

BENEFITS OF SWINGING. - Solvej

WHY IS IT SO GOOD FOR BABIES AND CHILDREN TO SWING?

Children's swings have endured over the ages and continue to be among the most popular of playground equipment. Swinging is not only incredibly fun and relaxing, but also has physical benefits, aiding your child's development.

START ALREADY AS A BABY

When your baby can sit up unaided, which is generally at about 6 months, the time is right to start swinging. Starting your baby swinging young makes the most of the many ways in which swinging help your child's development, as the first few years of life are when the foundation for further developments are made. It is important to have a safe and comfortable swing made for babies with support on all sides. The swing also needs a crotch restraint. Start out gently and push from the front, so your face is in full view. Play peek-a-boo games and make sound effects to make it even more fun.

EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

One amazing thing about swinging is that it has the capability to provide both excitement and relaxation which are complete opposites. Children are generally attracted to movement that meets their current needs and swinging has the ability to follow that need. An over stimulated child is likely to relax and calm down on the swing, while an under stimulated child is likely to seek out a feeling of excitement. The body & mind seem to have this fantastic ability to unconsciously know what they need and will automatically take that out of the swinging.

Excitement: The most obvious benefit of swinging is that it is fun and exciting. The feeling of being weightless for a split second at each end of the pendulum, feeling the wind as you accelerate down, hitting the bottom of the pendulum in full speed with the extra g-force on your body is exciting. To laugh and be happy is most beneficial to both our physical and mental health.

Relaxation: Swinging is a rhythmic activity, which has great settling effects. Rhythmic motions send messages to the brain which is calming. This is why tired babies and toddlers easily go to sleep if they have a safe enclosed swing that supports them on all sides.

If your child is having trouble with emotional regulation or focus/concentration, try encouraging them to swing. Swinging can provide a good solution to anxiety, aggressiveness or lack of focus and short attention span and it is easy, fun and free of side effects.

PHYSICAL BENEFITS

Sensory integration: Sensory input is the raw material for brain development and learning. Swinging helps with sensory integration which provides a crucial foundation for later more complex learning and behaviour. This is the process of the brain organising and interpreting the information from sensory experiences. Sensory experiences include touch, movement, body awareness, sight, sound and the pull of gravity. The sensing systems most affected by swinging are the vestibular system, visual perception and proprioception. The influence of these systems plays a major role in the developmental milestones of sensory processing and gross motor skills for children. Many studies have been carried out on how sensory integration even contributes to speech and language development and how swinging helps with this.

Balance: The Vestibular System is situated in our inner ear and helps us know if we are moving and which direction we are going. It gives us a sense of spatial orientation, and is the sensory system that provides the leading contribution about movement and sense of balance. The fluid in the inner ear is constantly swirling back and forth when we are swinging. When swinging we are not only moving back and forth, we are also leaning backwards and forwards, and we are moving up and down, plus we are constantly changing speed as well.

Visual perception: The development of changing the depth of focus has already started at 6 months and is basically completed during the baby's second year. Swinging is an excellent way of helping to develop and exercise this ability as the baby is moving back and forth constantly changing the depth of focus when looking at you or the surrounding environment. The vestibular system sends signals to the neural structures that control eye movements that provide the anatomical basis of the vestibulo-ocular reflex, which is required for clear vision. The visual connection between vestibular and proprioceptive systems is also developed through swinging, as swingers use visual cues to adjust their balance and movement.

Proprioception: This is our sense of knowing our body and where our different parts are located in relation to each other and how they are moving. It can be described as body awareness. This system gathers information from the muscles and joints to tell us our body position and posture. Again apply this to swinging, when the body has to figure out how to constantly change its position in relation to where it is in space, to control a moving object.

Muscles and joints: When children are pushed in a swing, or when they propel a swing themselves, they engage all their muscles and joints to hold on, balance and coordinate their body to the swinging motion. This is not only great for overall muscle development but also develops gross motor skills. The pull of gravity is constantly changing when you swing. It goes from no pull at the ends of the pendulum (you feel weightless with no pressure on the body) to extra pull, g-force, at the bottom of the pendulum (you feel heavier with extra pressure on the body) and your muscles have to constantly adjust.

Coordination: Especially when children stop relying on someone to propel them on a swing, using a swing helps them develop coordination. The timing and use of muscles necessary to make the swing move and to speed up or slow down is usually difficult for children to learn. At the age of about 4 years a child can swing by themselves and swinging is excellent for learning and training full body coordination.

It is a well known fact that one of the most effective way to learn is to use a repetitive, sequential and rhythmic pattern. Swinging provides such a pattern which is repeated with short intervals, so there is a lot of development and learning happening while the child is having pure fun. Can it get better than that?

ADVANTAGES FOR PARENTS

Not only is swinging great fun for children and beneficial for their development but there are advantages for the parents as well. An easy to shift swing can be of great help to those who work in and around the home and have to look after the little one too. There are times when you want to get things done without your baby/toddler clinging to you. Just pop baby in the swing, close at hand, where he/she can see you and feel part of what you are doing. An occasional push and conversation will keep baby entertained while you get on with the job.

When our daughter Solvej was a baby we found it extremely useful to have a baby swing at home. We used it as much inside as outside. One of the best places was in the kitchen. When it was time to cook it was great to have her up high so she could see what was going on. It is also great not to have your little one hanging on your trouser leg. It is also so much safer not to have them crawling on the floor so you can trip over them or spill something hot on them. An occasional push kept her happy and if tired the swinging often made her go to sleep.

We really recommend having a swing that is easy to shift at home, but if you don't have this luxury go to the local playground often and let your children climb and swing as much as possible.