

Making the Case for Playing Outdoors

Healthy
in nature



How to Use this Information

This information can be used to help you make a case for playing outdoors and for supporting unstructured play activities. It can also be used to support new outdoor play-based programs as well as integrating outdoor play in existing programs.

▶ Promote the concept!

Use this information to help promote playing outdoors and related policies and programs in your area.

▶ Spread the news!

- Give this information to parents, recreation centre patrons, members of the public, fellow staff members, municipal leaders, community partners and others.
- Incorporate this information in your communication materials such as a recreation newsletter or programming guide or in correspondence with municipal council and community partners.



Why Play Outdoors?



- ▶ When children are outside in nature they receive physical, mental and social benefits. Children today spend less time playing outdoors than previous generations and their daily consumption of media and screen time has increased.^{3, 5, 6, 7}
- ▶ Children are more likely to move more outdoors than when they are inside.⁴
- ▶ Unstructured play outdoors contributes to kids having fun and getting outdoors. It connects kids with nature and combats “Nature Deficit Disorder.”¹
- ▶ Spending time outdoors as well as the social and environmental conditions of childhood influence an adult’s physical, mental and emotional health status.³
- ▶ Having nature playgrounds, parks and outdoor programming can help motivate Canadians to spend time outdoors. Seventy percent of 13 to 20-year-old Canadians say they spend an hour or less per day outdoors.⁵
- ▶ Canadian children in Grades 6 to 12 currently spend 7 hours 48 minutes per day in front of a screen.⁵
- ▶ Unstructured play outdoors provides opportunities for social connections with friends, exploration and risk-taking, and connections with nature. Ninety-two percent of Canadian children said they would choose playing with friends over watching TV.⁵
- ▶ Getting outdoors in nature positively influences our health and well-being by reducing depression and anxiety, helping us cope with stress, improving empathy toward others and positively influencing sleep quantity and quality.^{8, 9}



- ▶ Spending time outdoors can help reduce health problems associated with indoor living such as obesity, heart disease, Vitamin D deficiency, allergies and asthma, Attention Deficit Disorder, Type 2 diabetes and myopia (nearsightedness).⁶
- ▶ We also show more empathy and concern for nature and are more interested in environmental efforts related to nature.⁵

★ What is Nature Deficit Disorder?

- ▶ Nature Deficit Disorder is a non-medical term that describes the “negative effects when one’s connection to nature is severed.” (this term was originally coined in Louv’s book: Last Child in the Woods)²
- ▶ When we live without or with limited exposure to nature and the outdoors, we may experience physical, social or psychological breakdown. Research indicates that a lack of nature causes increased aggression, disrupted parenting patterns, disrupted social hierarchies, decreased civility, more aggression, more property crime, more loitering, more graffiti, more litter and less supervision of children outdoors, poor attention or cognitive function, poor management of major life issues, and poor impulse control.¹

★ What is Playing Outdoors?

- ▶ Playing outdoors is playing outside; it is as simple as that! When playing outdoors, people can explore, have fun and enjoy nature at the same time. It can occur in many different places such as a park, forest or in a person’s backyard. Outdoor play can be spontaneous and self-directed or it can be organized and structured.^{1,2}
- ▶ Outdoor play can be done during free time: at lunch, after school or work, and on weekends. Sixty-three percent of Canadian children’s free time after school and on weekends is spent being sedentary.⁵

🔧 Examples of Playing Outdoors

There are endless ways someone can play outdoors. Here are a few examples:^{2,4}

- ▶ building a tree house
- ▶ catching frogs or bugs
- ▶ splashing in creeks
- ▶ daydreaming in a park or special hiding place
- ▶ digging in sand
- ▶ collecting rocks
- ▶ making mud pies
- ▶ playing hide and seek in the forest
- ▶ visiting a lake or waterpark as part of a municipal recreation program
- ▶ joining a community sports team
- ▶ participating in a nature walk sponsored by a parks program
- ▶ geocaching in your local area





Availability and Accessibility of Parks and Outdoor Programs

- ▶ Outdoor play opportunities are available when people have access to parks, playgrounds, community centres, sidewalks and walking or biking trails in neighbourhoods. To make outdoor play a part of a daily routine, it needs to be accessible, safe and convenient.¹¹
- ▶ In Canada, 62% of Grade 6 to 10 students living in urban areas have at least one park or sports field within one kilometre of their house. But, they are not using them on a regular basis.¹¹
- ▶ Influential childhood experiences in nature don't typically come from annual trips but from daily or weekly events. Frequent nature play has more lasting impact if it is part of regular life. Children who are more exposed to the outdoors at a young age are more likely to continue to spend time outdoors as adults.³



FOOTNOTES

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