

A vibrant playground scene featuring a large, multi-colored play structure with slides in red, blue, and yellow, and a spring rider in the foreground. The ground is covered in dark blue safety matting. The sky is clear and blue, with some green trees in the background.

PLAY EVERYONE'S WAY

A GUIDE TO INCLUSIVITY IN PLAYGROUNDS, COMMUNITIES AND BEYOND

*Brought to you by International Play Equipment
Manufacturers Association (IPEMA) and Voice of Play*

Play and inclusivity

BY THE NUMBERS

People and children with disabilities are the nation's largest minority group. Many communities (and even schools) are behind when it comes to ensuring children, parents and grandparents of all abilities can play together - no matter what.

9 IN 10

Americans feel strongly that all playgrounds should offer inclusive options



6.7 million

THE NUMBER OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

74%

of parents believe it's important for their children to play with a variety of kids, including those with disabilities.

70%

of parents strongly agree that playground equipment should be designed so all children can play together.

ACCESSIBILITY VS. INCLUSIVITY

57%

of parents mistakenly believed that playgrounds are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to include elements designed for children with Down syndrome, sensory disorders, and visual and hearing impairments.

90%

of parents believe free play with other kids on the playground can help cultivate their child's perspective on equality for all.

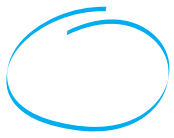


According to the 2020 Voice of Play Survey, play truly can be the “great equalizer” that helps bring together children of different races, backgrounds, and abilities.

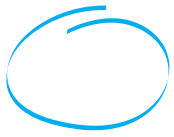
Truly **inclusive playgrounds**—ones that include accessible routes of travel, ramps, protective and accessible surfacing, shade, seating, and play elements that offer varying levels of challenge both elevated and on the ground-level—allow children to interact with others outside of their circle.

It is important to look for **playgrounds that are truly inclusive - not just accessible.**

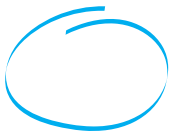
INCLUSIVITY CHECKLIST



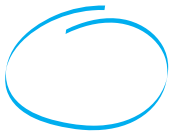
Ramps: Ramps should allow children to reach elevated play equipment and also include space for wheelchairs to turn around and have handrails on both sides, creating safer passage to raised playground components for children who are unable or do not want to use transfer systems.



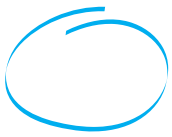
Ground-Level Activities: Activities that allow kids to enter/exit at the ground level, without needing to climb stairs or ladders. These areas offer independence for the youngest visitors who are just learning to walk, a safe space for those afraid of heights and easy access regardless of developmental or ability levels.



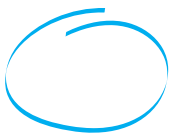
Diverse Swings: Offer several different swing set options: one for babies and their caregivers, one for ages 2-5 with the recognizable bucket seats, one for ages 5-12, one for big kids 12+ with higher weight limits and one with additional support and security.



Age-Appropriate Groupings: Separate areas with appropriately sized equipment for different age groups. Recommended age groups should be obvious from the design and scale, but signs posted in the area or on the equipment should give guidance.



Sensory Spaces: Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or sensory processing disorder often feel over or under stimulated. The mix of both calmer areas and sensory-rich activities involving music, lights or spinning motions, helps keep kids engaged without feeling isolated.



Social Spaces: Playhouses, barns, spaceships or fortresses, give children the opportunity to interact and socialize with different ages and abilities. These structures have the power to create a sense of community and safer play with different groups.



Overall Accessibility: Playground accessible routes should be free of major debris, toys and other impediments that may impact maneuverability throughout the play area.



TIPS TO HELP MAKE PLAYGROUNDS MORE INCLUSIVE

TIP #1

Identify Your Target Playground.

Basic ADA Standards for Accessible Design: Regulations that provide guidance on “what is required for a building or facility to be physically accessible to people with disabilities,” according to the ADA website. IPEMA offers a Checklist for Access that may be helpful in assessing your playground’s accessibility needs.

TIP #2

Find Your Community of Voices.

When building your team, consider not only parents and caregivers who have children with different abilities – but parents who have different abilities, too. Parents who use wheelchairs or walkers, for example, deserve just as much play time with their children on the playground and will likely be a strong voice for your cause.

TIPS TO HELP MAKE PLAYGROUNDS MORE INCLUSIVE

TIP #3

Get the Facts on Funding.

It's a great idea to see if local or state foundations could be an option for your project – non-profits support causes that help local communities, families and children. Try traditional fundraising through a bake sale, sports tournament, community yard sale, car wash and more. These activities raise money and increase awareness of the important cause – and can build the amount of support you have behind you and your team.

TIP #4

Talk to the Decision Makers.

For each community, who to talk to may be different. Depending on where the playground is – whether it's at a school, in a local community, or within city limits – you may have to go in front of the school board, municipality, or city council. And it's always helpful to have someone on your team who can make connections with the decision makers to help get you in front of them.