

Matching Children and Play Equipment: A Developmental Approach*

CHARACTERISTIC	DEVELOPMENTAL IMPLICATIONS	IMPLICATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENT
<i>Ages Zero to Two</i>		
Physical	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Makes jerky movements	Opportunities to move	Unencumbered space
Swipes at dangling objects	Opportunities to swipe at objects	Objects to strike
Begins to creep, crawl, and walk	Space without tripping hazards	Unencumbered space
Begins to grip and grasp objects	Opportunities to grip and grasp	Objects to grip and grasp
Social-Emotional	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Egocentric	To plays alone	Soft objects to play with
Plays alone, but with the support of adults	Opportunities to explore	Equipments that encourages exploration
Intellectual	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Likes to explore and discover	Opportunities to explore	Equipments that allows exploration
Begins to coordinate movements	Opportunities to coordinate actions with stimuli	Various sensory equipments
<i>Ages Two to Three</i>		
Physical	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Walks and talks	Opportunities to walk on equipment	Equipment to walk on
Jumps	Opportunities to develop jumping actions	Equipments to jump from, on, and down
Climbs and creeps	Opportunities to creep	Equipment to creep up and on
Social-Emotional	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Very egocentric. Plays alone, but near others	Opportunities for parallel play	Equipments that encourages parallel play
Intellectual	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Understands short directions	Small amount of information	Equipment that is self-explanatory
<i>Ages Four to Five</i>		
Physical	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Needs vigorous activity	Movement to improve growth and development. General abilities improving.	Equipment that promotes movement
Growth rate is increasing		Items that will increase body awareness

CHARACTERISTIC	DEVELOPMENTAL IMPLICATIONS	IMPLICATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENT
<i>Ages Four to Five cont.</i>		
Physical	Child:	Play space needs:
Percentage of muscle mass is increasing, body fat is decreasing	Is stronger, more agile, and very flexible	Items to promote agility and flexibility
Lacks muscle endurance	Tires easily and may require momentary rest	Items to promote intense activity alternated with less strenuous activity
Center of gravity high, sometimes difficult to balance	Is developing sense of equilibrium	Items to promote good equilibrium
Developing locomotor actions	Needs to spend time on locomotor activities	Items that use locomotor activities
Descends ladder with alternate feet	Needs opportunities to descend ladders	Ladders and climbers
Social-Emotional	Child should be provided:	Play space needs:
Egocentric and impatient	The space and opportunity to work alone	Equipment that can be used alone
Needs approval and praise	With experiences that challenge, yet foster success	Climbing pieces
Enjoys repetition	With routines to repeat	Slides, climbing devices, horizontal ladders
Learning to share	Opportunities to share	Equipment that must be shared to work
Transition between individual and group play	Times to play alone and with one or two others	
Intellectual	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Eager to learn	To experience and enjoy problem solving	Opportunities to solve problems
General lack of fear	Encouragement to work within their abilities	Opportunities to work with body, force, space, and relationships
Sorting out differences between real and make-believe	Dramatic play opportunities	Equipments for dramatic play
<i>Ages Six to Seven</i>		
Physical	Child:	Play space needs:
Steady gains in height and weight	Is stronger and more physically adept	Horizontal ladders, chinning bars,

CHARACTERSTIC	DEVELOPMENTAL IMPLICATIONS	IMPLICATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENT
<i>Ages Six to Seven cont.</i>		
Physical	Child:	Play space needs:
Legs short in relations to trunk	May appear awkward	Equipment that enhances control of body
Center of gravity near adult location	Needs activities requiring balance	Balance beams
Improved ability to focus eyes and track objects	Needs the opportunity to manipulate of objects	Equipment with distances
Skill and control are developing in gross motor activities	Needs to be able to repeat known activities, and practice news ones	Equipment to travel on, create direction, pathways directions
Abilities of males and females are different	Differences not apparent in relation to activity	Different equipment is unnecessary
Social-Emotional	Child needs:	Play space needs:
In awe of adults	Adults that are aware of this responsibility	Equipment that encourages children to perform well
Discourages easily	Praise	Equipment on which success is possible
Transition between individual and group play	To play alone, with one another, and occasionally with three or four other children	Equipment that fosters cooperation
Recognizes that some children are more skilled than others	Recognition that he/she has individual differences from other children	Equipment for differing skill levels
Intellectual	Child needs:	Play space needs:
Attention span is still short	Activities that are short and varied	Equipment with short distances
Improvements in reasoning powers	To be challenged with problems	Equipment with choices
Imaginative, enjoys drama	Activities that encourage creativity	Equipment that can foster imagination
Memory is improving	Activities that promote continuity	Equipment that promotes problem solving
Purposeful in work habits	Child has a desire to learn new skills and master others	Equipments that promotes mastery
Developing concepts of space, force, and time	To include work on space, force, and time	Equipment that can foster work in space, force, and time

*Thompson D, Hudson SD, Mack M. National Program for Playground Safety. Matching children and play equipment: A developmental approach. *Early Childhood News* 1999. [online] 1999 [2004 Jun 25]. Available from: URL: http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=463