



A PLACE TO PLAY

THE IDEA

As children grow they need many types of activities to develop their senses and to help their bodies to develop well. Play helps children to grow and to learn new skills, to share and cooperate with others and to use language. Excellent playthings can be found in the local community and made with materials that cost nothing. Everyday activities offer many opportunities to have fun and learn about new things. However, many children would like interesting and safe places to play, especially if they live in very crowded towns but also if they live in rural areas.

Older children and adults can help to make play places for younger children. They can find new places or improve the place where children play already by making it safer and more interesting. Older children need areas to play too. Often separate play areas are made for younger children and older children. The play equipment can be made to suit the different stages of the children's development. Younger children can play safely while older children can enjoy more challenging play activities and equipment without disrupting the younger children.

Understanding

All children need to be active. They like to run and to play tag. They like to climb and slide, to swing and jump. This kind of play is not a waste of time. It is very important because it helps children to:

- Use different parts of the body, especially their eyes and hands together.
- Use voice and gestures to communicate with others.
- Try out new ideas and activities.
- Use their imaginations and solve problems.
- Learn to share and cooperate with others.

In this way children learn new skills and find out for themselves about new things. All this helps children once they start school and makes it easier for them to learn. (See Activity Sheets 1.1 and 1.2 on understanding why play is important and for many ideas for play activities.)

Finding out more

Children can find out where children play and what kinds of play activities children enjoy. Children probably already have a place where they play.

Children can find out:

- Is it safe?
- Is it big enough for plenty of activity?
- How can it be improved to make it safer?
- How can it be made more fun and interesting?
- Would it be better to make a new place?

Planning and doing

With adult and youth support children can plan to **organise** play areas and activities in different places. Children can discuss possible action and make a plan.

They can ask:

- Who can help us? Teachers, parents, health and community workers?
- How do we start?
- Where can we play?

At home children can talk to parents about setting aside a special place for children's play materials and equipment.

At school they can discuss with the teacher or head teacher how to set up play areas. They can organise and help to care for materials and equipment. They may be able to persuade the head teacher that the

Many children play under the two big trees near Sunil's village. So the children in a local youth group undertook to improve the play area there. They cut off the dead branches from the tree and hung ropes with tyres on them from the strong branches. They made steps in difficult places so that children could climb the trees. They cleared the high grass and every few days they go round to pick up rubbish and make sure that there is no glass or sharp metal that could cut the younger children who play there. The place is safe now and even more fun to play in.

school grounds can be used as a neighbourhood play centre after school hours.

At clinics and other meeting places children can organise and care for equipment and materials for children attending the clinic.

In the community they can look for sites that are safe and suitable for children's play. Older children can **collect** and **organise play materials** and ideas from many different people and places in the community. All communities are rich in materials for play activities. These may be scrap materials like bits of wood, polystyrene and metal, matchboxes, plastic containers and tins, old tyres, waste paper and packaging. Or they can be things that are grown, like gourds, coconuts, seeds and seedpods, cornstalks and grasses, or dye from local plants. Sand, stones, charcoal and clay make good play material too. All are free. Activity Sheets 1.1 and 1.2 **Playing with Young Children** have

many ideas for making toys from these materials. Younger children will use their imagination and find their own ways to play with them.

Older children can help to store and care for the materials.

- Can a special place – a shed or lockable box – for children's play materials be set aside?
- Will shopkeepers provide them with materials to store equipment – old boxes, empty packets, ends of cloth, for example?

Children can **make equipment** with adult and youth support. Natural materials can be used to make play equipment. Soil itself can be used for making slides. Fallen trees and steep banks are good places to climb and slide. Off-cuts of lino or the sides of cardboard boxes are good for sliding down. Stepping stones or tree stumps can be placed far apart so that children have to stretch their legs to step from one to the other.

Including all children

Building a 'playground for all' is a good way to bring the community together. The playground in the picture is built from local low-cost materials and uses simple construction methods. The playground brings children and their families together through play. Children with disabilities and their parents can try out different playthings and exercise equipment. This is a safe and fun place for children who may be unwell and frail. Older children can have their own area where they play vigorous games and try out more challenging equipment that would not be safe for younger children to use.



Trees have many different uses. They can be used for climbing, perhaps with a few steps built into difficult places. Or simple swings made from rope and old tyres can be hung from strong branches. A thick rope with a series of knots about 30 cm apart is good for climbing up into a tree. A slide could be built to come down out of a tree.

In a village on the border of Thailand Karen and older children made a playground next to their school. The equipment was almost entirely made from bamboo that they cut themselves in the forest. Adults provided old tyres and rope for swings.

Trees can also provide shade for younger children playing with sand and water. An old tyre can be cut in half and filled with water. The other half of the tyre can be filled with sand and played in using bits of wood and different containers such as gourds and cut-off plastic bottles. Old tyres can also be used for tunnels. Younger children can experiment with materials that float (wood, plastic) or sink (stones, metal). They can fill up and pour out water using different sized containers and blow bubbles in the water with bamboo pipes and reeds. Where there are no trees children can still climb if there are climbing frames. Seesaws and balancing boards can be made from old bits of wood.

Appropriate paper technology (APT)

Equipment such as carts, balance boards and seats for swings can be made from paper, card and paste using a method called Appropriate Paper Technology (APT). Layers of card are glued one on top of the other with paste made from flour and water and strapped together with strips of paper soaked in paste. The finished pieces are dried in the sun. The results are very strong and long lasting. It is a good way of making special chairs, boards for lying on and walkers for children with disabilities as well as for making play equipment.

Supervise the play areas and help younger children

Older children can help younger ones by:

- Organising some of their games.
- Marking out areas of the play area with lines for games such as hop scotch.
- Giving them good ideas about how to use equipment and materials.
- Giving out equipment and later collecting it and putting it away.
- Organising the repair and replacement of equipment and materials, and teaching younger children to notice and report weaknesses.
- Supervising their play to make sure they are safe.
- Giving first aid and getting help when accidents happen (see Activity Sheet 4.1 **Preventing Accidents**).

Discussing the results of activities

After doing these activities children ask each other questions such as:

- Have we been able to make better places to play? If not, why not?
- How many children use the play area during a fixed period of time (one week, for example)?
- Which children use it and what for?
- How much do they use it?
- What other equipment/activities would children like in the play area?
- Is the equipment cared for?
- How many older children supervise play activities and referee games?

Doing it better

With adult support children can plan to make even better play equipment, ensure that the equipment is well cared for and the area is well supervised.

USING THE SHEET

Teachers and head teachers can organise play areas with older children, encourage them, and be concerned with safety. The school might be willing to set aside ground for an improved play area for all children. Making play equipment and materials might be included in craft lessons. Teachers in training can start a play area near their own college or teaching practice school, after surveying community needs.

Community and youth group leaders can discuss these ideas about how better play areas can be organised. They can help older children by teaching useful skills in refereeing, making equipment and first aid. They can also provide resources, and help secure land and finance.

Parents and others in the community can provide specialist skills and labour, help in organisation and supervision and contribute materials.

Local media, including press and radio, can explain ideas about better play, and report on progress and the success of play area projects.

School children in Hanoi, Vietnam petitioned the local People's Committee to help make the area next to their school a safe and pleasant place to play. Funds were found to help to drain the area to prevent flooding so that it could be used throughout the year. The children agreed to keep the area clean and to plant flowers and shrubs to make it beautiful.

Appropriate Paper Technology (APT) –
A manual is available from:
Mail Order Department,
Intermediate Technology Bookshop,
103-105 Southampton Row,
London
WC1B 4HH, UK.

Tel: + 44 (0)20 7436 9761/Fax: + 44 (0)20
7436 2013

For further information, please contact:
Child-to-Child Trust,
Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way,
London
WC1H 0AL, UK.

For further information on Appropriate Paper Technology see website at:

<http://www.apbt.org.uk> and