



Psychological
Service Home
Visiting Teachers

Play Ideas

Outdoor learning

It's important for all children to experience the world outdoors but for some this may require extra planning and management.

Below are some ideas which could help to differentiate outdoor play experiences making them accessible to more children. You could use this as a starting point for discussion within your team and with parents and professionals involved, to see if there is anything in this document which you might use or adapt to meet the individual needs of a child in your setting.



Raised beds or planters can be filled with aromatic plants like lavender and thyme or sturdy or textured plants for children to handle and explore. Planters like this image have been created to allow easy wheelchair/buggy access. They can also be used for sand, water, general planting, exploratory play with loose parts or to manage small world toys in a contained space.



Riccardo Lucon on Pexels.com

Adding outdoor equipment such as wind chimes, reflectors and windmills can create an extra sensory element to spaces. Streamers or ribbons, added as a curtain or hung from a hoop, can be more easily accessible to non-mobile children; a wheelchair or buggy can be pushed under or through them.



Some children can be sensitive to certain textures or experiences. Consider providing water play with different temperatures, wet and dry sand/soil, etc. Gloves could be used to help manage sensitivities. Hiding motivating 'treasure' in amongst sensory boxes can help to encourage exploration.



Multi-sensory experiences can be overwhelming for some children who might find it difficult to process them. Experiences may need to be introduced in a structured way to help them manage the pace and focus on individual items. You could create simple sensory boxes or low hanging mobiles, using natural elements such as; shells, driftwood, leaves, dried seeds, pinecones etc. These resources can also be useful to bring sensory experiences to a non-mobile child.



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You could also try creating visual, textured and musical sensory wall panels. Try using materials such as mirrors, coloured acetate, chains hung on a frame, percussion instruments, wind chimes, bells, pans and spoons, etc. These should be positioned at a child friendly height, with wheelchair access in mind.



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Some children can be over-excited or even upset by the elements. To support them with these experiences in a gradual way, you could try using a wind shield, an open-ended tent or even just an umbrella. Using a clear umbrella could allow a child to experience wind and rain visually without being overwhelmed.



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Some activities which could support peer interactions and social play:

- Hang a punch ball/balloon from a tree for a wheelchair user to hit to another person
- Use a switch operated bubble machine to enable a child to participate in group games
- Story telling outdoors to support understanding and make parts of the story 'real' e.g. Goldilocks walking through woods, hunting for the bear in a makeshift cave/dark area.