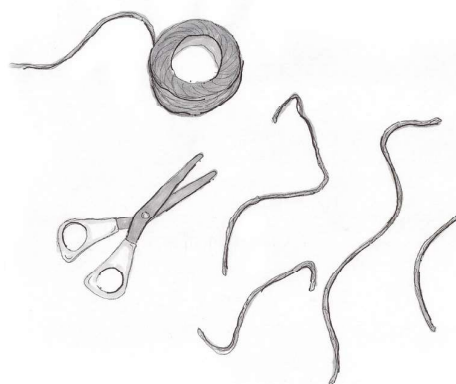


# Benefits of Loose Parts

Many organizations and communities struggle to provide safe and interesting places where children can play. For some, cost is prohibitive to building a playground. For others in flood zones or in displaced areas, setting up permanent structures can be near impossible. Loose parts play materials can be a great solution to overcoming these challenges. In addition, loose parts offer many benefits over traditional, fixed equipment spaces.



## Fixed Equipment:

- + Can be very expensive to install
- + Have generally been designed for maintenance and surveillance
- + Tend to focus on gross motor play (running, jumping, spinning)
- + Have equipment intended to be used in specific ways
  - + Become boring over time
- + Are inflexible to children's ideas

## Loose Parts:

- + Can be cheap or free to create
- + Are redesigned daily by the children
- + Require maintenance and storage
- + Accommodate all play types equally
  - + Allow children to build, dismantle, bang together, repurpose and more, to make their ideas real in the world
- + Become more engaging over time, as children's skills increase
  - + Encourage peer play and social cohesion

The good news is, loose parts can be added to any existing site, whether it's an empty space or an existing playground!

Example: One school has a large flat field for children to play in. One corner stays muddy most of the year, making it difficult to run in. To reduce conflict at recess, adults had been leading organized games in the dry portion of the field. However, they noticed that some children did not enjoy these games so they introduced loose parts including long bamboo poles tied with thin strips of bicycle innertube, pieces of fabric, as well as saucepans, spoons and mixing bowls. Using the fabric, a group of children decided to play wedding and dressed up the brides before parading through a village of bamboo houses. At the mud kitchen, children made a feast for everyone to celebrate together after the 'ceremony'.



Example: Another school has a fixed climbing frame. Children there spoke many languages, and adults noticed that the children were not mixing together. They brought bedsheets and ropes, pulleys and buckets. Soon, the children had used the cloth to cover parts of the climbing frame and whisper together inside these tents. Others had used the ropes and pulleys to raise buckets full of sand to the top of the climbing frame, where other children poured it down the slide. In this complicated construction, any child who wanted to could find a role that they did not need a shared language to explain.



# Why is **PLAY** so important?

## **Cognitive**

Play dramatically increases brain development, helps children concentrate better in class, and reduces stress, which hinders learning.

## **Social**

Children are able to practice skills of teamwork and solitude, and helps them to make new friends

## **Therapeutic**

Play is an intuitive method for children to process trauma, and reconnect to the world

## **Intellectual**

Play involves understanding that one thing can represent another, and the use of narratives, both of which are essential for literacy

## **Physical**

By encouraging children to move, stretch, run and climb, play is essential for children's physical development

## **Emotional**

Through play, children learn emotional self-regulation and resiliency, which is critical for success throughout life

## **Creative**

By allowing children to translate their ideas into reality, play encourages a rich and flexible creativity

## **Economic**

All of the above benefits combine, so that children with access to play are also more prepared for and able to thrive in school and work. This has direct financial economic benefits for the rest of their lives.

You can read more about the benefits of play through exploring the "Further Readings" list at the end of this manual, and in The Case for Play, available for free online at [www.playgroundideas.org/caseforplay](http://www.playgroundideas.org/caseforplay)