

"A creative approach which using ideas from all users to make the changes that they wants"

"Imagining and creating play spaces as areas where all children can have the chance to interact and play with each other"

What is an enabling outdoor environment?

"An area which goes beyond the 'right' equipment and the wrong attitude"



"Utilising all the resources and natural features to support and enhance the quality of the play experience for all children".

"Good use of the environment to give all children freedom to socialise and play how they choose"

"...is a well planned environment which accommodates the needs of all disabled children and allows them to makes choices and take measured risks"

"Using the outdoor area in such a way so that all children have equal access to the same environment but can use it in different ways"

Creating an enabling environment

Take a walk around your play environment. Ask yourself (truthfully) is it an exciting accessible environment for a disabled child?

Take a note of the hazardous and inaccessible areas. Look at the natural usage and walk ways in play areas. Where is the sun positioned throughout the day and what parts are shaded. What flowers, shrubs, herbs, trees grow and there other natural features?

Design and layout of an outside area should be functional. Access factors should be considered for non or less ambulant children who need to crawl in or roll into areas rather than walk. Don't rule out steps in the play area – having a few is good but too many can be restrictive.

Most natural environments are not completely flat yet most playgrounds are often designed that way so consider introducing elevated areas which are much more exciting and challenging. Being allowed to roll down a small hill is exhilarating for any child especially for those with profound needs.

Consider utilising the senses in your planning (hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste) through natural and manmade resources such as plants, herbs, wind chimes etc. Make a tactile trail which uses the senses. Plan an environment allows children to play out in the elements and use them e.g. puddles, snow hills.

Plan to maximise socialisation between all children giving them areas to hide, chat, run, roll, climb, and jump or just 'be'. Think about height and positioning of free standing equipment such as vegetable planters and water trays so that these accommodate the needs of cruising children and those using standing frames

Where possible activities such as sand play should be in ground based pits with easy access. Sand offers children a natural stability especially once seated.. This type of activity is much easier for certain disabled children to access and a lot more fun

Outdoor environments and equipment should be arranged to minimize hazards and errors but designed in such as ways as to support active experimentation and risk-taking whilst keeping the child safe.

Outdoor area check

- Is an access audit and risk assessment regularly carried out?
- Is the outside area accessible to all users?
- Which parts are inaccessible, how and to whom?
- Is there outdoor storage and is it sufficient?
- What features and equipment does the current play area have?
- What is missing in the play area?
- How can we help include different sensory elements?
- How can you make the outside area more accessible for children who are not mobile?
- How will ensure that all children are kept safe e.g. children who have little perception of danger?

- How can you make good use of natural features and light?
- What recyclable resources can be used or included?
- What should be removed and what should be added?
- How will disabled children's views (and adults) be incorporated into the plans?
- How will you cover the ELGs in outdoor activities?

Useful resources to consider:

- Weather resistant boxes for resources (laminated resources)
- Wind chimes, sun catchers, windmills
- Hammocks
- Drawing and painting walls
- Bamboo, bay, thyme, mint, lavender, rosemary
- Yoga mats, rubberised rugs; tyres and dycem (sticky plastic)
- Pallets and other wood for building and balancing
- Large shells and stones
- Digging planters
- Natural sculptures
- Washing lines and parasols
- Mud patch
- Climbing rock or felled tree trunk
- Digging area
- Flower and veggie planters
- Animal and bird observation/hide (look outs)
- Dens (willow house, tepees and tents)
- Race track
- Small animals pen or chicken coup
- Leaves, shredded paper
- Bridges and tunnels
- Blankets, sheets, cushions, room dividers
- Water features
- Pipes and guttering for water construction
- Hills (to go under and over)
- Ropes and nets











