Inclusive Playgrounds: The Role of Occupational Therapy

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Introduction

Play's Importance
Play holds significant importance in children's development across cultures, especially when experienced outdoors. This outdoor play offers freedom and child-directed experiences, enhancing self-confidence, independence, and imaginative engagement. Occupational therapists (OTs) are committed to ensuring play opportunities for all children. Their expertise in adapting evidence-based practices to child-specific needs and environments is crucial for inclusive play experiences.

Methods

A systematic review and meta-analysis of evidence were conducted to develop a framework for inclusive playground design recommendations for children with and without disabilities. This methodological approach aligns with the following principles: (1) use of evidence-based guidelines to develop recommendations; (2) participatory design with key stakeholders; and (3) consideration of child and family preferences.

Results

A total of 546 documents were screened in Cochrane, resulting in 18 meeting the inclusion criteria after removing duplicates and conducting title/abstract screening. Ultimately, 18 articles were included in the review (see Figure 1), including five found through manual searches. A comprehensive review identified four main themes in evidence-based playground design recommendations: accessibility, therapeutic engagement, safety, and community engagement.

Discussion

The survey was conducted via email to nonprofits like Everyday Sunshine, The Arc of Morgan County, and others, with a focus on programs and services for children with disabilities. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study aimed to identify key elements for inclusive playground design.

Conclusion

The review identified 32 articles included in the review (see Figure 1), including five found through manual searches. Following PRISMA guidelines, the author used the following databases: CINAHL Plus, Scopus, Google Scholar, and PubMed. The usability of playground elements, alongside accessibility, is crucial for inclusive play experiences. Recommendations include ensuring predictability in play experiences, enhancing sensory play opportunities, and promoting diverse play activities.

Acknowledgement & Contact Information

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References


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Play: The Role of Occupational Therapy

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Play's Importance
Play holds significant importance in children's development across cultures, especially when experienced outdoors. This outdoor play offers freedom and child-directed experiences, enhancing self-confidence, independence, and imaginative engagement. Advocacy for Play Various organizations, like the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), stress play as a fundamental right for children. Despite this, legal support for children's play remains inadequate in certain regions, expecting accessibility for children with disabilities.

Barriers to Play Challenges related to accessibility and validity persist in community playgrounds, even among those complying with ADA standards. These issues affect the experiences of children with disabilities, leading to isolation and limited participation.

Occupational Therapy Role
Occupational therapists (OTs) are committed to ensuring play opportunities for all children. Their expertise in adapting evidence-based practices to child-specific needs and environments is crucial for inclusive play experiences.

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