

Obesity and Families

The API looks at how children play



Today's children are growing up in a rapidly changing and dynamic world often dominated by television and computer games. In this world some children are confined and restricted from 'traditional play'. This is a concern because play is an important part of childhood development and carries many physical, social and cognitive benefits. In play children expand on their understanding of themselves and others, their knowledge of the physical world and their ability to communicate with peers and adults. Play helps to keep children healthy, enables them to develop an awareness of risk and danger and is important for building life skills. The absence of play in a child's life is an obstacle to the development of a healthy and creative individual. Play occupies a central role in children's lives so the API and families must strongly support play for all children and ensure they are not losing their right to play.

Different

Children are individuals who may play on their own or as part of a group. They will use equipment in a variety of ways, exploring their imaginations. Each child is different and within a public play space, not every piece of equipment means the same to every child. Children will use their imagination to play and often their play can be driven by their imagination. To one child's creative imagination a tower unit could be a space ship to the other a castle.

Growing and changing

Young children enjoy play where they are able to interact with different colours, sizes, shapes and sounds. They enjoy matching, ordering and comparing items. Children are interested in materials that help them understand spatial concepts such as puzzles and blocks. Primary school-age children need plenty of opportunity to move around and to engage in energetic activities. Adventure trails items encourage moving, stretching, balancing and walking which all help learning while playing.

In later childhood and early adolescence children enjoy developing their skills through team and individual sports. For this, multi-use games areas are an ideal solution to actively promote play for this age group and enable all children to participate in a variety of sports for competition or just for fun and develop their skills.



Adults need to recognise that play is something children do very well on their own but as adults we must provide children with the time and access to experiences that go beyond children's immediate environments. The impulse to play for all children comes from within the child and is only intentional, in the sense of it being purely about that which interests the child. So, good design of public play spaces is important and is needed so children can play beyond their immediate environments.

Play is always valuable

We value the importance of play and how children play. It is important to understand how children play so designs of equipment and the play area itself actively promote children to play. There is no set way to play, no rules to play. All children are different and will play differently. One thing we can be sure of is that play is part and should be a part of the learning process and as adults we must provide appropriate play activities and experiences for all children. We can only do this by learning and understanding how children play.

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