

# WHAT MAKES A PLAYGROUND INCLUSIVE?



## LEGEND

### 1. Entry Points

- 1.1 Entrance to the playground space is wide and free of obstacles
- 1.2 Wide, flat and firm pathways from the entrance to the playground
- 1.3 Enclosing the playground to prevent children from straying

### 2. Surfacing and Paths

- 2.1 A flat uniform surface made of moderately firm and stable material
- 2.2 Ramps that provide access to and between elevated play components

### 3. Features to Foster Inclusive Play

- 3.1 Play equipment accessible to all children
- 3.2 Variety of play equipment to provide appropriate challenges for children of all ages and abilities
- 3.3 Different types of sensory play components that are spread out within the play space to reduce overstimulation

- 3.4 Solitary play components for escaping overstimulation

- 3.5 Play components shaped in recognizable designs that allow for creative and imaginative pursuits

- 3.6 Informational features to aid with spatial orientation, communication and guidance on proper use of equipment

- 3.7 Shaded spaces to aid with temperature regulation

### 4. Staffing/Supervision

- 4.1 Trained staff present in the play space to support play for all children

### 5. Design Process

- 5.1 User involvement (families of children with disabilities and representatives from disability organizations) in the design process

# WHAT MAKES A PLAYGROUND INCLUSIVE?

*This resource is intended for those concerned with inclusion and are working to create a play space in their community for people of all ages and abilities*

## Importance of Play and Inclusive Playgrounds

Play is a fundamental human right of all children, including children with disabilities, who deserve equal access to play opportunities. This is especially important given that play is integral to children's cognitive, physical, and social development as well as their emotional well-being.

Playgrounds are designed to provide children with an array of opportunities to engage in different types of play. They are a unique setting where children can choose when, where (i.e., in relation to specific equipment), and how to interact with others while playing together or sharing the play space. Although children with disabilities value playgrounds as play spaces, playground designs often do not provide them with equal and equitable access to play. These needs are beginning to be recognized in playground design, where inclusive playgrounds are being developed to remove physical and social barriers to participation through designs that allow all children to play together.

## Evidence-Informed Recommendations for Designing Inclusive Playgrounds for Children with Disabilities

To better understand how to design playgrounds to be inclusive to children with disabilities, a scoping review was conducted. The scoping review used a rigorous and transparent approach for synthesizing available research evidence to identify key playground design factors that have been found to improve play equipment usability and overall playground experiences for children with disabilities. Consideration was also given to the surrounding built and social environments of playgrounds.

A total of 35 studies were included in the scoping review, and an analysis of these studies identified 13 evidence-based recommendations and one promising practice for designing inclusive playgrounds for children with disabilities. The recommendations and promising practice were classified into five broad playground elements: entry points; surfacing and paths; features to foster inclusive play; staffing/supervision; and design process. These recommendations highlight that an inclusive playground encompasses the total environment in which play occurs, from its entry points to the signage within and around the play space and the features of the play components that foster inclusive play.

The 13 recommendations for inclusive playgrounds address barriers to play for both children with mobility impairments *and* children with sensory or developmental disabilities. These recommendations benefit *all* children of a wide range of developmental stages and abilities while also supporting caregivers' ability to supervise and participate in their child's playground experience. Finally, the recommendations promote the creation of a safe space for children to play and explore, foster interaction between children with and without disabilities, and uphold the fundamental human right of play for all children.

To learn more about these recommendations and the supporting evidence, please view the published scoping review:

Brown D, Ross T, Leo J, Buliung R, Shirazipour C, Latimer-Cheung AE, Arbour-Nicitopoulos KP. (2021). A scoping review of evidence-informed recommendations for designing inclusive playgrounds. *Frontiers of Rehabilitation Sciences*, 2:664595. doi: 10.3389/fresc.2021.664595.

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