

Eyes on



Outdoor Play

Hard-wired for nature!



Centre of Excellence
for Early Childhood
Development

PARENTS



“Taking risks is also an important part of outdoor play.”

What do we know?

- Outdoor play refers to unstructured play that takes place outside, whether it’s in your backyard, a park or a nearby forest. It is free play, where your child chooses what and how to play.
- Playing outside in nature is essential to children’s healthy development. When children play outside, they are more physically active than when they play indoors.
- It’s also important for your child’s social, emotional and cognitive development: it helps build their thinking, problem-solving, attention and memory skills.
- Outdoor play can improve children’s mental health. Contact with nature reduces stress, boosts mood, and can protect against anxiety later in life.
- Despite the known benefits, children today are playing outside less than previous generations. Screen time, overscheduling and concerns for safety are some of the reasons.
- Taking risks is also an important part of outdoor play. This might be climbing a tree, running very fast, playing near water, playing hide-and-seek in the park, or play-wrestling.
- When children are given a chance to take developmentally-appropriate risks while playing, they can learn to:
 - build their judgment and how to stay safe;
 - evaluate and handle risk;
 - become more self-confident and independent;
 - better control their actions and behaviour.
- Children who play outside and in nature are more likely to care about the environment.

Paying attention to...

What can be done?

... how often your child gets to play outside.

- Make playing outside part of your child's daily routine.
- Plan outdoor playdates.
- Structured outdoor activities are great, but it's important to also make time for free, unstructured outdoor play.
- Limit screen time. For children aged 2 to 5 years, it's recommended to limit TV, computers and other electronics to under 1 hour per day.

... the environment in which your child plays.

- Outdoor play should involve changing conditions and natural elements. Let your child run down hills, build things with sticks or stones, or play with water.
- Bring wheeled toys outside. Give your child a ball, a skipping rope, bubbles or sidewalk chalk to play with.
- Don't let the weather stop you! Make sure your child wears appropriate clothes so that he is comfortable.

... letting your child take developmentally-appropriate risks.

- Try to give your child the freedom to explore and experiment on his own. Supervise without controlling or interfering.
- If you find it difficult to let go, take small steps. For example, observe your child from a distance for as long as possible without saying anything. Or, watch from a window while your child plays outside.



Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD). CEECD identifies and summarizes the best scientific work on early childhood development. It disseminates this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of Outdoor play, consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at www.child-encyclopedia.com.

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In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

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