

Children's Health

Making Play A Priority In The Face Of Childhood Obesity

(NAPSA)—For generations, children have enjoyed gliding through the air on swings and going down slides at their neighborhood playground. Long before the terms “BMI” and “trans fat” were part of everyday speech, kids would run out to the backyard or a local park to meet up with friends for an afternoon of fun.

For today's young children, play isn't all just fun and games; it is a fundamental need. Studies indicate that a lack of physical fitness is one of the biggest threats the nation is currently facing. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), childhood obesity rates in America have tripled over the past three decades. Nearly one in every three children in the nation is overweight or obese. This fact leads to a startling reality: For the first time in U.S. history, children will not live as long as their parents.

Playing outdoors with other children has been shown to benefit every aspect of a child's wellness and development, not just weight control. Playground equipment that encourages climbing, sliding and running help to build a child's gross motor and socialization skills, as well as agility, dexterity, body strength and self-confidence. In his 2008 book entitled “Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain,” Harvard Medical School clinical associate professor of psychiatry Dr. John J. Ratey cited numerous findings from neuroscientific, biomedical and educational research to show how physical activity improves learning. One case study referenced in the book is a program in Naperville, Illinois that resulted in the school district's eighth graders scoring in the top 10 percent among 38 countries on standardized math and science tests thanks to physical activity being integrated into the school day.

Despite these documented benefits of exercise, according to a recent report by the CDC, just one in five families has a park or playground within a half-mile of their home. It is vital that local communities—from lawmakers and leadership, to new parents and PTA members—



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unite to create and protect outdoor play spaces for children.

Today's very real budget constraints shouldn't stand in the way of bringing outdoor play to children in every community. When considering a new playground, it is important not to sacrifice safety for affordability. For those looking for reasonably priced, commercial-grade playgrounds, there are new options available. Where to start?

- Find an experienced playground manufacturer or consultant who can help guide the project and navigate any budget constraints
- Consider total costs to operate the equipment. For example, will the anticipated maintenance costs place burdens on the operation that could be avoided?
- Look to product lines that can accommodate multiple ages and abilities
- Consider products that are not only fun but also encourage kids to exert energy and increase physical activity

One option for getting children outdoors and active is the affordably priced PlaySimple® playgrounds by Playworld Systems®, a Pennsylvania-based manufacturer of playground and fitness equipment for over 40 years. PlaySimple commercial playgrounds are designed to get children exercising through the power of play, while engaging with one another.

Parents and community leaders can help today's children lead healthier lives by making play more available in public spaces. Visit http://playworldsystems.com/products/product_lines/playsimple.