



## Best Practice Guidelines

Evidence-Based Playground Activities  
Promoting Physical Activity & Fitness Through Active Play

The purpose of Play On! is to promote physical fitness and fun through the use of well-designed outdoor play environments and creative playground learning activities.

The 125 playground activities, combined with playgrounds aligned to six key elements of play, promote overall fitness and are highly effective tools for maximizing one of your community's greatest assets - playgrounds! PlayCore is proud to partner with physical activity experts SHAPE America to provide a valid solution to creating healthy bodies through active play.

## Play On! program includes:

- ▶ Play On! curriculum guidebook:
  - 125 standards-based playground activities for grades PreK-5
  - Assessment worksheets and equipment lists
  - National Standards of Physical Activity alignment matrix
  - Safety, implementation, inclusion, and teaching strategies
  - Design strategies
  - Funding resources
- ▶ Playground environments aligned with Play On! activities and design strategies to promote higher levels of physical activity
- ▶ Professional development training module
- ▶ The Play On! National Demonstration Site program, national recognition and press exposure for sites that implement use of the program through the use of six elements of play to promote youth fitness

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Partnership:





# A Solution to Promoting Lifelong Healthy Lifestyles

Physical activity in play is critical for healthy lifestyles and the development of the mind, body, and spirit. Communities are seeking valid ways to address the dramatic rise in childhood obesity and combat sedentary lifestyles in new, exciting ways. It is critical for professionals to advocate for play initiatives and effectively communicate how investing in play results in healthy community outcomes. Research indicates that children that engage in regular, healthy physical activity are more likely to continue to be active as adults. By providing evidence-based programs and well-designed outdoor play environments that intentionally promote fitness and physical activity, schools, parks, and activity centers can create more available opportunities for children to engage and have access to active play. Playgrounds not only promote gross motor development, but they improve critical thinking and problem solving skills, and provide opportunities for creativity, social interaction, and overall physical fitness.

SHAPE America has established standards for developing physically literate students “who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity” (SHAPE America, 2014). These standards have become the guiding principles of meaningful and significant content in physical education. Play On! fully aligns with the SHAPE America standards while promoting fitness and fun on the playground. The 125 playground activities provide meaningful ways for schools and recreation professionals to effectively address health and wellness initiatives and provide active play through the use of six key play elements that promote fitness—balancing, brachiating, climbing, spinning, sliding, and swinging.

This unique program can become a vital component in efforts to strengthen, educate, and build healthier communities through play, while maximizing the potential of your playgrounds.

## Multiple benefits include:

- Helps schools and recreation facilities align with **National Standards for Physical Education** and **60 minutes** of recommended physical activity.
- Promotes **moderate to vigorous levels** of physical activity.
- Teaches children, families, and communities the **significant health and developmental benefits** that outdoor play environments offer.
- **Reinforces classroom learning** outdoors through cross-curricular activities.
- Helps link to **potential funding** aligned to support health and wellness initiatives.
- **Maximizes playground investments** for use during free play, structured physical education, energizers, and before/after school programming

## Six key play elements:



Balancing



Spinning



Brachiating



Sliding



Climbing



Swinging

# RESEARCH

Research results were overwhelmingly positive and indicated that Play On! was effective in promoting physical activity for children.

Through a research grant contributed by SHAPE America, Dr. Yuanglong Liu and Dr. Suzan F. Ayers of the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Western Michigan University, developed and implemented an objective analysis of the Play On! Program.

They conducted a national study to evaluate the program that provided specific information about the correlation between the program and physical activity benefits. Fourteen schools were selected through a national Beta Site selection process through SHAPE America, in which schools submitted an application to volunteer to participate in the research. Approximately 6,000 children from 14 beta sites in 5 states participated from February to May 2009. Research included a series of pre- and post-intervention surveys completed by the teacher, children, parents, as well as two focus groups at one of the Beta Sites to qualitatively measure physical activity and skill development.

## Research Findings:

- 91% of teachers reported that playground use increased
- 90% of teachers plan to use the program in the future
- 100% rated the program 4-5 on a 5 point scale
- 25% of parents participated in more family activity after the Play On! program was initiated
- 100% of students reported having fun engaging in the activities
- 90-100% of teachers reported that Play On! motivated students to participate in regular, enjoyable, physical activity in a safe and supervised environment



## Research Sites:

- Weaver Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Bissett Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Delaware Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Sequiota Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Truman Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Campbell Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Disney Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Bowerman Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Cowden Elementary - Springfield, MO
- Fultondale Elementary - Fultondale, AL
- Port O'Conner Elementary - Port O'Conner, TX
- Independence Elementary - Lewisville, TX
- Petal Primary School K-12 - Petal, MS
- English Estates Elementary - Sanford, FL



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Playground Design

Playgrounds can be designed to fully implement the Play On! program, while incorporating the six key elements of play to promote fitness and help children reach moderate to vigorous levels of physical activity. Physical educators and recreation professionals can play a critical role in the selection of playground equipment and the overall design of the outdoor play and learning environment. A well-designed play space provides a critical opportunity to address the needs of the whole child and offer a wide variety of activities that motivate, engage, and challenge all children. Specific designs can be selected that encourage children to actively move through play and develop important fitness skills that align with national standards for physical activity.

The following design considerations are evidence-based strategies for promoting fitness and physical activity on the playground.

- **Variety** - Offer various elements of play such as brachiating/upper body bilateral coordination (alternating arm swinging/hanging/crawling), climbing, swinging, sliding, spinning, and balancing.
- **Continuum of Skills** - Provide a developmental progression of skills by selecting equipment for beginning, intermediate, and advanced level users that will promote healthy risk taking.
- **Naturalization** - Naturalized playgrounds that combine manufactured equipment with the living landscape provide more opportunities for increased physical activity. Utilize child-friendly plant materials, pathways, and existing topography to encourage movement and increase play value.
- **Loose Parts** - Providing additional loose parts encourages children to move and cooperate together as they manipulate their environment.
- **Active Play** - Disperse equipment and consider pathway layouts for configurations that will encourage movement through running, chasing, exploring, and active play.

### Balancing

- Increases understanding of efficient body positioning and control, principles of gravity, equilibrium, base of support, and counterbalancing.
- Promotes muscular strength and endurance throughout the entire body



### Sliding

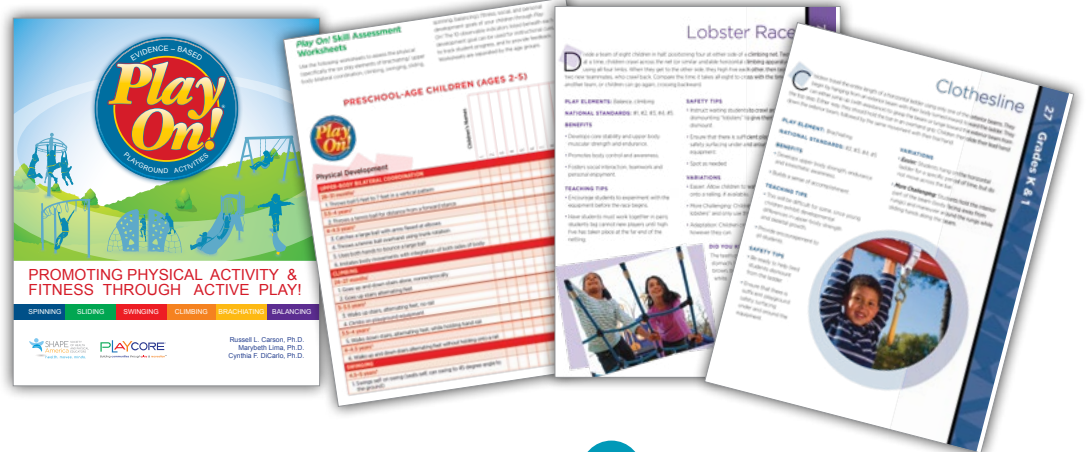
- Enhances core stability, balance, and leg and hip
- Provides body and spatial awareness experience

### Swinging

- Promotes aerobic fitness, muscular force, and whole-body awareness
- Emphasizes the importance of timely energy transfer during movement



# Playground Activities that Promote Physical Activity



dynamic  
flexibility  
al



## 3 Brachiating

- Improves muscular strength and endurance
- Promotes hand-eye coordination and rhythmic body movement



## 4 Spinning

- Develops kinesthetic awareness and postural control
- Improves understanding of speed, force, and directional qualities of movement



## 5 Climbing

- Enhances spatial awareness and coordination
- Fosters whole-body muscular strength, endurance, and flexibility



# Join the Movement!

# ADVOCACY

## Become a National Demonstration Site

- **Promote your leadership** through best practice program and design considerations that promote physical activity through active play
- **Collaborate with program partners** and document the process for others to replicate
- Create **positive attention** and attract partners/funds that support health and wellness initiatives to combat sedentary lifestyles
- Gain **national awareness** through various media outlets, press releases, collateral materials, and nationwide presentations
- Receive **certificate of recognition and signage** for serving as a model demonstration site

To learn more about creating a Play On! play and learning environment in your community, purchase a *Play On!* program, or to become a National Demonstration Site, please visit:

[playcore.com/solutions/youth-physical-fitness](http://playcore.com/solutions/youth-physical-fitness)

"The Play On! Program is an exciting opportunity to extend our physical education classroom to the outdoors. Through creative learning, the Play On! curriculum arouses the student's sense of curiosity, imagination and adventure to achieve a healthy, active lifestyle."

- Theresa Boehm Miller  
Curriculum Development Chair,  
Springfield Public Schools, Springfield, MO