

Cheshire Homes India-Mumbai

Sensory Garden For Children with Disabilities



A sensory garden is a facility that provides for an environment that is sensory stimulating; giving disabled children a combined sensory opportunity in an environment that is safe and promotes learning and development; both physical and intellectual.

A sensory garden includes facility and provisions to suit the needs of children with one or more disabilities. It may broadly contain features such as: aromatic and edible plants, fruit bearing trees, water features like a pool or a fountain, articles/equipments designed to make a sound, textured touch-pads, magnifying glass screens, sand pits, ball pool, safe swings, slides, flooring with different textures etc. The various provisions, features integrate in such a way so as to combine the play needs of children with their sensory needs.

Sensory Gardens are an infrastructure that meets accessibility concerns; the layout provides a stimulating journey through the senses, heightening awareness, and bringing positive learning experiences with special needs.

An Overview of Facilities in the Sensory Garden at Cheshire Home

The involvement of subject matter experts in this project at Cheshire Homes India-Mumbai aimed to ensure that the facility provided the required sensory stimuli to the disabled children in a variety of recreational forms whilst making it accessible and safe for them.

The sensory garden has designated areas as well as auditory, visual, olfactory and tactile stimuli both natural and artificial.

Auditory (Hearing): An area that has Cymbals, Rattlers, Squeaky Toys, Wind Chimes, Ringing Metal Poles etc. that stimulates the hearing faculty.

Additionally these sound making accessories also act as landmark for children with vision challenges, encourage/incentivize children with mobility issues to reach for them.



Use of Cymbals and Rattlers for Auditory Stimulation in the Sensory Garden

Olfactory (Smell) and Taste: Flowering, aromatic and hybrid fruit bearing plants with fruits growing on them; mango, chickoo (sapodilla/noseberry), custard apple, lemon, Ajwain (Ajowan caraway/Bishop's weed, mint, Tulsi (Holy Basil), lemon grass. These plants are also



Fruit Bearing Plants: Custard Apple, Chickoo, Lemon and Mango Growing at the Sensory Garden



edible as a part of Indian cuisine having therapeutic value. The smell and/or taste gives children a stimulating experience, provides them a landmark in mobility. These also serve as a real-time experience for children as it helps them develop language, vocabulary and understand the concept of natural fruits and flowers growing on plants and trees.

Tactile (Touch): To enhance opportunities for children for receiving tactile stimuli, the sensory garden has walkways with a variety of surfaces viz. plain tiles, rounded pebbles, rounded surfaces etc., mini-grass lawns, sand play area, pebbled pits and water pools. These are ideal for children with sensory issues. For instance, allowing a child to play in the sand by himself or and with others helps him to develop fine motor skills. Playing like burying themselves in sand, and feeling their body position within the sand, children engage their proprioceptive sense, or the sense of their body relative to space.

Walking on pebbled pits provides deep pressure on the foot's pressure points, other facilities like the swing, the ball pool and water pool which is fun, too provide the necessary tactile inputs.

The **water pool** provides an ideal space to work for therapy goals for Children with disabilities. For some of them it might be the first place where they learn to stand



without help as it allows buoyancy of the body in the pool, the body gets buoyant, which makes movements and activities seem easier to perform. Typically children with spinal cord injuries, stroke, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, developmental delay, hypotonia and Down syndrome are expected to benefit immensely.

Visual Stimuli: This includes the bright colours and contrast used throughout the sensory garden. The colourful ambience through a variety of flowering plants, an area designated as '**butterfly garden**', a 'window mirror' that has an entertainment value, various decorative and visually attractive articles placed across the garden. While all the articles have a visual appeal they also have the utility of educating the children like identifying/naming the colour and shape through interesting activities.



The Sensory Garden Has Been Augmented with Severally Visually Appealing Articles



The Sensory Garden Has Been Augmented with Severally Visually Appealing Articles

Physical Development of Children : While the sensory garden caters to the children with sensory challenges, it also designed to promote physical development as the entire facility in general encourages mobility. The therapeutic value of each aspect has been consciously assessed and included. The sensory garden also has areas like a mini-obstacle course (Right in Picture) made of vehicle tyres that have entertainment value but provide a wonderful opportunity for strength building, coordination challenges, gross motor practice, and sensory inputs; proprioception (sense of parts of body in relation to other parts or things) and vestibular in particular (Body Balancing) in older children.



Other facilities include a safe play unit (Right in Pic.) called “Rainbow Magical Carnival Castle” a combined entertainment activity unit that involve climbing up a staircase, a rope ladder, cargo net, a tyre swing and a slide. Climbing up and down these have a proven benefit for children’s physical strength of limbs, development of gross motor skills and enhancing eye-hand-leg coordination as in the case of normal children.

