

Differentiation in play - enabling children to play at different ability levels

Ability isn't a stable concept - children have different ability levels in different situations and at different times. One of the most beneficial features of free play is that it allows a child to play at his or her own level, whatever that may be at any given time.

Children who are tired, poorly or traumatised tend to regress and seek comforting play activities that reassure and boost confidence. At other times these children may be looking for a new challenge and want to stretch themselves. Good play equipment provides a range of play options: active, social, solitary, calm, strategic, frivolous, thrilling, challenging, reassuring to name but a few.

The benefit of this is that children who are less able are not stigmatised as they can play in their own way and there isn't a hierarchy of achievement in play – no-one's keeping score.

Once a child has mastered the most physically challenging piece of play equipment, he or she will tend to go back and play differently with other pieces of equipment or find other ways to challenge him/herself on the climbing frame.

Ensuring that playground equipment is accessible to as wide a range of children as possible will ensure that children can play in their own way and at their own level.

A basket swing is a great example of a versatile product that can be used by a baby on a blanket, but also socially by a group of older children, and anyone in between.

Generally, the less prescriptive the equipment, the more versatile it is.

Adventure Play Equipment



A birds Nest Swing is an inclusive play item that everyone can enjoy, regardless of ability or requirement; it can be fun to simply lay in staring at the sky, or to get some real momentum up and enjoy the ride.