Sliding One of the 7 Elements of Play
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In general, sliding:
- Promotes leg-hip flexibility
- Encourages cooperation and following directions
- Develops spatial awareness
- Develops critical thinking skills

So, exactly how does sliding provide all these benefits?

Sliding Helps Prevent W-Sitting
Have you ever seen a child W-sit? This is when a child is seated on the floor with one leg on each side of their body in the shape of a “W.”

W-sitting can be a precursor to development delays. For a child who has poor flexibility in the legs and hips, W-sitting will aggravate it. W-sitting doesn’t allow a child to rotate their trunk, twisting side-to-side, and discourages them from hand preference.

Sliding promotes flexibility of the leg and hip. For those W-sitters, it forces a child’s legs in front of them.

How does sliding help kids in the classroom? Sliding promotes spatial awareness.
Spatial awareness is the ability to be aware of oneself in space and the relationships between objects within a given space. For instance, a child with poor spatial awareness may tend to bump into things or have a poor sense of where his or her body begins and a wall starts.
“I had a child who was a big time W-sitter and who also had poor visual perception and spatial awareness. She seldom climbed on the play equipment and had a hard time following two to three-step directions. For instance, when we did projects in the classroom, such as making a cat, I would model the project at circle time, putting it together so the kids could see it in front of them, yet, she still had a hard time knowing where the ears, nose, eyes and mouth should go. An occupational therapist recommended a variety of activities for her, one of which was climbing up the slide the wrong direction. After a year of services and a lot of gross motor activities, she went on to Kindergarten with little evidence of any delays.”

Cooperative Play, Critical Thinking Skills and Social Interaction
Social skills are the foundation for getting along with others, which is critical for school-age children. Those who lack social skills may have behavioral difficulties in the classroom or find it hard to make friends.

• Slides are popular on the playground, which might mean the children have to wait in line for their turn. Sliding teaches patience and tolerance of others’ skills and physical abilities.

• Sliding promotes cooperative play, which means children are sharing a common activity and working toward a goal together.

I often let the children climb up the slide backward and it never fails that another child always wants to go down when someone else is coming up. I leave it up to the children to figure out who gets to do what because it helps them learn cooperation and problem-solving.

The kids like to try different ways to go down – two at a time, backwards or on their bellies. Sliding leads children to questions about speed, for instance, why did I go slow when I slid down on my belly and much faster when I went down on my bottom?

Through sliding, children not only develop balancing and coordination skills, but learn concepts such as gravity. They learn to keep their torsos balanced as gravity pulls them down the slide. They successfully climb up the slide, position themselves to go down and then push themselves down the slide.

Of course, through a child’s eyes sliding is just pure fun!