

Inclusive Play for Anchorage



Play is for All of Us

An Inclusive Play Guide



ANCHORAGE
PARK FOUNDATION

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PLAY IS...

- Essential for childhood development.
- Integral to physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development.
- One way that children make sense of their world.



Play creates feelings of success, independence, choice, and empowerment...

Play with other children develops values, respect, empathy and understanding...

Play helps us learn who we are...

Inclusive Play is for All of Us

...Play shapes us into the people we become.

When we design parks and public playgrounds without considering all abilities, we separate children and families from opportunities to learn and grow. Inclusivity helps all of us.

The Anchorage Park Foundation has a focus to renovate our Anchorage playgrounds to be fun, safe, and inclusive. Inclusive Play embraces a new way of thinking in Alaska, and in the world. We are leading this community conversation, and have engaged with Anchorage neighbors and active park user groups with great success. We are building community support and enhancing lives – with your help.

There is a place for you in the Parks for All movement in Anchorage. As you look through this guide, please note what we've accomplished in a short time, and what we've learned along the way. Help us dream and design something that is right for your neighborhood!



Beth Nordlund

Beth Nordlund
Executive Director
Anchorage Park Foundation

What is *Inclusive Play*?

One in seven children has a disability.

People with disabilities are the nation's largest minority group - and the only group that anyone can join at any time.

For every 1,000 children in a typical school system, 132 have a disability*.

Only a few disabilities are visible.

Inclusive Play is much more than providing wheelchair access. Wheelchairs and other visible mobility impairments account for only 1% of disabilities. The other 99% are invisible, and include a broad range of cognitive and physical concerns.

Inclusive play is about everyone.

Inclusive play means that all play is available to all children, and that parents and caregivers can interact with their children at play.

Inclusive play requires rich and thoughtful design. It interacts with children at all levels and engages all of their abilities and senses.



**2009-10 data from National Center for Education Statistics*

Play Hurdles for Alaska Families:

It's a sunny day at the playground. You're immersed in an amazing imagination adventure with your friends, exploring new and exciting places...But you watch from your wheelchair when your friends venture off and away from you. You wait for them to return.

Your daughter loves to climb. She climbs higher and higher on her favorite playground. You'd love to be right there with her, but the existing access surface isn't stable enough for you to easily walk on.

She looks down at you and smiles. When her foot slips and she falls, she hits her chin and her arm before landing on the ground. Another parent runs to help your daughter, while you struggle to reach her. You feel powerless.

Your son is most calm when he's in a familiar place, or can slowly adjust to a new situation. He loves playing with other children, and gains a lot from the interaction.

But when you take him to your local playground, the chaos of colors and lack of organization with so many new children makes it too hard for him to orient at his pace. You wish there was a playground that understood the way he plays.

Inclusive Play Means:

Your child is playing WITH friends.

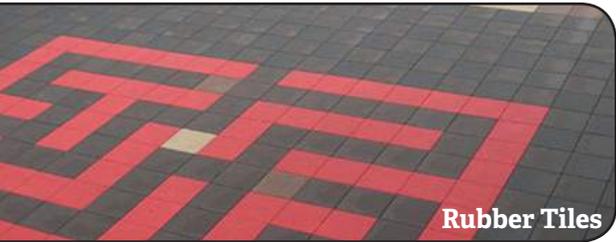
YOU can play with your children.

A play space that considers your child's needs.

Primer: Play Surfacing Basics



Playground safety requires that a resilient fall surfacing be installed around play events. The intent of fall surfacing is to minimize the chance that a child will suffer a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) when he falls. There are a wide variety of options available for surfacing, each with benefits and disadvantages. Main aspects to consider include:



Accessibility: While some loose surfacing is technically accessible, it is not a stable surface. Depending on one's disability, it might be hard to move through.

Climate: Water and freezing can affect material and installation choices, including resiliency and effectiveness after installation.

Cost: Solid surfacing provides the best accessibility, but it is also generally the most expensive.

Longevity: All surfacing has a life span and will at some point need to be maintained and/or replaced.

Maintenance: Loose materials require maintenance to ensure that they remain at proper levels and are evenly distributed.

Messiness: Loose materials become spread around playgrounds through play, which can wind up in pockets and shoes.

Play Design: Solid surfaces can become play events of their own with patterns and thoughtful design.



Inclusive Play in Anchorage



In recent years, we've built several playgrounds in Anchorage that aspire toward inclusive play.

Ahead, you'll find profiles about three playground improvement projects in Anchorage, along with some lessons we've learned along the way.

Cuddy Family Midtown Park (2013)

Cuddy Family Midtown Park is a certified Boundless playground. This “playground for all” was designed to allow children of all abilities to play with one another surrounded by activity. A community-led effort of families and local organizations working together to create a new type of play for Anchorage brought this playground to life. This playground expanded Anchorage’s ability to serve its diverse community. It provides healthy, inclusive play and recreation opportunities for children and parents.

Location is one of this playground’s best assets. Parents who bring their children here have options for other activities in the large park as well as the adjacent Loussac Public Library.



Proud Achievements

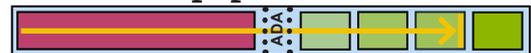
- We maximized at-grade play opportunities and provided ramps.
- We provided access to play without leaving behind mobility devices.
- We maximized the value of ramped systems as play environment.
- We integrated play spaces into adjacent grades and site.
- We provided vantage seating in and around play areas for caregivers.

Lessons Learned: Notes for Better Future Projects

- Maximize solid play surfacing. Maximize the separation between loose and solid surfaces if both are present. Minimize the use of loose materials as much as possible.
- Provide for all senses (including motion, such as swinging).
- Select vandal-appropriate materials. If park vandalism is a known issue, focus less on plastic sheet and slide materials.
- Integrate plants carefully to reduce trampling and damage.
- Minimize the distance from accessible parking or transit connections. Maximize the accessibility of route.
- Expand focus on sensory and cognitive impairments.



Inclusive Play Spectrum



Campbell Creek Park (2013)

When local residents voiced they no longer felt safe to enjoy near-abandoned Campbell Creek Park, community members united to create *Take Back Our Parks*. Their work helped revitalize and reclaim Campbell Creek Park through the installation of a vibrant playground and community-use area.

The success of this park is the focus on at-grade play opportunities and the provision of solid surfacing for almost all play activities.

Beyond the play equipment, seating encourages parents to be close to the action and allows informal opportunities for creative play. This park also has easy access to water and trails at nearby Campbell Creek.



Proud Achievements

- We focused on at-grade play opportunities.
- We provided seating around play areas for caregivers.
- We installed solid play surfacing beyond fall requirements, allowing it to act as a play area in itself!
- We scored points locating play adjacent to Campbell Creek.
- We prioritized vandal-resistant materials.
- We selected play equipment types with reduced shipping costs and provided a higher ratio of play options to cost.
- We considered options for those with mobility impairments to still access or be near friends at play at less-accessible equipment.

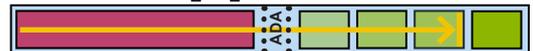


Lessons Learned: Notes for Better Future Projects

- Anticipate the level of expected use to ensure adequate parking and amenities.
- Provide a higher level of accessible connections to adjacent features like Campbell Creek.
- Minimize the use of loose materials as much as possible.
- For non-accessible features, provide at-grade play events that allow similar play value.
- Focus on providing the full spectrum of play design using at-grade equipment or accessible events above grade.
- Expand focus on sensory and cognitive impairments.



Inclusive Play Spectrum



Balto Seppala Park (2014)

Balto Seppala Park was a community-driven project. The Community Council organized to integrate a new play space with an existing picnic area and adjacent sports fields and popular hill for sledding, rolling, and cross-country training.

A financial gift was received during the design process that gave an opportunity to increase the park's accessibility through the provision of solid safety surfacing. Adding surfacing gave a higher level of accessibility and play convenience.

The Balto Seppala playground is very well integrated with adjacent seating areas and a shelter. Numerous benches and picnic tables overlook the play area, with wheelchair access provided. Neighbors added to its community connection with a Little Free Library kiosk.



Proud Achievements

- We provided seating around play areas for caregivers that also facilitates a sense of community.
- We installed solid play surfacing beyond fall requirements, allowing it to act as a play area in itself!
- We scored points locating play adjacent to natural resources such as the forest!
- We prioritized vandal-resistant materials.
- We selected play equipment types with reduced shipping costs and provided a higher ratio of play options to cost.
- We considered options for those with mobility impairments to still access or be near friends at play at less-accessible equipment.



Lessons Learned: Notes for Better Future Projects

- Minimize the use of loose materials as much as possible.
- For non-accessible features, provide at-grade play events that allow similar play value.
- Focus on providing the full spectrum of play design using at-grade equipment or accessible events above grade.
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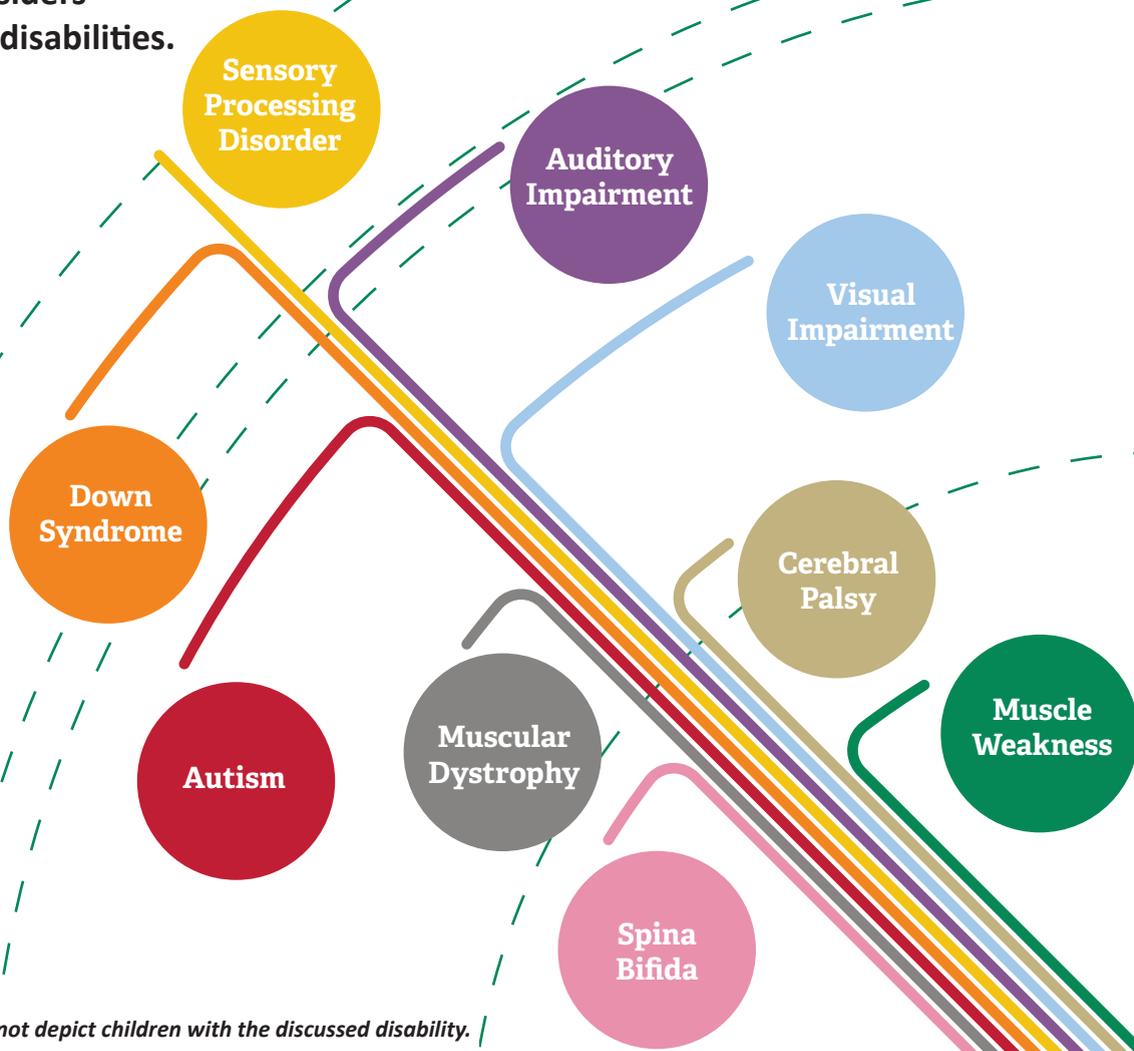
Inclusive Play Spectrum



Designing for Inclusive Play

A disability changes the way we interact with the world.

Learn more here about how Inclusive Play considers different types of disabilities.



**Photos in this section may not depict children with the discussed disability.*



How I Play...

- *I may get overwhelmed easily in new places with lots of people I don't know.*
- *Sometimes, I have a hard time coordinating movements that use my big muscle groups.*
- *I may like to spin, swing, touch, see, and hear different sounds while I play.*
- *I often end up playing alone, because I don't know how to connect with groups of children who are playing.*

Sensory Processing Disorder

Designing for ME:

- Create nooks and crannies within the main play structure and surrounding areas where I can get away and watch others play.
- Provide different climbing elements of varying difficulty, so that I can learn to master gravity and my body while I play.
- Provide a variety of sensory play opportunities in different locations throughout the playground so that I can explore these at my own pace.
- Provide play areas that allow me to play with one or two friends at a time, so that I can build my social skills during play.

How I Play...

- *I may be able to see some light and some shadows.*
- *I like to explore with my other senses, especially touch and hearing.*
- *I like to climb and swing just like other children.*
- *Sometimes, I have to be cautious when it is too sunny outside.*

Visual Impairment



Designing for ME:

- Use good contrast throughout the play structure, to help me navigate the playground.
- Provide me with lots of opportunities to explore tactile and auditory play experiences.
- Provide me with chances to climb and swing, just like my friends.
- Be sure to provide shade and cooling areas, so that I can get out of the sun if it gets too bright.

How I Play...

- *I may be able to hear different sounds.*
- *I like to explore with my other senses, especially touch and sight.*
- *I like to climb and swing like other children.*
- *Sometimes, I use pictures and sign language to communicate.*



Auditory Impairment

Designing for ME:

- Use a variety of sounds throughout the play structure, to help me build my auditory skills.
- Provide me with lots of opportunities to explore tactile and visual play experiences.
- Provide me with chances to climb and swing, just like my friends.
- Consider play signage with picture exchange systems and sign language.

How I Play...

- *I may easily get overwhelmed in new places with lots of people I don't know.*
- *Sometimes, I really like to climb, spin, swing and run using big muscles groups in my body.*
- *I may like to touch, see, and hear different sounds while I play.*
- *I often like to play alone, especially when I feel overwhelmed by the activity around me.*



Autism

Designing for ME:

- Create a way for me and my family to get to know the layout of the playground -- this could be a tactile map at the park entry.
- Provide a variety of climbing, spinning and open areas for me to explore at my own pace.
- Provide a variety of sensory play opportunities in different locations throughout the playground, so that I can explore these at my own pace.
- Create nooks and crannies within the main play structure where I can get away and watch others play.

How I Play...

- *I love to play with everyone on all kinds of play equipment.*
- *Sometimes, I need to really spin to get myself going on the playground.*
- *I need to have many activities that make me use my muscles and improve my muscle coordination.*
- *Sometimes, I use pictures and sign language to communicate.*

Down Syndrome



Designing for ME:

- Provide a wide variety of play experiences that encourage socialization.
- Individual spinning elements help me get going. Group balance play elements are fun too.
- Provide me with lots of elements to climb up, on, over and through to make my muscles work.
- Consider play signage with picture exchange systems and sign language.

How I Play...

- *Sometimes, it is hard for me to grab and hold onto things.*
- *Sometimes, I use a mobility device like a wheelchair or a walker to get around.*
- *Sometimes my muscles get tired, and I need a place to rest while I play.*
- *Sometimes I need a little more time to figure out how to do things.*



Cerebral Palsy

Designing for ME:

- Use hand holds on play elements that I can operate with a closed fist.
- Use pathways that exceed ADA standards, so that I can move more freely in the play space.
- Use pathways that have lesser slopes and lever off areas with enough room to rest along the play path.
- Create nodes of play where interactive panels can be located. This extra space allows me to have time to stop and play without being in the pathway of other children who want to move on to other play activities.

How I Play...

- *I often use a power wheelchair, because my muscles get really tired quickly.*
- *Sometimes I can use my hands, but using my fingers to grip things for a long time is tiring.*
- *I am often very bright and creative when I play.*
- *Sometimes my medication limits how much I can be in the sun and heat.*

Muscular Dystrophy



Designing for ME:

- Use pathways that exceed ADA standards so I can maneuver my power mobility device more freely in the play space.
- Use hand holds on play elements that I can operate with a closed fist or limited grip.
- Provide me with lots of fun elements to play with, so that I can use my creative mind while I play.
- Be sure to provide shade and cooling areas, so that I can get out of the heat and come back to play.

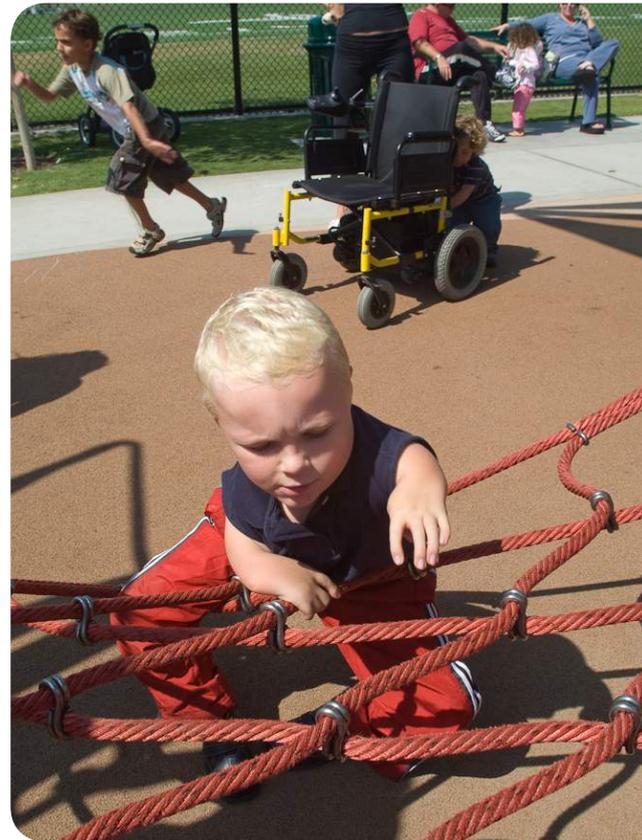
How I Play...

- *Sometimes, my muscles twitch and get really tight, making it hard for me to move them the way I want to.*
- *My muscles get really tired very quickly and make me feel weak.*
- *I like to climb, swing, and play with my friends.*
- *Sometimes my sense of touch and my perception of movement and spatial orientation don't work the way I want them to.*

Muscle Weakness

Designing for ME:

- Create a playground that is easy for me to access, so that I can successfully get to play.
- Provide me with places where I can rest while I play.
- Provide me with chances to climb, swing, and play with my friends.
- Include elements that help me build my sense of touch and my proprioceptive sense.





How I Play...

- *Sometimes I use a mobility device like wheelchair or a walker to get around.*
- *My arms are usually pretty strong, so I will leave my mobility device behind when I play.*
- *Sometimes my muscles will get tired, and I need a place to rest while I play.*
- *Sometimes my medication limits how much I can be in the sun and heat.*

Spina
Bifida

Designing for ME:

- Use pathways that exceed ADA standards, so that I can maneuver my mobility device more freely in the play space.
- Provide transfer points, so that I can leave my mobility device behind if I want to venture off to play without it.
- Create nodes so that when I take a rest, I can still play with my friends without being in their way.
- Be sure to provide shade and cooling areas so that I can get out of the heat and come back to play.



Help Bring More Inclusive Play to Anchorage!

- Visit your neighborhood playground to observe play. Is it meeting community needs?
- Start a conversation with your neighbors, community leaders, friends and family about Inclusive Play.
- Apply for an Anchorage Park Foundation community challenge grant that addresses inclusive play improvements to your local playground.
- Volunteer with the efforts of Parks for All (www.facebook.com/parksforall).
- Make a gift through the Anchorage Park Foundation designated for inclusive play.
- Seek funding opportunities to combine resources through the Anchorage Park Foundation.
- Be an advocate for inclusive playgrounds in Anchorage and across Alaska!

More Inclusive Play Resources Available at
www.anchorageparkfoundation.org

