



Best Practice Guidelines

Creating Inclusive Communities Through Meaningful Play



The purpose of PlayCore’s unique inclusive play programs is to provide educational resources for communities that wish to move playgrounds beyond minimum accessibility to create more usable outdoor play environments that recognize everyone’s right to fully participate in equitable play. Inclusive play environments intentionally address the physical and social inclusion of people of all ages and abilities. PlayCore is proud to partner with leading experts, Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities and Lekotek, to help communities provide meaningful, healthy play opportunities for everyone.

Partnership:



Comprehensive companion programs include:

- ▶ **Me2sm: 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Designsm**
 - Design guidebook of best practices for upgrading existing or designing new outdoor inclusive play environments
 - Considerations for addressing the needs of the whole child
 - Model inclusive play environments
 - Inclusive playground checklist
- ▶ **2Play Togethersm: Fostering Friendships Through Inclusive Play**
 - Program guide filled with tips and activities to promote inclusive play, understanding, and fun between children of all abilities
 - Playground activities that promote character development
 - Disability awareness resources

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Providing intergenerational, inclusive play ensures that all people experience the satisfaction of contributing to meaningful play and reap the lifelong developmental, physical, and social benefits of inclusion”.

- Keith Christensen, Ph.D.
Faculty Fellow, Utah State University
Center for Persons with Disabilities

A Unique Philosophy to Inclusive, Intergenerational Play

Thoughtfully planned outdoor play environments, services, and programs create opportunities to ensure that people of all ages and abilities can be both physically and socially active through play and recreation. Designing inclusive play environments that meet the 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design is a critical first step to provide the foundation for inclusive, intergenerational play to occur. Teaching or facilitating children about how they can successfully play together can be just as important. Communities can take inclusive play to the next level by offering programming designed to create awareness, break down barriers, and foster friendships.

Me2: 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design was developed to serve as an educational resource, design guide, and advocacy tool for communities and

professionals planning, creating, or revitalizing outdoor play environments that are dedicated to move beyond the minimum accessibility standards.

2Play Together: Fostering Friendships Through Inclusive Play provides programmers with strategies to help children with and without disabilities understand their similarities and differences and how to effectively play together.

These companion programs help communities make a fundamental statement about how they value play and recreation for all individuals—regardless of age or ability. The evidence is clear. Play is critical for all children and directly results in positive community outcomes.

Multiple benefits include:

- Promotes universal design philosophy for greater use by more people.
- Ensures a design philosophy that exceeds minimum guidelines, celebrate the abilities of users, and promotes both physical and social inclusion.
- Offers design considerations that address the needs of the whole child for physical, social, sensory, communicative, and cognitive development for play value variety and developmental continuum.
- Provides unique opportunities for intergenerational play and inclusion of children and adults of all ages and abilities.
- Increases usage through programming activities that utilize play and character education traits to create awareness, break down barriers, and foster friendships.
- Creates community engagement and increases usage across diverse user groups.
- Promotes social equity and expands community capital.



RESEARCH

Research supports inclusive play environments and programming that bring more meaningful play experiences to more people, to the greatest extent possible.

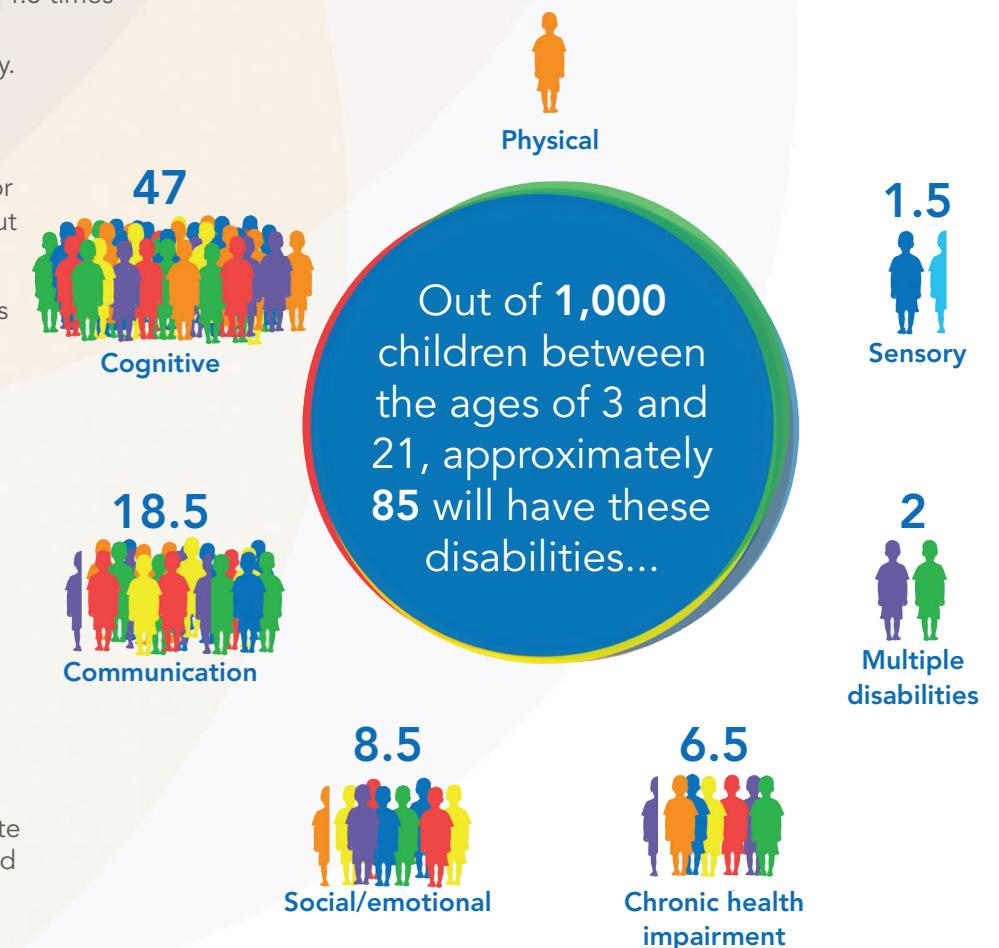
There is growing awareness that many activity and health disparities reported among children and adults with disabilities are not a direct result of the disability, but rather a result of the challenges individuals with disabilities face in fully accessing the environment, community services, and programs.

Consider the following research as evidence of the importance of inclusive play spaces:

- Out of 1000 children between the ages of 3 and 21, approximately 85 will have some form of disability.
- Children with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities have substantially greater difficulty participating in regular physical activity.
- Youth with physical disabilities have a 4.5 times higher rate of physical inactivity compared to peers without a disability.
- Children with physical and developmental disabilities are significantly more likely to be obese or overweight compared to peers without a disability.
- Inclusive design enables grandparents and older adults to participate more comfortably. The aging population—persons 65 years or older—represents 12.9% of the U.S. population, about one in every eight Americans, and is expected to grow to be 19% of the population by 2030.
- Teaching or facilitating children about similarities and differences and how to successfully play together can dramatically impact the quality of play experiences for all children. Intentional strategies to promote disability awareness provide children the tools to ask questions, get accurate information, explore their feelings, and learn how to positively interact with their peers.

- Research shows that disability awareness intervention and adult and peer mediated strategies have significant and positive effects on children's understanding and attitude toward people with disabilities.

Who are children with disabilities?



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Design Principles & Guidelines

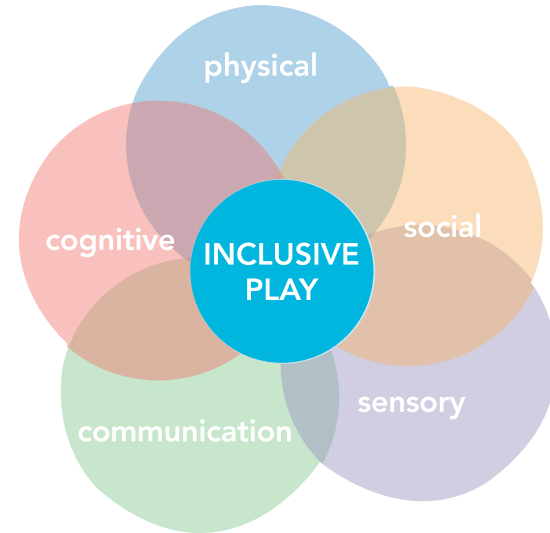
Playground Activities that Promote Character Development

7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design

Best Practices for Creating Meaningful Play Environments for People of All Ages and Abilities



be
fair
included
smart
independent
safe
active
comfortable



1 be fair

Accessible surfacing and routes to and throughout the play environment provide equitable access to a variety of physical and social activities that encourage exploration and discovery, while promoting an atmosphere of mutual respect and acceptance.

2 be included

Inclusive, intergenerational play activities that provide movement and motion offer dynamic experiences that accommodate individuals' diverse abilities and promote social interaction.



3 be smart

Auditory, tactile, and visual cause and effect activities provide multisensory feedback and naturally reinforce children's actions.



4 be independent

Wide ramps allow people using mobility devices room to pass others while traversing on the play structure and give peers the ability to race up the ramp side-by-side.



7 be comfortable

A combination of shade and sunlight throughout the playground helps protect from environmental elements and sensitivities.



6 be active

Providing play activities along a developmentally appropriate continuum allows children to gain skills, confidence, and engage in healthy challenges.



5 be safe

Benches and other seating around, on, and below the structure provide comfortable observation areas for supervision and "jump-in points" where children can socialize, rest, or observe until they are ready to play.



Created in partnership with the National Lekotek Center, 2Play Together offers valuable tips and playground activities in which all children will feel nurtured, encouraged, respected, and active—both physically and socially during play—creating a sense of community among all children.

Program Highlights:

- Supportive Research
- 15 Inclusive Play Activities for PreK-5th Grade
- Alignment to Top 10 Character Education Traits
- Disability Awareness Tips to help children understand the abilities of all children and to appreciate similarities and differences
- Inclusive resources for educators, programmers, and community advocates
- Aligns with play spaces designed to the 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design



The 7 Principles of Universal Design were created by the Center for Universal Design and North Carolina State University. These principles, which focus on adult usage of indoor environments, were uniquely tailored by Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities to address outdoor play environments and what children want to feel and experience during play. Children want to "Be" and feel that their experiences are fair, that they are included, that they are smart, and that they can be independent, safe, active, and comfortable during play.

The 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design book focuses on the usage of individual play elements as well as the overall playground design. Both a physical and social event, inclusive play is not solely about physically accessing an environment, but what happens once an individual gets there. The guidebook defines each of the 7 Principles and accompanying guidelines and also offers example of implementation. Applying these 7 principles creates inclusive play destinations that celebrate people of all abilities and focuses on what everyone CAN do!





Join the Movement!

ADVOCACY

Become a National Demonstration Site

- **Promote your leadership** through best practice principles that create outdoor play environments for people of all ages and abilities
- **Collaborate with program partners** and document the process for others to replicate
- Create **positive attention** and attract partners/funds that support inclusive initiatives
- Gain **national awareness** through various media outlets, press releases, collateral materials, and nationwide presentations
- Receive **letter of recognition and signage** for serving as a model demonstration site

To learn more about creating an inclusive play destination in your community, request a full copy of our inclusive play programs *Me2: 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design* and *2PlayTogether: Fostering Friendship Through Inclusive Play*, or become a National Demonstration Site, please visit:

www.playcore.com/inclusive-playgrounds.html

"Play, as a freely chosen and intrinsically motivating activity, is at the core of human development. It is through play that we share our abilities, make contact with our deepest self, and unleash our potential."

- Nilda Cosco, Ph.D
Education Specialist, Natural Learning Initiative