



Implementation Guide

Outdoor Play

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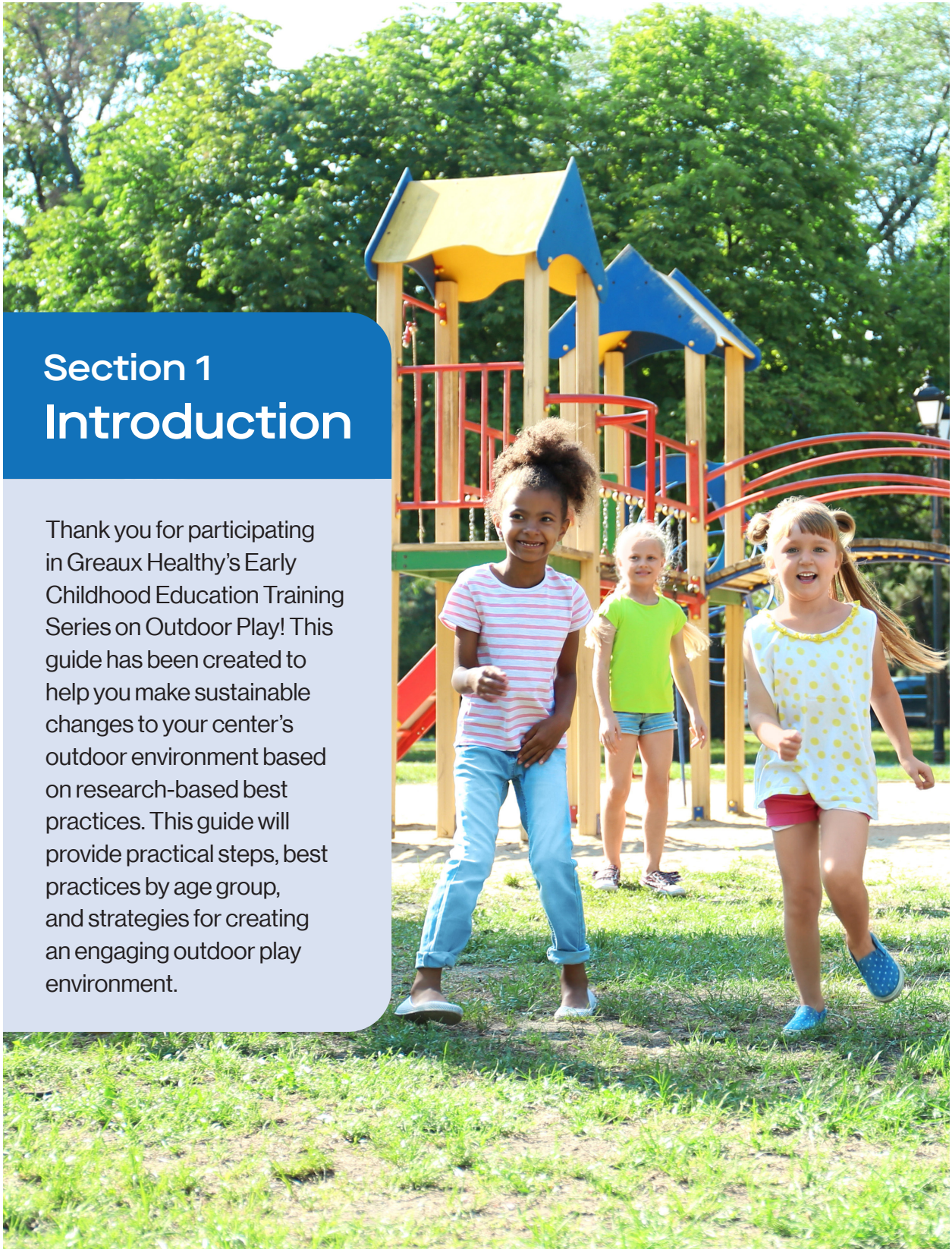
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Section 1

Introduction

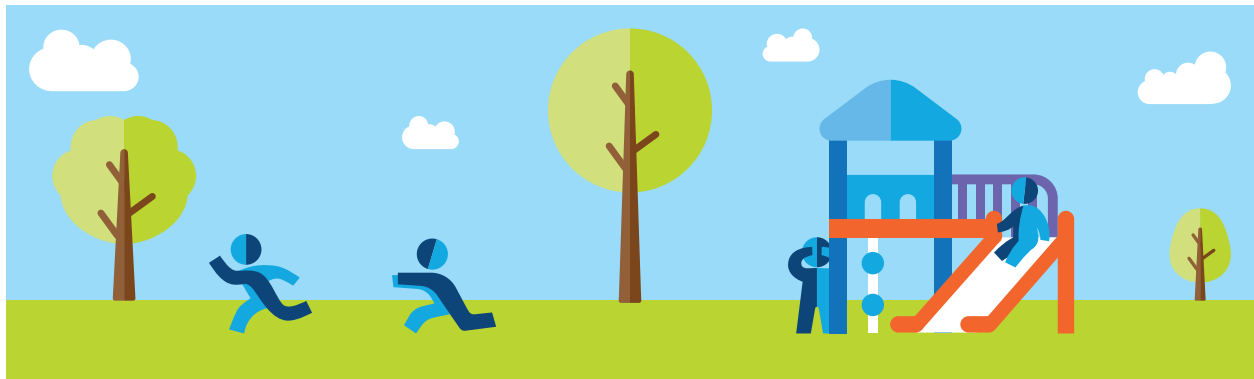
Thank you for participating in Greaux Healthy's Early Childhood Education Training Series on Outdoor Play! This guide has been created to help you make sustainable changes to your center's outdoor environment based on research-based best practices. This guide will provide practical steps, best practices by age group, and strategies for creating an engaging outdoor play environment.



Physical Activity

Physical activity is important for children's health and growth, and child care centers play a big role in encouraging it. Regular physical activity helps children strengthen their muscles and bones, improve their motor skills, and keep their hearts healthy. In child care centers, activities like outdoor play, games, and group exercises get children moving, which helps them stay healthy and also promotes socializing. These activities not only improve children's physical health but also boost their brain power and emotional strength. By offering different ways to stay active, child care centers create a fun and supportive space that helps children develop a love for movement, which can lead to a healthy lifestyle later in life.

Importance of Outdoor Play



Child care centers help children grow and learn during important years before they turn five. About 80% of 3–5-year-olds go to child care for six or more hours each day during the week.¹ Because of this, there isn't much time for outdoor play at home in the evenings.



Outdoor play is important for children's **physical, mental, and social** development.¹ It helps children stay active and curious while they play and interact with others. Spending time outside can also help children with their sleep and body clocks. Kids who play outside more often also have fewer attention problems.

Outdoor play doesn't take away from academic lessons. You can use outdoor time to teach and help children work together. Even the first step of getting ready to go outside is a chance to learn. The outdoors is a great place to do activities that need space. Sometimes, children do not need a lot of structure and can enjoy free play, where they choose how they want to play.

Outdoor Play in All Weather

Outdoor play is important, no matter what the weather is like. It is important to find ways to safely let children play outside even when the weather is tough.

Hot Weather

When it is hot outside, like it often is in Louisiana, it can be tempting to stay indoors. Here are tips for outdoor play in hot weather:

- Children can play in water, like fountains, sprinklers, water slides, or water tables.
- Give children water to drink while they are outside.
- Find shaded areas for play.
- Schedule outdoor play in the mornings when it's cooler.

Cold Weather

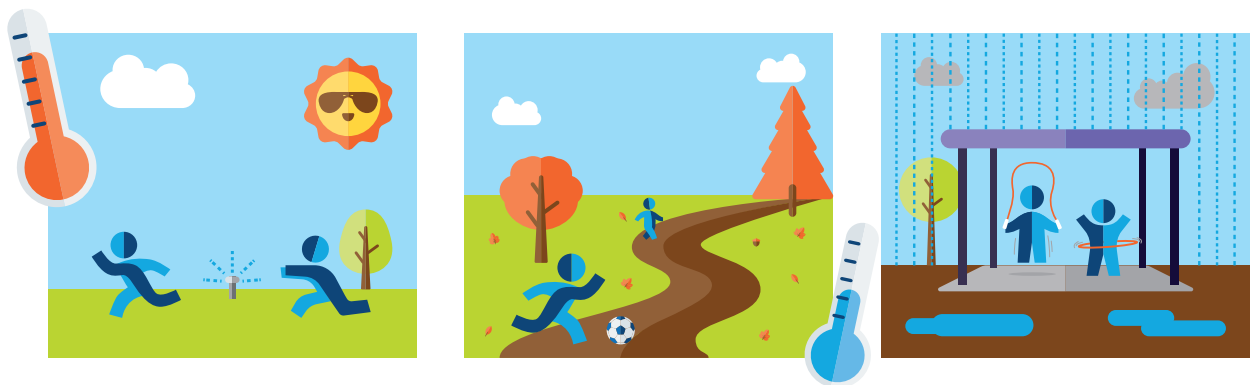
In the fall and winter, outdoor play can include lots of fun activities. Here are some ideas for these cooler months:


- Go on nature walks.
- Decorate outdoor trees for the holidays.
- Have picnics outside.
- Plan outdoor play for the afternoon when it's warmer.

Rainy Weather

Even when it rains, kids can still play outside! Here are some ways to let children play in the rain:

- Ask your center director about outdoor play in the rain. You might need parent permission, and children should have rain boots and extra clothes.
- Covered outdoor areas let children play outside while staying dry and still enjoying the benefits of being outdoors.





Section 2 Research-Based Best Practices

Best Practices by Age

All ages can benefit from being outside, including infants. Outdoor play can help infants with their sleep schedule and give them a chance to explore nature and practice early motor skills. When taking infants outside, it's important to think about the environment and the toys.

Since infants may not be moving around a lot yet, the area where they are located should be soft and maybe in a shaded spot. Blankets and soft mats can help make their outdoor space more comfortable. Toys can also help babies learn and enjoy their time outside. Toys that they can touch, or toys that help them stand and walk, can help meet developmental needs. Some examples of outdoor toys for infants are instruments, mirrors, painting supplies, windmills, toys to pull up on, and toys they can push.

Age	Frequency	Total Time
Infants < 1 year	2 or more times per day	No established best practice
Toddlers 1-2 years	3 or more times per day	60 minutes or more
Preschoolers 3-5 years	3 or more times per day	90 minutes or more

If you want to learn more about evidence-based best practices that you can implement at your center, the Louisiana Department of Health, Well-Ahead Louisiana offers Go NAPSACC to Louisiana child care centers. Go NAPSACC is an evidence-based platform that allows centers to assess their current practices and make an action plan for change. They also provide videos and resources for changes related to the topic you are interested in.

To access Go NAPSACC, you can go to www.gonapsacc.org for more information!

Children with Disabilities

Providers should plan, adapt, modify, and model general ways to support students with disabilities.

- Plan activities with parents and healthcare professionals that support a child's strengths
- Adapt by providing equipment that are easier to grip, see, and hear. Keeping items contained in one area can also allow for easy access to the equipment being used.
- Modify the activity and use steady outdoor play equipment
- Model appropriate behaviors by teaching children how to offer help and include children with different abilities in their play



All students need physical activity. There are many ways to adjust so students of all abilities can participate and enjoy themselves!

- Slow down, or reduce the length of time of activities to accommodate students with limited mobility or fitness capabilities
- Use a smaller play area for less mobile or skilled students.
- Use different kinds of balls that are easier to hold, throw, or see.
- A Goalball has bells inside so that visually impaired students can locate them.
- Whiffle and Nerf balls fly more slowly and reduce the fear of being hit.
- Rackets/paddles with short handles are easier to strike with than those with longer handles.
- Batting tees and suspended balls facilitate hitting or striking activities.
- Provide rule adjustments or extra chances for less-skilled students to allow for greater involvement and skill practice while playing non-competitive games.
- Change how quickly or how long the activity is played to be mindful of all abilities.

Section 3 Outdoor Play Environment



Outdoor Environment

The outdoor play area is important for children to be active and learn about nature. In a child care center, the outdoor space helps children explore, play, and grow. It gives them a chance to run, climb, and play games, which helps them get stronger, better at balancing, and more coordinated. A good outdoor space has equipment like slides, swings, balance beams, and open areas for pretending to play and making friends. Nature things like sandboxes, gardens, and water play help kids stay curious and creative. In the outdoor space, kids get healthier and learn how to work with others and solve problems, all while having fun in the fresh air and sunshine.

Outdoor Environment Components

The outdoor environment at a child care center has four key parts: outdoor activities, gardening, portable play equipment, and outdoor design. These parts together make a great outdoor space where children can learn, play, and interact with others.



- **Outdoor activities** give children chances for active play and physical growth, like running, jumping, or playing games with friends. Examples of outdoor activities are free play, guided play, seasonal activities, walking trips, and outdoor field trips.
- **Gardening** helps children connect with nature. It teaches them about plants, responsibility, and the environment. They can learn by doing hands-on activities like planting seeds or watering plants.
- **Portable play equipment** like balls, hoops, and ride-on toys makes the play space more fun and active. This equipment helps children use their muscles, jump, run, and play in many ways. Since outdoor spaces may be small, having portable equipment is a great choice. It can be moved around and used by children of all ages.
- **Outdoor design** makes sure the space is safe, fun, and ready for play. It includes things like shaded areas, open spaces, and paths for children to walk or run on. The best outdoor spaces have:
 - Shade, from trees or coverings, to keep the area cool.
 - A large space for running, playing games, and other activities.
 - Several play areas for children to explore.
 - Paths that connect all the areas and are wide enough for children to walk safely. These paths should also be curved or looped to make the outdoor space more exciting.

When all these pieces come together, the outdoor environment becomes a wonderful place for children to play and learn.



Section 4 Implementation

Quick Wins

Quick wins are tasks that are easy to do and do not require a lot of time or resources. These tasks often give quick results, make people feel good, and create a sense of achievement. They help build energy and create early successes, which are helpful when you need to make improvements fast or have limited resources.

Here are some examples of quick wins that you can try at your child care center to improve the outdoor play environment.

Portable Play Equipment

Portable play equipment is a great addition to outdoor play areas at child care centers because it offers flexibility and variety for children's physical activity. Items like balls, hula hoops, jump ropes, inflatable structures, or balance beams can be moved to different areas easily. This allows teachers to change the space to fit different activities and needs.

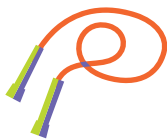
Step-by-Step Guide for Portable Play Equipment:

Step 1: Assess indoor space and determine designated play areas.

Look at the indoor space and decide where to set up different play areas. These areas will be used for various activities and physical play.

Step 2: Identify and gather necessary equipment.

Here's a list of equipment you may need:



Jumping Toys

Jumping toys like jump ropes and jumping balls help improve coordination, balance, and motor skills.



Push-Pull Toys

Push-pull toys like toy trucks, corn poppers, and push-pull cards build muscle, boost spatial skills, and promote cognitive skills.



Twirling Toys

Twirling toys like ribbons, scarves, batons, hula hoops, and parachutes help with motor skill development, balance, body awareness, coordination, and rhythm.



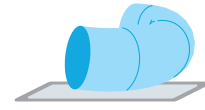
Balance Toys

Balance toys like balance beams and plastic “river stones” help children develop concentration and understand concepts like gravity, counterbalance, and other sports skills.



Throw, Catch, and Strike Toys

Throwing, catching, and striking toys like balls, pom poms, bean bags, and noodles help build hand-eye coordination, motor skills, spatial awareness, grasping skills, problem-solving, and balance.



Crawling and Tumbling Equipment

Crawling or tumbling equipment like mats and portable tunnels help kids develop strength, coordination, flexibility, and balance.

- Durability and Weather Resistance
 - Choose equipment that can withstand different weather conditions like rain, sun, and wind.
 - Make sure all equipment is easy to clean and maintain to last longer.
- Accessibility and Engagement
 - Ensure that the equipment is accessible for all children, including those with disabilities.
 - Rotate the equipment regularly to keep children interested and challenged.
 - Offer a variety of group activities to encourage social interaction.

Step 3: Implement indoor structured and free play sessions in your daily schedule. Plan times for both structured play (with guidance) and free play (where children explore on their own) each day.

Step 4: Evaluate and adjust based on observation. Observe how the children interact with the equipment and make changes if needed to keep them engaged and help them develop new skills.

Multiple Play Areas

Having multiple play areas in a child care center’s outdoor space gives children different types of fun activities. These areas help children grow in many ways, like with their physical skills, thinking, and making friends. By creating different zones, such as places for climbing, running, quiet play, and creative activities, children can pick what they like to do and what helps them learn best.

Step-by-Step Guide for Multiple Play Areas:

Step 1: Look at the outdoor space and decide where to put different play areas.

Step 2: Get the right equipment for each area.

- **Active Play Area:** Include fun equipment like slides, swings, balance beams, and climbing structures for running, jumping, and climbing.
- **Sensory Play Area:** Set up areas with things like sandboxes, water tables, or textured paths for children to touch and explore.
- **Quiet or Relaxation Zone:** Add shady spots or soft cushions where children can rest or enjoy calm activities.
- **Imaginative Play Area:** Create a space with things like playhouses, kitchen sets, or natural items like logs and rocks for pretend play.
- **Nature Exploration Area:** Add plants, trees, or small gardens where children can learn about nature and the environment.
- **Social Interaction Area:** Set up places like picnic tables or group play spaces for children to interact and play together.

**Age-Appropriate Design:**

- Make sure to have different areas for different age groups, like toddlers, preschoolers, or older kids.
- Use equipment that challenges children but is still safe for their age and abilities.
- Ensure all children, including those with disabilities, can use the play areas.
- Add features like ramps or paths that everyone can use.

**Step 3:** Plan when children will play in these areas, either in structured activities or free play.**Step 4:** Watch how children play and make changes to improve the space if needed.

Water Play

Water play in the outdoor area of a child care center is great for children! It helps them explore with their senses, play creatively, and interact with others. Activities like water tables, sprinklers, or small splash pools give kids the chance to pour, splash, and measure water. Water play also sparks their imagination as they come up with stories and games. Plus, it's a fun way to cool off on hot days, making outdoor play more comfortable. Water play helps children grow in many ways, like improving their thinking, physical skills, and social abilities, all while having fun and learning.

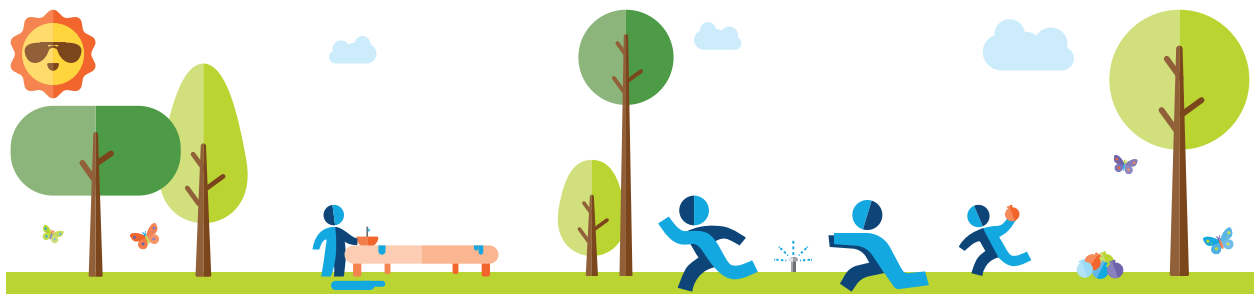
Water safety is important when children are playing with water at child care centers. You should always watch children closely and make sure there are enough adults for supervision.

Step-by-Step Guide for Water Play:

Step 1: Look at the outdoor space and decide where the play areas should be.

Step 2: Choose the equipment you'll need for water play. Here's some water play equipment to think about:

- **Water Tables:** Shallow tables where kids can pour, scoop, and measure water.
- **Sprinklers or Water Fountains:** Low-pressure sprinklers or fountains that kids can run through and cool off with.
- **Buckets, Scoops, and Containers:** Different containers for children to fill, pour, and experiment with.
- **Water Wheels or Flow Channels:** Things like water wheels or channels where kids can play with the flow and movement of water.
- **Watering Cans and Sprayers:** Tools for kids to water plants and learn about the environment.
- **Spray Toys or Hose Attachments:** Hose attachments that let kids change the spray patterns for different ways to play with water.



Step 3: Plan to have both structured and free play with water during your day.

Step 4: Watch how things go and make changes if needed to improve the play experience.

Game-Changing Projects

Game-Changing projects are bigger tasks that take more time and planning. They need some work and investment of time, but they can make a big difference and create lasting changes. Here are some game-changing projects you can do to improve your outdoor play area, and many of these are low cost.

Painted Playgrounds

Painted playgrounds at childcare centers are fun and colorful spaces that help spark creativity and imagination in kids. These bright designs turn regular outdoor areas into exciting places for learning and playing. You might see big shapes, numbers, letters, or fun themes that make kids want to be active and interact with each other. With cool things like hopscotch grids, mazes, and nature pictures, these painted playgrounds not only make playtime more fun but also help kids grow their thinking skills, motor skills, and social skills. Pennington Biomedical Research Center (PBRC) even has stencils that you can borrow to make your playground even more awesome!

Step-by-Step Guide for Painted Playground

Step 1: Assess outdoor space and determine designated play areas.

Step 2: Identify and gather necessary equipment.

- **Outdoor Paint:** Non-toxic, weather-resistant, and durable paint designed specifically for outdoor surfaces. It should be safe for children and able to withstand wear from foot traffic and the elements.
- **Paint brushes and rollers:** A variety of sizes will be needed for different design details—large rollers for backgrounds and large areas, and smaller brushes for intricate designs or outlines.
- **Painters tape:** For creating clean lines and borders, especially when working with geometric shapes, grids, or patterns.
- **Stencils (can be rented from PBRC):** Pre-made or custom stencils can help with creating specific shapes, letters, numbers, or themed designs. These are especially useful for creating precise and repetitive patterns.
- **Drop cloths or plastic sheets:** To protect surrounding areas from paint splatters and spills, especially on grass, concrete, or asphalt.
- **Paint trays:** For holding paint and evenly distributing it onto rollers and brushes.
- **Chalk:** For outlining the designs before painting begins.
- **Gloves:** For safety and cleanliness during the painting process.



Step 3: Implement outdoor structured and free play sessions in your daily schedule.

Step 4: Evaluate and adjust based on observation.

Stencil 1: Sunflower Hopscotch

GAME 1: Sunflower Hopscotch

Fundamental motor skills targeted: hop, jump, leap, underhand throw

Players:

If possible, try to have no more than 4 children to a stencil so that each child gets plenty of practice; however, there is no limit on the number of children that may play the game.

How to Play:

- Using a pebble or a small object as a marker, the first player will underhand throw the object onto one of the leaves.
- The child must then jump to the leaves (2 feet to 2 feet) and pick up the object.
- Then, once the object is received, have the child jump back through the course and hand the object off to the next player.
 - If there are no markers, a teacher can simply call out a number to target or allow the child to self-select the targeted area.

Modifications:

- Require that students step from spot to spot.
- Require students to leap from one leaf to the next.
- Require that students hop from spot to spot on their preferred foot.
- Require that students hop from spot to spot on their non-preferred foot.
- When the child arrives at their marker, balance on one leg (flamingo stand) to reach out and pick up the marker.

Extensions:

- As the child jumps from leaf to leaf, teachers can prompt them to call out the number that they have landed on.
- For players with more control (ages 5+), players can toss their marker onto a specific spot either following numerical order with each turn (turn 1= spot 1; turn 2= spot 2, etc.) or calling which spot they will throw to prior to their turn.
- For players with more control (ages 5+), have the player jump over the spot with the marker. For example, if the marker is tossed to spot 1, they must jump from the starting line at the base of the stencil over spot 1 and land onto spot 3. An alteration may also be that students can land with two feet on two leaves after jumping over the leaf with their marker.



Stencil 1: Sunflower Hopscotch

GAME 2: Sunflower Toss

Fundamental motor skills targeted: underhand throw, overhand throw, heel-to-toe walk, tiptoe walk, run, leap, gallop, or other locomotor activities.

Players:

If possible, try to have no more than 4 children to a stencil so that each child gets plenty of practice; however, there is no limit on the number of children that may play the game.

How to Play:

- Players will stand in a group line behind the starting line.
- Using a pebble or a small object as a marker, the first player will underhand toss their marker onto spot 1. That player will then jog quickly to get their marker and jog back to the end of the group line. Once the first player returns and is clearly behind the starting line, the second player can toss their marker onto spot 1.
- When each player returns to the front of the line, they can toss their marker to the next spot, unless their previous toss/marker did not land on the spot intended. If the player misses the spot they are attempting to underhand toss to, he or she will jog to get their marker and return to the end of the group line. On their next toss, the player will toss to the same spot until they can land their marker on the appropriate spot.
- The objective is to accurately toss their marker on all 10 spots.

Modifications:

- For players with less control, they can toss their marker onto any spot. They must land their marker on 10 spots, but they can toss to the same spot more than once.
- You can alter the game by having the child walk heel-to-toe on the stem of the flower to retrieve their marker or walk on their tip toes along the stem to work on balance.
- For younger children or with more players you can have children play on the right or left hand side of the board.
- Have children throw underhand to the closer targets (numbers 1- 5) or overhand to the further targets (6-10).



Extensions:

- Require that students use a different locomotor movement (i.e. walk, run, jump, hop, leap, skip, gallop, and slide) every time they go to retrieve their marker.
- Instead of throwing the marker in numerical order, players with high accuracy can choose which spot they want to toss to. When a player lands their marker on a spot, they should initial the spot where the marker landed using chalk and pass it to the next player. The objective is to initial all 10 spots!

Stencil 2: Keyboard

GAME 3: Find the Letters and Numbers

may require white board or note pad

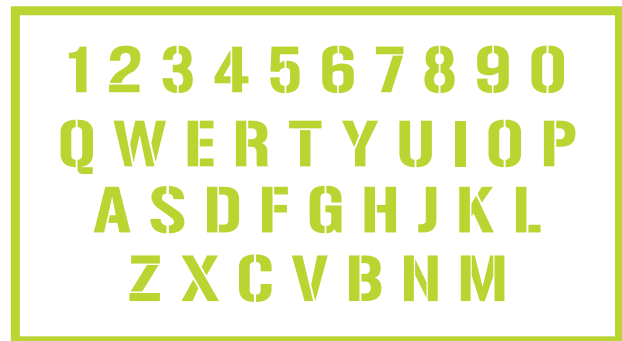
Fundamental motor skills targeted: variety of locomotor skills

Players:

There is no limit on the number of children that may play the game.

How to Play:

- Write a letter/number on a board or spell a small word (for example: and, the, up, in).
- Tell students to jump to get to that letter(s)/ number(s) and once there, balance on one foot on the letter(s) or number(s) that they see written.



Modifications:

- Change the starting point to make this more or less challenging for students.
- Change the type of locomotor skill students should use to get the letter/ number. Rather than jump have students run, skip, gallop, leap, slide, or hop.
- Identify only single letters and numbers and have students use a specific locomotor skill to get to that letter or number and then simply touch the keyboard square matching the letter/number. This would allow more students to play the game, as you may have too many students to all balance on the letters/numbers.
- Tell students to stand on a letter/number that is a specific color, pink for example. Help students recognize the letter/number they are standing on.

Extensions:

- Have students identify and balance on the letters or numbers in a word/ number that you say out loud.
- Identify words that are spelled using only a few letters. Place students in groups corresponding with the number of letters in the words you have selected (i.e. if you focus on words that only have 4 letters, place students into groups of 4). When you write a word/say a word, each member in the group must use a form of locomotion (i.e. running, jumping, skipping, galloping, leaping, sliding, or hopping) to get to a different letter in that word and once there, balance on one foot on the letter.

Stencil 2: Keyboard

GAME 4: Alphabet Toss

may require white board or note pad

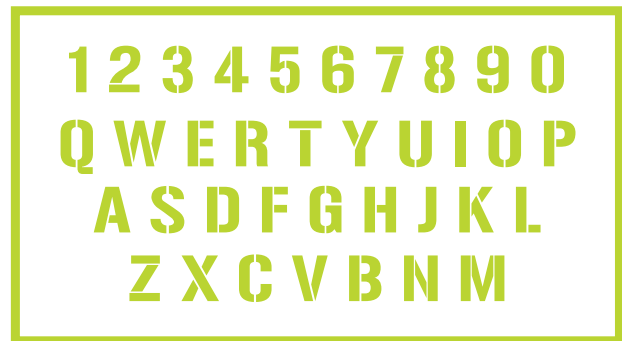
Fundamental motor skills targeted: underhand throw, overhand throw, a variety of locomotor skills

Players:

There is no limit on the number of children that may play the game.

How to Play:

- Have students spread out with their marker along 1 side of the keyboard. Write a letter or number on a board. Tell students to underhand toss their marker to the letter or number.
- Next, have the student choose a form of locomotion (i.e. skipping, galloping, leaping, sliding, hopping, etc.) to get to that letter/number.



Modifications:

- Identify only single letters and numbers. Go through the alphabet and numbers in order.
- Tell students to toss to a letter/number that is a specific color, pink for example. Help students recognize the letter/number they tossed to.
- Move the starting point around the keyboard to increase or decrease difficulty level.
- Have students throw onto the board and then identify the letter or color that they hit.

Extensions:

- Write a word on a board. Tell students to underhand toss their marker to ONE letter they see in the word.
- Identify words that are spelled using only a few letters. Place students in groups corresponding with the number of letters in the words you have selected (i.e. if you focus on words that only have 4 letters, place students into groups of 4). When you write a word/say a word, each member in the group must underhand toss their marker on a different letter in that word, in an effort to spell it as a group, and use some form of locomotion (i.e. skipping, galloping, leaping, sliding, hopping, etc.) to get to that letter.
- Incorporate/ reinforce letters being taught in class, colors with similarities, or weekly vocabulary.

STENCIL 3: Pathways Circuit

GAME 5: Pathway Party

may require music

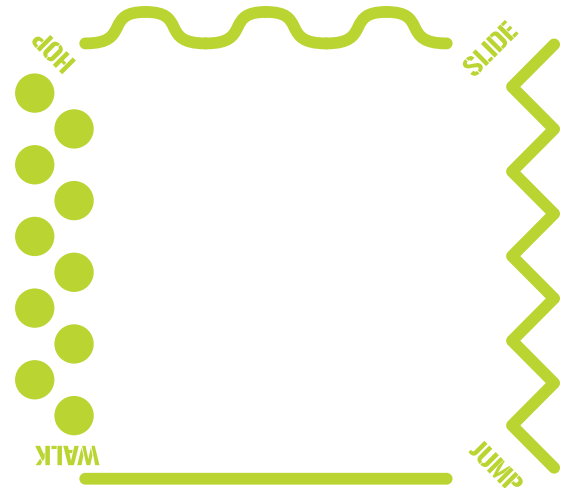
Fundamental motor skills targeted: variety of locomotor skills and balance/ coordination activities.

Players:

There is no limit on the number of children that may play the game.

How to Play:

- Have a group of children stand around a word (walk, hop, jump, and slide).
- Have the teacher start the music, the children will make their way around the course following the prompted activities (walking tightrope, hopping pebbles, curvy slide line, jump zig-zag line).
- When the music stops, have them freeze, then rotate them clockwise.



Activities:

- **Walking Tightrope:** Children should walk along the tightrope, trying to keep their feet on the rope as best as possible. Encourage heel to toe walking or have children walk on tip toes and try to maintain their balance. Children could slide laterally on the line if walking is too easy. Start children sliding on their preferred side and then change to their non-preferred side once they are comfortable with lateral movement.
- **Hopping Pebbles:** Children should travel from pebble to pebble by jumping. If the group can easily jump, have children hop from pebble to pebble on their preferred foot or to increase difficulty their non-preferred foot. Encourage children to improve their accuracy by jumping or hopping in the center of each stone. Encourage children to increase their distance by trying to skip a stone each time they reach the step pebbles. Children can also be encouraged to crab walk or leap along the pebbles, or jump like a frog to each "lily pad."
- **Jump Zig-Zag Line:** Children should travel from line to line by jumping from 1 to another. Encourage the children to improve their accuracy by jumping in the center of each short line. Children can also be encouraged to step and slide, keeping their foot on the line and slide in and out, or walk along the line either flat-footed, on tip toes, or heel to toe, trying to maintain balance along the turns in the line.
- **Curvy Slide Line:** Children should be encouraged to slide, walk, tip-toe, hop, jump, or gallop (leading with preferred or non-preferred foot) along the curve. As the curves are sharp it would be important for children to control their movements down the line. You may also have children try to walk backward along this line.

Modifications:

- Have children begin by walking along all pathways, gradually increasing the difficulty of the movement (run, jump, hop, skip, gallop, leap, slide).
- If there is no music accessible, let kids move for 1-minute increments before changing directions.

Extensions:

- Repeat the activity, adding variety along the way. Have the children move in a variety of different ways (i.e. silly, quickly, slowly, quietly, etc.).
- Children can even try moving backwards if developmentally appropriate.
- Have children choose how to travel down the pathway and play follow the leader down their pathway. It is important that adult monitors to make sure their movements are appropriate and safe.

STENCIL 4: Bullseye Toss**GAME 6: Bullseye Toss**

Fundamental motor skills targeted: overhand throw, underhand throw

Players:

Two or more players can play this game.

How to Play:

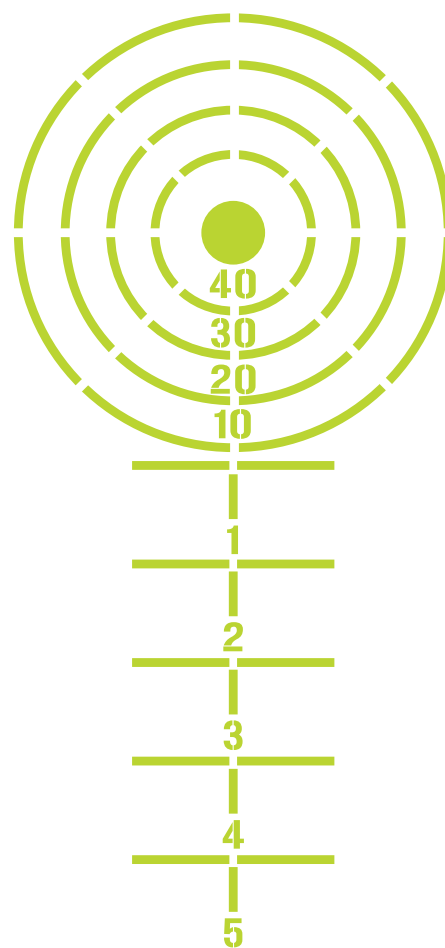
Using a pebble or a small object as a marker, each player will take turns underhand tossing marker onto the bullseye area while standing from behind the same line. Players will alternate turns tossing. Children should step over the line in front of them to practice contralateral stepping while throwing. This means children should take a large step with the foot opposite their throwing arm to assist with aiming and projecting of the object. This can be done for both overhand and underhand throwing.

Modifications:

Depending on their skill level, each child can be placed on a line that will give everyone an equal chance of landing the marker within the bullseye.

Extensions:

- If a player tosses from the same line each time and lands their marker on the bullseye three times, the child must move back and underhand toss from the next farthest line.
- Rather than use an underhand toss, try having the child throw overhand. This is a more difficult movement for this age group, so be sure that this movement is done appropriately.



STENCIL 4: Bullseye Toss

GAME 7: Number Toss

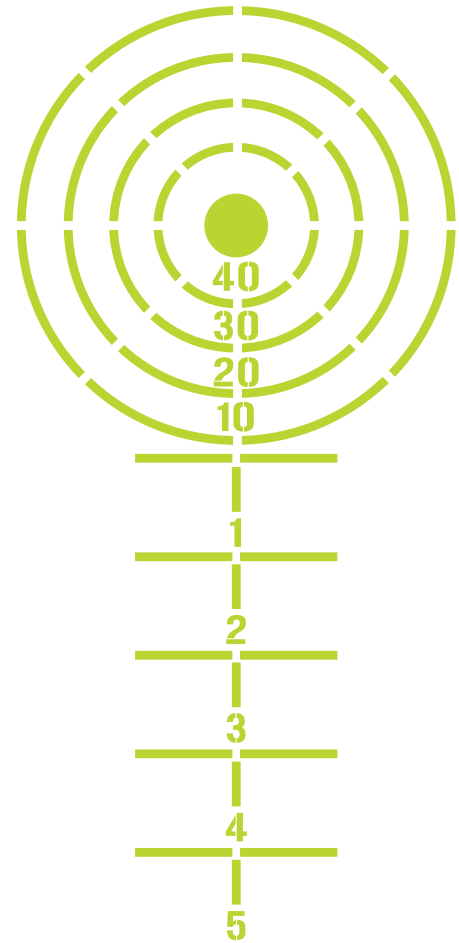
Fundamental motor skills targeted: underhand throwing, overhand throwing, variety of locomotor skills.

Players:

If possible, try not to have more than 4 children to a stencil so that each child gets plenty of practice; however, there is no limit on the number of children that may play the game.

How to Play:

- Students will be in a line off to the side of the numbered lines.
- Using a pebble or a small object as a marker, the first player will underhand toss the marker from line 1 to the bullseye. They will jog quickly to get their marker and jog back to the end of the group line. Once player 1 returns to the end of the group line, player 2 can toss their marker from line 1 to the bullseye.
- When each player returns to the front of the group line, they can begin tossing from line 2, unless their toss/marker missed the bull's eye on their previous turn. If the player misses the bullseye, he or she will jog to get their marker and return to the end of the group line. On their next turn to toss, the player will continue to toss from the same line until they can successfully land their marker on the bullseye from that line.
- The objective is to accurately toss and land their marker on the bull's eye from all 5 lines!



Modifications:

- Children can toss from any line that they feel successful from.
- For a younger group it might be easier for students to hop, jump, or leap over the yellow lines (holding the bean bag or small object). Once they have navigated down the stencil they can drop the item they are carrying onto the bulls eye for a target. You may also have children balance walking heel to toe or on tip toes down the main line.

Extensions:

- Require that students use a different locomotor movement every time they go to retrieve their marker.
- Rather than use an underhand throw, try having the child throw overhand. This is a more difficult movement for this age group, so be sure that this movement is done appropriately.

STENCIL 5: Bike Path

GAME 9: Locomote-A-Thon/Trike-A-Thon

Fundamental motor skills targeted: variety of locomotor skills

Players:

- Number of children should be dependent on spacing and equipment set up.
- If using tricycles, this will be limited to the number of tricycles available. No more than 4 children should ride at the same time.

How to Play:

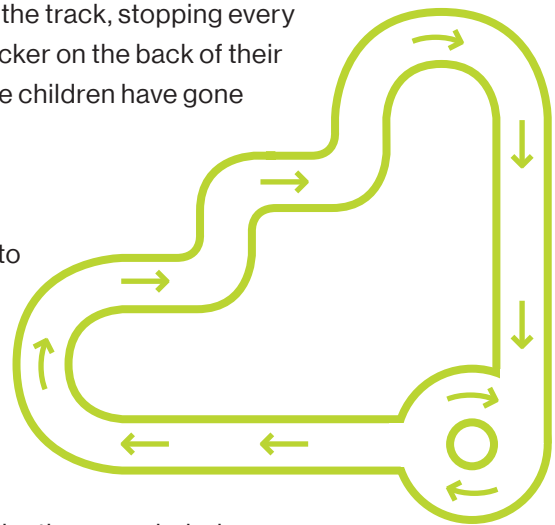
- Mark a line as your start and finish line.
- On the go signal, children will make their way around the track, stopping every time they cross the start line to receive a stamp or sticker on the back of their hand. These markers will indicate how many times the children have gone around the track.

Modifications:

The class will go through the course together, attempting to get as many class laps as possible.

Extensions:

- Choose a different locomotor movement to use throughout the path (walk, jog, run, gallop, slide, jump, hop, skip).
- If you have hula-hoops available, have children participating use a hula-hoop as a visual for their own car.
- Children could also create a parade through the obstacle course incorporating locomotor skills throughout the parade "route".
- You may also incorporate traffic safety lessons or biking/walking safety (i.e., looking both ways, coming to a complete stop, or hand signals for stop, turning left and right).



STENCIL 6: Mirror Me

GAME 10: Mirror Me

Fundamental motor skills targeted: hopping, jumping, balancing, leaping

Players:

The Mirror Me stencil should only be used by two children at a time or by a student and a teacher.

Directions:

- Children will be in a group line off to the side of the stencil. One child should be designated the leader for the first round. The remainder of the children in the group line are followers.
- The designated leader will stand on one side of the Mirror Me stencil and the first child in the group line will stand on the other side, facing the leader.
- The leader should perform an action (stand on one number; step two feet to two numbers, etc.), and the child following should mimic that action.
- Once the child following correctly mimics the movement, it is the next child's turn in the group line.
- Change the designated leader every time the group line comes back to the beginning.



mirror me

Modifications:

- Have an instructor stand on one side of the Mirror Me stencil and a child on the other side facing the instructor. The instructor should perform an action (stand on one number; step two feet to two numbers, etc.), and the child should mimic that action. Once the child following correctly mimics the movement, it is the next child's turn in the group line.
- A sequence of movements may also be conducted depending on the age of the children (e.g., right foot on blue, then left foot step on purple, then leap out of the circle, etc.)



Extensions:

- Instead of stepping to a number, the designated leader could use a different locomotor movement (i.e. jump, hop, leap, and slide) to get to a number.
- Have designated leaders come up with different balances using the stencil.
- Have children perform more than one movement in a row, seeing if the children can mimic a sequence of movements the leader performed.
- If developmentally appropriate, have the children identify the numbers or colors they are stepping or jumping to by saying them out.
- May discuss left and right hand sides of the stencil and work on directions.
- May also work on contralateral movement, stepping on one color and then placing hands on another.

Gardens

A garden at a child care center is a great way for kids to learn and have fun. It helps them explore nature, watch plants grow, and learn about how the environment works. Gardening teaches kids responsibility because they help plant, water, and take care of the plants. This makes them feel proud of their work and helps them connect with nature. Gardens also encourage healthy eating by letting kids try fresh fruits and vegetables, so they can learn to enjoy healthy foods.

Types of Gardens



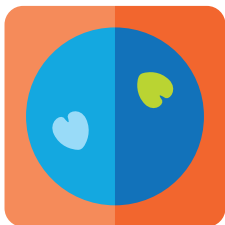
Butterfly Garden



Container Garden



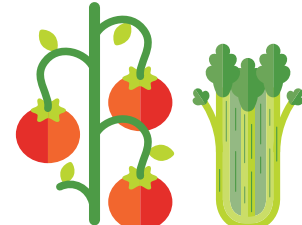
Demonstration Garden



Water Garden



Organic Garden



Edible Garden

Step-by-Step Guide for a Garden:

Step 1: Assess outdoor space and determine designated garden area.

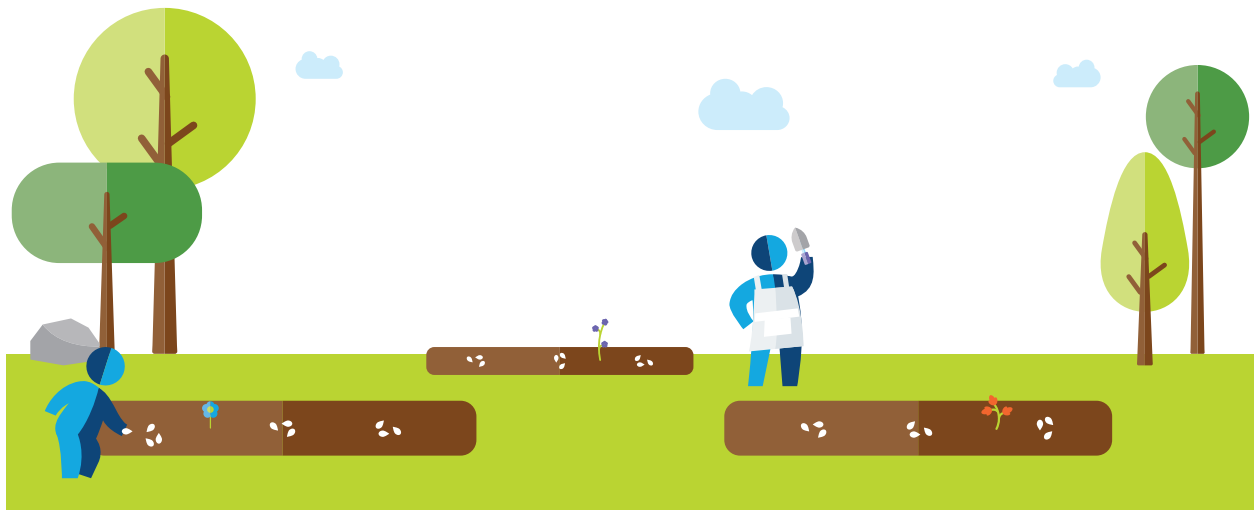
- **Location:** Choose a sunny, safe spot with good drainage for the garden. Ensure it's within easy access for both children and staff.
- **Size and Layout:** Decide on the size of the garden. It can range from small raised beds to larger plots depending on available space and resources. Sketch a layout that includes plant beds, walking paths, and seating areas.
- **Safety Considerations:** Make sure the area is fenced or has barriers if needed to keep children safe from tools, chemicals, or unwanted animals.

Step 2: Identify and gather necessary equipment.

- **Soil:** Get nutrient-rich, well-draining soil to fill the garden beds. If needed, test the soil quality and adjust with compost or organic matter.
- **Tools:** Choose child-friendly gardening tools, like small shovels, watering cans, gloves, and hand rakes. These should be age-appropriate and safe for children to use.
- **Plants:** Select easy-to-grow plants that are safe for children. Vegetables like tomatoes, carrots, bell peppers, or lettuce, and flowers like sunflowers or marigolds are great choices.
- **Raised Beds or Containers:** If your ground is not suitable, consider raised garden beds or large containers for planting.
- **Mulch:** Use mulch to help retain moisture, suppress weeds, and keep the soil temperature stable.

Step 3: Plant the garden

- **Clear the Area:** Remove weeds, rocks, and debris from the area.
- **Create Garden Beds:** Build or arrange the raised beds or ground plots. Ensure the beds are accessible to children, and paths are wide enough for them to move freely.
- **Prepare the Soil:** Loosen the soil and mix in compost to improve fertility. This step helps create an ideal environment for plants.
- **Planting Together:** Have the children and families participate in planting seeds or young plants. Show them how to plant, space the plants, and cover seeds with soil.
- **Labeling Plants:** Let children help create labels for each plant. Use colorful markers, craft supplies, or laminated tags to name the plants.

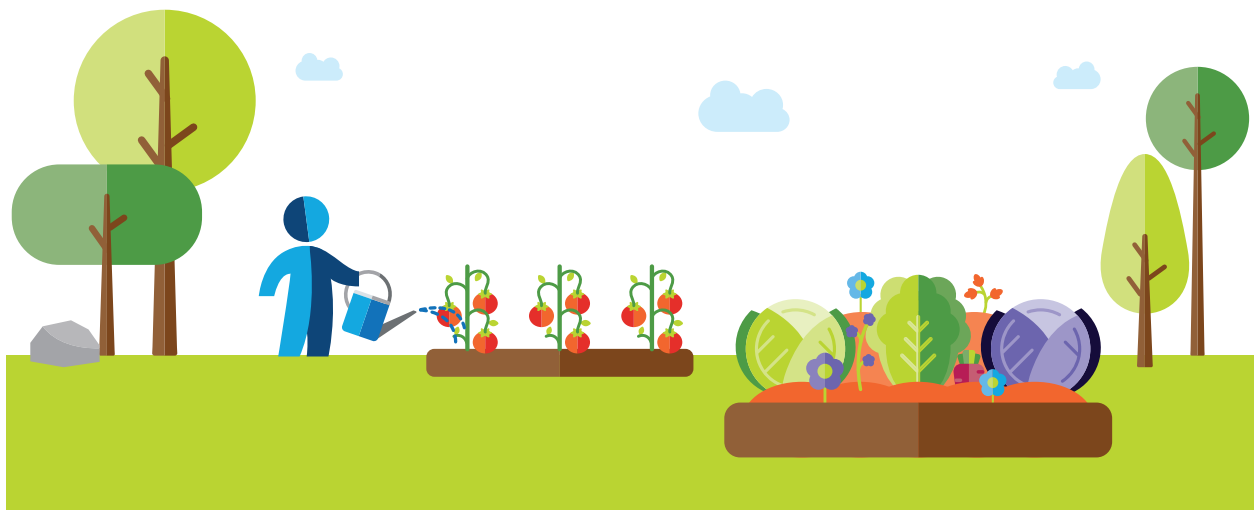


Step 4: Implement outdoor structured and free play sessions for the garden in your daily schedule.

- **Watering:** Teach children how to water plants gently with watering cans or hoses. Discuss the importance of giving plants enough water but not over-watering them.
- **Picking the Garden:** When the vegetables, plants, or flowers are ready, let the children help with picking. This could be an exciting moment for them to see the results of their hard work.
- **Sharing the Garden:** Children can share the plants with others or use it for meals, snacks, or cooking lessons.
- **Celebration:** Consider hosting a small event to celebrate the garden's success. This could include a picnic with food from the garden, art projects, or a garden party. Include families in the celebration.

Step 5: Evaluate and adjust based on observation.

- **Long-Term Care:** Consider how the garden will be cared for in the long term, especially during school breaks. You could involve families, volunteers, or local master gardeners.
- **Expanding the Garden:** As the children's knowledge grows, you might expand the garden, add new features (e.g., a composting area or butterfly garden), or rotate crops each season.



Shading

Outdoor shade at child care centers is very important because it helps keep kids safe and cool while they play. When it's hot outside, shaded areas give kids a place to play without getting too hot or getting sunburned. This helps kids keep their energy up and prevents them from feeling too tired or sick. Shaded areas let kids play outside longer, which helps them get stronger and better at things like running, jumping, and playing games. It also makes outdoor play more fun, so kids enjoy playing outside even more.

Step-by-Step Guide for Shade

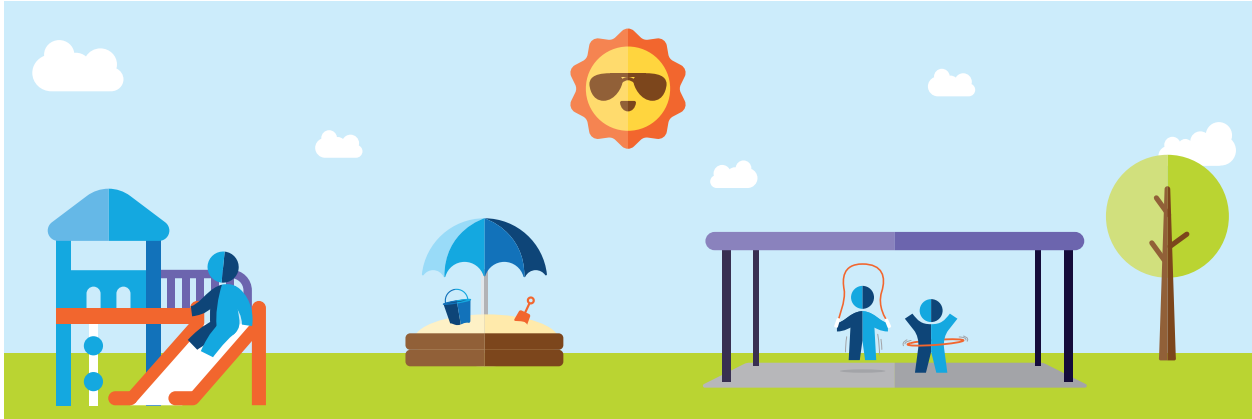
Step 1: Assess outdoor space and determine designated play areas.

- **Identify Key Areas:** Determine where children spend the most time outdoors, such as play areas, sandbox zones, seating areas, or outdoor classrooms. These are the areas where shading will be most beneficial.
- **Consider Sun Exposure:** Track the sun's movement to identify areas that get the most direct sunlight, particularly during peak hours (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.).
- **Age Group Considerations:** Different age groups may require varying amounts of shade. Toddlers and infants may need more shaded areas, as they are more sensitive to the sun.



Step 2: Identify and gather necessary equipment.

- **Shade Sails:** These are a cost-effective and customizable option. Shade sails are large, triangular or rectangular fabric panels that can be stretched across a framework to block the sun. They provide versatile coverage and come in various colors and sizes.
- **Shade Structures:** Permanent shade structures made of metal, wood, or other materials can provide a long-lasting solution. These may include pergolas, gazebos, or awnings, which are sturdy and can cover larger areas.
- **Shade Trees:** Planting trees is an environmentally friendly option that provides natural shade. Choose fast-growing, non-toxic trees with broad canopies, such as maple, oak, or locust trees. Be mindful of any potential allergens or fruit that may create messes.
- **Portable Shade:** For areas that require flexible or temporary shade, consider using portable shade umbrellas or pop-up tents. These are particularly useful for events, activities, or when the sun shifts during the day.
- **Outdoor Canopies:** Large fabric canopies with sidewalls can be installed over playgrounds or rest areas to provide full shade coverage and protection from wind or rain.



Step 3: Implement outdoor structured and free play sessions in your daily schedule.

- **Designated Rest Areas:** Set up shaded zones with seating where children can take breaks, read, or rest. This area could include benches, picnic tables, or outdoor cushions.
- **Shaded Play Areas:** Ensure active play areas, such as swings, climbing frames, or slides, have adequate shade to protect children from overheating. A shade structure over these areas is especially important for summer months.
- **Educational Spaces:** If your childcare center holds outdoor lessons or group activities, set up shaded spaces for those sessions. This could include shaded tables or areas for storytelling or crafts.

Step 4: Evaluate and adjust based on observation.

- **Observe Sun Coverage:** Throughout the year, observe how the shade performs during different seasons and times of day. Adjust or add additional shade options if certain areas still receive too much direct sunlight.
- **Adapt to Changes:** As the children grow and the outdoor space is used differently, you may need to adjust or expand your shaded areas. Consider expanding shade structures as the center adds more outdoor activities.



Naturalized Learning Environments

A “naturalized learning environment” is a special type of outdoor play area that uses nature to help kids learn and play. This means using things like trees, plants, rocks, and gardens in the playground. These natural things make kids curious, encourage them to play, and help them work together with others. Making a naturalized learning area can be simple and doesn’t have to cost a lot of money. It can start with small changes using things you already have, like adding plants or creating spaces where kids can move from one activity to another. When kids play in areas with more nature, they can be more active and have fun while learning from the world around them.

Step-by-Step Guide for Naturalized Learning Environments

Step 1: Assess outdoor space and determine designated play areas.

- **Evaluate the Available Area:** Assess the size and layout of the outdoor space. Take note of sunlight, shaded areas, soil type, and any existing features (like trees, bushes, or paths).
- **Identify Key Zones:** Consider which areas will serve different functions: quiet nature exploration zones, active play areas, sensory gardens, or areas for building and creative play.
- **Safety and Accessibility:** Ensure the space is safe for children to explore, with soft surfaces, child-friendly plants, and no hazards like sharp objects or toxic plants.

Step 2: Identify and gather necessary equipment.

- **Outdoor Seating:** set up wooden benches, picnic tables, cushions, mats, or tree stumps and logs.

- **Natural Play Materials:**
 - **Loose Parts:** Items like large stones, logs, sticks, pine cones, leaves, acorns, and branches can be used for building, creative play, and sensory exploration.
 - **Wooden Blocks:** Large, natural wooden blocks or logs that children can stack, balance, or use to create imaginative structures.
 - **Sand and Water Play Tools:** Buckets, shovels, and scoops for engaging children in sand and water play, encouraging exploration of natural elements.
- **Exploration Tools:**
 - **Magnifying Glass:** For observing small plants, insects, and other natural elements up close.
 - **Bug Catchers or Insect Nets:** Safe containers or nets for capturing and examining insects or small animals.
 - **Binoculars:** Small, child-friendly binoculars for birdwatching or viewing distant features like trees or plants.
 - **Field Guides:** Books or laminated cards with information on local plants, trees, insects, and animals to encourage learning through exploration.
- **Natural Art Supplies:** Materials such as leaves, flowers, twigs, stones, clay, and bark that children can use for creating nature-inspired art projects.

Step 3: Implement outdoor structured and free play sessions in your daily schedule.

- **Engaging Learning Activities:** Activities like nature journaling, scavenger hunts, and storytelling are great ways to encourage children to explore and learn in a fun, hands-on way. These activities help children develop their creativity, problem-solving skills, and ability to express themselves, all while enjoying the outdoors and using their imagination.

Step 4: Evaluate and adjust based on observation.

- **Observe Children's Interaction:** Watch how children engage with the naturalized environment and adjust the space based on their interests and learning needs. For example, if they are drawn to a particular type of plant or animal, consider expanding that area.
- **Ongoing Maintenance:** Regularly check the plants, structures, and pathways to ensure everything remains safe and in good condition. Involve children in the upkeep as part of their learning process.
- **Seasonal Updates:** Adapt the outdoor space for different seasons by adding seasonal plants, activities, or learning opportunities (e.g., birdwatching in the winter or growing vegetables in the spring).

Curved or Looped Path

A curved or loop path in a child care center's outdoor space is a fun and exciting way for kids to explore, move, and play. Unlike a straight path, a curved or loop path makes children want to wander around and see different parts of the playground. The gentle curves slow them down, which helps them pay attention to things around them, like plants, bugs, or the weather. These paths can also help guide kids from one play area to another and give them a chance to walk, run, or ride bikes and scooters, helping them get exercise and have fun!

Step-by-Step Guide for Curved or Looped Paths

Step 1: Assess outdoor space and determine designated play areas.



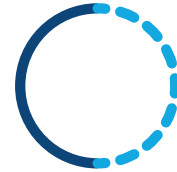
Evaluate the Layout

Begin by assessing the overall layout of your outdoor area. Identify the areas where curved paths would be most beneficial, such as between play zones, sensory gardens, shaded areas, or outdoor classrooms.



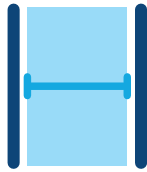
Consider Traffic Flow

Think about how children will move through the space. A looped or curved path should connect different areas naturally, avoiding congestion and creating a smooth flow of movement.



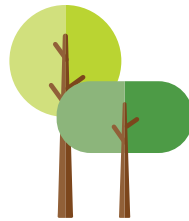
Curved vs. Looped

Decide if you want a gently curved path or a full loop. A looped path may encircle a central area (such as a garden or play structure), while a curved path can meander and create a more organic design.



Path Width

Ensure the path is wide enough for children to walk, run, or ride tricycles safely. Aim for a width of at least 3-4 feet to allow easy movement and ensure it's accessible to children of all abilities.



Integrate Natural Features

Incorporate natural elements like trees, shrubs, or rocks along the path. Curved paths work especially well when they follow the contours of the land or wind through natural landscapes, giving the impression of a more organic, nature-inspired space.



Consider Sensory Experiences

Incorporate different textures along the path to stimulate the senses. For example, you can use gravel, wood chips, or bark along parts of the path to encourage tactile exploration. You could also integrate plants that have strong scents or bright colors along the route.

Step 2: Identify and gather necessary equipment.

- **Concrete Materials:**

- **Type of Concrete:** Choose a high-quality, durable concrete mix suitable for outdoor use. Reinforced concrete is often best for paths in high-traffic areas.
- **Non-Slip Surface:** Select a non-slip surface to prevent accidents, especially during rainy weather. Textured concrete or exposed aggregate finishes provide traction while still being aesthetically pleasing.
- **Edge Treatments:** Plan how the edges of the path will be finished. Options include straight edges, rounded edges, or curbed edges, depending on the style you want to achieve.

- **Eco-Friendly Path Materials:** Select materials that are safe, durable, and child-friendly. Some great options include:
 - **Wood Chips or Mulch:** Soft, organic materials that work well in curved paths and provide a natural look.
 - **Gravel or Pea Gravel:** Durable and easy to walk on, but ensure the gravel is small enough to avoid tripping hazards.
 - **Rubber Pavers:** Recycled rubber is a safe, non-slip surface ideal for areas where children are likely to run.
 - **Flagstone or Pavers:** Natural stone or eco-friendly pavers can be laid to form a more structured, but still flexible, path.
- **Ensure Stability:** Choose materials that won't shift or cause tripping hazards as children walk on them. This is especially important in high-traffic areas or places where children are running or biking.

Step 3: Implement outdoor structured and free play sessions in your daily schedule.



Nature Exploration

Use the curved path as a way to guide children toward different areas of nature exploration. You could set up a small outdoor learning station along the path for children to observe plants, bugs, or weather patterns.



Creative Play Zones

Designate areas along the path for creative play, such as a spot for storytelling, building, or role-playing. Add natural materials like logs, stones, or sand to encourage imaginative play.



Physical Activity

Encourage children to use the path for running, riding bikes or tricycles, or even engaging in obstacle course activities that can follow the curved path.

Step 4: Evaluate and adjust based on observation.

- **Regular Upkeep:** Maintain the path by keeping it free of weeds, debris, and any materials that may cause tripping hazards. Replenish loose materials like mulch or wood chips as needed to keep the path in good condition.
- **Safety Checks:** Periodically check the path for any issues, such as erosion, uneven surfaces, or broken materials. Ensure that it remains safe for children to use.



Section 5

Conclusion and Key Take-Aways

In conclusion, making a fun and safe outdoor play area at your child care center is important for helping kids grow in many ways. By adding natural things like plants, fun play equipment, places to explore, and safe paths, you can create a space where children can learn, be creative, and play with others. A well-designed outdoor area helps kids stay healthy, learn new things, and feel free while connecting with nature.

Key Take-Aways

- Outdoor play is important for children's **physical, mental, and social development**.¹
- Outdoor play is important no matter what the weather is that day. Being able to adapt and let the children still get outside, in a safe manner, is crucial.
- Providers should plan, adapt, modify, and model general ways to support students with disabilities.
- Infants < 1 year should participate in outdoor play 2 or more times per day.
- Toddlers 1-2 years should participate in outdoor play 3 or more times per day for 60 or more minutes.
- Preschoolers 3-5 years should participate in outdoor play 3 or more times per day for 90 or more minutes.
- The outdoor environment at a child care center consists of four key components: outdoor activities, gardening, portable play equipment, and the overall outdoor design.

Section 6

References

1. Corcoran L, Steinley K, Grady S. *Early childhood program participation: results from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2016*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, NCES 2017101REV. Washington, DC: US Department of Education; 2017.
2. Webster EK, Kepper MM, Saha S, Beyl RA, Kracht CL, Romain JS, Staiano AE. Painted playgrounds for preschoolers' physical activity and fundamental motor skill improvement: a randomized controlled pilot trial of effectiveness. *BMC Pediatr*. 2023;23(1):455. doi:10.1186/s12887-023-04260-2