

Going Beyond Accessibility by Advocating for Inclusive Playgrounds

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Overview

Play is the primary occupation of all children and is vital for the development of physical, cognitive, and social-emotional skills. Children of all abilities benefit from play and should all have equal opportunity to use and explore playground equipment. Many community playgrounds are limiting and create barriers which do not allow all children to use them. It is important that occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) step up and utilize their skills and knowledge to bring about a change.

Occupational therapy practitioners, with their knowledge of environmental barriers, understanding of disability and specific knowledge of activities, are in an ideal position to develop and maximize the accessibility and usability of playgrounds. OTPs can play an active role in altering existing playgrounds, helping to create new ones, or by educating community and local government officials about the importance of designing playgrounds that benefit and engage all children.

(Prellwitz & Skar, 2007)

Accessibility vs. Usability

Accessible means...

Playgrounds are designed to ensure that people who have a disability or use a wheelchair can physically get to the playground. Accessible playgrounds are essential because parents who may have a child with a disability can now bring their child to a place where they can engage in activities with other typical children (Accessible Playgrounds, 2019) .

Usability means ...

Playgrounds are areas where children can play together and anyone can use/access the space. Usability “implies that a person should be able to move around, be in and use the environment on equal terms with others” (Prellwitz & Skar, 2007, p. 145)



Image retrieved from <https://www.playgroundprofessionals.com/playground/playstructures/new-equipment-trends-lead-more-inclusive-playgrounds112>

“Playgrounds can create an environment of inclusion or exclusion; thus, addressing the factors that influence the usability of playgrounds is paramount”

(Ripat & Becker 2012, p.151)

Elements Of An Inclusive Playground

Occupational therapy practitioners, with their knowledge of environmental barriers, understanding of disability and specific knowledge of activities, are in an ideal position to develop and maximize the accessibility and usability of playgrounds

(Prellwitz & Skar 2007).

Equitable Use

- Usable by those with and without disabilities

Flexibility of Use

- Different uses for components
- Different heights
- Usable by one or many children

Simple to Use

- Usable by children or grown ups

Perceptible Information

- Color and tactile variation, maps, pictures

Tolerance of Error

- Minimizes errors
- Uses rails, fencing, extra space
- Uses tactile & color variation

Low Physical Effort

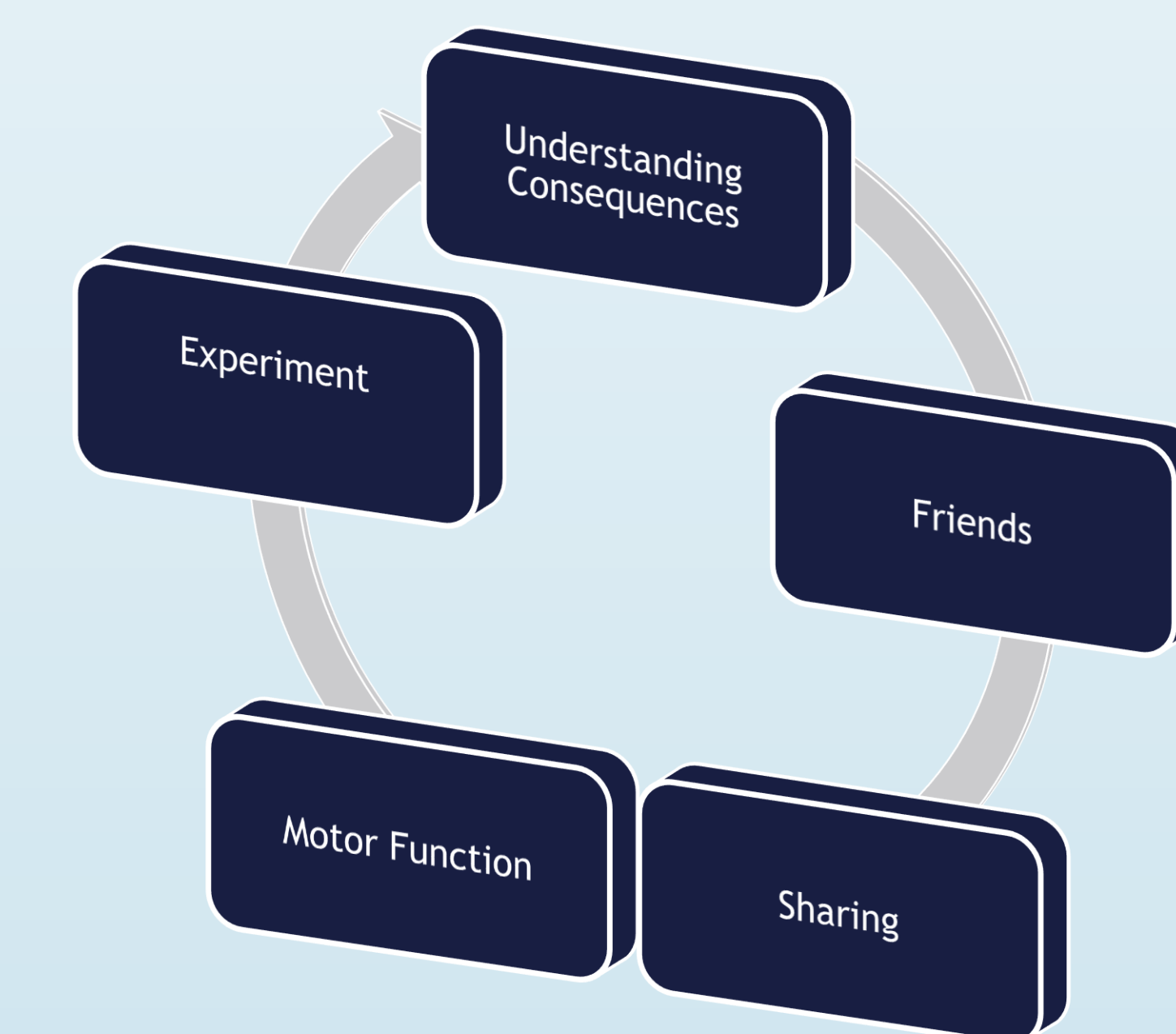
- No drop offs, even transitions, low ramping
- Elements that use cooperation

Size/Space for Multi-Use

- Room for parent/wheelchair play
- Space for groups of children

Benefits of Playground Use for Children

- Socialization and role play
- Engage in their primary occupation—play!
- Enhance communication skills
- Problem solving development
- Use creativity
- Improve motor skills
- Building tolerance and acceptance of others



(Furey, Tedder, Welsh & Wilson, 2009)

Role of Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy practitioners are able to provide insight on playground design and equipment, which will help develop playgrounds for children with and without disabilities

(Prellwitz & Skar, 2007).

Educate:

- ❖ Benefits of play
- ❖ Play as a child’s primary occupation
- ❖ How to find accessible playgrounds

Advocate:

- ❖ Communities
- ❖ Schools
- ❖ Assist in building and development
- ❖ Fundraising

Occupational therapy practitioners “can aid in facilitating environments that promote the ability of all children, with and without disabilities, to engage in play”

(Furey, Tedder, Welsh & Wilson, 2009 p.8)



Image retrieved from playmattersot.com

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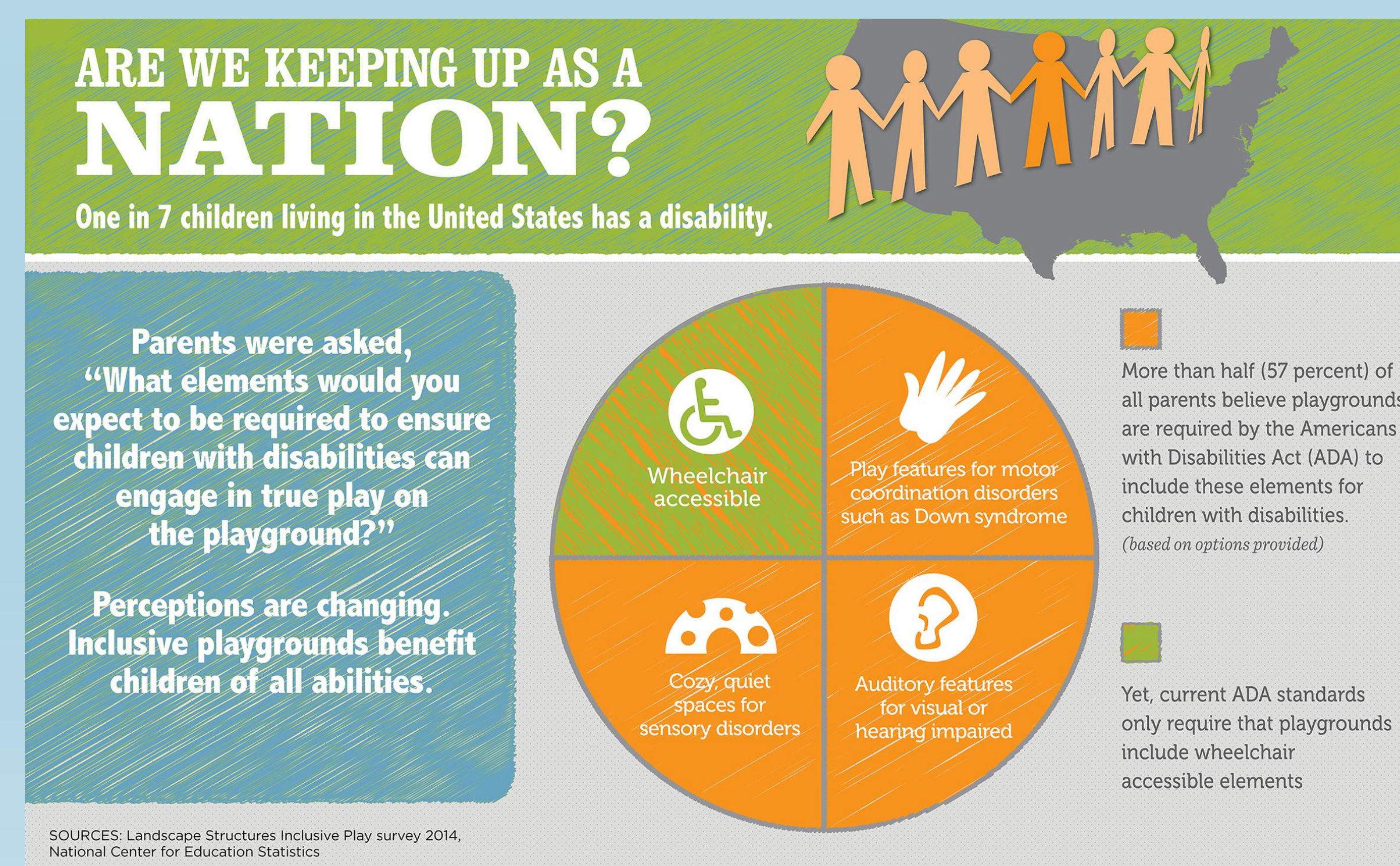


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