

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often experience challenges in functional social skills, emotional regulation, sensory processing and motor planning. A well-designed play environment can help support their development by incorporating equipment that meets their unique needs and encourages meaningful play experiences.

Motor Planning

Children with ASD may have difficulty coordinating their muscles and bodies to execute movements. Play structures with multiple challenge levels such as climbers help them develop motor planning skills by encouraging coordination and goal-oriented movement. For example, the Super Netplex® provides varied pathways, allowing children to learn from peers while navigating their way to the slide entrance.

Sensory Processing

Sensory integration is essential for children with ASD to interpret their environment effectively. Play spaces that offer diverse sensory experiences help children adapt to and integrate different stimuli. Key sensory play elements include:

- **Tactile Play:** Sand areas and sensory tables
- **Visual Input:** High-contrast color panels
- **Vestibular Input:** Sliding, swinging, rotation and spinning elements
- **Auditory Input:** Musical play features like Rhapsody® outdoor musical instruments
- **Proprioceptive Input:** Climbers or slides that provide deep-pressure stimulation



Social Skills Development

Social communication can be challenging for children with ASD, and many use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices. To encourage social interaction, inclusive play spaces can incorporate:

- **Symbol Communication Signs:** Encouraging interaction between verbal and non-verbal children
- **Parallel Play Opportunities:** Elements such as marble panels and water features allow engagement without direct eye contact
- **Cooperative Play Equipment:** Rotating, swaying and rocking structures encourage teamwork and imitation skills



Emotional Regulation

Helping children with ASD learn to manage their emotions is key to a positive play experience. Sensory input plays a vital role in emotional regulation:

- **Swinging Opportunities:** Linear swinging has been linked to calming effects and regulation
- **Quiet Retreats:** The Cozy Dome® and sensory tunnels offer spaces with reduced stimuli, allowing children to self-soothe and regulate their emotions



The Power of Play Observation

Outdoor play provides an organic setting for children to observe and learn from peers. By creating a thoughtful play environment, we empower children of all abilities to explore, engage and develop crucial life skills through play. **Learn more by contacting your local consultant, ExerPlay, Inc., at 800.457.5444 or [exerplay.com](https://www.exerplay.com).**

