



HEAD START BODY START INFANT AND TODDLER OUTDOOR PLAY SPACE ASSESSMENT

The **Head Start Body Start Outdoor Play Space Assessment for Infants and Toddlers** has been developed to assist Early Head Start and other early childhood programs assess the quality of outdoor play spaces for infants, toddlers, and twos. Using this tool will help identify the strengths and needs of an existing outdoor play space, and serve as a basis for setting priorities and for planning enhancements and improvements. It can also be used as a tool to help plan and design a new outdoor play space.

Directions: This tool is best utilized during a walk-through of a play space. The assessment is divided into eight categories, listed in the left-hand column. **For each of the eight categories**, consider the extent to which a play space meets the given criteria. Score the play space using the rating scale, defined below and found in the center column. Circle the number that best reflects the present state of the play space based on the criteria and examples for that category. Use the right-hand column to make additional comments, such as strengths, areas for improvement, high or low priorities, ideas, donation prospects, etc. **Note:** If you are using this tool to help plan a new play space, simply ignore the Rating Scale column.

Rating Scale: 1 = Not at all 2 = Somewhat 3 = Partially 4 = Mostly 5 = Fully

Category	Rating Scale	Comments
<p>A. WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT: <i>The overall environment is welcoming, inviting, and comfortable for infants, toddlers, and adults.</i></p> <p>CRITERIA:</p> <p>1) Welcoming/Inviting: <i>Several of the following are present:</i> Garden; fountain or water feature; statue; gazing ball; local cultural artifacts; whimsical signs; fence weaving; children’s art; murals; non-toxic (preferably native) plants, trees, shrubs; house; flag; banner; chimes; wind sock; pergola; weather vane; deck; patio; umbrella; or other welcoming and inviting features or objects.</p> <p>2) Comfort and Routines: <i>Several of the following are present:</i> Drinking fountain; diaper-changing</p>	1 2 3 4 5	

<p>area; balance of shade and sun (trees, pergola, manufactured shade structures, open and sunny areas); sleeping/resting accommodations (mats, cots, portable cribs, quilts); places to sit, relax, rejuvenate (garden bench, porch swing, glider, outdoor chairs, vine teepee, small tent, pergola); division of spaces by activity (quiet/noisy, restful/active, wet/dry, messy/orderly); or other features that offer comfort.</p>		
<p>B. KEY FEATURES: <i>The overall play area has a variety of manufactured and natural materials that provide developmentally and age-appropriate opportunities for infants, toddlers, and twos to experience a sense of freedom, discovery, exploration, creativity, innovation, and sensory stimulation.</i></p> <p>CRITERIA:</p> <p>1) Sense of Freedom: <i>Several of the following are present:</i> Multi-purpose space; open grassy area; ride-on toy track with a variety of ride-on/wheeled toys; stepping stone path; climbing structure; steps; balls of varying sizes; sand area; balance beam; or other features that provide a sense of freedom and independence.</p> <p>2) Discovery/Exploration: <i>Several of the following are available:</i> Bird house; bird feeder; water features (<i>bird bath, wading pool, recirculating fountain, dry stream bed with water pump, hose, sprinkler, mister</i>)*; vegetable or flower gardens; playhouse; sunflower house; gentle hills; or other features that offer discovery/exploration experiences. * All water features require appropriate supervision.</p> <p>3) Creativity/Innovation: <i>Several of the following are available:</i> A variety of topographical surfaces; a variety of work surfaces; building blocks; tree cookies; loose parts for building; balls; writing/painting/drawing/sculpture materials; colorful scarves; or other materials to encourage creativity and innovation.</p> <p>4) Sensory Stimulation (touch, smell, taste, sound, and sight): <i>Several of the following are available:</i> Items for music/noise/acoustical play; CD player; wind chimes; talking tubes; light/shade contrasts; color combinations and contrasts; leaves, bark, twigs, pine cones; grass; herbs; flowers; edible plants and/or fruit trees; colorful tiles; or other features that provide age-appropriate stimulation and exploration with supervision.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p>C. INTENTIONAL DESIGN: <i>The overall play space reflects planning, management, and resourcing for curriculum implementation and ongoing child assessment on par with indoor play environments.</i></p> <p>CRITERIA:</p> <p>1) Planning: The play space supports <i>all</i> infant and toddler developmental domains related to school readiness:</p>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Development & Health: The play space supports opportunities to practice healthy and safe habits and personal care tasks such as dressing, toileting, washing hands, following safety rules and routines, and resting/napping. (See also Category E: Movement and Motor Development). • Social & Emotional Development: The play space provides: a) Opportunities to demonstrate self-regulation and relationships (cozy, quiet niches where individual children can be alone or with an adult; calm, uncluttered environment;) accommodations for large group/small group socialization, peer to peer interaction, adult/child interaction, and individualized/private spaces (such as garden benches, porch swings, gliders, stumps, outdoor chairs, raised platform, bean teepee, playhouse, or other features that support socialization); b) Opportunities for solitary, parallel, and cooperative play (e.g., balls, bats, dramatic play props, outdoor stage, playhouse, or other features that support different <i>stages</i> of play); c) Accommodations that support different <i>types</i> of play (symbolic, rough-and-tumble, socio-dramatic, fantasy, role play, or other different types of play). • Approaches to Learning: The play space provides opportunities to demonstrate attention, curiosity, persistence, and cooperation. Several of the following are available: Balls; dramatic play materials; colorful scarves; playhouse; tree cookies; building blocks; natural growth; natural and manufactured loose parts; containers for collecting and moving objects; water; large locks and keys; digging tools; or other materials and features that support a variety of approaches to learning. • Language & Literacy: Examples of each of the following are included: Books; inviting spaces to read; mats; quilts; easels; writing tools; directional signs; children’s names in print; or other play materials that support language and literacy. • Cognition & General Knowledge: The play space provides opportunities to learn and demonstrate: a) Logic, reasoning, and problem solving (with puzzles, water flow, weather vane, rain gauge, gates with latches, loft, etc.); b) Mathematics knowledge and skills (with natural and manufactured loose parts (for counting, sorting, sequencing, and comparing), signs with numerals, loose parts with variation in shapes and colors, etc.); c) Science knowledge and skills (with magnifiers, wind chimes, weather vane, living things, containers, rain gauge, garden tools, etc.); and d) Social studies knowledge and skills (with miniature roads, buildings, people/families, local/community artifacts, recycling bin, etc.). <p>2) Management: The outdoor space is managed similarly to the indoor classroom, including oversight, changing of toys/materials, monitoring, and continuous improvement and enhancement to support optimal learning and development.</p> <p>3) Resourcing: The outdoor space – including equipment, materials, natural and created features – has multiple, varied, defined, and multi-use learning and development areas.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
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<p>D. NATURAL FEATURES: <i>The overall play space allows and encourages children to connect with nature.</i></p> <p>CRITERIA:</p> <p><i>Several of the following are apparent:</i> Planters; raised planting beds; bird feeder; bird house; trees for shade and climbing; umbrella; water (stream, bird bath, water hose, misters, sprinklers, water containers); flowering plants, edible fruits, vegetables; climbing vines; stumps; logs; boulders; tree cookies; long grass; pine cones; <i>acorns, pebbles, and/or shells*</i>; frogs; earthworms; bugs/insects; animals (as allowed by regulations); sand; twigs; dirt and mud; topographic variations (mounds, terraces, slopes); or other naturalized materials and features that connect children with nature.</p> <p>* Small, natural, loose objects require closer supervision.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p>E. MOVEMENT AND MOTOR DEVELOPMENT : <i>The play space supports progress in children’s locomotion and traveling skills, balancing and non-locomotor skills, manipulative and object control skills, and fine motor strength and coordination skills.</i></p> <p>CRITERIA:</p> <p>1) Locomotion and Traveling Skills</p> <p><u>Infants:</u> The play space provides opportunities for movement, rolling over, crawling, scooting, sitting propped up, sitting with support, pulling up, and moving with music. <i>The play space includes several of the following:</i> Walking path; pull-up bar; push/pull toys; tunnel; vine teepee on grassy area; A-frame on grassy area; smooth logs; quilts; mats; outdoor carpet square; or other features that support the emerging locomotion and traveling skills of infants. Adults bring blankets outside to sit on the ground with non-mobile infants.</p> <p><u>Toddlers and Twos:</u> The play space provides opportunities for moving, walking, running, hopping, jumping, marching, tiptoeing, tumbling, sliding, leaping, skipping, galloping, following the leader, riding. <i>The play space includes several of the following:</i> Push/pull toys; tricycles; wagons; wheelbarrow; wheeled toy track (with bridge, tunnel, traffic gate, photo directional signs, or variations in surface material); tree with low limbs and low step ladder; walking path; embankment slide; A-frame; vine teepee; or other features that support the emerging locomotion and traveling skills of toddlers and twos.</p> <p>2) Balancing and Non-locomotor Skills</p> <p><u>Infants:</u> The play space provides opportunities for “tummy time”, sitting propped up, sitting without support, rolling, stretching, rocking back and forth on hands and knees, and reaching. <i>The play space includes several of the following:</i> Quilts; mats; manipulatives; pull-up bar on grassy surface; walking/crawling path; or other features that support infants’ emerging mobility and balancing skills.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	

<p><u>Toddlers and Twos</u>: The play space provides opportunities for turning, swinging, swaying, squatting, standing on tiptoe, stretching, bending, balancing, reaching, wiggling, twisting, turning, jumping off, getting in and out. <i>The play space includes several of the following</i>: Swings; low ramp; walking path; balance beam; rope ladder; stairs/steps; hopscotch tiles; tent; or other features that support toddlers’ and twos’ emerging balancing skills.</p> <p>3) Manipulative and Object Control Skills <u>Infants</u>: The play space provides opportunities for reaching, grasping, throwing, splashing, and releasing. <i>The play space includes several of the following</i>: Manipulatives/toys of different weights, textures, sizes, colors, and shapes; balls of varying sizes; small containers for water; or other materials that support infants’ gross motor and manipulative skills.</p> <p><u>Toddlers and Twos</u>: The play space provides opportunities for throwing, underhand tossing, striking with body and with implements, pushing, catching, kicking, rolling, carrying, collecting, pedaling, transferring objects, making movement in a variety of directions/speed/levels. <i>The play space includes several of the following</i>: Bean bags; scarves; pine cones; tires/wheels; balls of various sizes; bats; buckets and containers; tricycles and pedal toys; or other push toys and materials that support toddlers’ and twos’ manipulative and object control skills.</p> <p>4) Fine Motor, Strength and Coordination Skills <u>Infants</u>: The play space provides opportunities for picking up, grasping, batting/swiping, releasing, banging, moving objects about. <i>The play space includes several of the following</i>: Natural loose parts (pine cones, leaves, sticks, etc.); musical toys; blocks; balls of various sizes; or other manipulatives, toys, or materials that support infants’ emerging fine motor, strength, and coordination skills.</p> <p><u>Toddlers and Twos</u>: The play space provides opportunities for drawing, painting, cutting, opening/closing, weaving, latching, locking/unlocking. <i>The play space includes several of the following</i>: Fence or grid for weaving; mail boxes; containers with lids; latches; gates; large keys and locks; crayons; paint brushes; scissors; spray bottles; musical instruments/toys; or other materials and features that support toddlers’ and twos’ emerging fine motor, strength, and coordination skills.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	
<p>F. FLEXIBILITY AND INDIVIDUALIZATION.</p> <p>CRITERIA:</p> <p>1) The play space provides features that allow for adaptations, scaffolding, and learning and development activities that meet the changing, individualized needs of all children, including children with disabilities and special needs (e.g., wheelchair access, raised sand table, tricycle without pedals, both flat and varied walking surfaces, etc.).</p> <p>2) The play space changes and evolves over time to reflect children’s needs and their created</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	

<p>products/projects.</p> <p>3) The play space supports both child- and teacher-initiated learning and development activities.</p> <p>4) The play space supports solitary, parallel, and cooperative play.</p>		
<p>G. SAFETY, MAINTENANCE, SHADE AND STORAGE: <i>The overall play space meets all relevant safety codes and regulations; receives planned, ongoing maintenance; and provides adequate and convenient storage.</i></p> <p>CRITERIA:</p> <p>1) Safety Codes and Regulations: The play space meets <u>all required</u> local, state, and federal safety codes and regulations, and uses the following for guidance and enhanced safety: a) ASTM (<i>American Society for Testing and Materials</i>); b) CPSC (<i>Consumer Product Safety Commission</i>); c) Head Start Program Performance Standards; d) NAEYC (<i>National Association for the Education of Young Children</i>) <i>Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation</i>; and e) state licensure regulations. *Infant and Toddler play space is separate from preschool play space per OHS regulations.</p> <p>2) Shade: 25% – 50% of the play space is shaded (by trees, tall shrubs, and/or man-made shade structures).</p> <p>3) Maintenance: The play space reflects a sense of organization, is free of debris, can be easily supervised, and is well-maintained (including surfacing and sand areas) on a planned and ongoing schedule.</p> <p>4) Storage: Adequate storage such as sheds or small outdoor buildings are used to store and organize loose parts, toys, wheeled toys, creative arts materials, child assessment materials and files, and other outdoor play materials that need protection from weather.</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5</p>	

H. REASONABLE RISK AND CHALLENGE: *The overall play space provides both risk and challenge appropriate to children’s emerging skills.*

CRITERIA:

- 1) The play space provides a sense of freedom with open areas for running, big body movements, and rough-and-tumble play.
- 2) The play space includes areas that provide a sense of comfort, coziness, and solitude while also being easily supervised by adults (e.g., pergola, small chairs, small tents, nooks, hideaways, low hedges, quilts/mats for infants, etc.).
- 3) The play space provides areas and equipment that promote reasonable risk and challenge to support emerging skills and development (such as trees to climb, low step ladders, lofts, uneven walking path, pergola, shrubs, dirt, etc.).
- 4) The play space provides safe but stimulating features for children to self-assess their capabilities and skills (such as climbers, steps, topographical variations, garden tools, musical/acoustical feature).
- 5) The play space provides materials, equipment, and features that promote independence, self-regulation, and a sense of confidence (such as water hose, gate with latch, wheeled toys for pushing and riding, bird feeder, etc.).

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References:

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