

# Play Space Assessment



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# PLAY SPACE ASSESSMENT: 3- THROUGH 5-YEAR-OLDS

The **Play Space Assessment** has been developed to assist Head Start and other early childhood educators in assessing the quality of the outdoor play spaces for **children ages 3 through 5**. Using this tool will help identify the strengths and needs of an existing play space, and serve as a basis for setting priorities and planning enhancements and improvements over time. **It can also be used as a tool to help plan and design a new play space.** The assessment is divided into eleven (11) categories.

**Directions:** This tool is best completed during a walk-through of a play space. For **each of the eleven (11) categories** in the left-hand column, consider the extent to which a play space meets the given criteria. Score the play space using the rating scale below found in the center column. **Circle** the number that best reflects the present state of the play space. Use the right-hand column to make additional comments, such as strengths, areas for improvement, high or low priorities, ideas, etc. **Note:** If you are using this tool to help plan a new play space, simply ignore the ratings scale column. This tool can be completed by teaching teams, parents and administrators.

**Rating Scale:** Not at all = 1      Somewhat = 2      Partially = 3      Mostly = 4      Fully = 5

PLAY SPACE ASSESSMENT FORM		
Category	Rating Scale	Comments
<p><b>Key Features</b>                      The play space comprises a variety of developmentally appropriate play areas/learning settings and materials made of manufactured and natural materials to promote a diverse range of experiences for children. All materials and equipment included in the play space are designed and/or selected for children in the age range that are using them. At least five (5) of the following are included in the play space: <i>multipurpose, open space; anchored play equipment</i> (i.e. climbing structure, swings, slides, springers/rocking toys) ; <i>wheeled toys</i> (i.e. tricycles, scooters, wagons, push toys, other); <i>manipulative equipment</i> (i.e. balls, jump ropes, hula hoops, other); <i>water play features</i> (i.e. hose/sprinkler, wading pool, stream, recirculating shallow water feature, other); <i>music and movement/acoustic play area</i> (i.e. marimbas, log drums, rain sticks, chimes, other); <i>sand play area; balance beam/stepping stones;</i></p>	<p>1   2   3   4   5</p>	

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<p><i>playhouse; flower or vegetable garden; loose parts for building; climbing tree; climbing/rolling mound; raised deck/stage; other.</i></p>		
<p><b>Movement Opportunities</b>  The key features of the existing site promote physical activity and movement. At least five (5) of the following listed activities are supported by the key features of the outdoor space in <u>each</u> of the identified categories: <i>traveling actions</i> (walking, skipping, hopping, climbing, jumping, crawling, sliding, marching, galloping, running, leaping); <i>stabilizing actions</i> (twisting, turning, squatting, swinging, swaying, pushing, pulling, stretching, bending, shaking, dodging, landing); and <i>manipulating actions</i> (throwing, catching, bouncing, tossing, rolling, kicking, trapping, opening, closing, striking, object handling). Key features of the play space provide opportunities for children to move at varying speeds with different degrees of force and to explore ways to control their movement, such as rocking, stepping, rolling and flight. They are able to move in a variety of directions (i.e. up, down, right, left, forward, backward, and sideways) and levels (i.e low, medium and high).</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p><b>Flexibility and Play</b>  The play space has a variety of features that can be changed and/or played with in many different ways. The flexibility of the play space offers a wide range of experiences for children. The play space supports children in being spontaneous, innovative, flexible, and creative. It supports children in solitary play as well as parallel and cooperative play. Children engage in <i>functional play</i> (gross motor activities/skills such as running, jumping, throwing, climbing, crawling, rolling, swinging, sliding, etc); <i>construction play</i> (building that incorporates cognition and gross and fine motor skills); and <i>symbol play</i>( role play or fantasy play).</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p><b>Shelter and Shade Structures</b>  Natural or artificial shade structures provide enough shade to accommodate the total number of children in the classroom. For example, shade might be provided by a combination of the following: shadows cast by the building, manufactured shade structures, trees, pergolas, umbrellas.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p><b>Natural Features</b>  The play space incorporates a variety of natural elements for children to play with such as trees, stumps, boulders, long grass, water, and pebbles. The landscape contains natural elements from three or more of the following categories: a variety of species of trees or shrubs; a variety of non-poisonous flowering plants; vines; topographic variation (i.e. mounds, terraces, slopes); and a variety of safe ground surfaces.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	

<p><b>Welcoming Atmosphere</b> The play space has a friendly, inviting atmosphere. The play space is clean, free of litter and kept in good repair. Outdoor toys, loose parts and supplies are appropriately stored and organized. At least two of the following decorative elements add visual and/or auditory interest and appeal to the play space: banner, chime, wind sock, statue, gazing ball, flag, cultural artifact, or decorative object (i.e. wreath, topiary, fence weaving, mural, mosaic, weather vane, pinwheel, whirligig, whimsical sign, garland, wood sculpture).</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p><b>Sensory Elements</b> The play space provides opportunities for a variety of sensory experiences (i.e. touch/textures, smell, listening, looking, vestibular and proprioceptive input). For example, opportunities for vestibular stimulation are provided by at least two of the following: rolling; rocking; swinging; sliding; merry-go-round; gliders; and other. Opportunities for proprioceptive stimulation are provided by at least two of the following: climbing; crawling on/through; lifting; throwing; and other. At least two fragrant herbs are planted in different locations to enhance the multi-sensory experience of the play space.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p><b>Accessibility and Inclusive Play</b> All children are able to get to everything they want. Children across ages and abilities access and enjoy the play space and the opportunities it creates to participate with peers. This may include mixed-use play equipment (i.e. the addition of an accessible swing to a bay of swings) and/or free-standing accessible play equipment like slides, elevated sandboxes and spring riders. Opportunities are present for children's various levels of physical abilities with lesser and greater challenges provided (i.e. lower and higher climbing areas; tricycles with and without pedals). Surfacing of the play area and surrounding paths are accessible.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p><b>Risk and Challenge</b> The play space provides children with opportunities to do things that are exciting and adventurous. Components of the play space are characteristically open-ended, challenging children's physical, social and cognitive abilities by having the potential for engaging in increasingly more difficult and complex activities. Visual and textural variations suggest different ways for children to move from place to place (run quickly across open grassy space; jump from flat stone to flat stone; tiptoe from brick to brick ). Opportunities are present for increasing challenge (i.e varying height apparatus, hills, and trees to climb; variety of surfaces for balancing such as beams, logs, stones, and stumps). Adventure is created by the inclusion of hiding places, jumping perches, looping trails, secret pathways, hidden hollows, and cozy nooks. The play</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	

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<p>space is safe and piques children’s interest and creativity through the use of novelty such as inclusion of new materials (parachute, pool noodles, and beach ball) or by having familiar materials (i.e. doll carriage, scarves, or costumes) introduced into the outside setting.</p>		
<p><b>Surfacing</b>  The surface or ground under and around playground equipment is soft enough to cushion a fall (i.e. hardwood fiber/mulch, sand, pea gravel, and synthetic or rubber tiles and mats). The surface is well maintained, generally at a depth of 12 inches, is kept free of standing water and debris and not allowed to become compacted. Surfacing may vary throughout the play space to include a variety of textures and experiences for children as well as to provide an accessible pathway for all children.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p><b>Enclosures and Safety Features</b>  The play space is enclosed by a fence at least four (4) feet tall and the fence has a safe gate closure with no entrapment spaces where children’s heads can get stuck. Play equipment is free of protrusion and entanglement hazards (no bolts or pieces extend outside the structure and any ropes present are securely attached on both sides). No sharp edges or points are exposed that could cut the skin. No entrapment openings are present throughout the play space (generally all openings measure smaller than 3.5” and larger than 9”) and sufficient space is maintained between play equipment (generally a minimum of 12 feet). Any elevated surfaces (generally those higher than 20”) should have guardrails. The play space is free of trip hazards such as random stumps or exposed concrete. Storage sheds are available to maintain moveable and manipulative equipment. *Programs should consult CPSC guidelines and ASTM standards for playground safety.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	

— Adapted from: Casey, T (2007). *Environments for outdoor play: A practical guide to making space for children*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Co.; and De Bord, K., Hestenes, L., Moore, R., Cosco, N., & McGinnis, J. (2005). *POEMS: Preschool outdoor environment measurement scale*. Lewisville, NC: Kaplan.

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