

The Jungle Gym

The beginning of the year is the perfect time to explore all aspects of your environment which can include the 'jungle gym' or 'adventure playground'.

With new children to the school or centre one of the first things we do with them is show them around; where to put their bag, the toilets, drinking fountain, the playground etc. The playground, but more specifically the jungle gym, will definitely be the highlight for them. But in today's environment we can't presume that they a) will know what to do on the jungle gym and b) can use it safely.

It is important that we show them how they can use the playground and games they can play on it, as well as how to use it safely. Landings are one important part of being able to not only jump off the playground but how to land without injury if they fall off. Research shows that this equipment facilitates the integration of the three main areas of movement – locomotion, balance, and manipulation. In particular, brachiating skills (coordinated, rhythmic, body motion) and upper body strength are developed.

In regards to games and activities the children can do on the jungle gym one idea is to brainstorm ideas with the children. Children are very creative and will come up with a lot more ideas than us.

Jungle Gym Activities (Under 5s)

Here are some activities for under-fives to help develop their upper body strength, rotation, and safe landings, as well as fun games they can play on the jungle gym.

Upper Body

Swinging and Hanging – Have opportunities available for children to hang and swing, this means they are holding their own weight with their arms. Bars, ropes, poles and twings are great for this.

Create a swing circuit with landing platforms placed to allow resting places along the circuit.

Rope swing – Place a box to one side of the rope and a landing mat on the other and see if the children can swing from the box and land on the mat. If the child does not like the feel of the rope, cut the end of an old sock and put it over where they touch the rope.

Monkey Bars – Swinging on monkey bars is a great way to develop upper body strength, it also introduces the skill of 'brachiating (hand over hand)' and the correct grip (thumb under).

Climbing – Helps with upper body development and also helps to incorporate in the legs – climbing often means cross patterning. Tie a rope up the top of the slide or slope and children have to pull themselves up. Use a ladder, cargo netting, climb trees etc.

Pirate Ship – Climbing ropes are fastened from floor to bar. Knots are tied in the ropes within reaching distance of feet and hands. Place a stranded doll at the top of the rope (ships mast) and children climb up and down hand over hand to rescue it. They children could carry a telescope (cardboard tube) to the top to look for land, whales, coral reefs etc.

Balance and Rotation

Hanging upside down – Hang the child so their head is lower than the rest of their body. Bars are great for this. Swings, twings, hammocks, tyres, barrels – These are all great for stimulating our balance system.

Landings

Motorbike landing – Key points to remember are to have our feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent (sitting on a bike) landing as quietly as possible. Ideally the landing should be held for three seconds.

Motor bike game – Driving round and when whistle blows or stop is called out children have to stop with a jump and land. Start on the ground by jumping over different objects rope, hoops, hurdles etc. Move to jumping off a low height and then work your way higher as their confidence develops.

Other games

Play hide and seek.

Normal tag around, on and under the jungle gym.

Pirates and other make believe games.

Ring the Bell – For this game you will need a bell. Place the bell at the highest point on the jungle gym and the children will take turns climbing up to the bell and ringing it.

March of the Ants – Play music for the children as they march around in an area away from the jungle gym. Once the music stops, they need to scramble to the jungle gym; they're not "safe" unless their feet are off the ground. Pick one child or a teacher to be "it" and chase down the ants and try to catch them before they reach the structure. The person caught becomes the next "it" and the game starts over.

