

# Does Your Playground Include the 7 Elements of Play?

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**C**hildren learn through play, making playground activities an extremely important part of their day.

On the playground, there are seven elements of play that help children not only develop physically, but also help in the areas of cognitive, adaptive, social and emotional development as well.

You can use this checklist to ensure your playground helps children have lots of fun plus be more successful in the classroom.

## ❑ **Swinging**

- Physical development: Large and small motor
- Promotes sensory processing
- Relaxes and soothes
- Helps develop problem-solving skills
- Swinging can have a large impact on the brain's ability to process sensory information.

Swinging is a great activity to help develop a child's vestibular system. Children who have an underdeveloped vestibular system may not have a sense of balance or don't feel grounded. Often, their equilibrium is off and they may need activities like swinging to help develop their vestibular system.

Swinging helps promote whole body awareness and body coordination. Knowing where your fingers are in relation to your body. Activities such as writing, coloring and cutting require whole body awareness.



*"Some of my preschoolers have not spent much time on a swing. You can see their excitement as they start to realize how it works; 'this is what happens when I move my legs back and forth, I keep going higher and higher.'"*

*— Jami Murdock, Early Childhood Educator*

## ❑ **Swinging**

- Promotes leg-hip flexibility
- Encourages cooperation and following directions
- Develops critical thinking skills

Have you ever seen a child W-sit? This is when a child is seated on the floor with one leg on each side of their body in the shape of a "W."

W-sitting can be a precursor to development delays. For a child who has poor

flexibility in the legs and hips, W-sitting will aggravate it. W-sitting doesn't allow a child to rotate their trunk, and discourages them from hand preference.

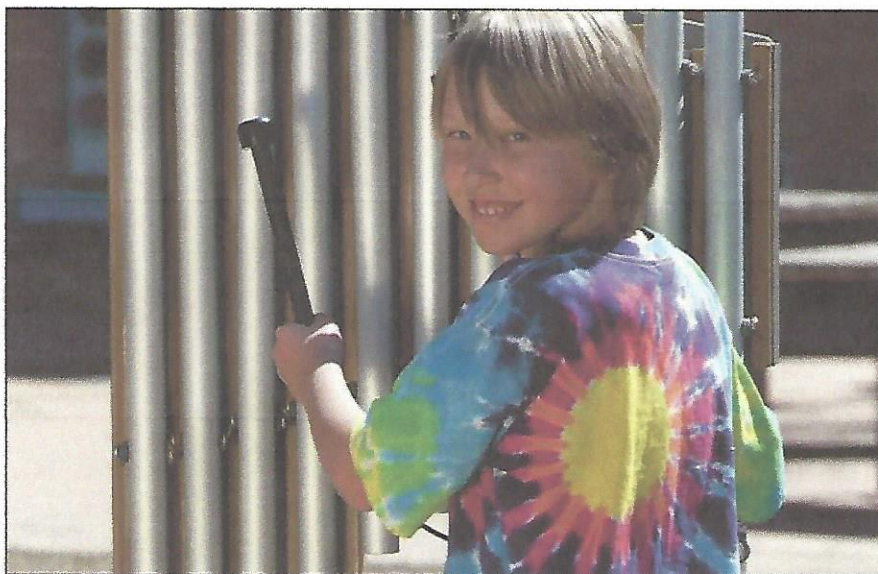
Sliding promotes flexibility of the leg and hip. For those W-sitters, it forces a child's legs in front of them

It also promotes spatial awareness. A child with spatial awareness problems may struggle with following directions. They might struggle with spacing between letters, putting the first letter at the top of the page and the next at the bottom.

## ❑ **Climbing**

- Enhances spatial awareness: Knowing where to put things on paper when they do a project
- Helps develop vestibular system. Coordinating eye movements with the head, which helps when copying from a





blackboard and reading across a page.

- Increased muscle tone and strength

Children who slouch oftentimes have poor muscle tone in their arms, legs and trunks. Climbing helps strengthen these muscles and increase endurance.

Visual perception skills are sharpened through climbing, too. Skills such as sorting items, putting puzzles together, building with blocks, memory games and matching games require visual perception skills.

#### **Overhead Climbing**

- Strengthens the upper body enabling children to sit comfortably at a table and increases hand-eye coordination
- Kinesthetic awareness, or awareness of our own movement, gives children a better understanding of personal space, which is critical for social interactions.

Do you see children who always seem to be tired or have a hard time making it through the school day? Get them out doing some overhead climbing to build their endurance. This improves upper body muscular strength and endurance as well as hand-eye coordination.

It also translates to the classroom helping children develop critical thinking and

conflict resolution skills.

For instance, a child has to figure out the best way to get from point A to point B. Is that going to be by moving hand-over-hand across the bars or by grabbing the bar with the left hand, then with the right hand?

#### **Spinning**

- Kinesthetic awareness, helps children know where they are in line
- Cognitive development

- Better muscle tone and endurance

What a great way for children to understand speed, force, and direction. Put a group of children on a spinner and let them feel the motion together. You might hear screams of joy as they spin faster and faster!

Spinning is another activity for those “sloucher” children, helping to build better muscle tone and endurance.

#### **Balancing**

- Cognitive development, introducing mechanical principles
- Encourages pretend play and learning to take turns
- Muscle strength and endurance

Balancing activities help children understand concepts such as gravity, equilibrium and counterbalances, skills essential for many sports.

Watch as children walk on a balance beam. They figure out how to move forward without falling off, holding their arms out, moving one foot in front of the other or just scooting along.







Balancing activities promote social interaction and pretend play, too. Listen and you might hear the children pretending to be pirates making each other “walk the plank.”

#### Sensory System

- Tactile system is the largest sensory system in the body, helping children determine whether something is cold, wet, hot, sharp, and helps the brain organize

information for developing the visual and auditory systems.

- Noise and other sounds, such as musical instruments, help develop a child’s auditory system. Children with sensory processing disorder often like deep tones, rather than high.
- Visual processing helps children move their eyes in specific directions, allowing motion tracking. Play activities help strengthen the eye muscles, giving chil-

dren the ability to see differences between objects that are similar.

#### Translating Play to the Classroom

Play activities in general help children develop gross and fine motor skills, both necessary for the classroom. What you may not realize is that play also helps children:

- Learn how to work in a group, developing social skills
- Learn how to take care of themselves
- Gain a sense of achievement and pride
- Increase their self-confidence
- Learn how to problem-solve without someone telling them how to do it and increase their own decision-making skills

If you are interested in learning more about how the different elements of play contribute to a child’s success in the classroom, contact ABCreative. Jami Murdock, an early childhood educator for the past 25 years, works with us giving a presentation on “How Important Are Playground Activities to a Child’s Success in the Classroom.”



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