

Importance of Outside Play for Children with Autism

Unstructured play is critical in the development of ALL children, but children on the Autism spectrum play very differently than other children. Many of them struggle with stimulation in play spaces that cause them to respond in ways that can be disruptive. The way they react might include flapping, pacing, screaming, throwing what looks like a temper tantrum or harming themselves. They also tend to play off to themselves, they don't like loud noises, they line their toys up, they repeat the same action over and over and they struggle with imaginative play.

Because of this, many families with children on the spectrum might not feel comfortable taking their children places because they also don't want to disrupt other families from their activities.

Miracle Park will be a place for ALL children to play together as one unit. Since it is geared towards inclusive play, many of the families who will take their children there are dealing with some of the same behaviors and obstacles as other parents who will also be there, so since they are all accustomed to these issues, no one will feel disrupted. The feeling of inclusion that is so important for children is also VERY important to caregivers because it's comforting to be around others in similar situations.

Because children on the spectrum struggle with over stimulation, the more exposure they have to play spaces, the more accustomed they will become to the sights, sounds and structure of Miracle Park. Building exposure can help lessen the struggles and they can learn to respond to different noises, sounds, and environments. So, the more parents expose their child to Miracle Park, the more the child will be able to adapt to various stimulators.

Miracle Park has been designed with all these important things in mind. The colors are from a playful color palette but are not over stimulating. The park will have interactive play equipment that focuses on play but also includes activity that utilizes all 5 senses, movement, and balance. IF the child happens to become overstimulated, there is a place where the child can go to calm down.

Miracle Park will also have signage that includes letters, words, and pictures to promote communication skills. Many children on the Autism Spectrum and their families already use the PECS system to communicate. PECS stands for Picture Exchange Communication System. Having letters, words and pictures at the park will allow the family to continue communicating with their child the way they typically do at home.

Miracle Park will be completely fenced in and all playground equipment is built in an area that provides a complete line of vision from all areas so parents can see their child anywhere on the playground and know they are safely fenced in.

All equipment is also spread out to allow room for play without a child being overwhelmed and without feeling overcrowded.

Playing outside in the natural light of the sun is much healthier than artificial lighting. Children spend most of their day in school with fluorescent lighting or on computers/tablets with lights that can overstimulate. The best medicine for that type of overstimulation is natural lighting.

Children on the spectrum pick up on the moods and anxieties of their parents and siblings. Many times, the family is too worried about how the child will “fit in” or behave in public settings, that they don’t enjoy their time together. Children on the spectrum can pick up on that anxiety and feed off the energy of the family. At Miracle Park, parents and siblings can all relax and enjoy playtime in a safe, secure, nonjudgmental, accessible setting.

The playground will be free of charge. Many families have limited income and parents struggle to find affordable activities for their child to safely play. Providing a park where ALL children can play for free lifts one extra burden off the families.

For the children on the spectrum who don’t have back yards to play in or who spend the whole day confined to their desk at school, having a free open field that is securely enclosed to play and run around in is an ideal way to release pent up energy.

Many typical playgrounds allow for plenty of big muscle play. All children, especially children on the spectrum, also need manipulative play, pretend play, sensory play, quiet play, and creative play. Miracle Park has the ability and the equipment to provide all of this and more to everyone.

Miracle Park will also have Yalp interactive equipment such as the Sona Arch and Memo Pillars where they must use a variety of senses to play along. These activities also help with following instructions because they are given verbal cues to see what the next part of the “game” will be.