

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 (5 - 12 year olds)

Exploring the 'playground' can be the ideal way to observe the children in your class and find out what skills they do and don't have. For example; Can they jump from a height and land safely? Are they able to swing and rotate around a bar? Do they have the upper body strength to climb up the slide or climbing wall? We often assume that the children are utilising all aspects of the playground, but if you look closely you will notice that a number of children will bypass particular pieces of apparatus. Is this because they don't like it or they don't have the skills to use it?

Follow the Leader – Have the children either follow you around a selected course on the playground or follow a chosen leader.

Circuits – Make a station circuit where they stay at a place and do an activity for a minute, e.g. go across the monkey bars, climb up and down the net.

Ball tag – Taggers on ground or on equipment.

Relays using the playground – Get children to design an activity for each part of the playground and have groups move around each activity.

Freeze! – You'll need a whistle for this one. Set an end point on the jungle gym for the finish of the race. The highest point will typically be the best option. Start the race a little bit away from the jungle gym and line the children up. On your first whistle, they will start running toward the structure. On the next whistle, they have to freeze in place.

If children move when they should be frozen, then those children each take three steps back. Each subsequent whistle will unfreeze and freeze them. First to the top wins.

Time Challenge – Set a course around all or parts of the playground and challenge the children either individually or in teams to complete the course in the fastest time.

Jungle Gym Tag – Kids often play tag on the playground, but this is a variation of the game they're used to playing. In this game, all the children start on the jungle gym and must stay on it the whole time. If the child who is "it" sees that there is another player touching the ground, he yells, "Monkey on the rocks!" and that player then becomes "it." This makes the game of tag more interesting and slightly more difficult.