



Nature Play
SA
TURN PLAY INSIDE, OUT.

NATURAL PLAYSPACES PRINCIPLES

Natural and wild spaces offer the best opportunities for children to play freely outdoors. We can't always provide this experience but we can create spaces that offer rich and diverse experiences that enable children to play how they want to play, that will test their cognitive and physical capabilities, stimulate their senses, provide social interactions or independent play, and will teach them about living things and how to care for them.

The following principles have been developed by Nature Play SA to assist you create an environment that will help all children who use this space to enjoy freedom, fantasy, privacy and peace.

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Listen to childrens' voices

Consult broadly with the children who will be using the space, listen to what they are saying and create an environment that reflects their perspectives on the world and how they like to play.

Listen reflectively to the children allowing them to express their ideas and aspirations through creative mediums and carefully interpret into reality.

Capture a sense of place

Give children a sense of belonging and of knowing where they have come from and what needs to be respected and preserved.

Your design should capture stories and elements that are unique to your site, your area, your culture, your values, your history. They should be interactive and tangible and support education.

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Stimulate the senses

Children experience the diversity and beauty of the world through their senses. Create a space that will give children an opportunity to engage all 5 senses and provide an understanding of the changing seasons and context.

Touch – provide different textures in pathway materials, vegetation, rocks, structures – rough, smooth, prickly, furry, uneven, sharp, wet, dry

Sight – use varieties of natural colours, intensity of light, shapes, heights, forms through vegetation, sculpture, art, birds, butterflies, insects. Make it beautiful and inspiring to look at.

Smell – Plant herbs, bushes/trees with scented leaves and flowers

Taste – Include vegetable gardens, fruit trees, edible plants

Listen – create a soundscape using running water, rustling leaves/ grasses, insect hotels, bird gardens.





“In nature a child finds freedom, fantasy and privacy: a place distant from adult world, a separate peace that children should explore and learn from”

Richard Louv

Use Natural Elements

Nature provides the best materials for creative and imaginative play. Mimicking nature closely will provide a calming effect and will help facilitate childrens’ authentic interactions with nature

Water – gives opportunity to touch, play, listen, experiment, discover. Create ponds, dry or shallow, rocky streams, water pumps for mixing with dirt/sand

Sand/Mud – allows children to dig, explore, create; integrated with water offers a textural and creative experience.

Plants /Trees – create mood, provide beauty, shade, screens, niches, aroma, texture, food, habitat for insects/birds/butterflies, seeds, spaces to hide, an apparatus to climb. Consider colour, forms, seasons, native and non-native,

Changing topography – use what is naturally occurring on your site or create new to provide diversity, interest and opportunities by including an open space, hills, mounds, creeks, swales and rock faces to meet, climb, run, roll, slide, balance and jump.

Wood/Stone/Boulders – use these elements to construct pathways, bridges, borders, fences, climbing structures, seating and to provide items for loose parts play, construction, gathering and collection.

Create Seamless Connections

Connections between spaces helps children understand their surroundings and their relationship in the space. Good integration between areas provides continuity and helps children be confident and independent in their exploration.

Providing seamless integration between the indoor and outdoor spaces and between different outdoor areas will allow children to move freely between each area and give them one sense of place and identity. Use winding pathways, tactile paths, boardwalks, tunnels, bridges, stepping stones /logs and plants to connect spaces.

Incorporate a range of play spaces

Diverse play opportunities provide an inclusive environment for all personalities. Offering a diverse range of spaces will encourage all areas of a child’s development – social, cognitive, physical, emotional.

Consider how you can provide spaces to inspire:

Fantasy and Imagination – natural amphitheatres, performance areas for drama, music and roleplay. Cubbies

Adventure – high structures, uneven surfaces, ropes, different sized boulders and logs to challenge and evaluate risk

Construction – cubby building, loose parts, small worlds to encourage creativity

Gathering & Collection – rocks, seeds, leaves, cones, sticks, pebbles to find and collect, to use as currency,

Special places – small, enclosed or hidden niches with seating, hammocks to be independent or social.

Factor in Loose Parts

Loose Parts provide the ultimate, open-ended, creative activity allowing children complete autonomy in manipulating where and how their play will go.

Include an area where children have the freedom and space to be able to invent, create, dismantle, move, carry, line up and build loose parts. Use natural materials that have different forms, textures and sizes, like stones stumps, bark pieces, log rounds, sticks, shells, pinecones.

Model Sustainable practice

Supporting local economies and good environmental outcomes will help children to build a life-long connection to nature and community.

Use what is readily available on site or in the local area, and choose to use only local suppliers, contractors, artists, products.

