



Natural Playgrounds Toolkit



Talita van der Walt
for Penreach

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Introduction

When children play in the early years of their lives, they are developing skills, habits, and attitudes that become the foundation for their schooling and adult work life, and that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. Play is so important for the development of a child that it has been identified by the United Nations¹ as a right of every child.

The skills required to properly develop self-discipline, motivation, and the ability to collaborate, all start to take root in the first six years of life. Through play, children learn how to cope with frustration, how to keep trying until they get it right, how to share with others, and how to express themselves. In addition, the foundations for reading, writing and maths are laid down during play, ensuring that children are ready for school.

What is the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit?

In many places, children lack stimulating play opportunities. The Natural Playgrounds Toolkit was developed by Penreach to raise awareness of the importance of play and to empower communities, grade R teachers and early childhood practitioners, by providing them with the skills required to build a playground for young children out of natural resources.

Who is it for?

The Natural Playgrounds Toolkit is a manual designed for you as a grade R teacher, early childhood development practitioner, community development worker, or for any other interested **stakeholders** to study individually or as a group. It is meant for you to study individually or to use for your discussions as a group, and provides you with the guidance and tools required to build a natural playground.

How was it developed?

Penreach, with the support of the Roger Federer Foundation, piloted the natural playgrounds initiative in several locations in Mpumalanga, South Africa, with local communities and schools. Another Roger Federer Foundation partner, Molteno, also drew lessons from the Penreach natural playgrounds initiatives and has also replicated natural playgrounds in several schools and communities in Limpopo Province in South Africa.



Video: Introduction
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=726-ryXZOv0>)

STAKEHOLDERS (PARTNERS)

People who have an interest in realising the project in favour of the children.

Through this practical experience and lessons learnt during these pilots, this natural playground manual was then developed. So, what you are learning here has been successfully applied in practice!

NATURAL PLAYGROUND

An area where kids can play with natural elements such as sand, water, wood, and living plants.

RESOURCES

A supply of money, materials, staff, volunteers, and other assets that can be used by the project to effectively achieve its aims.

How should it be used?

The toolkit is divided into five sections that represent the different steps to be followed in establishing a **natural playground**. In the toolkit, you will find a toolbox of practical tools and samples that will help you consider everything necessary to make a success of your project. The toolkit will guide you step by step through the whole process of establishing a natural playground in collaboration with parents and your local community.

While you work through the toolkit, you are encouraged to keep a journal or a set of notes that can help you reflect on your journey and also to note down discussion points for your learning group. At first glance, some of the tools may seem to contain similar information, but they are all actually important in their own right and build on each other. Each tool, therefore, forms a specific part of the process that enables you to get to the end result. There is no hard and fast rule that you must use all the tools, or use them all exactly as they are presented – adapt and be creative as you see fit. If you are an experienced community development worker, some of the tools may seem so obvious that you could feel tempted to skip them. We do strongly suggest that you consider the pros and cons carefully before discarding a tool. Remember, however, that our goal is to leverage the experience, expertise and **resources** that you and your community members and **stakeholders** bring to the table collectively, and to help you all successfully build your children the best natural playground with as many natural resources and as little financial cost to you as a school or community as possible.

1. United Nations High Commission for Human Rights
2. A Chance to Play Southern Africa. 2017. *The Child's Right to Play: A Policy Brief for South Africa*. Johannesburg: ACTPSA
3. Children's Act 38 of 2005
4. The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four Years

Children's legal right to play

International laws and regulations on play

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 31:

- Right to leisure, play, and culture appropriate to the age of the child.
- Right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life.

Article 12:

- Respect for the views of the child.
- Children have the right to have their opinions taken into account.

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

Article 12:

- Right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

National play policy and Regulations

The National Plan of Action for Children in South Africa 2012–2017

'Play is part of early childhood development programmes and school curriculum and children are aware of its importance in their lives.'²

- Ensure that play is an integral part of all early childhood development programmes supporting the early learning of babies and young children.
- Encourage and resource play activities for children and adolescents through the school curriculum.
- Ensure that each community has safe and well-kept play areas for children.

Children's Act 38 of 2005

- Recognises play as a right and requires that 'all proceedings, actions or decisions in a matter concerning a child recognise a child's need for development and to engage in play and other recreational activities appropriate to the child's age.'³

Regulations to the Children's Act:

- Promote children's rights to rest, leisure and play.
- Respect and promote cultural diversity and appreciation.
- Design programmes according to children's age and capacity for development, and meet the needs of the children for whom the services are provided, including children with a disability.
- Provide a safe environment where premises and equipment are safe and clean and children are adequately supervised.

The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four Years

'Babies, toddlers and young children learn when they play with things around them, what they smell and taste and sound like. They also learn by watching other children play. They learn by watching what adults do. This takes time and adults need to make sure that all children have plenty of opportunities to learn through play, also called active learning.'⁴

The National Early Learning and Development Standards for Children From Birth to Four Years

- Recognise play as central to achieving early-learning milestones.
- Recognises the provision of 'opportunities for active play as a universal strategy to be provided by all – parents, caregivers – to enable positive growth and development.'

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy

- Play as a principle in early learning that government is duty-bound to provide.
- Increase the knowledge of parents and caregivers of the developmental value of play.
- Play-sensitive planning and increased allocation of resources through town planning processes to make adequate play facilities available.

Section 1

Understand

The importance of play

Play develops skills, habits and attitudes that stay with children for the rest of their lives.

Play in early childhood has a strong and lasting influence on a child's health, wellbeing, and long-term development. Studies show that early play experiences shape a child's physical growth, capacity for learning, chances of finishing school, future employability, and even income. Through play, children develop the brain pathways that are needed to learn and grow.

Brain pathways

The brain begins developing in the womb. During the first years of life, dramatic growth takes place and positive experiences at this stage of development help to build strong brain connections.

Towards an adult brain

A baby's brain has more connections than an adult's. The connections quickly increase until the point where the brain starts to 'prune'. Active pathways that are regularly used and reinforced by experience are kept, and the rest are 'pruned' away.



Video: The importance of play
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn3ruzb2n_8)

PLAY

Play is the work of children. It consists of activities that are performed for self-amusement that have behavioural, social, and psychomotor rewards.

FACT BOX



The first one thousand days in a child's life holds the key to unlocking their life-long potential.



90% of critical brain development happens before **age five**.

‘Delays in cognitive and overall development before schooling can often have long lasting and costly consequences for children, families and society. The most effective and cost-efficient time to intervene is before birth and the early years of life. Investment in Early Childhood Development should be a key priority.’

National Development Plan: Vision for 2030

Over time, children develop more and more complex skills by using their different brain pathways.

Sensory pathways

vision, hearing, touch, taste, smell

Language pathways

symbols, ideas, social relationships, talking

Higher cognitive functions pathways

critical thinking, reflective thinking, thoughtful actions

Healthy brain development is determined by a child’s early life experiences, including a healthy pregnancy, safe and nurturing care, nutrition, language stimulation, play, and lots and lots of attention and interaction. The neural pathways that are developed in a child’s first three years act like roadmaps for later learning.

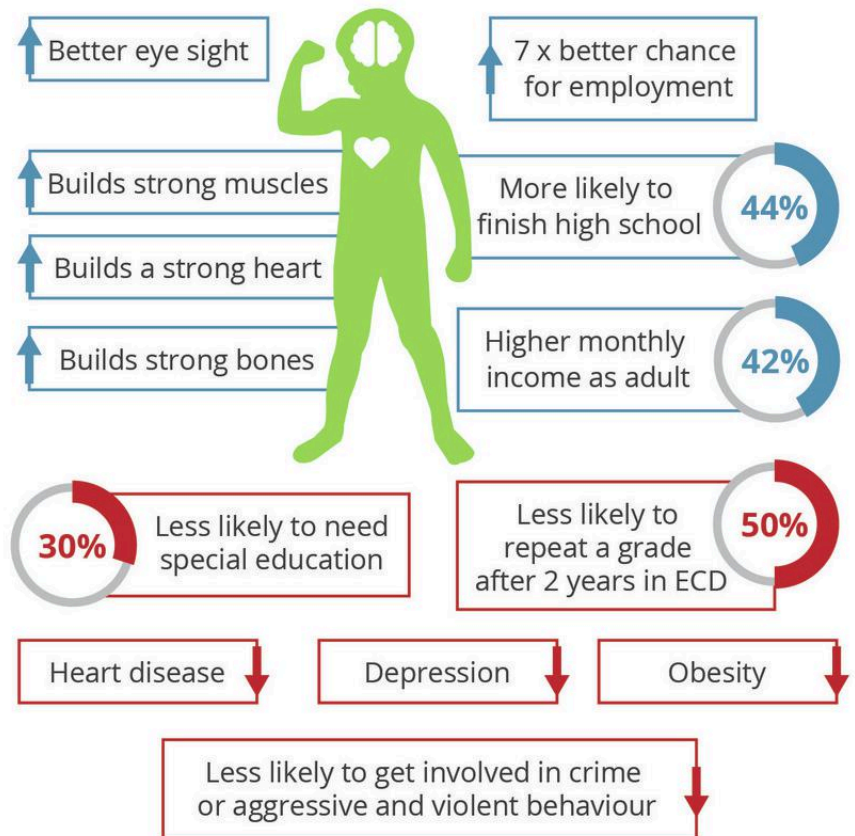


Figure 1 Long-term benefits of active outdoor play

More likely to:	Less likely to:
Show improved literacy skills	Drop out of school
Show improved mathematics skills	Repeat grades
Stay in school longer	Need special education
Complete high school	
Study further	

Figure 2 Likely effects on children who experience high-quality early childhood development

'A holistic development addresses all the developmental needs of a child at the same time. In other words, Parents, Care Takers and ECD Centres cannot just 'look after' children, they have to make sure that children are developed to their fullest potential.'

Children's Act 38 of 2005

What children need to develop

During the first years of a child's life, factors such as adequate healthcare, good nutrition, good quality childcare and nurturing, a clean and safe environment, early learning and stimulation will influence the child's future.

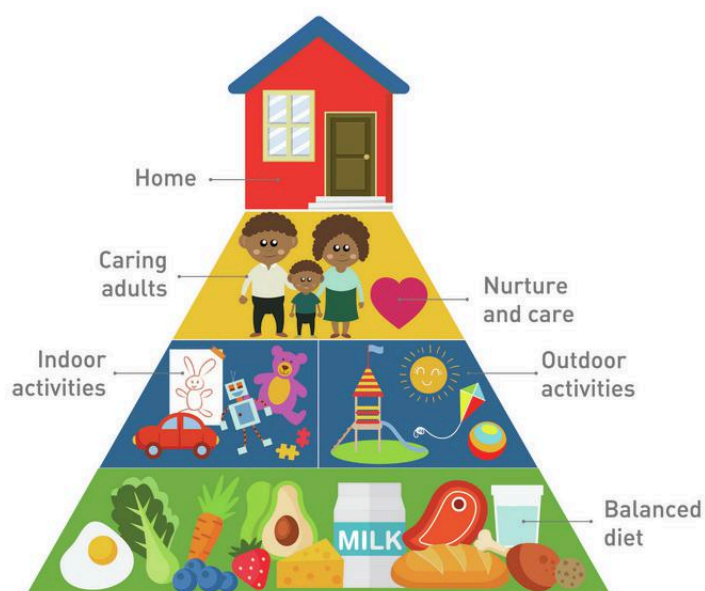


Figure 3 The hierarchy of needs that are important for early childhood development

To ensure that these important factors are met, each day of a child's life should include:

- physical activities for large and small muscle development
- creative activities using different natural and other materials
- talking and listening activities with other children and with adults
- challenging and exciting activities to develop intellectual abilities
- opportunities for imaginative play
- opportunities for rest and quiet play.

Children learn best when they play and discover things for themselves, relax and have fun, talk and interact with others, and share their feelings and worries.

Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services by the Department of Social Development

Quality early childhood development covers a number of areas of a child's life, such as their physical wellbeing and social interactions. These are summarised in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Quality early childhood development areas

Learning through play

Through play, children create new things, solve problems, and form an understanding of the world.



Figure 5 The play wheel demonstrates the different ways children can learn through play.

1. Curious

Children are curious by nature.

2. Explore

Children's curiosity drives them to explore through play.

3. Discover

When children explore through play, they discover new things and learn.

4. Fun

The child experiences exploring and learning as fun.

5. Repeat

Children (and adults) like to repeat activities that are fun.

6. Mastery

Repeating fun activities helps children to master their skills.

7. Confidence

A child who is mastering new skills feels confident.

8. New challenge

A confident child will try new challenges.

Age-appropriate play

As children get older, they develop more interests and skills. This means that their play gets more complicated.

0–12 months	1–2 years	2–3 years	3–4 years	4–5 years	I enjoy:
•	•	•	•	•	Discovering and exploring
•	•	•	•	•	Interacting with adults
•	•	•	•	•	Moving and practicing
	•	•	•	•	Imitating
	•	•	•	•	Creating
	•	•	•	•	Stacking and building
	•	•	•	•	Filling and emptying things
	•	•	•	•	Pushing things together
	•	•	•	•	Pulling things apart
	•	•	•	•	Hiding and finding
	•	•	•	•	Climbing and jumping
		•	•	•	Talking and asking questions
		•	•	•	Interacting with children
		•	•	•	Testing and matching
			•	•	Dancing and singing
			•	•	Sharing and organising
			•	•	Playing simple games
			•	•	Problem solving
				•	Running
				•	Understanding
				•	Choosing
				•	Playing with language and numbers

Figure 6 Activities suitable for age-related skills

Outdoor free play

Free play has fewer rules, which leaves more room for self-discovery, imagination and creativity. Watch the video to see the benefits and possibilities of outdoor free play.

Playground safety

How to keep a safe playground

Follow these guidelines to ensure that your **playground** is safe.

Check clothes

- Remove necklaces.
- Take off unzipped jackets, clothes with drawstrings, and scarfs.
- Children must wear sports shoes with rubber soles or no shoes.
- Children must wear a hat if there is no shade.
- Children must wear a raincoat if it is raining.

Go over the rules

- Take turns and share.
- No pushing, hitting or shoving.
- Show respect for others, themselves, and their space.
- Everyone must have good manners.
- Clearly show where they may play and with what.
- No eating or drinking while playing.

Look up

- Is the area age appropriate?
- Nothing higher than 1,5 m.
- Nothing closer than 2 m from the next object.
- Are there broken or rusted parts on the equipment?
- Is there anything wet or slippery?
- Is all play equipment secured to the ground?
- Are there any small spaces where children can get stuck?

Look down

- Is the area clear of objects that are too small for the age group?
- Check that there are no poisonous or dangerous plants nearby.
- Check that there is no litter or broken glass.
- Check that there are no animals or dangerous insects in the crawl spaces.

FREE PLAY

Unstructured, voluntary, child-initiated activity that allows children to develop their imaginations while exploring and experiencing the world around them. It is driven by children's natural curiosity, love of discovery, and enthusiasm.



Video: Outdoor free play
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Flz644RD61E>)

PLAYGROUND

An outdoor area where children can play.

Stay close

- Stay engaged.
- Do not use your mobile phone while children are playing.
- Watch out for children who are not watching where they are going.
- Watch out for any dangerous actions.

Playing allows children to make mistakes and learn through trial and error. This helps them recognise their limitations and discover their abilities. If play becomes too safe, it is not only boring, it also limits children's practical experiences of risk management, and their ability to recognise and deal with risky situations. Keep your playground safe by being aware of the risks involved. Most injuries on a playground can be avoided by having proper supervision at all times.

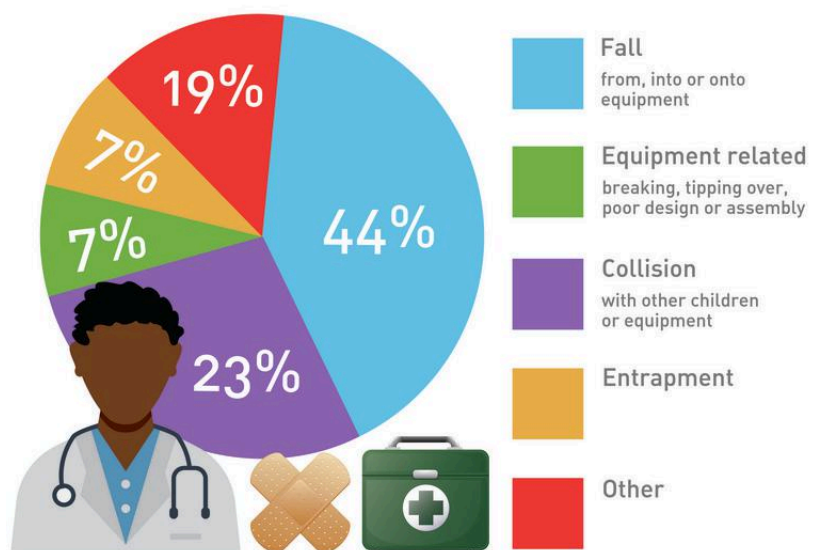


Figure 7 Common playground injuries

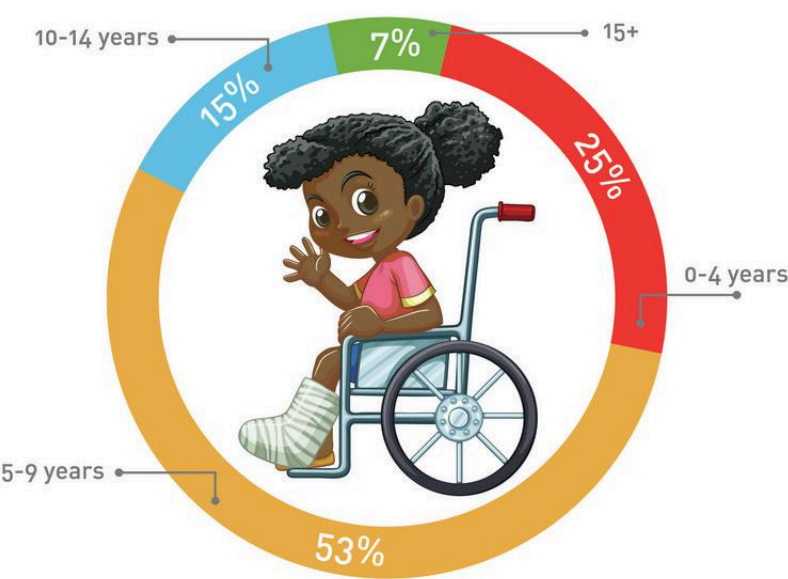


Figure 8 Age group most likely to be injured

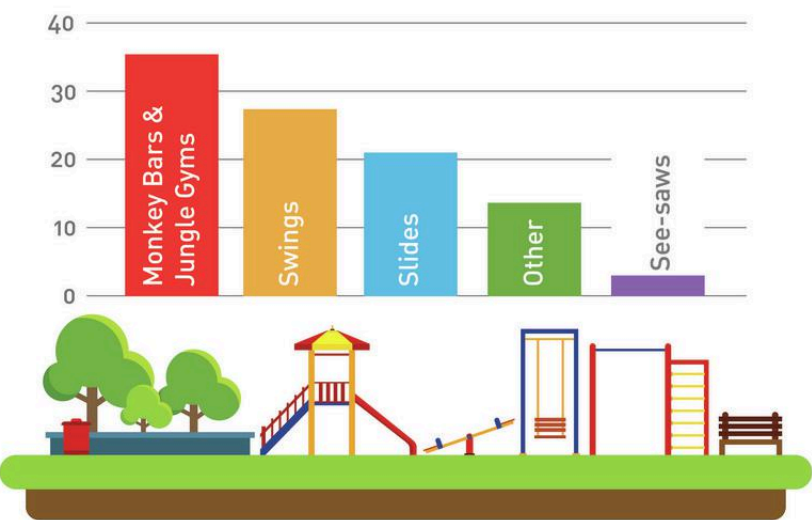


Figure 9 Equipment causes of injuries

Playground safety checklist

South Africa has the following safety guidelines in place for early childhood development centres:

- An outdoor play area of adequate size must be provided for use by every child on the premises, including an outdoor play area of a minimum of at least 5 m² per child on the premises, and separate play areas for children between the ages of 0–2 years and those between the ages of 3–6 years.
- The premises must be surrounded by a fence constructed from an approved material, with a lockable gate to prevent a child from leaving the premises unnoticed and to prevent unauthorised entry by the public.
- Ponds, pits and/or other hazards in any garden or external play area must be fenced off to ensure the safety of children. No poisonous or harmful plants may be grown on the premises.

Use the checklist as a guide for ensuring that your playground is safe.

Fall height and fall zones

- ☐ Is the possible fall height less than 1,5 m from all pieces of equipment?
- ☐ Is there a minimum clearance of at least 2 m separating each piece of equipment?

Safety surfacing

- ☐ Is there impact-absorbing material under all pieces of equipment over 500 mm in height (e.g. sand, bark, mulch or ground rubber)?
- ☐ Is the surfacing well maintained (e.g. at least 300 mm depth of loose-fill material)?

Design hazards

- ☐ Is the equipment free of possible spaces a child could get their head stuck in, such as openings between 80 mm and 230 mm?
- ☐ Is all moving equipment free of any potential trapping and pinching points?
- ☐ Are there sturdy guard- and handrails, appropriate to a child's hand and grip size? Any platform higher than 30 cm is required to have a rail.
- ☐ Does the larger equipment prevent possible climbing on the outside of the structure? No structures may be higher than 1,5 m.

Shading

- ☐ Is all equipment suitably shaded, if there is no natural shade?

Maintenance

- ☐ Is the equipment's frame stable and free from movement?
- ☐ Is the equipment free from rust, cracks or broken items?
- ☐ Are timber items on the equipment free of rotten or splintered wood?
- ☐ Is all equipment free of protruding fixings and sharp edges?
- ☐ Is the play area free of loose stones or gravel?

- ☐ Is the play area free of trip hazards?
- ☐ Is the play area free of tree branches or anything sharp at children's eye level?

Slide

- ☐ Is the slide securely anchored in the ground?
- ☐ Does the slide have built up sides?
- ☐ Do the slide steps have a guard rail?

Swings

- ☐ Are the swings securely anchored to the ground?
- ☐ Do the swings for children under 6 years of age have chair-like back support?
- ☐ Do the tyre swings have drainage holes to let out rain water?
- ☐ Is the area under the swings filled with sand?

Sandpit

- ☐ Is the sandpit placed in the shade or have a roof for sun protection?
- ☐ Is the depth of the sandpit at least 40 cm?
- ☐ Is the sandpit filled with river sand?

Playground

- ☐ Is the playground enclosed and gated?
- ☐ Is there enough space in the play area for children to play?
- ☐ Are all garden tools, equipment, and chemicals locked away?
- ☐ Is the area free of all poisonous or thorny plants?
- ☐ Is the area free of any litter or dangerous objects lying around, such as glass, tins, and rusty nails?

How to design your natural playground

For this step, you first need to understand how children play. When adults design **playgrounds**, there is a danger that we think from our own point of view. This means that we provide play spaces that are reminiscent of our own experiences or what we've seen in other schools. We must also remember that the more expensive option isn't always the best option.

We need to think and design from the child's point of view. What do children need to develop holistically? How do children play at their best?

Design a playground for the children – not for yourself!



Figure 10 The steps to follow when creating your natural playground

Natural playgrounds vs traditional playgrounds

Natural playgrounds are different from traditional playgrounds in a number of ways.

Traditional playground	Natural playground
Expensive to install.	Can be very cheap or even free to create.
Needs maintenance and surveillance.	Needs maintenance and storage.
Focuses on gross motor play (running, jumping, sliding, and climbing).	Accommodates all types of play (gross motor, fine motor, social, etc).
Fixed equipment is intended to be used in a certain way.	Loose parts , pathways, sand, water, trees, and plants can be reimagined and redesigned by children daily.
Becomes boring over time.	Becomes more engaging over time as the children's skills improve.
Inflexible to children's ideas.	Children can build their ideas in the real world.
Purpose is physical fitness and not always accessible for differently abled children.	Play can be imaginative and is accessible to all children.
Level of risk taking is predetermined by equipment.	Children can take risks at their ability level in a variety of situations.

Figure 11 The differences between a natural playground and a traditional playground

Natural playground ideas

Layout

Make different play spaces for different kinds of activities. Spread the play spaces throughout the playground instead of squashing them all together in only one area. Place larger or more popular play spaces, such as climbing structures and sand play areas, where they are easy to supervise. Make sure the supervisor can see all areas where children can play.

Incorporate natural elements, such as trees or rocks, as part of the play spaces. If you do not have trees, plant some for future children. It can be a project where you involve the kids to help protect and water the trees. Find out from your closest nursery which trees grow fast, and be sure to limit the mess when planting the trees.

These play spaces can be separated by paths. Well-designed borders that demarcate or separate play spaces can offer as much (and sometimes more) play value than the play space itself. Wherever possible, incorporate natural borders (boulders, stumps, logs, shrubs, etc.) of varying sizes and diverse materials.

Natural elements

If you don't have a hill in your playground, consider creating one and covering it with grass. This provides opportunities for climbing and rolling.

Consider creating a small vegetable garden where children are involved in the planting and watering. Research shows that children are more likely to eat vegetables that they helped to grow themselves.

Simple natural elements, like rocks and stones, can have many uses in a natural playground. Placing rocks and boulders in the playground provides challenging routes, sitting places or climbing opportunities. A 'river bed' can be made with stones. Select pebbles and stones that are an age-appropriate size. Having a 'table' or flat item in the sand play area encourages children to not carry the sand away from the sandpit.

Trees and shrubs can be used as windbreaks, to provide shade, moderate the temperature, reduce glare, separate play spaces, and can be educational tools. Trees that shed their leaves can block out the sun in summer but allow in the warmth of the winter sun. Plants can also be used to create hidden spaces.

LOOSE PARTS

Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials. They can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart and put back together in multiple ways.

TIP

Use Tool 4 (page 53) to plan your natural playground and request donations for equipment.

Loose parts

Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions, which can be used alone or combined with other materials. They can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart and put back together in multiple ways.

When you are wondering what will make a good loose part, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it flexible or sturdy enough that it can be used and reused in different ways without breaking or becoming dangerous?
- Is it something you can give to children, to do whatever they want with, even if that means finishing it or destroying it?
- Is it something that you can easily collect after playtime, or something you can leave out all the time?

The list of possible loose parts is endless, but can include:

- wooden coins (slices of wood about 3 cm thick)
- logs of different heights and widths
- chalk
- cardboard boxes of various sizes and shapes
- leaves, feathers, shells, or pine cones
- stones, pebbles, or rocks
- milk and bread crates
- wooden pallets
- buckets, tubes, and plastic gutters
- funnels and hosepipes
- nets
- tyres of different shapes and sizes
- steering wheels
- computer keyboards
- old clothes for dressing up.

Loose parts should be easy to use and easy to put away. They can be stored in containers, sheds or open boxes against the side of the playground. Old suitcases or child-sized trolleys and wheelbarrows can be used for transporting loose parts to and from the storage place and to encourage children to keep the playground tidy. Many loose parts are unlikely to be tampered with or stolen and can be left outside depending on local circumstances.

Size is important. Large loose parts can be quicker to tidy away. Small loose parts, like cones and shells, can easily get scattered outside. Having them as part of the outdoor environment in a cone pit or using shells as mulch in raised beds and containers means less gathering. Synthetic small items are difficult to tidy and could impact the environment if left outside.

Think about how materials and resources will be dried on rainy days. Quick-dry materials, such as tarpaulins and organza, can be easier to manage than cotton-based materials for den building and dressing up.



Figure 12 Different types of play all fit together to form an environment of holistic development.

1. Water and sand play

Water and sand offer opportunities to dig, pour, sift, scoop, and build. This helps to develop big and small muscles, stimulates the senses, and allows children to learn maths and science principles.

2. Gross motor play

Any play that involves movement helps to strengthen the body and develop gross motor skills. When children crawl through a tunnel, climb a tree or run around they learn body coordination, spatial awareness, and to enjoy exercise.

3. Fine motor play

Any play that involves using the hands and fingers will develop hand eye coordination and fine motor control.

4. Construction play

Any play that involves building something with loose parts. When children balance blocks on each other, build a 'house' or create new roads in the playground they learn how to solve problems, use their senses, and how shapes fit together.

5. Drama play

Dramatic play is when children make up stories and act them out. This 'pretend' play improves literacy and reading skills. When children play 'house' or 'teacher', pretend to be an animal or listen to a story they learn how to communicate and take turns.

6. Music play

When given the opportunity to create music, children develop their creativity. When children play real or pretend musical instruments, sing songs, and dance, they learn to use their hands and fingers, about sounds, rhythm and tempo, and gain self confidence.

7. Art play

When given the opportunity to create art, children develop their creativity. When children draw, paint, scribble, or play with mud and clay, they learn about different textures and cause and effect. They also explore and experiment with their environment.

8. Nature play

Any play that involves exploring nature. This can be watching insects, planting plants, balancing on a rock or playing with feathers, leaves and seeds.

9. Solitary play

Children need to be able to spend time alone if they want to. It is important to provide spaces where they can do this.

10. Sensory play

Children develop sensory abilities including sight, smell, touch and sound as they play. All forms of play include sensory input. It's important to provide your play environment with a variety of play equipment and loose parts to help children explore their sensory skills.

Section 2

Engage

Involving the community

Community members are experts on what is happening in their surrounding area.

Communities are not just groups of people who stay in the same area; they are also a group with a common interest. Community members are in the best position to identify and understand the problems and needs of their community. They can bring in different cultures and habits. The more diverse the people you involve, the more ideas, perspectives, and **resources** will become available to your project.

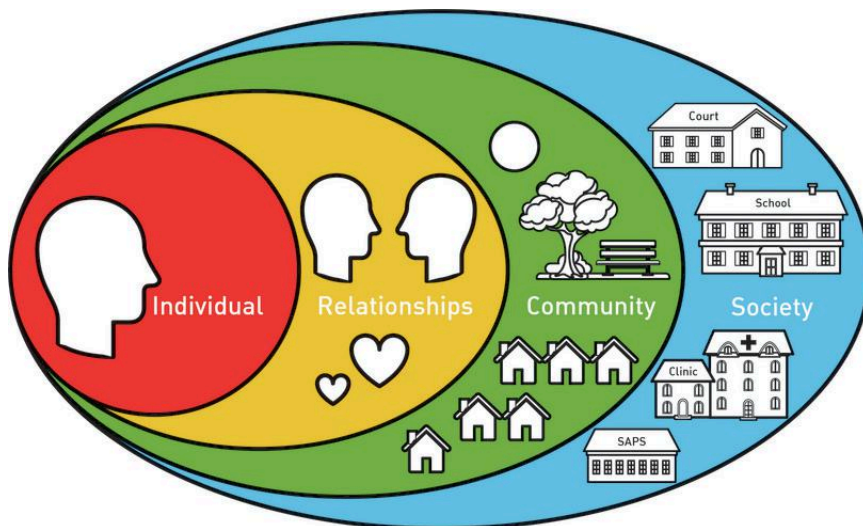


Figure 13 The relationship between an individual and the wider community

A few examples to consider are listed below:

Parents and children can contribute with labour, assist with funding, and help mobilise the community. Children have great ideas and fantasies for their dream **natural playground**.

Community members can serve on committees, give and collect information, participate in surveys, participate on task teams, distribute flyers, promote the project, and help with some of the planned activities.

Social workers and members of the Department of Social Development can help you understand the developmental and play needs of children.

Community-based organisations (CBOs and NGOs) can advise on strategies, help facilitate meetings, share experience and expertise, serve on committees, help implement plans, help you identify service providers and existing projects. For example, organisations or facilities for people with disabilities can give their views on developing playgrounds that are inclusive and accessible.

Businesses can assist with products and services, serve on planning committees, and can benefit by displaying their marketing material in the playground or at community events.

Faith-based organisations and churches can provide insights into the community, act as mentors, and offer support and volunteers.

Schools can provide spaces for meetings, workshops or events, allow talks at the school, put up posters, and encourage teachers to participate.

Local radio and media can assist in promoting and supporting events by creating awareness and helping you communicate with the public.

Clinics can assist with the input on the health and nutritional needs of children when active.

Philanthropists are individuals in a community who are willing to invest in the growth of its members. These individuals can offer ideas and financial assistance.

How to handle community participation

We are often tempted to go ahead and do the work on a project ourselves because it can be so much faster. Getting everyone to work together takes a little more effort at the start – it may even be slower – but the more we involve people in our projects, the better the results and impact will be. The community will have a stake or interest in the playground and each community member will bring their influence, expertise, and resources to the table to build something far greater than each individual could have done on their own. And finally, by including others, they will be empowered to create similar projects.

To increase the level of community participation in your project, work through the four phases below, using the goals, messages, and tools as a guide for each phase.

PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP

An interactive workshop that involves participants working together towards a particular objective. It uses tools that stimulate creativity through working together and applying participants' experiences and expertise.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
Goals	To give the community helpful information.	To gather the opinion of the community on the problem and possible solutions.	To work with the community to make sure that their views are considered and understood.	To partner with the community to assess the problem and develop solutions.
Messages	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, acknowledge your concerns, and give you feedback on decisions.	We will work with you and the results will reflect how your input influenced decisions.	We will get advice and community-specific solutions from you and implement them with your help.
Tools	Fact sheets, posters, websites, radio talks	Focus groups, surveys, the public	Workshops	Participatory workshops, task team membership

Figure 14 How to increase the level of community participation

Inspired by the Engagement Continuum of the International Association for Public Participation

Facilitating community meetings

Get the right people

Before you approach potential **partners**, make sure that you are clear on exactly what you are doing and what you want them to do. Consider writing your request in a short letter to take with you; it will show potential partners that the project is organised and professional. 'Sell' the project to potential partners by helping them understand what the need is in the community, what your plans are, how they will be addressed, and the benefits of partnering. Be specific and clear on what exactly it is you want them to do.



Video: How to handle community participation (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riQQZl59_lo)

Preparation for the meeting

Invite participants with a letter that includes a summary of your idea, and the date, time, length, and location of the meeting. Select a meeting place and familiarise yourself with it beforehand. The ideal meeting place is easily accessible, has refreshments, toilet facilities, and enough space to comfortably accommodate all participants. Once you have decided on your facilitation methods, check that you have all the equipment required, such as pens and paper. The most important tool is you! See that you are neatly dressed and groomed, use movement wisely, and engage your audience with gestures and facial expressions.

Use facilitation methods that require active participation

Activities should be participant-centred and participatory, such as group discussions and exercises. You should encourage participants to provide feedback. Divide the presentation of information into shorter, mini lectures and not one long session. Provide paper and pen for note taking and exercises and provide participants with the relevant materials to facilitate group discussions.

Brainstorm

A brainstorm is a rapid-fire, creative thinking tool used to generate ideas. It is based on a session of uncensored thinking and problem-solving where no one criticises another's ideas. It is often used to generate ideas for a novel. You can do it with sticky notes or list all ideas on a flipchart.

Facilitator's role

- Focus the group on the set agenda.
- Protect group members from personal attack.
- Remain non-defensive and accept feedback.

During the meeting

Arrive early to allow time to set up the room and make last minute preparations. Introduce yourself to the group and briefly outline the aim of the meeting and the agenda. Follow the agenda and designated time frames as far as possible. Avoid exceeding the allocated time. Provide clear instructions and time frames for activities. Demonstrate your knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject matter. Sessions lasting for two or more hours should include a formal break. After the meeting, thank participants and summarise key points in a written report.

Icebreakers and energisers

An icebreaker is any activity at the beginning of the meeting that is designed to get people to know each other better, so that they can work together more effectively. Energisers are games that are used when you notice the energy levels of the group getting low. They usually involve physical movement.

Splitting in small groups

When you want everyone to participate, splitting a big group into smaller groups might be a good idea. Each smaller group either has the same task or different tasks. You will see that you will get a lot done in a short time and it is a good way to discuss values and beliefs or take a vote where necessary.

Create a supportive environment

- Call group members by name.
- Each person's questions and viewpoints should be heard.
- Be courteous and patient and do not ridicule or belittle people.
- Be encouraging and affirm effort and progress.
- Ensure that participants are comfortable.

Section 3

Assess

What is a needs assessment?

A **needs assessment** is a starting point for generating new ideas. It is best to do a needs assessment at the start of a project.

A playground needs assessment will give you insight into what your playground offers at the moment, the views of the children that use the playground, and the views of other community members with experience of children and play.

There are many reasons for doing a needs assessment. A few of them are:

- to collect information about the need (playground)
- to ensure we do not build a playground or parts of a playground that is not needed or wanted by the community
- to help you focus on the needs of the children and not on what we, the adults, want to do
- to uncover things that you might have missed
- to test assumptions and reduce the risk of doing more harm than good.

TIP

The playground needs assessment tool is the perfect starting point to get community members involved. If people are consulted about the problem, they are more likely to contribute to and participate in the solutions.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A systematic process for determining and addressing needs, or gaps between current conditions (where we are now) and desired conditions or 'wants' (where we want to be).

How to do a needs assessment

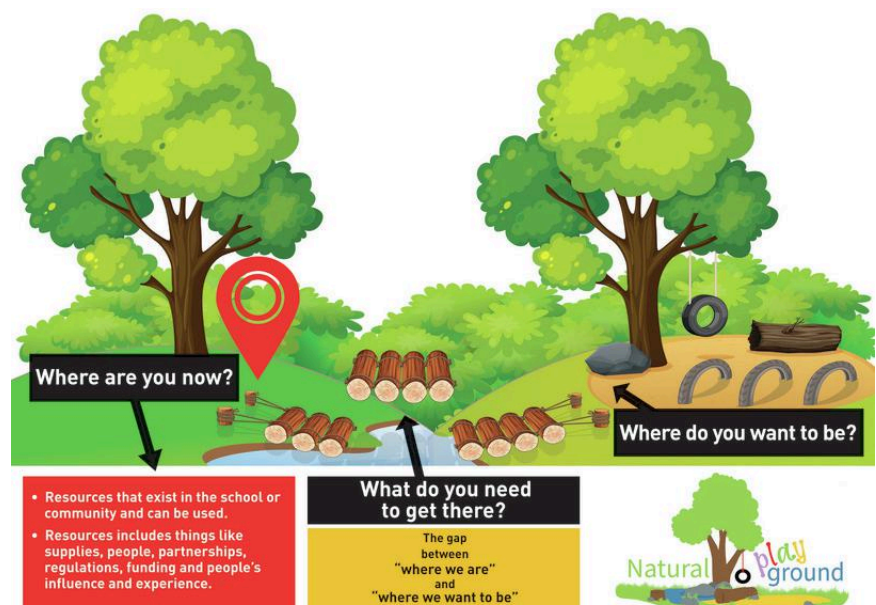
To solve a problem, we first need to understand what the solution is. A playground **needs assessment** gathers information about the ‘road’ we need to take to create the **natural playground** we want for our children.

In short, it is finding out what needs to be done in order to move from where we are to where we want to be. Watch the video to find out how to conduct a needs assessment for your natural playground.



Video: How to do a needs assessment
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYGEj3ICKCI>)

You can use Tool 2 (page 45), Tool 3 (page 49), Tool 4 (page 53), Tool 5 (page 57), and Tool 7 (page 67) to help you conduct a needs assessment for your playground.



Section 4

Act

What is a playground action plan?

Action plans turn dreams into reality. A playground **action plan** is a tool that shows your community and **partners** that you are serious about getting things done; it helps you to make sure you don't overlook something; it also helps you use **resources** efficiently. An action plan can be as detailed as you wish to make it. The level of detail will be determined by what you want to use it for.

A good action plan is complete and includes all the activities you need to do to achieve your **objective**. It makes it very clear who will do what, by when, and it also anticipates risk by considering what would limit implementation of the plan and creates strategies to deal with this. An action plan considers communication by making sure that you think of everyone who needs to know something about the implementation, what they need to know, and how this information will be communicated to them.

A good action plan will answer:

- **Why** are we doing this? What is our vision and mission?
- **What** are the objectives we want to achieve with these activities?
- **How** will the activities be conducted?
- **Who** will do the activities?
- **When** will the activities be completed?
- **What** human resources and material resources are needed to do the activities?
- **What** risks or challenges do we anticipate, and what will we do to address them?
- **Who** needs to know what about the project?

ACTION PLAN

A document that lists the steps that must be taken in order to reach your goals or objectives.

OBJECTIVE

A description of the thing that you plan to do or achieve.

BUDGET

A budget is a financial plan that shows what money you expect to have and what money you expect to spend to achieve your plans.

ECD

ECD stands for Early Childhood Development.

The importance of budgeting

The best way to stick to your **budget** is to have one.

The budget shows the amount of money you plan to raise and spend for the purpose of establishing a **natural playground**. If your **ECD** centre is registered as an NGO or NPO, you have the responsibility to be transparent with the money you spend.

A budget is needed for planning

Budgeting helps you to plan and monitor how much money is spent. It helps us to think before we buy things, because if we do not stick to the budget, we will not be able to do what we planned.

A budget is needed for fundraising

The budget is an important part of the proposal sent to potential donors. It gives a detailed account of what you plan to do with the money or goods received, and what results will be achieved.

A budget is needed for monitoring

You need **resources** to implement your plans. If you do not spend your resources as planned, the completion of the project will be affected.

A budget is needed for accuracy

A budget will help you consider all the little things that will require money, such as:

- **Workshop costs:** when you invite people to help you think in a workshop, you must provide refreshments, or lunch if the workshop takes the whole day. Remember that most of us have a sandwich for lunch, so don't waste money by trying to impress people with expensive lunches.
- **Travel and subsistence costs:** even if you get materials donated, you may need to pick them up. If the journey is long, you must plan for refreshment.
- **Materials and assembling:** in addition to the actual materials to build or make an item, you will need things like screws, sandpaper, and cleaning materials to maintain the playground.
- **Labour costs:** if you cannot find volunteers with the right tools, you may need to hire tools or workmen with the right tools and expertise for building certain aspects of the playground.

How to write a playground action plan

Vision

The vision is the dream you have for your natural playground. Your vision communicates what you believe the right playground will do for the children who use it. The vision will make your beliefs about play clear to the staff, children, parents, volunteers, and the wider community. This information is gathered using Tool 1: Partner Finder (page 43).

Objectives

This section describes what you want to achieve. It describes how you plan to address the gap between where you are now and where you want to be. Twelve priority objectives were identified in the Visioning Workshop, and each of these objectives were formulated as smart objectives using Tool 7: Formulating Objectives (page 67).

Activities

You can use as much detail in this section as you think is necessary to run your project smoothly. Always remember to identify the following:

- what do you plan to do
- what activities do you plan to achieve the objective
- who is responsible for each aspect of the activity and seeing that it is completed within a set time frame.

Activities and timelines were identified when the objectives were formulated using Tool 8: Activity Plan (page 71).

Resources

What do you need in terms of human resources and material resources to do the activities? You must identify what you already have, what you still need, and what this will cost. Use Tool 4: Resource Inventory (page 53) to assign resources to each activity.

Risks and challenges

We know that things do not always work out as we plan. If we plan for things that could go wrong, we are prepared to react quickly and take action to avoid or minimise the impact. It is important to identify what risks or challenges are anticipated and, if a challenge is encountered, what you will do to address it.

For instance, frequent electricity interruptions will make it difficult to do the administration necessary for the project. We can anticipate this challenge by buying a generator or laptops that run on batteries, if possible, or we can identify tasks we could do during electricity interruptions. Risks and challenges and possible solutions were identified using Tool 6: Risk–Benefit Assessment (page 61).

Communication planning

We could have the best **action plan** possible, but if we do not communicate it clearly, it will just remain a plan on paper. For each activity, you need to consider what needs to be communicated about the project, to whom and in what way.

Monitoring implementation

Your **monitoring** plan will help you to check that your activities are implemented as planned. Your monitoring plan was formulated using Tool 9: Monitoring Summary (page 75).

Section 5

Monitor and Evaluate

What is monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring and **evaluation** is an important part of every initiative and project as it allows you to track the progress of your initial idea and document results and success. It is also called outcome-based measurement.

Outcome-based measurement is a universal approach that strengthens accountability and encourages clarity about what your project is doing and what it is changing. Outcome-based measurements follow a logical chain of events that link resources to activities, activities to products or results, and results to outcomes and impact. Each step of the project process is linked with the next step, as demonstrated in Figure 16.

Monitoring and evaluation cannot be done at the end of a project, it needs to be designed as part of the chain of events when **objectives** are formulated.

MONITORING

The systematic process of collecting, analysing and using information to track a programme's progress toward reaching its objectives.

EVALUATION

The systematic process of collecting, analysing and using information to determine the impact of a project; is it making a difference?

- **Efficiency** determines the extent to which human and material resources are well used. It tells us if the input is worth the output it achieves.
- **Effectiveness** assesses the extent to which a project achieves its objective. It tells us if the input is worth the output it achieves.
- **Impact** determines whether or not we are making a difference to the problem we are trying to solve. It tells us if the project is producing change.
- **Sustainability** estimates the extent to which changes are likely to continue after the project ends. It tells us if the changes are lasting.

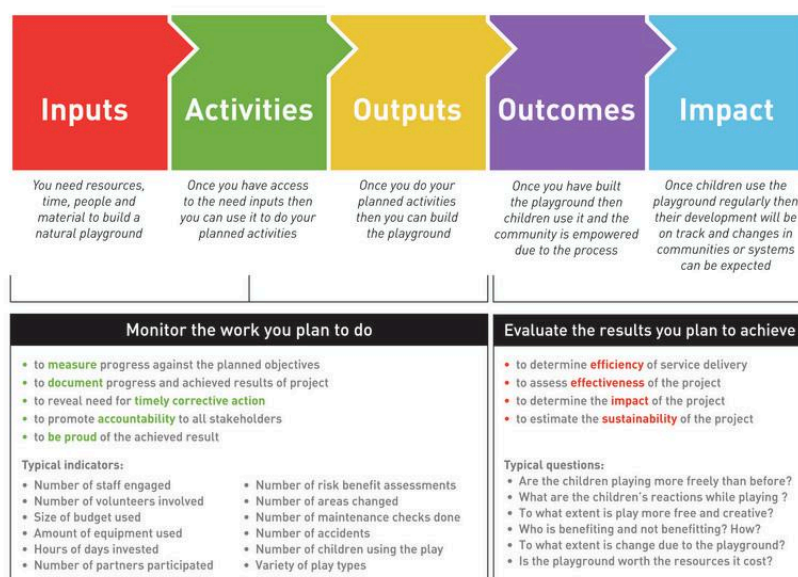


Figure 16 Once you have decided that your approach to play needs to change, follow these steps in the creation of your natural playground.

How to approach monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring

Are we getting where we want to be?

In Section 1 (page 9), we saw that play is important for early childhood development and that it offers many varied benefits to the child; in the short term but also and especially in the long term. The ultimate goal of our project is that we want to offer a play environment or space where children can develop the skills, habits and attitudes that they will need for the rest of their lives.

Monitoring and evaluating the project helps us to make sure we reach our goal of having a **natural playground**. Good intentions are not enough. We want results that will lead to the achievement of our goal.

Once the children start using the natural playground, it is important to keep monitoring and evaluating on a regular basis to ensure that the playground is a safe and exciting play space. Use Tool 9 (page 75) as a guide for monitoring the playground and Tool 10 (page 79) to monitor that the playground stays inline with safety standards. Tool 11 (page 83) helps to monitor that the playground is maintained so that the performance and safety of the equipment in your playground remains at a high standard.

We want to show that our project has made a real change in children's lives and that any donations of money or **resources** were not wasted. If there are places that children don't use or like, we need to adapt and change it to keep on offering play opportunities that address the holistic developmental needs of the children. Tool 12 (page 87) can be used to evaluate if there are opportunities that will have a positive impact on children's development.

Evaluation

Monitoring is often about facts and figures, things you can count and see. It is relatively easy to do if you work in a systematic, organised manner.

When you evaluate you make judgements. You weigh the facts that you have analysed against a standard. Choose indicators of evaluation by considering your activities and outputs.

The standard that you use to judge or weigh, is determined by a combination of:

- theory and research,
- societal norms (including laws),
- practice experience (informed opinion),
- your personal beliefs, attitudes and views.

See Tool 12 (page 87) for examples of the types of evaluations you can do.

Evaluation is a little more tricky than monitoring. It helps if you have experience in evaluating projects when you do it. If you do not have a person on your team that is familiar with identifying indicators for evaluating, try to get someone from your community or from a local NGO to assist you. On the upside, evaluations usually happen further apart than monitoring, generally every three to six months and at the end of a project.

Toolbox

Tools at a glance

Tool 1: Partner Finder (page 43)

Find out who cares about your community or school by defining who has an interest or investment in it.

Tool 2: Playground Map (page 45)

Explore how people experience the playground by mapping the playground and how they use it.

Tool 3: Playground Dreams (page 49)

Explore what you want to include in a playground by defining opportunities and activities for all types of plays and ability levels.

Tool 4: Resource Inventory (page 53)

Explore what resources are available by listing resources in different categories.

Tool 5: Issue Finder (page 57)

Explore the legal and practical issues of creating a natural playground by examining policies, regulations and access to resources.

Tool 6: Risk–Benefit Assessment (page 61)

Explore the risks and benefits of playing with loose parts by weighing the likelihood of dangers against the potential benefits.

Tool 7: Formulating Objectives (page 67)

Formulate smart objectives by describing exactly what you want to achieve.

Tool 8: Activity Plan (page 71)

Ensure that everything you have planned can be completed on time and on budget by creating an activity plan that is easy to understand.

Tool 9: Monitoring Summary (page 75)

Ensure that everything you planned gets done by monitoring implementation.

Tool 10: Monitoring Safety (page 79)

Ensure that the playground is a safe place by monitoring safety standards.

Tool 11: Monitoring Maintenance (page 83)

Ensure that your natural playground remains safe by monitoring maintenance issues.

Tool 12: Evaluate Results (page 87)

Ensure that the natural playground offers a variety of opportunities by evaluating it against developmental play needs.



Tool 1

Partner Finder

Find out who cares about your community or school by defining who has an interest or investment in it.

When do you use the Partner Finder tool?

Communities are not just groups of people that stay in the same area, they can also be groups with a common interest like a school or workplace or people that live elsewhere but have an interest in the area like business owners, organisations or government departments.

Defining your community helps you to decide who should be involved or can contribute to your natural playground Needs Assessment with manpower, resources, perspectives, experience, expertise, and insights.

You can use the Partner Finder at the start of a project to help you define who the stakeholders are in your community.

Who can use the Partner Finder tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams
- Workshop facilitators

How do you use the Partner Finder tool?

Work individually or as a group to come up with as many names as possible to complete each column. The more people that contribute to the worksheet, the more ideas you will have. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers, just come up with as many ideas as possible. When you plan, you can decide who to use or not to use. The next step after you've

completed the Partner Finder tool is to appoint someone to get the contact details for each of the people you listed.

Partner Finder

People who know something about child development and play.

Social workers, academics, occupational therapists, nurses, doctors, teachers, psychologists, etc.

Enter your ideas here.

People who are affected by the lack of a playground.

Children, community members, local government, school principals , youth workers, local businesses, etc.

Enter your ideas here.

People who come from different cultures.

Culture, nationality, language, interest groups, etc.

Enter your ideas here.

People who have special needs or different abilities.

People with disabilities, old people, youth, children, women, etc.

Enter your ideas here.

Organisations that work with children.

NGOs, CBOs, faith-based organisations, shelters, schools.

Enter your ideas here.



Tool 2

Playground Map

Explore how people experience the playground by mapping the playground and how they use it.

*This tool forms part of your **needs assessment**.*

When do you use the Playground Map tool?

The playground map tool is great to use when making improvements to an existing playground. It allows you to clearly identify what you want the new playground to offer. People's perception of the existing playground can provide information that cannot be obtained any other way. It can reveal areas children avoid or use often, areas that are important or areas that can be developed.

The playground map is a cheap and easy tool to use with young or old. The only requirement is that you have a facilitator and someone to take notes. The playground map helps you get perspective on the existing playground, how children use and access resources and where they prefer to be.

Who can use the Playground Map tool?

- Groups or teams
- Workshop facilitators

How do you use the Playground Map tool?

To use the Playground Map tool you will need a venue that is close to the playground, a diverse group of at least ten to fifteen people, large sheets of blank paper, and coloured markers or crayons. Additionally, it could be useful to have tables and chairs for participants to use while creating their

maps (younger participants can use the floor if necessary) and masking tape to stick the completed maps to the wall during the final discussion.

The facilitator should provide their workshop with the required equipment and follow the outlined steps. The exercise should take approximately one hour in total.

Playground Map

Step 1: Frame and explain the exercise

Explain the exercise to participants by telling them that they will be drawing their playground so that everyone can better understand what it offers and what its problems are. Assure everyone that this is a fun activity, that there is no right or wrong way to complete the task, and that the groups are made up of many people because many different ideas and perspectives are needed. Divide participants into groups of five to six people and give each group a piece of paper and set of markers or crayons. This step should take five minutes.

Step 2: Establish a starting point

Ask the group as a whole what the centre of the playground is. This is usually the most used or most prominent area. Once the group agrees, ask each smaller group to make a mark in the middle of their paper representing that central point of the playground. Next, ask them to mark the fence or boundary line of the preschool or playground area. This step should take five minutes.

Step 3: Walk about and draw playground

Once they have completed step 2, participants are to go for a walk about the playground and to continue to draw their map using the following prompts:

- Draw the main roads going past the school or playground.
- Draw any water, trees, rocks or paths in the playground.
- Draw the current playground equipment. Participants can draw simple symbols, as long as they are easy to interpret.

Once the general map and layout of the playground is established, participants should map out their playground concerns and opportunities using the following prompts:

- Mark with a blue dot places where there is playground equipment and write the name of the equipment.
- Mark with a green dot places where there are natural resources and name them (tree, plants, or rocks, etc).
- Mark with a black dot places where children play and write which type of play and the approximate age of the children who use each area.
- Mark with a yellow dot places where nothing seems to be happening.

- Mark with a pink dot any items that cannot be moved, such as a building, big trees, taps, or fences.
- Mark with a red star any areas or aspects of the playground that pose any dangers or concerns and make a note of what you observed.

Once each group has completed their map they should return to the venue to discuss their findings. This step should take fifteen minutes.

Step 4: Feedback to the group

Ask each group to send a representative to give feedback and talk through their map. If possible, stick each map on the wall so that they are easy for all to see. This step should take fifteen minutes.

Step 5: Group discussion

Ask the following questions to the group as a whole (and any other questions that might arise). It is important that either the workshop facilitator or a helper takes notes on what is discussed.

- What is most obviously the same in all of the maps?
- What is most obviously different in all of the maps?
- What have you learned about the playground by drawing the map?

This final step should take twenty minutes.



Tool 3

Playground Dreams

Explore what you want to include in a playground by defining opportunities and activities for all types of plays and ability levels.

*This tool forms part of your **needs assessment**.*

When do you use the Playground Dreams tool?

You should use the Playground Dreams tool at the start of a project to help you define what you want to include in a playground.

A good natural playground offers opportunities for all types of play. Use Figure 12 (page 23) as a guide on the different types of play to include in your playground. The playground should cater for all the senses (see, hear, touch, smell, and taste) and have activities and opportunities for users of all ages, abilities, and developmental stages.

Who can use the Playground Dreams tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams
- Workshop facilitators

How do you use the Playground Dreams tool?

Work through the tool and come up with as many ideas as possible to complete each block. In each block, write down what activity or opportunity you would like in your playground for that type of play. You can do this exercise on your own or with small teams or groups at a community participation workshop. The more people who contribute to the worksheet, the more ideas you will have.

Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Just come up with as many ideas as possible. When you plan, you can decide what to use or not to use. Make sure to include activities and opportunities for children younger than two years and for children with disabilities.

Playground Dreams

TIP

It is not always possible to fill every block with play ideas and many ideas will overlap across types. If you're stuck you can always look at Section 1 (page 23) to refresh your memory on the different types of play and examples of each.

Gross motor play

Enter your ideas here.

Fine motor play

Enter your ideas here.

Sensory play

Enter your ideas here.

Drama play

Enter your ideas here.

Music play

Enter your ideas here.

Art play

Enter your ideas here.

Nature play

Enter your ideas here.

Sand play

Enter your ideas here.

Water play

Enter your ideas here.

Construction play

Enter your ideas here.

Solitary play

Enter your ideas here.

Loose parts play

Enter your ideas here.



Tool 4

Resource Inventory

Explore what **resources** are available by listing resources in different categories.

*This tool forms part of your **needs assessment**.*

When do you use the Resource Inventory tool?

You should use the Resource Inventory tool at the start of a project to help you define what resources you have available for each different type of play.

Any space will already have resources that can be used, even if it is only the soil in the yard. By listing the resources into categories, you may find that you have a lot of resources for one type of play but nothing for others.

Who can use the Resource Inventory tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams
- Workshop facilitators

How do you use the Resource Inventory tool?

Work through the tool and come up with as many ideas as possible to complete each block. In each block, write down what resources you already have that can be used to create an activity or opportunity for that type of play. You can do this exercise on your own, with small teams, or with groups at a community participation workshop. The more people who contribute to the worksheet, the more information you will have.

TIP

It is a good idea to complete Tool 3 (page 49) and Tool 4 at the same time to get an idea of what resources you have and what you will need in the future.

Resource Inventory

Gross motor play

Enter your ideas here.

Fine motor play

Enter your ideas here.

Sensory play

Enter your ideas here.

Drama play

Enter your ideas here.

Music play

Enter your ideas here.

Art play

Enter your ideas here.

Nature play

Enter your ideas here.

Sand play

Enter your ideas here.

Water play

Enter your ideas here.

Construction play

Enter your ideas here.

Solitary play

Enter your ideas here.

Loose parts play

Enter your ideas here.



Tool 5

Issue Finder

Explore the legal and practical issues of creating a natural playground by examining policies, regulations and access to **resources**.

*This tool forms part of your **needs assessment**.*

When do you use the Issue Finder tool?

The Issue Finder tool helps you to plan for the practical implementation of a playground that meets the safety regulations and standards prescribed by your local authorities.

This tool is designed to be used together with your local guidelines and laws that exist to ensure inclusion and safety in the playground. While we want to offer an exciting playground for children, we also want to make sure that we have considered the guidelines and laws that will help reduce the risk of injury to the children who will be playing there.

Any plan has practical issues that will affect how we implement it. Considering this in advance will prevent us from getting surprised, discouraged or overwhelmed when we start to build our playground.

TIP

See Section 1 (page 15) for playground safety regulations and a useful checklist to guide you through this tool.

Who can use the Issue Finder tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams
- Workshop facilitators

How do you use the Issue Finder tool?

Work through the tool and answer each question as best you can. You can do this exercise on your own or with small teams or groups at a community participation workshop. The more people who contribute to the worksheet, the more ideas you will have.

Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Just come up with as many ideas as possible. When you plan, you can decide what to use or not to use.

Issue Finder

Age groups

Different age groups have different developmental needs. How will your playground address this?

Enter your ideas here.

Capacity

How many children can be using the space and equipment?

Enter your ideas here.

Zones

How much space is there between equipment?

Enter your ideas here.

Equipment

Does the equipment meet the requirements in terms of height and design?

Enter your ideas here.

Installation and maintenance

Will this be done by staff, volunteers, or paid for?

Enter your ideas here.

Resources

What do you need to build the playground? Don't forget about transportation of the new equipment to the playground.

Enter your ideas here.

Other

Are there any other rules, regulations, or issues that need to be considered?

Enter your ideas here.



Tool 6

Risk–Benefit Assessment

Explore the risks and benefits of playing with **loose parts** by weighing the likelihood of dangers against the potential benefits.

*This tool forms part of your **needs assessment**.*

We should encourage opportunities for children to define and take their own risks, but it is of the utmost importance that adults are not negligent and do not permit avoidable dangers and injuries.

When do you use the Risk–Benefit Assessment tool?

The Risk–Benefit Assessment tool helps you to decide if the benefits outweigh the risks when introducing loose parts play.

Childhood is an ongoing process of trial and error with the potential for achievement, but also the certainty of accidents. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to take the risk of injury.

Taking risks is how we learn what we are capable of, what we can achieve and how to survive failure. Opportunities for risk in play are very important if we want our children to develop into brave, confident, competent, and resilient people. When we select loose parts for play, we are offering opportunities for children to create and experience new kinds of risk.

Who can use the Risk-Benefit Assessment tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams
- Workshop facilitators

How do you use the Risk-Benefit Assessment tool?

Work through the tool and come up with as many ideas as possible to complete each block. For each group of loose parts, write down the potential physical and emotional benefits for the child, the potential risks of injury, and how best to reduce those risks without limiting the benefits. You can do this exercise on your own or with small teams or groups at a community participation workshop. The more people who contribute to the worksheet, the more information you will have.

TIP

When determining the risks for each group, order them according to the likelihood of them happening. Put risks that are likely to happen daily first, followed by risks likely to happen weekly or monthly and lastly put risks that are likely to happen once a year or never. This is useful in determining the risk to benefit ratio. However, remember that some risks are not worth taking even if they aren't likely to happen.

Risk-Benefit Assessment

Tyres, hoops, pallets, boxes, and crates

Potential physical and emotional benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Potential risks of injury

Enter your ideas here.

How to reduce risk without limiting the benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Blankets, sheets, tarps, ropes, and tape

Potential physical and emotional benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Potential risks of injury

Enter your ideas here.

How to reduce risk without limiting the benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Buckets, cups, containers, gutters, bottles, and pipes

Potential physical and emotional benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Potential risks of injury

Enter your ideas here.

How to reduce risk without limiting the benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Kitchen utensils and digging tools

Potential physical and emotional benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Potential risks of injury

Enter your ideas here.

How to reduce risk without limiting the benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Wood pieces, blocks, planks, and sticks

Potential physical and emotional benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Potential risks of injury

Enter your ideas here.

How to reduce risk without limiting the benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Seeds, rocks, leaves, and other small items

Potential physical and emotional benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Potential risks of injury

Enter your ideas here.

How to reduce risk without limiting the benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Sand

Potential physical and emotional benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Potential risks of injury

Enter your ideas here.

How to reduce risk without limiting the benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Water

Potential physical and emotional benefits

Enter your ideas here.

Potential risks of injury

Enter your ideas here.

How to reduce risk without limiting the benefits

Enter your ideas here.



Tool 7

Formulating Objectives

Formulate smart objectives by describing exactly what you want to achieve.

When do you use the Formulating Objectives tool?

Someone once said, ‘If you don’t know where you are going, how will you know that you got there?’

Well-formulated objectives lead to successful, measurable projects. When you have established the priority issues that you want to address in your project, you need to formulate an objective for each one of those priorities.

Who can use the Formulating Objectives tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams
- Workshop facilitators

How do you use the Formulating Objectives tool?

For each objective, answer the prompts to help you identify how exactly to achieve your goals. For multiple objectives you can copy the prompts onto a piece of paper and write down your answers.

TIP**Goal:**

A goal is the big picture, what you are working towards. For us it is to create or update a natural playground.

Objectives:

Each objective is a step you need to take to reach the goal.

Activities:

Are the different things we do or deliver (produce) to reach each objective.

Formulating Objectives

Objective 1

What aspect of the playground do we want to complete and by when?

Enter your objective here.

Activity

What do we need to do to reach this objective?

Enter your ideas here.

Output

What is the result or product of this activity?

Enter your ideas here.

Responsibility

Who is responsible for completing this activity and by when must it be completed?

Enter your ideas here.

Inputs

What resources (people, things, and money) do we need to complete the activity?

Enter your ideas here.

Monitoring

How can we check that the activity is complete?

Enter your ideas here.

Objective 2

What aspect of the playground do we want to complete and by when?

Enter your objective here.

Activity

What do we need to do to reach this objective?

Enter your ideas here.

Output

What is the result or product of this activity?

Enter your ideas here.

Responsibility

Who is responsible for completing this activity and by when must it be completed?

Enter your ideas here.

Inputs

What resources (people, things, and money) do we need to complete the activity?

Enter your ideas here.

Monitoring

How can we check that the activity is complete?

Enter your ideas here.



Tool 8

Activity Plan

Ensure that everything you have planned can be completed on time and on **budget** by creating an activity plan that is easy to understand.

When do you use the Activity Plan tool?

Once you have outlined your **objectives** it is important to determine the **resources** needed to achieve your goal. You can use the Activity Plan tool to draft a budget for your project. Summarising all resources on one sheet prevents you from duplicating items or persons needed.

Who can use the Activity Plan tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams
- Workshop facilitators

How do you use the Activity Plan tool?

For each objective and activity, identify the resources needed to complete the activity, potential places or people to source the resources from and the overall cost of resources for that activity. Do this by completing the prompts in the tool below. Once you have completed the tool, use the request for donation sample letter as a guide when contacting possible donors.

For multiple objectives you can copy the prompts onto a piece of paper and write down your answers.

TIP

Use the resource inventory you created using Tool 4 (page 53) to answer the prompts and add in new resources only if necessary. This helps you make sure you're using everything you have and keeping costs down.

Activity Plan

Reference 1

Objective and Activity

Enter your objective and activity here.

Resources

Describe what item or person is needed.

Enter your ideas here.

Possible sources

Who could be approached to contribute?

Enter your ideas here.

Cost

How much will these resources cost?

Enter your ideas here.

Reference 2

Objective and Activity

Enter your objective and activity here.

Resources

Describe what item or person is needed.

Enter your ideas here.

Possible sources

Who could be approached to contribute?

Enter your ideas here.

Cost

How much will these resources cost?

Enter your ideas here.

Sample Letter: Request for donation

Dear parent / guardian / community member

Request for loose parts for our new playground

At the Most Fantastic Pre-School we believe that play is critically important to the development of our children. We would like to empower our children's creativity! We want our children to have a variety of different materials and objects (loose parts) to move, carry, combine, redesign, line up, take apart and put back together in multiple ways!

By stocking our new active open play space – located in the centre of our school – with loose parts, we want to offer children:

- daily inspiration
- endless possibilities
- a chance to think
- encouragement to be creative.

Why do we believe this is important? With children's natural curiosity and creativity, using loose parts will support brain development, scientific experimenting, mathematical thinking, risk-taking, and learning by trial and error – skills we want our children to have in order to be successful for the rest of their lives!

In order to stock up, we need your help to gather all that we need for our 'loose parts'. If you have anything at home, or anything you can perhaps gather with your children on an outing, we would very much appreciate it. Please see the list below for items we are looking for.

We appreciate your help and thank you for your support

Kind regards,

MS E.C, Diva

Principal Teacher

Loose parts:

- wooden coins (slices of wood about 3 cm thick)
- logs of different heights and widths
- chalk
- cardboard boxes of various sizes and shapes
- leaves, feathers, shells, or pine cones
- stones, pebbles, or rocks
- milk and bread crates
- wooden pallets
- buckets, tubes, and plastic gutters
- funnels and hosepipes
- nets
- tyres of different shapes and sizes
- steering wheels
- computer keyboards
- old clothes for dressing up.



Tool 9

Monitoring Summary

Ensure that everything you planned gets done by **monitoring** implementation.

When do you use the Monitoring Summary tool?

Monitoring is a regular, ongoing activity that provides information you can use to make sure that the implementation of the project is on track. The Monitoring Summary tool helps you summarise your monitoring activities.

Who can use the Monitoring Summary tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams

How do you use the Monitoring Summary tool?

Just as cars have indicators to show the direction you are going, projects need indicators to show the direction it is going. Once you know where to look you will see that there are many indicators that you can check. Performance indicators monitor that activities are completed during implementation of the natural playground.

For each **objective** and activity, identify the indicators needed to measure progress, the way that you will check this indicator, how often you will check it and when it should be completed by. Do this by completing the prompts in the tool below.

For multiple objectives you can copy the prompts onto a piece of paper and write down your answers.

TIP

Indicators were already identified when you formulated objectives using Tool 7 (page 67).

Monitoring Summary

Reference 1

Objective and Activity

Enter your objective and activity here.

Indicator

Indicators that you identified to measure progress.

Enter your ideas here.

Means of verification

How will you check the indicator?

Enter your ideas here.

Frequency

How often will you check?

Enter your ideas here.

Date

When will this be completed?

Enter your ideas here.

Reference 2

Objective and Activity

Enter your objective and activity here.

MONITORING SUMMARY

Indicator

Indicators that you identified to measure progress.

Enter your ideas here.

Means of verification

How will you check the indicator?

Enter your ideas here.

Frequency

How often will you check?

Enter your ideas here.

Date

When will this be completed?

Enter your ideas here.



Tool 10

Monitoring Safety

Ensure that the playground is a safe place by **monitoring** safety standards.

When do you use the Monitoring Safety tool?

Nothing stays new forever. Once your new playground is built, it is important to regularly monitor the equipment and spaces against safety standards to make sure that the playground remains a safe and exciting space for children. The Monitoring Safety tool helps you continuously check the safety of your playground over time.

Who can use the Monitoring Safety tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams

How do you use the Monitoring Safety tool?

Once you have completed the safety checklist in Section 1 (page 15), use the Monitoring Safety tool to check that your playground continues to be safe for children. It is important to do a thorough safety check of the natural playground from time to time to reduce the risk of unnecessary injuries to children.

Other ways to avoid unnecessary injuries:

- Regularly talk to children about the rules
- Make sure to always have active and attentive supervision by adults

You can fill it in below.

Monitoring Safety

Fall height and fall zones

- ☐ Is the possible fall height less than 1,5 m from all pieces of equipment?
- ☐ Is there a minimum clearance of at least 2 m separating each piece of equipment?

Safety surfacing

- ☐ Is there impact-absorbing material under all pieces of equipment over 500 mm in height? (e.g. sand, bark, mulch or ground rubber)
- ☐ Is the surfacing well maintained? (e.g. at least 300 mm depth of loose fill material)

Design hazards

- ☐ Is the equipment free of possible spaces children could get their heads stuck, such as openings of between 80 mm and 230 mm?
- ☐ Is all moving equipment free of any potential trapping and pinching points?
- ☐ Are there sturdy guard and handrails, appropriate to a child's hand and grip size? Any platform higher than 30 cm is required to have a rail.
- ☐ Does the larger equipment prevent possible climbing on the outside of the structure? No structures may be higher than 1,5 m.

Shading

- ☐ Is all equipment suitably shaded, if no natural shade applies?

Maintenance

- ☐ Is the equipment's frame stable and free from movement?
- ☐ Is the equipment free from rust, cracks or broken items?
- ☐ Are timber items on the equipment free from rotten or splintered wood?
- ☐ Is all equipment free of protruding fixings and sharp edges?
- ☐ Is the play area free of loose stones or gravel?
- ☐ Is the play area free of trip hazards?
- ☐ Is the play area free of tree branches or anything sharp at children's eye level?

Slide

- ☐ Is the slide securely anchored in the ground?
- ☐ Does the slide have built up sides?
- ☐ Do the slide steps have a guard rail?

Swings

- ☐ Are the swings securely anchored to the ground?
- ☐ Do the swings for children under 6 years of age have chair-like back support?
- ☐ Do the tyre swings have drainage holes to let out rain water?
- ☐ Is the area under the swings filled with sand?

Sandpit

- ☐ Is the sandpit placed in the shade or have a roof for sun protection?
- ☐ Is the depth of the sand pit at least 40 cm?
- ☐ Is the sandpit filled with river sand?

Playground

- ☐ Is the playground enclosed and gated?
- ☐ Is there enough space in the play area for children to play?
- ☐ Are all garden tools, equipment and chemicals locked away?
- ☐ Is the area free of all poisonous or thorny plants?
- ☐ Is the area free of any litter or dangerous objects lying around, such as glass, tins, and rusty nails?



Tool 11

Monitoring Maintenance

Ensure that your natural playground remains safe by **monitoring** maintenance issues.

When do you use the Monitoring Maintenance tool?

Preventive maintenance is an important part of managing your natural playground. Once your new playground is built, it is important to regularly monitor the state of your equipment.

When you have a maintenance programme in place, you will maintain the performance and safety of the equipment on your playground. Regular upkeep and consistent checks help you to avoid major damage in the future.

Who can use the Monitoring Maintenance tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams

How do you use the Monitoring Maintenance tool?

Use the tool as a guide for monitoring the maintenance needed in your playground. Walk through your playground and take note of the issues listed on the tool. When you find an issue, comment about it in the space provided.

Monitoring Maintenance

Broken equipment

Check for broken equipment, such as loose bolts, missing caps, and cracks. Be sure to check for cracks in the plastic. If you do find a broken piece, remove it (or block it from use) until it is fixed or removed.

Enter your ideas here.

Broken glass, trash, and fragments

Keep your playground clean by disposing of broken glass and other trash; this can prevent cuts and unsanitary conditions.

Enter your ideas here.

Loose anchoring

Check that all play equipment higher than 50 cm is anchored or firmly fixed to the ground. If you find equipment that is not anchored, remove it (or block it from use) until it is fixed or removed.

Enter your ideas here.

Insect damage

Insects can damage wooden equipment. Keep in mind that, if you include natural materials in your play area, they will require annual upkeep. You should check for rough spots and regularly sand them down to help prevent splinters.

Enter your ideas here.

Animals, rodents, and pests

Make sure there are no animals, rodents, or pests in hollows and hide-outs in the playground.

Enter your ideas here.

Problems with surface under play equipment

Is the surfacing underneath equipment well maintained? For example, does it have at least 300 mm depth of loose fill material underneath? Check high-use areas, such as under swings and slides, regularly and fill up if necessary. An easy trick is to mark the ideal surfacing depths on the equipment's 'legs'.

Enter your ideas here.

User modifications

Check if children have tied ropes or other things to parts or equipment or if have they left things out of place.

Enter your ideas here.

Rusted or corroded metals

Metal becomes weak (and dangerous) where it rusts or corrodes. Check carefully where metals come into contact with the ground. It is also important to check between each piece of swing chain and connection points on the swing frame.

Enter your ideas here.

Tyres

Remember tyres are a fire hazard and should be stored safely. Drill holes in tyres to make sure water can not get trapped inside. Make sure the tyres have no metal wires sticking out.

Enter your ideas here.



Tool 12

Evaluate Results

Ensure that the natural playground offers a variety of opportunities by evaluating it against developmental play needs.

When do you use the Evaluate Results tool?

When you evaluate, you want to establish if your playground is offering play opportunities that will impact on the holistic development of children. The evaluate results tool helps you to check that as many as possible of the developmental play needs of children are catered for in your playground.

Who can use the Evaluate Results tool?

- Individuals
- Groups or teams

How do you use the Evaluate Results tool?

Work through the tool to determine whether your playground offers a variety of play opportunities for children. Mark if the listed opportunity is available in your natural playground.

TIP

Use Figure 12 (page 23) to refresh your memory on the different types of play and the play opportunities in Section 1 (page 14) as a guide for the appropriate type of play for different age groups.

Evaluate Results

Does your playground offer opportunities for...

Physical play:

- ☐ Running, walking
- ☐ Crawling under and over
- ☐ Skipping, hopping, and jumping
- ☐ Climbing
- ☐ Sliding
- ☐ Balancing
- ☐ Rocking
- ☐ Rotating and spinning
- ☐ Playing with a ball
- ☐ Riding scooters and bikes

Social and solitary play:

- ☐ Quiet places to sit, talk, or think
- ☐ Places to hide
- ☐ Interaction with other children
- ☐ Playing on their own

Creative play:

- ☐ Sand and mud
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Natural loose parts
- ☐ Recycled loose parts
- ☐ Chalk, drawing, or painting
- ☐ Music or sound making items
- ☐ Pretend play items and places
- ☐ Performing areas

Does the playground?

- ☐ Encourage play
- ☐ Stimulate the senses
- ☐ Stimulate curiosity
- ☐ Stimulate imaginative play
- ☐ Support maths and science play
- ☐ Support opportunities for communication
- ☐ Encourage a love of nature

Facilitator's Guide

Notes for facilitators

These notes were developed to guide facilitators of the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit. To meet the needs of each individual group, facilitators will need to adapt as required.

Target group of the workshop

This workshop will be useful to many people, such as volunteers on management committees, managers and staff (at least ECD NQF level 4 or 5) of schools, provincial and district officials, social service professionals who are employed by schools, ECDs, NPOs, DSD, sports and recreation departments, and municipal officials. Organisations are assumed to have specialists in **ECD** who are able to train using the toolkit.

Purpose of the workshop

People who attended this workshop and received the materials are able to:

- Describe the importance of play.
- Discuss strategies to engage communities.
- Implement a playground **needs assessment**.
- Develop a playground **action plan**.
- Track the progress and success of the project.

Duration

The duration of this workshop is a minimum of twelve hours. It can be presented over two days or session by session on different days if it is more convenient for the group.

Selection of facilitators

The ideal facilitator for this programme will have:

- at least five years of experience in the early childhood development field
- a demonstrated ability to work effectively with people whose cultures are different from their own, including differences in race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, socio-economic status, level of education, age, etc

- prior experience as a facilitator and knowledge of outcome-based training
- a command of the language of instruction and terminology related to early childhood development.

Selection of training venue

The ideal training venue has:

- adequate free parking and easy access to public transport
- enough light, but also the possibility to make the room dark enough to see PowerPoint slides, if the facilitator decides to use these in their presentation
- air conditioning, fans, heaters, or other ways to make the room temperature comfortable
- a place to prepare and serve tea and refreshments
- limited disturbances
- good acoustics so that your voice will carry
- enough space to comfortably accommodate your group and their movement, including small group discussions
- toilet facilities
- accessibility for people with disabilities.

You must familiarise yourself with the venue beforehand, so that you can check that you can set up the room as you require. This includes checking for enough electrical outlets for a laptop and data projector if you choose to use these, planning for your position with a table, etc. If you plan to use a data projector, you must ensure that there is either a screen or a smooth wall to project against; also check to see that the projector works so you can make alternative arrangements before the audience arrives, if necessary.

Toolkit package

- Facilitator's guide (this section of the toolkit) that guides the facilitator in implementing the workshop.
- Participants' toolkit with information for participants to use during training; this can either be access to the toolkit on an electronic device, printed copies of relevant sections, or both.

Tips for handling the workshop

Prepare yourself with the necessary material to conduct a workshop.

The most important tool is you

See that you are neatly dressed and groomed. Use movement wisely and engage your audience with gestures and facial expressions.

Set up of workshop space

The ideal room setup permits easy viewing of the facilitator and slide projections. The facilitator should be able to move about and engage the audience. It should also facilitate ease of group discussions. Figure 17 gives examples of possible workshop arrangements.

Refreshments

Scheduling enough body and refreshment breaks is vital. Serving refreshments is key as it impacts on the atmosphere and mood of the workshop. Arrange for someone to help you have tea and refreshments ready.

Tips for adult training

Knowledge of a few basic principles that underlie the learning process can guide facilitators in presenting in a way that optimises participants' learning.

Adults learn because they want to. They know what they need to learn. Adults learn better by doing. This is why we need to actively engage the participants in the learning process. Participant's involvement has many benefits. It can help to improve retention and generate interest.



Video: Workshop facilitation tips
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhutBzS8_8s)

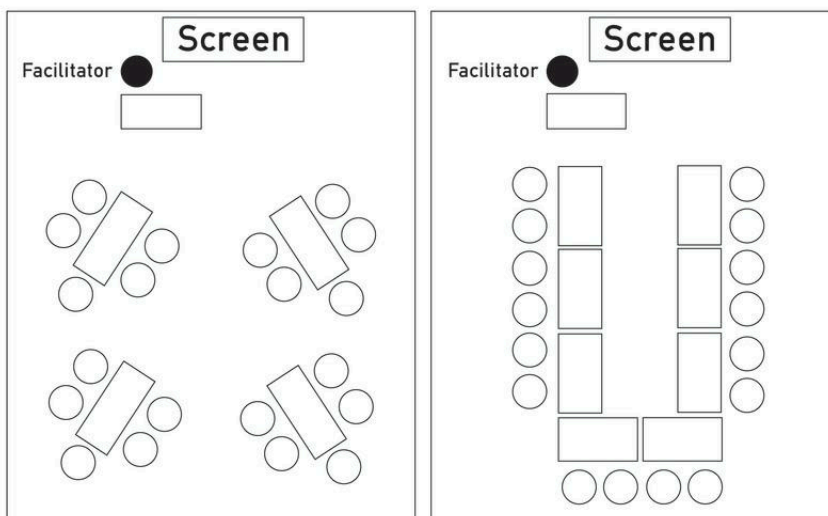


Figure 17 Arrangement of workshop space.

Training methods

Facilitator's role

Your role is to serve as the facilitator of the group's learning. A good facilitator should be a neutral servant of the group. This is achieved by focussing the group on the given task and overall agenda, suggesting methods and procedures for achieving the task, protecting all group members from personal attack, and remaining non-defensive and accepting of feedback with goodwill. It is important that you help the group to reach win-win decisions or a common consensus.

Facilitation methods

There are several facilitation methods utilised in this workshop, such as a mini lecture, which is similar to a lecture, but shorter and actively involves some level of group participation.

Multi-sensory approaches

People process information through different perceptual styles, including auditory and visual. Using a variety of activities to create multi-sensory experiences can accommodate different learning styles and can help to reinforce skills or knowledge acquired through other senses. Beside your material, enrich the learning experience by offering opportunities for individuals to share relevant knowledge and experiences. Involvement techniques are a must.

Engage the audience with methods like seeking their agreement to a statement, asking for examples or applying your own experience.

Group discussion

Group discussions can take a variety of formats. One form is the structured discussion which involves guided interactions among participants. The facilitator sets the direction and tone of the discussion and keeps the group on track.

Brainstorming

The facilitator will pose a question or problem to the group and will ask participants to generate as many ideas or responses as possible. The facilitator records each response and at the end discusses the ideas with the group. Brainstorming is an effective method of both generating participant involvement and drawing on the **resources** of the group to enrich the learning experience.

PowerPoint pointers:

If you choose to create powerpoint slides for your workshop, make sure to practice the slides so you know them. Do not turn your back to the audience and read from the screen. It makes you look unprepared. Rather position the screen of your laptop so you can read from it but make consistent eye contact during the presentation.

Using advocacy

Advocacy is when someone speaks on behalf of or in support of a vulnerable group and their rights and needs with the aim of gaining support or commitment.

When we advocate for natural playgrounds, we want to ensure that:

- The voice of children is heard on playgrounds and its importance for healthy development is reiterated.
- The right of children to play is achieved at a nominal cost.
- The play needs of children are considered when developing playgrounds.
- Those with influence in government departments create a supportive environment for the implementation of natural playgrounds at school level.

Advocacy for the toolkit

The goal for using advocacy in the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit is to gain support and commitment from decision makers for the implementation of natural playgrounds.

In Section 1 (page 9) of the toolkit, you will find information to use when advocating. Depending on the audience, venue and the amount of time available, you should plan your talk to cover the importance of play in child development, and advocate for natural playgrounds as a solution to providing play opportunities to children at a nominal cost.

Qualities of advocates

Effective advocates can influence policy and **budgets** by using facts and strong relationships to educate government officials and the public on the changes they want to bring to play opportunities for young children.

Effective advocates have:

- **good communication skills** to argue their side
- **analytical skills** to analyse the situation and argument
- **good people skills** to make and build connections
- **perseverance** to keep on trying until they succeed
- **creativity** to find different ways and angles to present their side
- **passion** and a firm belief in the cause they are advocating for.

Using participatory workshops

Most of the tools in this toolkit are specifically designed to be used by groups of diverse **partners** and stakeholders.

There are two **workshops** that cover the tools. At the end of each workshop, a task team is elected to summarise the information gathered in the workshop.

Exploration Workshop guide

Pinpoint **stakeholders** and where to begin in the creation of your natural playground by facilitating the participation of community members.

When should you run an Exploration Workshop?

Finding a starting point for your playground **needs assessment** can be daunting. There are so many possible things that could be investigated. This community participation workshop uses the community as experts of their environment to pinpoint issues that can be explored. Certain issues will be explored on the day, others will be identified and then explored by a task team after the workshop.

TIP

These activities can be done in one day or over several sessions depending on how much time people have available. The allocated time and starting times indicated can be adjusted to suit each workshop as needed.

Before the workshop

Identify facilitators: You will need an experienced person to facilitate the community participation workshop. In addition you will need a co-facilitator to take notes of the group discussions and feedback. The facilitators need to prepare by:

- Reading through all sections of the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit and ensuring they understand the process of creating a natural playground from start to finish.
- Reading through the necessary tools in the Toolbox (page 41) and these instructions for this workshop in the Facilitator's Guide.

Identify participants: Use Tool 1: Partner Finder (page 43) as a guide to identify as many people as possible to attend the workshop. There should be at least one or two people per category.

Identify a venue: Find a venue that is in the community and close to the existing playground you want to update or the site for the new playground.

Arrange the workshop: Make necessary arrangements for the workshop, such as refreshments, meals, stationery, and devices pre-loaded with the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit. Arrange for a facilitator and two or three note takers. Remember to check for any dietary requirements of participants and cater for the special needs of people with disabilities.

Exploration Workshop schedule

1. Welcome and logistics

- 10 minutes
- 9:00am

Introduce yourself, explain the programme and point out the amenities to participants. State the goal for the workshop and the group rules.

2. Ice breaker

- 15 minutes
- 9:10am

Begin your workshop with an ice breaker. This allows participants to introduce themselves and feel more comfortable.

Stand in a circle, holding a ball. As an example, state your name and a game that you enjoyed playing as a child. Throw the ball to someone else in the circle. When they catch it, they say their name and a game that they enjoyed playing as a child, or something similar, such as their favourite place to play. This person then throws the ball to someone else, who shares a similar thing about themselves. Follow the pattern until everyone has a chance to introduce themselves.

3. Set the scene

- 45 minutes
- 9:25am

Give each participant a copy of the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit to use as a guide during the workshop.

Set the scene for the day by doing a thirty minute presentation on the concepts in the booklet and why the workshop is being held.

4. Define ‘where we want to be’

- 30 minutes
- 10:10am

Use Tool 3: Playground Dreams (page 49) to explore what you want to include in your playground.

Divide participants into small groups of approximately five people. Each small group follows the instructions on the tool. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group. Note takers should compile a combined list of ideas from the group feedback.

5. Define the ‘who’

- 30 minutes
- 10:40am

Use Tool 1: Partner Finder (page 43) to define who has an interest or investment in your playground.

Divide participants into small groups of approximately five people. Make sure participants understand the concept of brainstorming (page 28). Each small group follows the instructions on the tool. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group. Note takers should compile a combined list of ideas from the group feedback.

6. Tea break

- 30 minutes
- 11:10am

Break for tea to allow participants to rest and relax with refreshments. As a facilitator, you can network and answer individual questions or comments if necessary.

7. Define ‘where we are’

- 60 minutes
- 11:40am

Use Tool 2: Playground Map (page 45) to explore how people experience the playground.

Divide participants into small groups of approximately five people. Each small group follows the instructions on the tool. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group. Note takers should compile a combined list of ideas from the group feedback.

8. Lunch

- 45 minutes
- 12:40pm

Break for lunch to allow participants to rest and relax with food. As a facilitator, you can network and answer individual questions or comments if necessary.

9. Define 'what we have'

- 60 minutes
- 1:25pm

Use Tool 4: Resource Inventory (page 53) to explore what resources are available.

Divide participants into small groups of approximately five people. Each small group follows the instructions on the tool. Let each small group complete the tool by brainstorming. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group. Note takers should compile a combined list of ideas from the group feedback.

10. Define 'where we are'

- 30 minutes
- 2:25pm

Use Tool 5: Issue Finder (page 57) to explore the legal and practical issues of creating a natural playground.

Divide participants into small groups of approximately five people. Each small group follows the instructions on the tool. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group. Note takers should compile a combined list of ideas from the group feedback.

11. Define 'where we want to be'

- 30 minutes
- 2:55pm

Use Tool 6: Risk–Benefit Assessment (page 61) to explore the risks and benefits of loose part play.

Divide participants into small groups of approximately five people. Each small group follows the instructions on the tool. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group. Note takers should compile a combined list of ideas from the group feedback.

12. Tea break

- 20 minutes
- 3:25pm

Break for tea to allow participants to rest and relax with refreshments. As a facilitator, you can network and answer individual questions or comments if necessary.

13. Elect a task team

- 45 minutes
- 3:45pm

Ask participants to nominate five to ten people to process the information that was gathered during the day. Confirm that the nominees are willing to serve on the task team. If not, ask for another nominee. Make sure to include people who work in the field of early childhood development on the task team.

Visioning Workshop guide

Develop a shared vision and goals for a natural playground by facilitating the participation of community members.

When should you run a Visioning Workshop?

Once you have had an Exploration Workshop where you have identified stakeholders, problem areas, and services in the community, the next step is to hold a Visioning Workshop for your natural playground.

Before the workshop

Identify facilitators: You will need an experienced person to facilitate the community participation workshop. In addition you will need a co-facilitator to take notes of the group discussions and feedback. It is best if the same facilitator and co-facilitator who ran the Exploration Workshop also run the Visioning Workshop. The facilitators need to prepare by:

- reading through all sections of the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit and ensuring they understand the process of creating a natural playground from start to finish
- reading through the necessary tools in the Toolbox (page 41) and these instructions for this workshop in the Facilitator's Guide.

Identify participants: Invite all participants that attended the Exploration Workshop and invite all partners and stakeholders that were identified using Tool 1: Partner Finder (page 43) in the Exploration Workshop.

Identify a venue: Find a venue that is in the community and close to the existing playground you want to update or the site for the new playground.

Arrange the workshop: Make necessary arrangements for the workshop, such as refreshments, meals, stationery, and devices pre-loaded with the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit. Arrange for a facilitator and two or three note takers. Remember to check for any dietary requirements of participants and cater for the special needs of people with disabilities.

TIP

These activities can be done in one day or over several sessions depending on how much time people have available. The allocated time and starting times indicated can be adjusted to suit each workshop as needed.

Visioning Workshop schedule

1. Welcome and recap

- 10 minutes
- 8:30am

Introduce yourself and welcome participants. Summarise where we are in the process of building a natural playground and where we want to get to by the end of the day. Ask for comments on the previous workshop session.

2. Develop a common vision

- 30 minutes
- 8:40am

Divide participants into small groups of approximately five people. Each group is to either draw, write, make a poem, do a rap song or commercial or use any other creative means to share their vision for their playground to the group as a whole in sixty seconds.

Each group has ten minutes to prepare, ten minutes to practice and then there is two minutes per group to present feedback.

Your vision communicates what you believe the right playground will do for your children.

Vision statements should be inspiring and uplifting to everyone involved in the project and easy to communicate. The statement should be short enough to fit on a t-shirt.

Here are a few vision statement examples:

- Inspire kids to play.
- Make time for play.
- Dream a playground.
- When kids play, we all win.
- Play – the work of children.

3. Results of Exploration Workshop

- 30 minutes
- 9:10am

Divide participants into five groups:

- Group 1 get the summary of Tool 2: Playground Map (page 45)
- Group 2 get the summary of Tool 3: Playground Dreams (page 49)
- Group 3 get the summary of Tool 4: Resource Inventory (page 53)
- Group 4 get the summary of Tool 5: Issue Finder (page 57)

Each group is to discuss the summary for fifteen minutes and then there is two minutes per group to present feedback.

4. Finding priorities

- 30 minutes
- 9:40am

Before the workshop, write out the summary of Tool 3: Playground Dreams (page 49) on twelve separate pieces of large paper. Each of the categories, (for example, Gross Motor Play,) is written on its own sheet of paper with the corresponding suggestions from the Exploration Workshop written underneath.

Participants must vote for one item in each category by writing their initials next to it. Facilitator is to count the votes, determine a winner in each category, and mark it clearly. If there is a draw, simply revote that one category. Make sure to assure participants that the other ideas are not thrown out, they are simply reserved for another time.

5. Tea break

- 30 minutes
- 10:10am

Break for tea to allow participants to rest and relax with refreshments. As a facilitator, you can network and answer individual questions or comments if necessary.

6. Develop the goals

- 60 minutes
- 10:40am

Use Tool 7: Formulating Objectives (page 67) to formulate smart objectives by describing exactly what you want to achieve.

Divide participants into twelve groups. Each group gets one of the twelve priorities to work with (or more than one if there are less than twelve groups). Make sure participants understand what they need to do by going through the tool with them, using examples. Let each group complete the tool by brainstorming. Remind them that they must keep the information discussed earlier (results of Exploration Workshop) in mind when writing up objectives. They have fifteen minutes to do this. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group.

7. Activity plan

- 40 minutes
- 11:40am

Use Tool 8: Activity Plan (page 71) to see that everything you have planned can be completed on time and on budget.

Divide participants into twelve groups. Each group gets one of the twelve priorities to work with (or more than one if there are less than twelve groups). Make sure participants understand what they need to do by going through the tool with them, using examples. Let each group complete the tool by brainstorming. Remind them that they must keep the information discussed earlier (results of Exploration Workshop) in mind when writing up objectives. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

- 40 minutes
- 12:20pm

Give a short overview of the concepts in Section 5 (page 37). Use Tool 9: Monitoring Summary (page 75) to see that everything you planned gets done.

Divide participants into small groups of approximately five people. Make sure participants understand what they need to do by going through the tool with them, using examples. Let each group complete the tool by brainstorming. Remind them that they must keep the information discussed earlier (results of Exploration Workshop) in mind when writing up objectives. Each small group provides feedback to the bigger group. Discuss Tools 10, 11 and 12 with the group and explain when to use them.

Use the following draft documents to tell people about your natural playground.

Sample meeting invitation

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Saturday 18 October, 9am to 11am at The Most Fantastic ECD Centre

Dear

The Most Fantastic Pre-School is planning an exciting new natural playground. Please join us for an informational meeting to find out how a natural playground can benefit our children. Learn more and come and help us think.

Many of you will still remember playing outside until your parents called you. Today's children are experiencing a different kind of childhood. Television and mobile phones mean that many children spend as little as thirty minutes in free, outdoor play each day. Research shows that playing outside can improve vision, reduce ADHD symptoms, improve school performance, reduce anxiety, and encourage a love for exercise.

A natural playground provides simple structures and natural materials that inspire imagination! Rocks, sand, hollow logs and water encourage climbing, construction, experimentation and problem-solving.

The Most Fantastic Pre-School values your input on this project, and your support will help us to put a plan into action. The meeting will be hosted by Ms. E.C Diva at The Most Fantastic Pre-School.

Please let us know if you can make it at 555 555 5555.

Yours in playing,
Ms E.C. Diva

Sample introduction letter to parents

Dear Parents

We send this letter in case you missed our last meeting where we discussed the new way of play we are embracing at our school.

We are excited to announce that we are introducing loose parts play in the Most Fantastic Pre-School.

Staff will be encouraging children to use their imagination by playing with resources including cardboard boxes, tyres, baskets, old sheets, wooden planks and plastic gutters. These are called 'loose parts'. They can be used in many different ways, allowing

children to make anything from a pirate ship or castle to a road or house.

Loose parts play will happen in and out of class time. It will be a chance for children to play freely with friends, investigate, discover, explore, create, use lots of trial and error to learn for themselves, learn to make their own judgments about adventurous play, and recognising safety limits.

Please ensure your children are dressed for the weather so they can join in properly – they might need a raincoat or sunscreen, sun hats, or a spare set of clothes depending on the weather.

- Staff and children will be working together to start the loose parts play.
- Staff will receive additional information on loose parts play.
- Issues including how to use the resources safely have been investigated.
- Children will be involved in discussing health and safety issues.
- All items will be checked initially and on a regular basis for safety.

Parents and carers, would you like to come and see what's happening? Do you want to understand why we are moving to this type of play? Phone me on 555 555 5555 so we can arrange a time to meet.

Do you have any resources to donate? We will need loose parts to keep things interesting.

Let us know if you'd like someone to collect donated items.

Yours in playing,

Ms E.C. Diva

Sample play policy

The Most Fantastic Pre-School recognises that:

- Children have the right to play.
- Play is the work of a child.
- It is important to have enough time and good places to play freely.

Playing is one of the most important aspects of a child's life.

Playing helps children be healthy, well, and happy.

Playing is the way that children learn best, and it makes them positive about learning later in life.

Most importantly, playing improves children's ability to develop and grow.

We value the children's urge and desire to play and therefore aim to provide for a broad range of play opportunities within the

school playgrounds before, during, and after the school day.

The Most Fantastic Pre-School recognises that:

- Children will naturally create and/or seek out challenging situations.
- Some children may have accidents, get dirty, wet or upset when playing.
- Any potential risk of harm to children needs to be balanced with the benefits that free play offers.

We will do our best to avoid children getting hurt by providing supervision for the play opportunities that we provide.

The Most Fantastic Pre-School believes that adults' attitudes towards, and understanding of, children's play will have a huge effect on the quality of the play opportunities we offer at school and at home. We will, therefore, seek out training opportunities and support research among our staff so that they are confident to facilitate children's freely chosen, self-directed play. We will do our best to advocate play with parents when we have meetings.

Using coaching

Coaching is done to improve performance and to develop specific skills, in our case this is the development of a natural playground. Coaching usually takes place on a face-to-face, one-to-one basis and has a very specific planned programme with a short timeframe. For a coaching relationship to work, it must be based on a foundation of mutual respect and willingness to participate.

Coaching is an effective development approach because it:

- Develops competencies, skills and abilities.
- Provides corrective feedback to the participant.
- Empowers participants to learn and grow.
- Helps participants clarify their thinking.
- Identifies and solves problems.
- Makes decisions, implements changes, and overcomes obstacles.
- Provides flexibility in the learning process.
- Helps participants to implement new knowledge and skills into their practice.

Coaching for the natural playground workshops

The goals of using coaching sessions as part of the Natural Playground process is to work with the participant to solve implementation problems and to improve the quality of natural playgrounds that are developed at schools and in the community. The ideal situation is that each participant is paired with a coach to reach these goals.

Skills and qualities for coaches

Coaches assist participants to develop to their full potential. They help participants grow and develop a skill by analysing their performances, instructing in relevant skills and by providing encouragement. Coaches should be:

Good communicators

Coaches should have strong written and verbal communication skills. They must have an excellent ability to listen, good presentation skills, ability to summarise information, and experience in giving feedback. Coaches can recognise changes in mood and body language and adapt as needed. They should also have the ability to write **action plans**, SMART goals, and summarise discussions.

Knowledgeable on the relevant coaching topics

Coaches should be knowledgeable of all the topics and tools covered in the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit, such as early childhood development, children's developmental needs, play, natural playgrounds, **loose parts**, **free play**, design processes, and the grade R curriculum.

Experienced in training or coaching sessions

For example, they should have experience in generating new ideas, encouraging participation, managing disagreements, facilitating a process, and guiding participants.

Strong in soft skills

Coaches should be emotionally intelligent, be good with people and able to establish trust and rapport with people. Coaches can build warm, confidence-inspiring relationships.

Non-judgmental, respectful, and accepting of other people

Coaches should remain objective and impartial and be understanding and compassionate of the participant and maintain confidentiality.

Respectful

A coach does not treat participants like children, wanting to solve their problems for them, rather a coach sees the participant as able, responsible, resourceful and capable to choose.

Up to date

A coach is willing to commit time and energy to learn coaching skills.

Coaching do's	Coaching don'ts
Serve as a facilitator.	Tell participants what to do.
Serve as a non-judgemental outsider.	Grade participants' ideas, plans or actions.
Use a defined model.	Dictate all the details.
Ask questions.	Provide answers or solve problems.
Listen.	Be the expert.
Ask for details.	Dwell on mistakes.
Serve as a sounding board.	Act as a therapist.
Challenge perceptions.	Argue that participants are wrong.
Focus on the future.	Dwell on the past.
Call for action.	Insist or demand.
Challenge participants to meet their goals.	Be afraid to give feedback to participants.

Figure 18 The do's and don'ts of coaching

Coaching model for the natural playground process

There are many different coaching models in circulation. The one that will work well in the natural playground process is the **GROW** model that stands for **G**oal, **R**eality, **O**ptions, **W**ay forward. It provides a structure for coaching discussions. The model places the responsibility for development on the participant. They must come to the coaching session with goals for discussion.

The **GROW** model is used as a discussion tool with four stages for *each* coaching session.

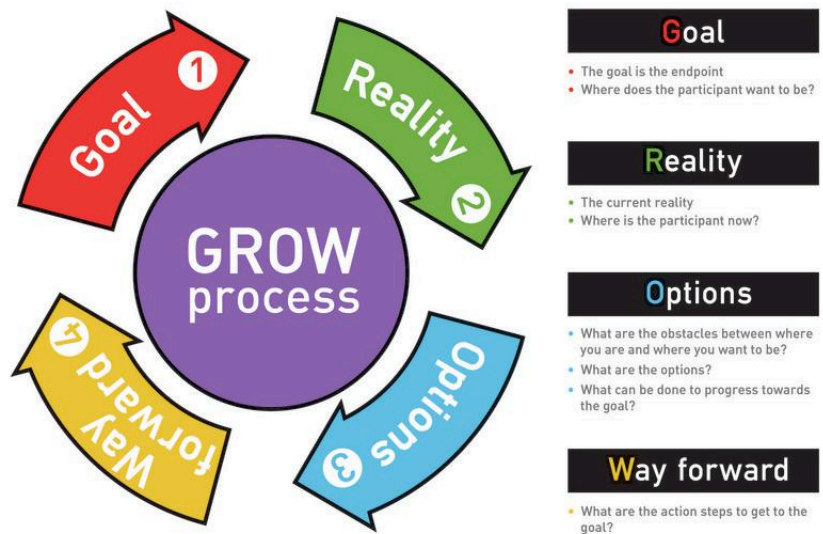


Figure 19 The **GROW** model.

Stage 1 Goal:	The participant brings the issue they want to work on and solve to the session and writes it down. The coach uses questioning and listening skills to help the participant to define exactly what they want to achieve.
Stage 2 Reality:	The coach uses questioning and listening skills to help the participant define the issues that need to be addressed. The participant talks about the reality they are facing (issues and obstacles) and writes it down.
Stage 3 Options:	The coach uses questioning and listening skills to help the participant to identify obstacles and options. The participant brainstorms obstacles and options and writes it down.
Stage 4 Way forward:	The coach helps the participant to develop an action plan to establish what specific actions the participant will take. Gives feedback on the participants' progress. The participant writes down an action plan and makes sure to implement it before the next coaching session.

Using group study

Group study is when a small group of people meet regularly to discuss toolkit material. Each group is unique and benefits from the backgrounds and abilities of all of its members. Forming study groups is a strategy to supplement learning. Groups can share unique insights and learn from each other. For group study to be effective, a leader that is more experienced or has a higher level of education is a prerequisite.

Benefits of group study

Improve your notes

Comparing notes allows participants to fill in any information or important concepts they may have missed.

Sharing talents

Groups provide participants an opportunity to benefit from the talents and knowledge of the other group members.

Support system

Group is a great way to give and receive motivation and support from fellow students.

It makes learning fun

Studying in a group environment breaks the monotony of spending long hours studying on your own.

Group study in the natural playground process

The goals of using group study in the natural playground process is to create an environment where:

- Participants can motivate and encourage each other to progress and avoid procrastination.
- Participants can bring and discuss questions about the toolkit material.
- Participants can ask and discuss practical questions about the implementation of the learning.

Group study sessions should include foundation phase teachers with Grade R teachers. The group study can follow the structure of the guided self-study toolkit outline. Give members time (one week) to work through a section on their own and then discuss that section at the group study session.

Skills and qualities for group study leaders

The group study leader should have a higher qualification or more experience than the rest of the group. They should be able to keep the group focused on the agenda and goals for the day and keep the group study session from becoming a social group. Groups can always socialise at other times. They must see that each group member does their share by preparing for the session and ensure that no one dominates the group. It is important that all members have an equal opportunity to participate.

Forming a group study

Study groups are effective only if they are taken seriously and conducted regularly with a key focus every time.

Use the following guidelines when forming a group study.

How many:

Group study sessions are best kept smaller with three to six participants.

Who:

Group study sessions should have participants with the same goals, such as working through, understanding, and implementing the Natural Playgrounds Toolkit.

Duration:

Keep your sessions between one to two hours long. Anything longer is difficult to fit into busy schedules.

When:

Try to have the group study in the same place and on the same day and time every week. This will help people to remember when to attend.

Where:

Make sure you do it in a location with none or very little distractions and where group members can communicate freely.

Managing a successful study group

Decide on basic ground rules to keep order and structure

Make rules about participation, cell phone use, respect for each other, keeping to the agenda and so on.

Create clear goals and objectives for every study session

Knowing what you want to achieve in a study session will help keep the group on target and prevent you from losing track of time.

Be prepared

Unprepared participants are a frustration to themselves and the members who did prepare. Each member should review the material and make notes on insights they had and questions they want to discuss

Ensure participation

In this way everyone has an equal opportunity to benefit from the group. A good way is to assign topics to each person to lead the discussion on.

Be willing to ask for help

No one knows everything, and that is okay. If there is a disagreement in the group on a topic, commit to get the answers from a senior staff member and get back to the group.

Stay focused

Before each session, someone should be assigned to lead the session. The leader must ensure the group sets goals, is productive, stays on track and achieves all the goals. Remember to take a break during the study session.

Using guided self-study

Guided self-study handbooks allow independent learning in a structured format delivered entirely online or electronically. Participants are given all the materials needed to complete the process without supervision or attending classes. Guided self-study fosters a self-reliant learning experience where participants work through the content provided in the toolkit completely autonomously.

Benefits of guided self-study

Fewer distractions

You face fewer distractions when you are on your own. This helps you to get focused and stay focused.

Control your study environment

When you study on your own, you can choose the environment that is perfect for you; maybe you like soft background music, a desk and bright lights.

Control your study schedule

Some people prefer to work at night, others early in the morning. Some need a break every 30 minutes, others can work for two to three hours at a time. Some want to study every day, others want to study twice a week.

Control your study agenda

Studying on your own gives you the freedom to spend more time on a specific topic, even doing more research on it, if you are interested in it or want to understand it better.

Guided self-study in the natural playground process

The goal of using guided self-study in the natural playground workshops is to encourage participants to explore topics and assist participants to develop study skills.

Participants are required to keep a study journal. After each topic, there are self-reflective questions that need to be answered before they can progress. The answers, in addition to any other notes participants wish to make, are written in the study journal.

In addition, coaching and group study sessions are available to discuss and clarify the topics further.

Managing to be successful at guided self-study

Before you start studying, clarify the following for yourself:

Are you ready to learn?

- Do you believe you can do it? If not, consider what you need to do to believe in yourself. What is your mindset? Are you positive? Do you believe you can grow?
- Are you organised? Do you have a place and time to learn? Did you inform family members? Do you have access to the internet and a device to go online? Do you have a notebook (study journal) and pens? Did you switch off everything that can distract you?

- Are you self-disciplined? Can you stick to your decisions or do you need to ask someone to hold you accountable?
- Can you be honest with yourself? Self reflection and self-evaluation is part of learning. If you want to improve, research information on how to improve your self-reflection skills. If you do not stop and pause to consider what you have learned, you do not give your brain a chance to evaluate and integrate the information.

Do you have learning goals?

- Set timeline goals for each module and the entire process and clearly indicated when you want to complete it. If you are part of a group-study or have a coach, this may influence your timing.
- Set your own goals for what you want to achieve by completing the playground.

How do I learn best?

- Can you sit quietly and read the material? Do you need to take notes or draw pictures to understand the material? Do you need to find someone to tell them what you learned so that you can remember it?
- Do you need to go and do what you learned to remember it? You can read up on learning styles if you are unsure how you learn best. When you know your preference, find ways to make it work for you.

How do I know that I am learning?

It is important to reflect on what you have learnt. After each topic answer these three reflective questions honestly:

1. What information surprised you?
2. What do you know now that you didn't know before?
3. What will you do better or differently from now on?

Glossary

Action plan: A document that lists the steps that must be taken in order to reach your goals or objectives.

Budget: A budget is a financial plan that shows what money you expect to have and what money you expect to spend to achieve your plans.

ECD: ECD stands for Early Childhood Development.

Evaluation: The systematic process of collecting, analysing and using information to determine the impact of a project; is it making a difference?

Free play: Unstructured, voluntary, child-initiated activity that allows children to develop their imaginations while exploring and experiencing the world around them. It is driven by children's natural curiosity, love of discovery, and enthusiasm.

Loose parts: Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials. They can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart and put back together in multiple ways.

Monitoring: The systematic process of collecting, analysing and using information to track a programme's progress toward reaching its objectives.

Natural Playground: An area where kids can play with natural elements such as sand, water, wood, and living plants.

Needs Assessment: A systematic process for determining and addressing needs, or gaps between current conditions (where we are now) and desired conditions or 'wants' (where we want to be).

Objective: A description of the thing that you plan to do or achieve.

Participatory Workshop: An interactive workshop that involves participants working together towards a particular objective. It uses tools that stimulate creativity through working together and applying participants' experiences and expertise.

Play: Play is the work of children. It consists of activities that are performed for self-amusement that have behavioural, social, and psychomotor rewards.

Playground: An outdoor area where children can play.

Resources: A supply of money, materials, staff, volunteers, and other assets that can be used by the project to effectively achieve its aims.

Stakeholders (Partners): People who have an interest in realising the project in favour of the children.

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