

The Developmental Benefits of Playgrounds

An essential tool in a child's development

Look around any typical neighborhood playground and you are likely to see kids laughing, swinging and running. It may look like frivolous fun, but serious learning is also going on. Playgrounds are outdoor hands-on classrooms of their own, with tremendous learning opportunities for kids of all ages. A wide body of research shows that children gain many valuable benefits from playground play.

Physical Benefits

The first obvious benefit is that the running, jumping, swinging and climbing that goes on at playgrounds helps keep children physically fit

and healthy. Although kids' activity levels vary during outside play, the energy expended is certainly greater than when children watch television or play video games. Research has shown that the physical benefits of play include learning reflexes and movement control; increasing flexibility and balancing skills; and learning to walk, run, jump, throw, climb, slide and swing. These activities all lead to improved physical health and fitness. Increased physical activity for children has proven to be effective. Studies show that children who are more physically active are healthier when it comes to blood pressure,



cholesterol and insulin levels. Pediatric experts say parents should make sure 3- and 4-year-olds get at least an hour of active play each day.

Social Benefits

Children have many opportunities to move in and out of group play while on playgrounds. Solitary play

promotes creativity and independence. Unlike the structured play of recess or organized sports and games, playground free play allows children to play any way they choose, supported by a wide range of structures and spaces. While playing alone, kids can also learn social

(Continued on page 8)



View Connections on the Web!

Thanks to our friends at Parent to Parent of New York State, *Preschool Connections* can be viewed online at the Parent to Parent Web site. Visit <http://www.parenttoparentnys.org/> Go to "Information," then "Library," and then "Newsletters"

In This Issue...

What's Happening	page 2
How to Read Aloud	page 3
Resources	page 4
Health & Development: Mitochondrial Disease & more	page 5
Media: Vaccine Safety	page 6
Ask Nancy: Understanding Four-Year-Olds	page 7

About Helping Hands School

Helping Hands School is a private, nonprofit preschool for birth to 5 with special needs. Situated on 60 acres of rolling hills, woods, and fields in Clifton Park (Exit 9 off the Northway), Helping Hands School currently provides special education preschool and early intervention services to children from Saratoga, Rennselaer, Schenectady and Albany counties. A nursery school for typically developing children is also offered.

Services

- A continuum of services for preschool children with disabilities, including various integrated and self-contained special education classroom models.
- Early Intervention home and community-based services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays.
- Intensive program options for children with a diagnosis along the autism spectrum.
- Developmental play groups for toddlers with special needs.
- Special Education Itinerant Teacher services provided in home, nursery school, daycare and community settings.
- Related services, including speech/language, occupational, and physical therapies.
- Comprehensive evaluations for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers suspected of having a developmental delay or disability.
- Family support services available including parent support groups and social work services.
- Parent education workshops and newsletters for families of preschoolers and families of children with special needs, birth to 5.

About the Newsletter

Preschool Connections is a quarterly publication of Helping Hands School. The newsletter provides parents with up-to-date information about issues related to raising children of all abilities. Readers are welcome to copy and share information from this publication, but please credit Helping Hands School and *Preschool Connections*.

The newsletter is made possible by the FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES through the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disability (OMRDD).



Helping Hands School
41 Werner Road
Clifton Park, NY 12065
(518) 664-5066

Editor: Deborah Reed
Artwork: Dave Ross
Contributors: Kathy Ross
Dianne Burke
Nancy Cupolo
Patti Crisafulli
Ed Lake
Cheryl Ryan



Happenings

Family Events

Saratoga Springs Public Library. The library is a hoppin' place this summer! Highlights include: The Zucchini Brothers (July 9); The Last Dragon by The Puppet People (July 16); Concert in the Park: Kidstuff (July 31); and Amazing Mr. Twisty (August 6). *Call for a complete listing, 584-1198.*

The circus is coming to town! Every summer a company of talented Smirkus Troupers, ages 10-18, go on a 2-month performance tour around New England. This renowned youth circus returns to the Spa City for another great four shows on July 8 and 9 at the Saratoga Race Course. Get ready for a 750-seat European style one-ring Big Top Tent experience. *Call for tickets, 1-877-SMIRKUS.*

Saratoga County Fair. Rides, animals, displays and fun! Saratoga County Fairgrounds in Ballston Spa, July 15-20., 9 am to midnight. Admission: \$7-\$10 adults; \$3 children ages 6-12; under 6 are free. *Call 885-9701.*

NYRA Open House. Discover Saratoga before the official start of the thoroughbred meet. Enjoy music, pony rides and family entertainment at the Saratoga Race Course on July 20, 11:00 am -4:00 pm. *Call 584-6200.*

Berry pickin'. Take your family to Winney's Farm in Bacon Hill (near Schuylerville) for blueberries (695-5547) and Hand Melon Farm in Greenwich for strawberries and fall raspberries (692-7502).

Double M Pro Rodeo. Ballston Spa has its own "Old West," with bull riding, barrel racing, clowns and much more every Friday night. A Tennessee Style BBQ starts at 6:00 pm and the rodeo action begins at 8:00 pm. *Call 885-9543.*

18th-Century Day. Step back in time at the historic Schuyler House! The grounds abound with 18th-century activities, including puppet shows, music, oxen cart rides, blacksmithing, basket weaving, chair caning, candle making, tinsmithing, and more. August 10, 12 noon to 5:00 pm. Free! *Call 664-9821.*

Section 504 (What's that mean?)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a federal law that protects the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. This law is closely intertwined with IDEA. Children, who qualify under this law, receive services and/or accommodations in the public school system without being classified under IDEA and their school districts Committee on Special Education.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE? Students whose illness, physical or mental disability substantially limits one or more life activities, such as caring for oneself, seeing, breathing, learning and walking are protected under Section 504. Examples of students who are eligible include children with asthma, diabetes, allergies, cerebral palsy, cancer, HIV related illness, epilepsy, dyslexia, dysgraphia, spina bifida, ADD/ADHD and children with chronic health conditions.





Books for Kids

How you Read Aloud Makes a Difference

Interactive reading style is more beneficial when reading aloud to your child

If you want your children to perform well in school, start reading aloud to them now. Research has shown that young children who are read to more frequently score higher on vocabulary tests and school readiness assessments. These children show significant developmental gains in language and literacy---the single strongest predictor of school success. Preschoolers who develop a love of reading become better readers, with academic advantages persisting over time. In comparison, children who are poor readers in their first year of school are likely to remain so.

Interestingly, more important than the frequency of reading aloud is the parent's style of reading. The

more you read, the better, but a recent article published in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood* suggests that an interactive reading style has a greater impact on a child's language development. "Interactive" means asking children questions about the story that move it beyond the page, like "What do you think the caterpillar *is* going to do next?" Such an exchange "requires them to really use their language skills," says Elisabeth Duursma, director of research initiatives at Reach Out and Read and lead author on the study. It's as simple as using a picture book as a springboard to talking about your child's own experiences, connecting the story in the book to the real world. Parents can also offer explanations along the lines of "he cried because he

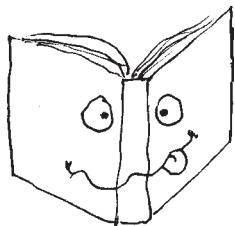
was sad." These open-ended discussions give children a chance to learn to talk about their own feelings. Children relate to David's devilish antics and remorse, for example, in *No, No David!* and the sadness of seeing a birthday cake ruined by the dog in *Benny Bakes a Cake*. Besides helping children learn about their world and enhance language skills, interactive reading becomes a mutually enjoyable activity for parents and children to share. When children read books with someone they love, they learn to love books and eventually will become better readers themselves.



Who reads the most?

A recent report examined how many parents in the United States read daily to their children age 5 and younger. Researchers gathered state-by-state data on reading frequency from a national survey.

Results indicated that less than half of U.S. parents reported reading to their children on a daily basis. States in the Northeast, especially Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire, had the highest rates of daily reading (61-68%) and Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi had the lowest (38-42%). There was a strong correlation with children's later reading abilities. Fourth grade reading proficiency scores were highest in Massachusetts, Maine, and Connecticut, while the lowest scores were in Louisiana and Mississippi. Not surprisingly, household income and parents' educational level played a role. (Source: http://www.reachoutandread.org/press_chart.html)



2008 Summer Reading Program at Saratoga Springs Public Library

Spend your summer reading great books! The library will have bookmarks, reading records, certificates, free ice cream, and lots of prizes for all! Come to the Children's Room now through Tuesday, September 2 to participate. Children ages 3 and up are invited to take part.

A special party for all participants on August 27 will feature Toukie the Clown and Mark Wade, ventriloquist. Call 584-1198 for more details.

Parent Resources

Best Playgrounds

Kids' Creekside Village at Kelly Park, Ballston Spa

This brand new, community-built playground is a real winner. Highlights: A "Tot Lot" for ages 2-5; accessible marimbas (musical tone bars that children can use); lots of ramps; places to run and hide; and equipment that can be used by all children.

Burgess-Kimball Memorial Park, Milton

Highlights: Area is entirely fenced and largely shaded. Smaller play area for tots; old-fashioned see-saws can be used by young children with supervision; toddler swings.

Gavin Park, Wilton

Highlights: Big structure is suitable for older children, but there is also equipment for young ones, including 2 toddler swings.

Outside of Saratoga County:

The Crossings, Colonie

This huge, 130 acre-park opened in 2003 and is definitely worth a visit. The park has walking trails, a tree maze to explore, tons of picnic tables in sun and shade, a 3-acre pond with ducks and fish to admire, and a "barrier-free" playground. Visit <http://www.colonie.org/parks/crossings/>



Product Recall

Swing Sets

About 11,000 Adventure Play Sets and Create N Adventure Wooden Play Sets have been recalled. Backyard Leisure

has received 114 reports of glider hangers breaking, including 3 reports of minor injuries to children. The swing sets are made of wood and feature various types of gliders, slides and swings. Consumers should remove the gliders from the swing sets and contact Backyard Leisure to receive free replacement glider hangers and repair instructions. Call 866-546-7902.

Merry-Go-Rounds Sold Exclusively at Toys R Us

About 15,000 Playsafe Spinning Quad Merry-Go-Rounds are being recalled. The inner bearing on the merry-go-round can fail, causing the seat assembly to suddenly drop to the ground. This poses a fall hazard to children. The merry-go-round has four yellow plastic seats and black and silver metal bars. Consumers should immediately take the merry-go-round from children and return it to Toys R Us for a full refund, or contact Pacific Cycle to receive a free retrofit kit at 877-564-2261.

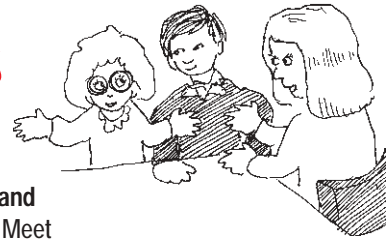
Programs

Wildwood

July 17: Recreational

Opportunities for Children and Adults with Special Needs.

Meet representatives from the following programs and learn about the fun activities they offer: STEP (Saratoga Therapeutic Equestrian Program); Albany Cougars Hockey Program; STRIDE; Special Needs Sports; and Wildwood Elementary, Adolescent and Adult Recreation. Latham Office. 7:00-8:30 pm. For more information, call Gladys Askew, 640-3318.



PESI

September 26: Over 75 Quick, On the Spot Techniques for Children with Emotional and Behavior Problems. Jennifer Wilke-Deaton, MA, LPA will present. Albany. Visit www.pesi.com or call 800-844-8260.

Parent to Parent of NYS and NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

September 27: Collaborative Problem Solving for the Explosive Child. J. Stuart Ablon, Ph.D. and author of *The Explosive Child*, will provide an overview of a model of treatment called "Collaborative Problem Solving" (CPS). The CPS model helps adults teach cognitive skills while reducing the frequency and intensity of explosive/noncompliant episodes at home, school, and other settings. Albany. For more information, call 381-4370.

Center for Autism Related Disorders

November 7: Annual CARD Conference. Keynote presentation is *Instructional Strategies for Students with ASDs* by Ilene Schwartz, Ph.D., of the University of Washington. Desmond Hotel and Conference Center, Albany. For more information, call 866-442-2574 or visit www.albany.edu/psy/autism

Epilepsy Foundation

November 7: Annual Conference. For more information, call 456-7501.

Upstate NY Autism Awareness

Monthly events. This not-for-profit organization was formed by local parents of children with autism. The mission is to make a real difference in the lives of the children affected with autism and other developmental disabilities by providing assistance, resources, and education to families in the community. To that end, the group sponsors monthly family events, as well as fundraisers and other programs. For more information, call Jennifer Livingston, 632-9621 or visit <http://www.autismawareness.mysite.com/index.html>

What is...

Mitochondrial Disease?

A mitochondrion is part of every cell in the body that contains genetic material. Mitochondria are responsible for processing oxygen and converting substances from the foods we eat into energy for essential cell functions.

Mitochondrial and metabolic medical conditions are now referred to as mitochondrial cytopathies. Mitochondrial cytopathies actually include more than 40 different identified diseases that have different genetic features. The common factor among these diseases is that the mitochondria are unable to completely burn food and oxygen in order to generate energy.

The types of mitochondrial diseases are categorized according to the organ systems affected and symptoms present. Mitochondrial diseases might affect the cells of the brain, nerves, muscles, kidneys, heart, liver, eyes, ears, or pancreas. Depending on how severe the mitochondrial disorder is, the illness can range in severity from mild to fatal.

Symptoms vary, but may include: poor growth; loss of muscle coordination or muscle weakness; visual and/or hearing problems; developmental delays; mental retardation; heart, liver or kidney disease; gastrointestinal disorders, severe constipation; respiratory disorders; diabetes; increased risk of infection; neurological problems; thyroid dysfunction; and dementia.

About one in 4,000 children in the United States will develop mitochondrial disease by the age of 10 years.

Diagnosis of mitochondrial disease can be invasive, expensive, time-consuming, and labor-intensive. Therefore, evaluation is not taken lightly. The evaluation includes a combination of clinical observations and laboratory tests. *SOURCE: Cleveland Clinic Center for Consumer Health Information*

Health and Development

Food Additives and ADHD. A properly supervised trial eliminating colors and preservatives from the diet of hyperactive children should be considered a part of the standard treatment, says an editorial in the *British Medical Journal*. Although a substantial body of evidence shows a link between attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and artificial food colorings and preservatives, removing them is still considered as an alternative rather than a standard treatment for ADHD, writes Professor Andrew Kemp from the University of Sydney.

Data published in 2007 showed that normal (not hyperactive) children were significantly more hyperactive after they ate a mixture of food colorings and a preservative (sodium benzoate), with obvious implications for children with ADHD.

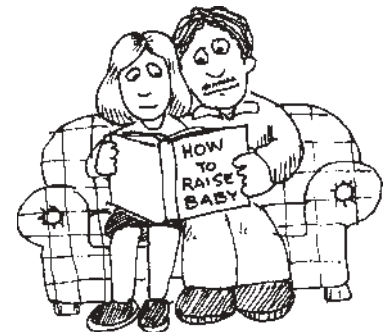
In light of these findings, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) reviewed the evidence linking preservatives and colorings with hyperactive behaviors from 22 studies between 1975 and 1994.

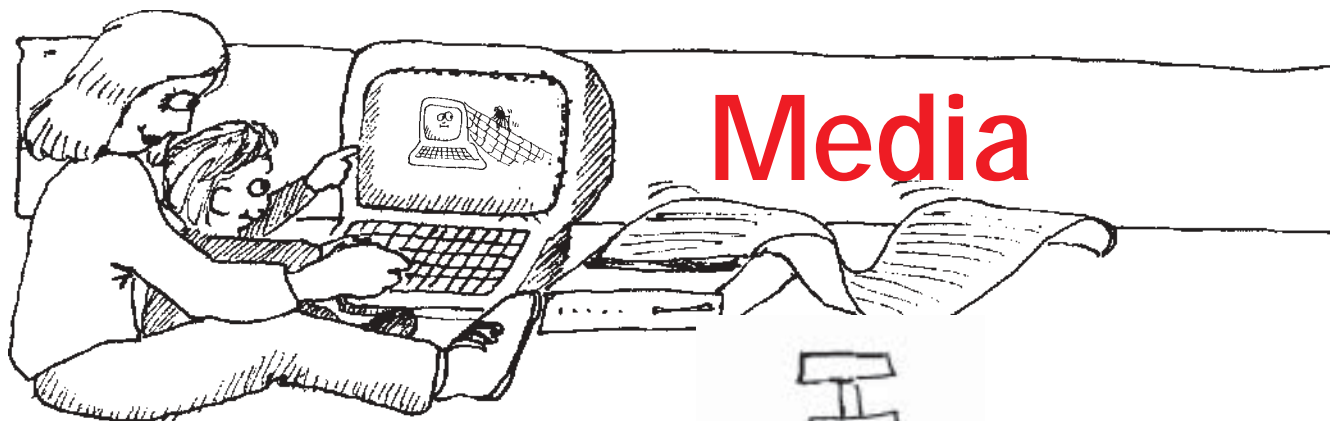
Sixteen of the studies reported positive effects in at least some of the children. However, the EFSA pointed out that hyperactivity has a wide range of social and biological causes, and exclusively focusing on food additives may “detract from the provision of adequate treatment” for children with the disorder. But, argues Kemp, to discount the accumulating evidence of dietary factors may also do this.

Increasing numbers of children are taking drugs for hyperactivity. Removing colors and preservatives is a relatively harmless intervention, so a properly supervised and evaluated trial period of eliminating them should be considered as part of the standard treatment, he concludes.

Sleep and Parents' Behavior. A recent study published in *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* suggest that parents' behavior may contribute to sleep issues in children. Researchers at the University of Montreal studied 987 pairs of parents and children. They enrolled the families when the child was 5 months old and continued to observe them until the child turned 6. Parents filled out yearly questionnaires that detailed their child's sleeping habits, such as having bad dreams, sleeping less than 10 hours a night, and taking more than 15 minutes to fall asleep. Parents also reported their own behaviors, indicating, for instance, if they stayed with the child until he or she fell asleep and how they responded to nighttime awakenings (such as feeding the child, taking the child out of bed, or bringing the child into bed with them).

The researchers discovered that more sleep problems occurred when parents gave food or drink to a child who was 2 1/2 to 3 1/2. This parental response may be a holdover from a child's earliest months when parents interpreted nighttime crying as hunger. There was a lower risk of sleep problems in older children when a parent stayed with the child while the child was falling asleep. However, parents' taking a child into their own bed after awakening was associated with more sleep problems.





Media

Vaccine Safety

Despite the media hype, research clearly indicates that mercury in vaccines does not cause autism

Earlier this summer more than 8000 people showed up for a “Green Our Vaccines” march in Washington, D.C. Leading the rally were celebrities Jim Carrey and Jenny McCarthy, who joined with other national autism advocacy groups to press for the elimination of toxins from children’s vaccines and to change children’s vaccination schedules.

McCarthy’s 6-year-old son has autism, and the actress has become a vocal advocate for more autism-related research.

McCarthy and Carrey said that while they do support immunization, they and their allies believe children receive “too many vaccines, too soon, many of which are toxic.”

There has been much heated debate in the news about the link between autism and childhood vaccinations. Many parents of children with autism believe that vaccines, especially those containing the mercury-based preservative thimerosal, are to blame for bringing on their children’s autistic symptoms. But the

mainstream medical community has repeatedly said there is no proven link between vaccines and autism. In an effort to reduce childhood exposure to mercury and other heavy metals, thimerosal began being removed from kids’ vaccines in 1999. Now, vaccines for infants and young children contain no or very little thimerosal. Autism rates, nevertheless, continue to rise.

Parents have also voiced concern about “combination” vaccines, which protect against more than one disease with a single shot. For example, the MMR vaccine protects against measles, mumps and rubella. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, vaccines have been studied carefully and found to be safe. All vaccines contain antigens, explain medical authorities, which cause the immune system to do its work to fight (and protect the body from) infections. The general consensus among medical experts is that healthy children’s immune systems are equipped to handle these multiple exposures.



Parents who are concerned about their children getting too many shots may want to visit the following reputable Web sites for the most up-to-date information about vaccine safety:

National Network for Immunization Information

Offers a particularly good discussion on: “Do multiple vaccines overwhelm the immune system?”

http://immunizationinfo.org/immunization_issues_detail.cfv?id=140

US Food and Drug Administration

“Frequently Asked Questions About Thimerosal in Vaccines” has excellent information. Sample questions include: Why are some vaccines noted to be “thimerosal-free” while some are “thimerosal-reduced”? What are preservatives and why are they added to vaccines? and Why is exposure to mercury a concern?

<http://www.fda.gov/cber/vaccine/thimfaq.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Web site offers a thorough Vaccine Safety section.

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/concerns/multiplevaccines.htm>

American Academy of Pediatrics

“Facts for Parents About Vaccine Safety” is a relatively short statement that is easy to understand. <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/autismparentfacts.htm>

Vaccine Education Center of The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

The Center was launched in October 2000 to provide accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date information to parents and healthcare professionals about vaccines and the diseases they prevent. <http://www.chop.edu/consumer/jsp/division/generic.jsp?id=75689>

Ask Nancy



Nancy T. Cupolo is a regular contributor to Preschool Connections. A popular educational consultant and training specialist, Nancy draws on 27 years of teaching experience in special education, elementary education, and early childhood education, as well as many years as a college-level professor and administrator. Nancy is owner of her own consulting business, Children First. E-mail your questions to Nancy at ncupolo@nycap.rr.com

Understanding Four-Year-Olds

"I have a son who seems to be very bossy at times and he refuses to accept direction from others especially other children when he is playing with them. How can I help him to be more considerate?"

You have probably noticed by now that your son's playmates are important to him and that you're no longer the central focus of his life. He has begun to assert his own independence. This may be seen as "bossy" behavior, however it is very typical behavior for a four year old. He wants to be accepted by his peers yet he does not yet have all of the pro-social competency skills needed for interacting with others. These skills have to be taught by you, his primary role model. One of the most effective ways to do this is to build upon his strengths. By now he has developed the ability to take turns most of the time, to share once in awhile, and can abide by simple rules. Take some time to join him in playing simple board games such as Candy Land. Focus on playing and turn-taking, not winning, and reinforce these actions as you play together. Provide puzzles that you can work on together or that he can assemble with a friend (5-30 pieces). Outdoors, spend time investigating the world around him with 2 or 3 of his friends using simple tools such as his "observing glasses" or a magnifying glass, a butterfly net (or a white sheet to catch the bugs in the tall grass and observe them on the sheet); reinforce working together, taking turns, showing consideration, being a good observer and



a kind person. Identify a "leading scientist" for each outdoor trip and reverse the roles as needed to reinforce the time and place to "take charge" and "be a boss." While you're at it, enjoy the beauty of the outdoors as a true learning environment!

"Mia, my daughter, is four years old. I can understand her perfectly when she talks to me and so can her brother, however I've noticed that her teachers at child care and certain family members who do not see her all of the time keep asking her to repeat what she says. Should I be concerned?"

First, I would recommend that you watch Mia closely for a few days and notice if she has mastered any of the following skills: catching a ball, hopping on one foot, dressing herself with minimal adult assistance, takes care of toilet needs, participates in make-believe play, threads small beads, draws, and forms shapes out of clay. Next listen to her intently. Does she use prepositions such as *on*, *in* and *under* when she talks? Does she speak in complete sentences and use past tense in verbs (e.g., "Mommy went to work")? Does she state her full name and the name of other family members, answer when asked to do something, and recite simple songs? It is important that you observe all of your child's activities and take notes regarding your observations. Next pay close attention to her speech; does she pronounce the first and last consonants in words? What about the middle sounds? Does she substitute sounds such as a "d" for the "g" sound in "good?" You may have become accustomed to her speech and if others continue to notice that it is unintelligible this would warrant an evaluation. If you notice any other signs listed above I would refer her immediately for an assessment and consult with your classroom teacher.

(Playgrounds from page 1)

cues by observing group interactions without being a part of them.

When playing in groups, children learn important interaction skills. Spontaneous games that children create among themselves encourage participants to plan and make decisions, as well as make and understand strategies, rules and objectives. Whether it be a game of tag or fantasy play that makes a climbing structure a “castle,” with children assigned roles as “king,” “queen,” and “knight,” games teach children to negotiate, compromise, and work together. Children also learn to control themselves and tolerate their frustrations in a social setting because without abiding by the invented “rules,” the child is less likely to play successfully with his or her peers.

Specific playground equipment can foster social development. Research has

shown that platforms and decks provide children with places to congregate. Bridges and ramps provide kids with opportunities to play games. Swings and slides encourage kids to learn to take turns, and tunnels and roof-covered areas encourage group games and pretend play.

Making sure playground equipment and surfacing is accessible for all kids is one way to include *all* children. Research has shown that children assign value to those they can play with and those they cannot. Their perception is that those who play are contributors and those who don't play are not. Therefore, children with disabilities who are prevented from playing on playgrounds because of non-inclusive equipment or surfacing are already facing a disadvantage of being perceived by their peers as having less value than the children who are playing. This “contributor status” perception unfortunately

often carries on through life. Working to make playgrounds accessible to all is one way to make sure all children develop social skills and achieve critical peer status on equal ground.

Emotional Benefits

Free play encourages children to develop skills that build self-confidence and self-esteem, such as risk-taking, conflict resolution and imaginative dramatic play. Playground equipment like climbers and overhead hanging apparatuses presents children with physical challenges, which build a sense of accomplishment that leads to higher self-esteem.

Research has shown children use free play to express their emotions and to learn to deal with their fears and scary experiences. Free play allows children to express themselves completely, without holding back. Certain playground equipment fosters

experimentation, like tunnels and enclosed spaces, where kids can simulate being in a house, car or school. During free play, kids can use imaginative or pretend play to experience different feelings and outcomes. This allows them to break out of the limitations of their reality and experience new things. These experiences and feelings change as a child grows older. Preschoolers develop emotional strength and stability, while older children develop spontaneity and humor.

Start Today!

We are fortunate to have many quality playgrounds in Saratoga County, which are free and open to the public. Many provide equipment that is accessible to children with disabilities. We've listed our favorites in the Resource section on page 4. This summer, why not visit different playgrounds in the area and provide your child with both fun and learning.

Address Correction Requested

Helping Hands School
41 Werner Road
Clifton Park, NY 12065
(518) 664-5066

