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 places facilities? How far is it from accessible parking? Accessible public transport?
- 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? Or does the facility offer different age appropriate spaces?
- 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.



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.

[www.sensorytrust.org.uk](http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk)

Tel: +44 (0)1726 222900

Email: [enquiries@sensorytrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sensorytrust.org.uk)

