

# If I could build... Empowering the voices of children with disabilities in playground planning

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**Background:** Children with and without disabilities consider playgrounds as significant places in their life, which offer opportunities for play and social interactions. Playgrounds are especially important in times when opportunities to meet are restricted, for example, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Environmental qualities such as, play policies, playground design, individual and societal attitudes on disability and on outdoor play could be supportive or restrictive in children's play. Even though the primary purpose of playgrounds is to be a place for children to play, playground design is mainly determined by adults. Children's voices regarding their use of playgrounds, and their wishes and needs to enhance participation on playgrounds are seldom addressed. In particularly perspectives of children with disabilities are often absent. The P4Play Marie Skłodowska-Curie (MSC) Training Network is an innovative European Joint Doctorate (EJD) programme in Occupational Science for Occupational Therapists, which adopts a child's rights-based perspective and aims to investigate the nature of play through the lens of People, Place, Policy and Practice (P4Play). The aim of this poster presentation is to give insight into how the perspectives of children with disabilities may contribute to playground design.

**Method:** The presentation draws on an international project that explores children's perspectives through literature reviews and semi-structured interviews.

**Results:** Children make important contributions to playground design. For example, children with disabilities show a unique understanding of their own situation and propose inclusive playground adjustments. Their unique perspectives on play could help playground providers to adapt playgrounds to their needs and wishes to ensure participation in play including opportunities for social interactions and challenges according to their abilities.



I would set up a small table to eat snacks where wheelchairs can also go, or for people who have broken their legs and simply those who are otherwise in the wheelchair. For electric and manual wheelchairs. I would put a table that is lower for the hand wheelchairs and I would make the one for the electric a bit higher. Yes, and when it's really very cold in spring, I would make a bit like a heater. To have a small chair that can be heated. Yes. And otherwise, next to it, when it's hot, you can just make another table to eat snacks.

Girl, physical disability

**Discussion:** Children are the main users of playgrounds. Maybe children, and especially children with disabilities with their unique understanding could have an important role in playground planning. We suggest that child-focused participatory methods that include children with different abilities and a variety of needs and backgrounds should be included in processes of playground planning, evaluation, and monitoring to enhance playground design.

## Conclusion:

Good play provision respects all children's needs, wishes and preferences. Especially children with disabilities should be considered as key references for other stakeholders.

We would build a wheelchair accessible mini golf course  
Girl, physical disability

## Key references

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