

Making Your Outdoor Space Work for ALL Children

Outdoor play and gross-motor play is important for all children. Some children have difficulty using the equipment or engaging in play, but there are many things you can do to help them. The VLS Cognitive Course offers more information about adapting your space for learners with special needs.

Try the following to help children be successful in the outdoor space.

Adapting Equipment

- If a child can't reach the pedals on a trike, attach blocks to the pedals to make them taller.
- If a child can't keep his feet on the pedals, try attaching a soft Velcro loop or strap to each pedal.
- Ask a volunteer or your maintenance team to build a ramp and handrails on all equipment and at all doorways.
- If a child can't reach the water or sand table, provide smaller, individual buckets of water and sand. Place the buckets on the child's wheelchair tray, a lower table or the ground.
- If a child can't catch the balls other children throw, make the balls easier to catch. You can let a little air out of the balls or buy different kinds of balls. Koosh balls, beach balls, textured balls, balls with bumps or ridges and soft cloth balls can all be easier to catch.
- If a child has trouble seeing the ball, consider purchasing balls with bells inside them.

Relationships with Peers and Adults:

- Consider pairing a child with special needs with a social peer. Encourage children to pull one another in a wagon, wait for each other at the bottom of the slide and play buddy games together.
- Plan your staffing patterns so an adult can stay near a child who might need extra help.
- Encourage children to help one another.

Making the Environment Work:

- Use colorful tape or chalk to help children know where to play with certain toys (i.e., make a "track" for trikes).
- Set up a "sensory" zone where children can explore a variety of textures, smells, sights and sounds.
- Ensure there are quiet spaces to go to if a child gets overwhelmed.