



Drop-off routine

At arrival time on our school's playground, a number of children head directly for the swings. They may ask for a few pushes before their parent leaves. It's a great transition activity for children and family members to do together. Once goodbyes are said, being on a swing gives a child a perfect place to watch what's happening on the playground. She can make a choice from a distance about what to do next, without having to immediately be in the midst of social activities.

Mastery and science

No matter what age children are when they master the art of swinging, they feel proud and self-reliant about this new accomplishment. Children must figure out how to "pump"—to shift their weight (leaning forward or back) and at the same time move their legs (straight out or bent)—to get just the right motion to propel the swing. This is physics in action! As children swing, they are learning about gravity and how it pulls you back down to the center each time. Children learn that when they pump, they can go fast or slow, high or low, and be in control of the experience. Then there's stopping—dragging one's feet seems to work best. Learning to swing requires lots of practice and some coaching to figure things out.

Swing types and activities

There are many kinds of swings available: traditional, tire, and rope, to name a few. Each one functions on the same principle of back and forth. Tire swings can spin or swing in a circle or an arc. Traditional swings can be manipulated to create different experiences for a child.

The standard approach to swinging is for an adult to push a young child from behind. You might also push from the front, using palms to the bottom of shoes. Children sometimes request an "underdog" push, where the adult holds on to the seat, runs forward under the swing, and then lets go—the result is a very strong push!







"I like the spinny-ness, but not too fast."

-Miladia, age 4

and is related to balance) develops properly when children have opportunities to move their bodies in certain ways—spinning, tumbling, and swinging in particular. The book discusses how lack of outdoor playtime and not being physically active can negatively impact overall sensory development.

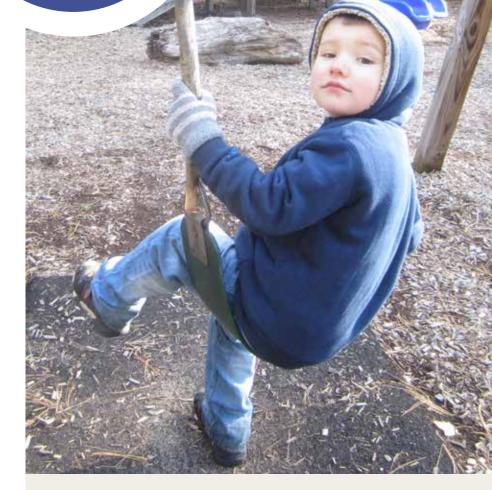
With more time and space outside, children are able to move their bodies in a variety of ways. Movements that involve not being upright, like handstands and cartwheels, are especially beneficial for developing balance and spatial awareness. Adults need to advocate for recess and emphasize the importance of free-play time outdoors. If frequent outdoor play is not feasible, offer gym space and tumbling mats to support healthy physical development.

Conclusion

As children swing, we see smiles and hear laughter-it's a thrilling, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate activity! Don't forget that fun is a big part of learning!

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Photographs: Courtesy of the author





This article was inspired by Angela Hanscom's book Balanced and Barefoot: How Unrestricted Outdoor Play Makes for Strong, Confident, and Capable Children. To learn more, visit www.balancedandbarefoot.com.