

# User-Friendly and Engaging Parks

Healthy  
*in nature*



## How to Use this Information

This information is about creating *user-friendly and engaging parks* and why it is important to do so. For example, did you know that parks are more often used when people see them as accessible, safe and aesthetically pleasing?

### ► Promote the concept!

Use this information to help develop parks that are user-friendly and engaging.

### ► Spread the news!

- Give this information to 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.



## Park Safety and Security



- Parks contribute to a healthy human habitat, allow us to thrive and live healthy lives, and enable us to connect with nature. Spending time in green parks has a positive impact on our health and functioning.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Parks are used more often when people see them as safe and aesthetically pleasing. For example, parks are perceived to be safe if they are attractive, well lit and have open areas such as lights on a walking path. If parks are aesthetically pleasing to users such as tree-lined paths rather than empty open spaces, they are more likely to be utilized.<sup>3</sup>
- Parks that include features that support recreational activities such as trails, playgrounds, sport facilities, garbage cans and restrooms may encourage higher levels of usage across all ages.<sup>4</sup>
- When the safety of parks is improved, the perception of safety among parks users increases. For example, when parents can see their children playing, it allows for easy supervision or when there is a single entrance into the park, the perception of safety increases.<sup>5</sup>
- Perceptions of road and neighbourhood safety can also have an impact on park usage. Examples include perceptions of “stranger danger” and high numbers of pedestrian-vehicle accidents. Lights at high density intersections and traffic calming mechanisms such as speed bumps, pedestrian crossing lights and reduced speed limits enable users to walk, bike, scoot and skateboard safely to parks. Canadian children and youth are spending more time being driven and less time walking to and from parks and extracurricular activities.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

## ★ Park Accessibility

- ▶ The distance from the park to home or work influences the amount of time people spend in urban green areas. People who live close to green space visit more frequently than those who don't. For example, those who live 50 metres or less from the nearest green area visit the space three to four times per week. Those who live 300 metres from green space visit two and a half times per week and people who live 1,000 metres visit once a week. If people have few green environments within their local area, they do not compensate for this by visiting more distant public parks or urban forests more frequently.<sup>9</sup>
- ▶ People with parks nearby their homes are more likely to use those parks for recreation.<sup>1,4</sup>
- ▶ Although many children have safe and accessible walking or biking access to community parks and playgrounds, they are not using them. 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. We should encourage children to use their local parks and playgrounds.<sup>7,10</sup>



### FOOTNOTES

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