

DEVELOPMENTAL FX



OUTDOOR PLAY

A DENVER PARKS & PLAY GUIDE

CREATED BY DFX CLINICAL TEAM MEMBERS:

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DEVELOPMENTAL FX

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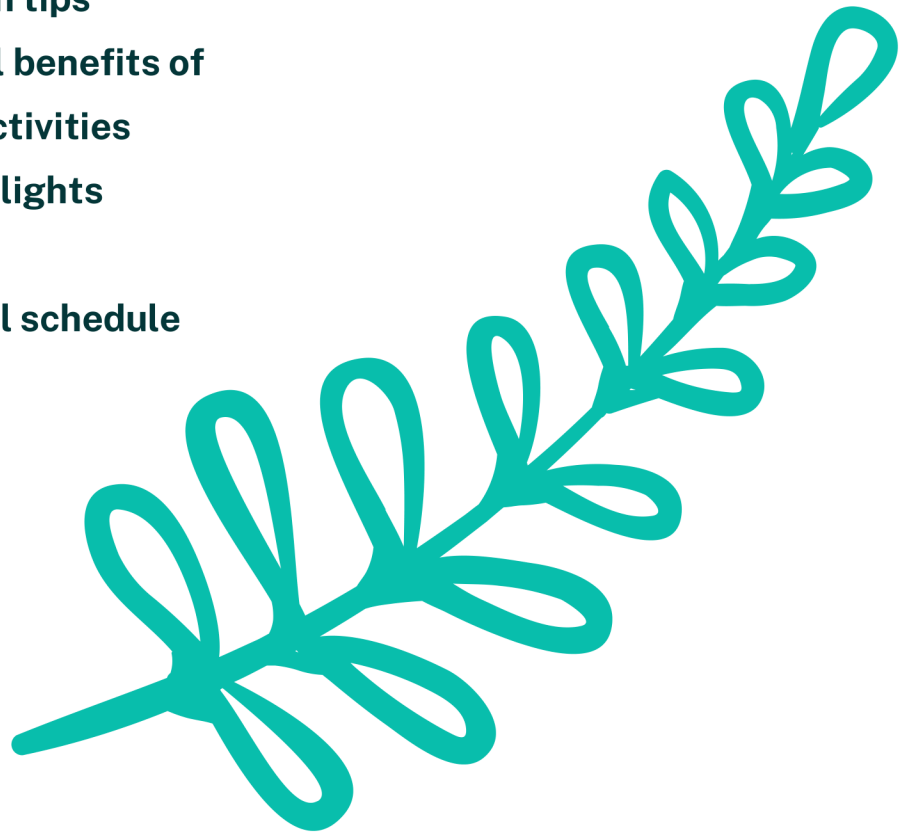


ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was created to empower families to get outside! Outdoor play is essential for the development of children's physical, emotional, intellectual, and social well-being. The information, resources, and activity ideas are intended to support family learning about the benefits of the outdoors, connecting with their children in natural spaces, and engaging in play that supports the whole child.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- Two featured Denver parks
- Highlighted play spaces at parks
- Play opportunities
- Communication tips
- Developmental benefits of specific play activities
- Sensation highlights
- Safety tips
- A sample visual schedule
- Resources



JAMES A.

BIBLE PARK

6802 E YALE AVE, DENVER, CO 80224

AMENITIES:

- Renovated playground
- Bike/pedestrian paths/trails
- Baseball/softball fields
- Basketball court
- Tennis courts
- Fitness equipment
- Natural areas
- Creek access
- Grassy fields
- Picnic tables
- Benches
- Restroom



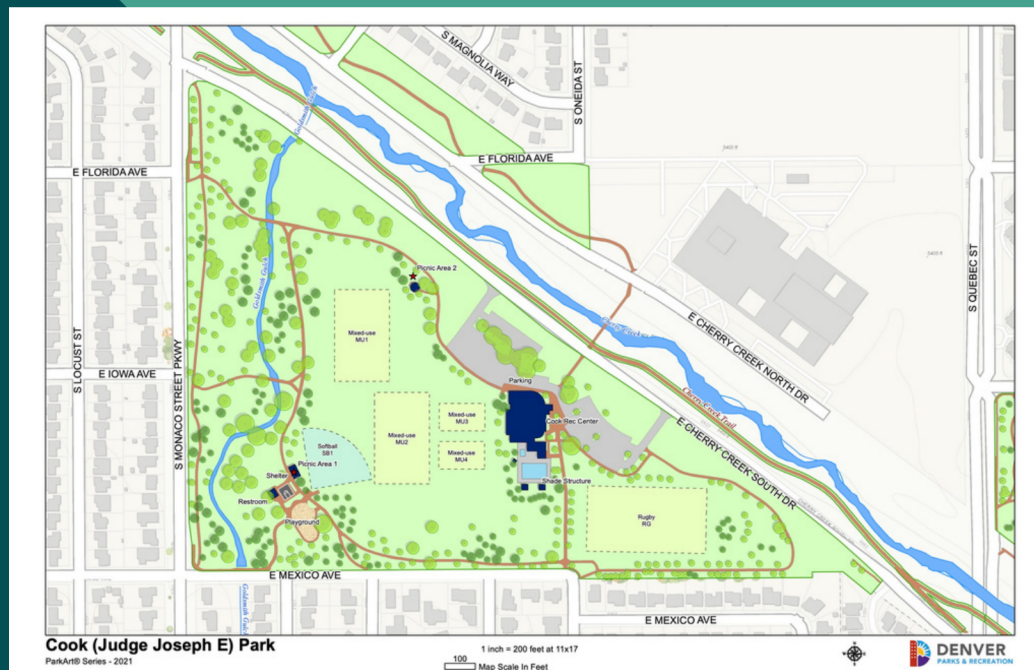
JUDGE JOSEPH E.

COOK PARK

7100 CHERRY CREEK S DR, DENVER, CO 80224

AMENITIES:

- Next to recreation center with outdoor pool
- Playground
- Benches
- Bike/pedestrian path
- Picnic shelter/tables
- Restroom
- Basketball court
- Soccer field
- Baseball/softball field
- Football field
- Natural areas
- Creek access
- Fitness equipment



SAFETY & COMFORT



DRESS FOR THE WEATHER & ACTIVITY

- **Bundle up and pack cold weather layers for colder temperatures**
 - Hats, waterproof layers, gloves
 - *Become a weather detective! Practice checking the weather and selecting the right clothing for comfort and fun!*
- **Consider the right shoes for play**
 - Water shoes, tennis shoes, snow boots

SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS

For a variety of reasons, sensory-sensitive kids may avoid nature play. Tactile input from the environment, different noises, fear of injury or wildlife, aversion to certain clothing, and the unpredictability of the great outdoors can make a child feel uncomfortable and unsafe.

However, given the the right tools and support, play opportunities in nature can help to facilitate the organization and integration of sensations.

Helpful tips to make nature approachable:

- Give your child predictability, information and options
- Make a plan before you arrive
- Provide deep tactile pressure/proprioceptive input before messy play and or putting on certain clothing (if averse)
- Be flexible and open
- Designate a safe space
- Use co-regulation to support and empower your child



SAFETY FIRST

Make sure to pack plenty of water and snacks

Carry a simple first aid kit in your car/ backpack

OUTDOOR PLAY TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS:

- Look for a balance between organized activities and those that encourage free, independent play and exploration
- Inspire curiosity and wonder
- Embrace natural resilience; help kids feel secure about taking healthy risks
- Give the freedom to get dirty and fully engage in nature
- Join in!
- Make outdoor/nature play a priority
- You don't have to have all the ideas, there are lots of resources you can explore! Check out the list at the end of this guide.

COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS:

- Be at your child's level and get face to face
- Observe your child and notice what they are interested in
- Join in their play with warmth and enthusiasm
- Avoid "quizzing" - try making comments and narrating play!
- Expand on your child's message by adding new words, ideas, or information



WHAT IS PLAY?

PLAY IS...

- A powerful, brain-building activity that supports all areas of your child's development, including language, motor, and social skills
- Intrinsically motivating
- Spontaneous or structured
- Fun!
- Involves repetition of experience, exploration, experimentation, and imitation of one's surroundings
- Can be physical, emotional, social, and cognitive
- Can occur alone, 1:1 or in groups
- For everyone!

"Play is the universal language of childhood. It is through play that children understand each other and make sense of the world around them."

- Play Scotland

NATURE/OUTDOOR PLAY

PLAYING OUTSIDE PROMOTES...

- Exploration and creativity
- Executive functioning skills
- Sensory integration
- Motor skills
- Relaxation and emotional regulation
- Healthy risk-taking
- Socialization
- Apprecation of nature

"Nature is a tool to get children to experience not just the wider world, but themselves."

- Stephen Moss



PLAY PLACES AND SPACES:

CREEK

PLAY OPPORTUNITIES:

- Make a splash! Throw rocks!
- Practice skipping rocks
- Large rock balancing
- Float a boat
- Build a dam
- Look for wildlife
- Crawdad "fishing"
- Creek crossing
- Rock hunting
- Mud/sand play



DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS:

- The uneven footing in a creek can help develop balance and stability
- Creeks provide lots of opportunities for sensory exploration (the feel of mud, sand, wetness/dryness of rocks, temperature of the water, speed of the water)

COMMUNICATION TIPS:

Sing a rhyming song! Recognizing and producing rhyming words is an important pre-reading skill. Try singing these fun open-ended rhyming songs: Down by the Bay, A-Hunting We Will Go, Willoughby Wallaby Woo. For older children, try making up your own song or write a poem!

SUGGESTED ITEMS TO ENHANCE PLAY:

- Buckets
- Net
- Towels
- Shovels
- Toy boat
- Floaty toys
- String



SENSATION STATION:

Our tactile sense is the sense of touch that gives us information about the sensations of pressure, texture, temperature, pain and movement. We use our **TACTILE** sense to experience and process information from our environment. Some activities which enhance our tactile sense include: messy play, water play, and walking barefoot .



PLAY PLACES AND SPACES:

NATURAL AREAS

GRASS/TREES

PLAY OPPORTUNITIES:

- Tree climbing
- Hill rolling
- Tag/freeze tag
- Red light, green light
- Sledding
- Races
- Barefoot exploration
- Snow/snowball play
- Hide and seek
- Hide items for scavenger hunt
- Activate your senses (what can you see, hear, feel, smell)
- Pick a sit spot and practice mindfulness, sitting still for 1-3 minutes



COMMUNICATION TIPS:

Play a physical game, such as *What Time Is It Mr. Fox?* or *Simon Says*. These games exercise executive functioning skills by encouraging children to pay attention to others, hold information in their working memories, and both initiate and inhibit their actions. Games with words and phrases that repeat often can be easiest for children to learn!

SENSATION STATION:

Our proprioceptive sense is the sense of muscles working in our bodies and understanding the positioning of our muscles in comparison to our own body and our environment. We use our **PROPRIOCEPTIVE** sense to know where our bodies are in space and how to generate coordinated movements to successfully execute tasks. Movements which support our proprioception sense include: climbing, rolling, crashing, bouncing, crawling and other heavy muscle work activities.

DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS:

- Nature spaces offer many opportunities for all kinds of healthy movement - running, climbing, rolling...
- Climbing trees improves fine and gross motor strength, motor planning, body coordination, and spatial awareness
- Grassy play offers opportunity for social play with peers and promotes imagination and creativity
- Spending time in natural areas reduces stress and fatigue

SUGGESTED ITEMS TO ENHANCE PLAY: Balls, Cones, Sleds



PLAY PLACES AND SPACES:

PICNIC TABLE



COMMUNICATION TIPS:

Offer choices using descriptive words: Do you want to trace the big, crunchy, brown leaf or the tiny, smooth, yellow leaf?

DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS:

- Arts & crafts offer opportunity for self-expression, planning, concentration and patience
- Crafts with sensory infused elements and that involve detailed precise hand and finger control can promote hand development, specifically fine motor strength and coordination
- Purposeful attention and emphasis on the natural world builds appreciation and respect for our environment
- Games strengthens engagement and foster relationships

PLAY OPPORTUNITIES:

- Nature arts & crafts
 - Paint with a flower or stick "brush"
 - Stencil leaves
- Nature journal
- Build fairy houses/nests
- Nature restaurant or kitchen
- Card games or board games
- Drawing or coloring

SUGGESTED ITEMS TO ENHANCE PLAY:

- Paper
- Crayons
- Notebook
- Glue
- Paint



PLAY PLACES AND SPACES:

PLAYGROUND



PLAY OPPORTUNITIES:

- Obstacle courses (timed or collecting items throughout)
- Movement, movement, movement! (sliding, hanging, climbing, swinging)
- Tummy slide or tummy swinging
- Balance challenges
- Hide and seek
- Pretend play: castles, house

COMMUNICATION TIPS:

Plan an obstacle course! Give directions using sequencing terms and location words: First, walk under the tower. Then, go through the tunnel. Last, climb to the top of the slide!

For older children, play pretend with roles: Chef + Customer, Superhero + Villain, Detective + Sidekick.



DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS:

- The movement opportunities that playground play offers build gross and fine motor skills, core strength and body awareness
- Playground play allows for spontaneous engagement with peers and opportunity for social development
- Playground play promotes imagination and self-confidence

SENSATION STATION:

Our vestibular sense is the sense of moving, and maintaining an upright position. We use our **VESTIBULAR** sense to know which way is up or down, or how fast or slow we move. The vestibular system has the greatest impact on daily function. It affects posture, balance, movement, coordination, attention and arousal. Movements our vestibular sense perceives include: linear, vertical, angular, rotary, rhythmical and orbital. It is easiest to see our vestibular sense in action on various types of playground swings.

PLAY PLACES AND SPACES:

TRAILS/BIKE PATHS

PLAY OPPORTUNITIES:



- Chalk drawing/painting
- Water painting
- Biking/skating/scooting
- Nature walk
- Scavenger hunt
- Red light/green light
- Four square
- I spy
- Animal walks
- Cone courses



DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS:

- Trails and bike paths provide unlimited adventure and play opportunities
- Biking, skating, and scooting enhance cardiovascular fitness, postural balance and coordination
- Nature walks can activate the senses and exercise mindfulness
- A simple walk or ride is a great way to get outside and spend time with family and friends

COMMUNICATION TIPS:

Animal walks to build vocabulary: Name a category and then have your child pick something in that category. Start with a broad category like “animals,” and then try a more specific category (ocean animals, animals that fly, farm animals). Get creative! Have you ever walked like a vegetable? A kitchen appliance? A vehicle?



SUGGESTED ITEMS TO ENHANCE PLAY:

- Bikes/skates/ scooters
- Chalk
- Balls
- Paintbrushes & water
- Backpack
- Cones

PARK FAVORITES AT BIBLE PARK

PLAYGROUND

- Slides, swings, platform spinner, hanging upside down, hill play (vestibular)
- Monkey bars, climbing equipment (proprioceptive)



- Echo games (auditory)
- Riding sports (vestibular)
- Wildlife sightings (visual)



TUNNEL

PARK FAVORITES **AT COOK PARK**



- Water/mud/sand play (tactile)
- Rock/creek bed balancing (vestibular-proprioceptive)
- Nature sounds (auditory)

CREEK

TREES

- Climbing (proprioceptive)
- Hanging (vestibular)



SAMPLE VISUAL SCHEDULE



RESOURCES

- <https://www.1000hoursoutside.com/>
- <http://www.gomeso.org/>
- <https://www.generationwild.com/>
- <https://www.childrenandnature.org/>
- <http://www.hanen.org/Home.aspx>
- <https://www.timbernook.com/>
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/activities-guide-enhancing-and-practicing-executive-function-skills-with-children-from-infancy-to-adolescence/>
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/6-reasons-children-need-to-play-outside-2018052213880>
- https://pathways.org/playing-in-nature/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAzMGNBhCyARIsANpUkzOUgS-UxHMMksiBKfatZLa7Ekq8CVTX3vyGFM_Yun7FrkLXCIsNQhwaAs5dEALw_wcB



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