



WHY OUTDOOR PLAY MATTERS FOR CHILDREN

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Recreation Nova Scotia is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. Mi'kma'ki includes seven districts found in what is now known as Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and parts of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, the Gaspé region in Quebec and northeastern Maine. Mi'kma'ki is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship which the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1752. The Treaties of Peace and Friendship did not deal with the surrender of lands and resources; instead, they recognized Mi'kmaq title and outlined what would be an ongoing relationship between nations based on peace and friendship. We are all treaty people.

It is the intention of this booklet to support outdoor play and a connection with nature for all. To do this, we must first recognize how broken treaty relationships contributed to harm as it relates to Mi'kmaq Peoples' ability to remain connected to the land. This broken relationship has also resulted in attacks on Mi'kmaq language and culture through the Indian Act and residential schools. To contribute to understanding of Indigenous values about how to help children grow and learn, we have included content from Dr. Angela James on p.10.

Among the Mi'kmaq People, language and traditional story telling are an important tool to teach children about the natural world. However due to residential schools and other harmful practices, today the Mi'kmaq language is threatened. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples clearly recognizes language as a main tool used to communicate meaning, make sense of shared experiences and to pass culture from one generation to another. All readers are encouraged to explore the Mi'kmaq translation website and app provided below where you will be able to hear the pronunciation and see translations.

Despite injustices the Mi'kmaq People continue to show their strength and resiliency through the continued sharing of culture, traditions, and language. Many Mi'kmaq schools and childcares use nature and outdoor environments to teach students Mi'kmaq language and culture. By promoting the outdoors as an important environment for learning, joy and healthy child development, this booklet aims to instill a desire to protect, preserve and respect the natural environment for future generations living in Mi'kma'ki.

Recreation Nova Scotia also recognizes that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose histories, legacies and contributions have enriched the part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years. Crystal Watson, PhD candidate with Dalhousie University, notes "the health benefits of 'free play' for all are well established, but for Black and Indigenous children, it is not as easy as opening the front door and letting the kids outside". Ensuring play spaces are safe for all is important work of the recreation sector, and as Crystal notes "we know that it us up to all of us to make sure all kids have a place to play that is safe, and for Black and Indigenous children, this is critically important."



kinu.ca/mobile-apps
kinu.ca/app/lnuisuti



References:

Sable, T., & Francis, B. (2012). *The language of this land, Mi'kma'ki*. Cape Breton University Press.
native-land.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Mikmaq_Kekinamuek-Manual.pdf

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOKLET

Information about why outdoor play matters for children

Guidance on the adult role in outdoor play

What to say instead of 'be careful' (p.33)

Practical tips for how to help your children get the most out of outdoor play

9 common play patterns that support learning and growth (p.27)



Playing outside is one of the best ways children can be healthy for their whole lives. For many reasons parents and caregivers can find it hard to get children outside. We hope this booklet provides useful tips on how to get started and support more outdoor play in all seasons.

Supporting outdoor play in your life need not cost money but in the early days the adult may need to be intentional to create time for play, think about outdoor spaces differently, creatively source materials and stretch your own comfort zones.

The information and ideas in this booklet can be used throughout the childhood years, ages 0-12. Enjoy, explore and celebrate your successes!


NOTE: We use "adult" throughout this booklet to represent parents and caregivers.



“ Access to active play outdoors—and its risks—is essential for healthy child development. ”

—Outdoor Play Canada’s Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play





HOW MUCH SHOULD WE MOVE?

Check out the full Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines about how much we should all sit, step, sleep and sweat™ : [csepguidelines.ca](https://www.csepguidelines.ca)

HOW MUCH SHOULD KIDS MOVE?

Physical activity guidelines for 0-17



INFANTS (<1 YEAR): A variety of age-appropriate movement during awake time is important.




AGES 1-4: Movement and activity are important. Aim for 180 minutes of physical activity spread throughout the day. As they age include more and more energetic play.



AGES 5-17: At least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity, all at once or in small bouts. Also include a variety of light activity and general movement throughout the day. As kids age (5-17), include heart pumping activities as well as muscle strengthening activities.

Sourced from [csepguidelines.ca](https://www.csepguidelines.ca)



Screen time for 0-2 year olds is not recommended. Screen time for ages 3-4 should be no more than 1 hr/day. As they age, keep recreational screen time to less than 2 hrs/day. Less is better!

MOVE MORE. SIT LESS. PLAY OFTEN!

Move in a variety of ways throughout the day. **More is better!** As kids age include activities that gets their heart pumping and body sweating.



WORTH NOTING!

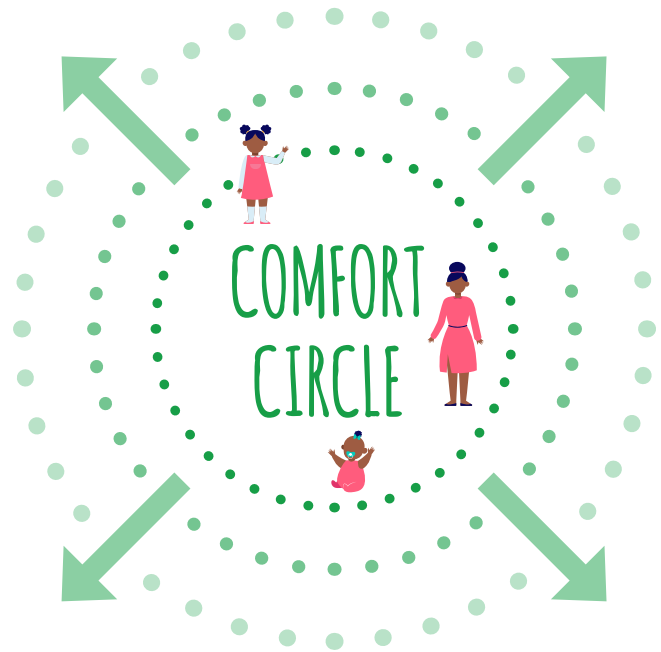
Adults (18-54) should aim to for at least 150 minutes of physical activity each week. **More is better.** Show your child that movement and play are part of every day!

FINDING YOUR OWN COMFORT ZONE WITH OUTDOOR PLAY

Playing actively and being outdoors, and taking all the risks involved in both, is very important to healthy child development.¹ Not all adults love being outside, getting dirty, or trying physical challenges like climbing or jumping. It is important, though, to give children these opportunities.

If outdoor play doesn't feel comfortable for you, start small. Choose an outdoor space that feels comfortable and spend a short amount of time there. As you become more comfortable you can try new areas and activities for longer periods of time.

When children see adults around them enjoying outdoor space and play, they are more likely to enjoy it too.



The role of the adult is to give children Permission to Play, Time to Play, Space to Play and Materials to Play with.

Start simple, then grow along with the child and their interests.



DIFFERENT KINDS OF OUTDOOR PLAY²

PLAY is what children and youth do when they follow their own interests and ideas, in their own way and for their own reasons. Words often used to describe play include: freely chosen, self-motivated, personally directed, spontaneous, and fun.³ Play involves imagination, exploration, delight and a sense of wonder. Children play in ways that represent their experiences, show their ideas and feelings, and help them understand themselves, others and the world.⁴

OUTDOOR PLAY is play that happens outside. Outdoor play often includes some risk or nature play.

ACTIVE OUTDOOR PLAY includes play outdoors that involves physical activity, whether it's light or very intense.⁵



See page 36
for info on Loose
Parts as one
way to enhance
child-led play.

CHILD-LED OUTDOOR PLAY is play that children lead and direct. Children use the items and space around them to choose how and what they will play. **The role of the adult in this type of play is to give children Permission to Play, Time to Play, Space to Play and Materials to Play with.**

See page 12
for more on the
adult role in
outdoor play.

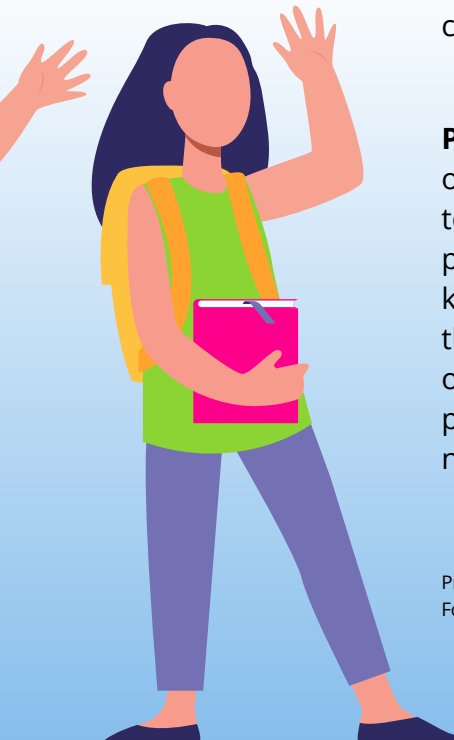
See page
30 for more
information
on risk vs
hazard.

RISKY PLAY is thrilling and exciting forms of play. It gives children the chance to be challenged, to test limits, and to explore boundaries. Risky play also helps children learn about the risk of injury and setting limits. Risky play involves uncertainty. The adult role in risky play is to make sure there aren't any things that could obviously hurt children in the play space while still allowing children to take risks in their play. Some dangerous items, considered hazards, could be broken glass, sharp edges or branches, and wire. Risky play is different for each child, and it changes as the child ages.

PHYSICAL LITERACY is when kids have a range of basic movement skills and the confidence to participate in a wide variety of sports and physical activities. Physical literacy is when kids have a range of basic movement skills and the confidence to participate in a wide variety of sports and physical activities. Kids who are physically literate can also apply their skills to new situations that are unfamiliar.⁶

See page 20
for more
information on
physical
literacy.

Primary source: outdoorplaycanada.ca Glossary of Terms (2019)
For more info on Physical Literacy see activeforlife.com



THE BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY

Outdoor play helps children develop in many ways. Research shows they can grow stronger, smarter, friendlier, more resilient and more connected to the world around them. Children need space and time to practice their outdoor skills, just like any other skill.⁷



“*Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.*”

—Fred Rogers

Outdoor play helps children develop skills and have opportunities in areas that are important for child development. This booklet gives you information and ideas on how outdoor play can help children develop in the following ways:

SOCIAL

- More opportunities for social interactions
- The chance to build relationship skills
- More time to share, cooperate, help, and communicate
- More chances to show positive behaviours

EMOTIONAL

- Options for self-regulation and self-soothing when they have big emotions or energy
- More calmness (it reduces feelings of loneliness and stress)
- Personal satisfaction and confidence
- Awareness of self and an appreciation for the world around them
- A sense of freedom and ability to rely on themselves (self-reliance)

THINKING

- More chances to make decisions and problem solve
- Space for creative thinking and curiosity
- The chance to develop better language, concentration, and reasoning skills
- The chance to build confidence as they learn from their successes and failures
- Opportunities to learn how to assess and manage risk

PHYSICAL

- More movement
- Physical literacy and sensory skills (taste, touch, hearing, smell, sight)
- Better sleep
- Sunshine, which improves sleep, mood, and helps to build a healthy response to fighting off illness and disease. Sun is a good source of Vitamin D.
- Where the body is in space (proprioception)
- How it feels internally to be in different spaces (interoception)
- How to judge balance, gravity and movement in a space (vestibular sense)

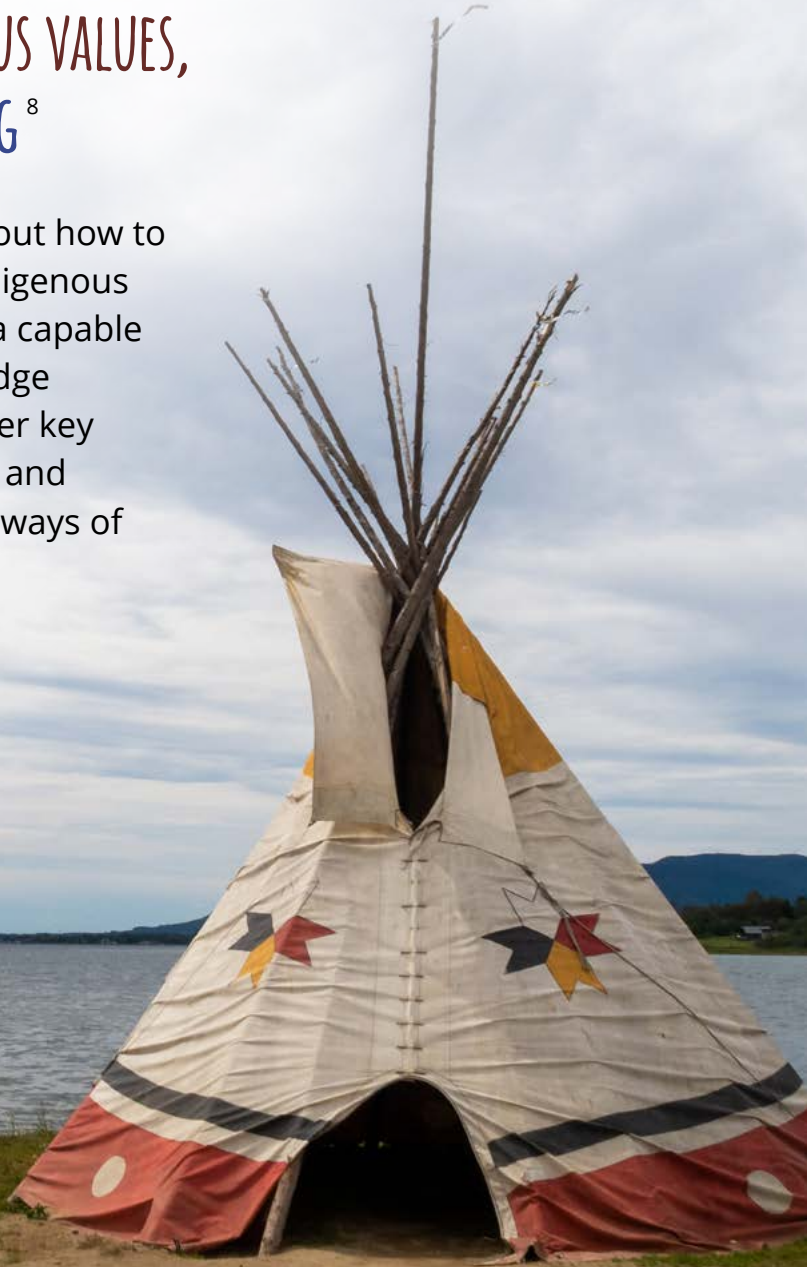
SPIRITUAL

- A respectful relationship with the natural world
- A sense of freedom, self-reliance, and responsibility



OUTDOOR PLAY AND INDIGENOUS VALUES, BELIEFS AND WAYS OF KNOWING⁸

There are different ways to think about how to help children grow and learn. An Indigenous point of view is to see each child as a capable person that adults should acknowledge and respect. You can read some other key Indigenous values on the next page, and see how they compare to “Western” ways of thinking about children’s learning and development.



Adapted and shared with the permission of Dr. Angela James

PARENTS AS FIRST TEACHERS

This shows the importance of nurturing, love, belonging and trust in raising children, rather than focusing on becoming independent.

CYCLES OF LEARNING

This value uses cyclical and spiral stories in learning, This can be ideas or skills that weave together to form meaning and understanding, This is different than a “staircase approach” which is like adding one idea on top of another with each idea needed to be understood by itself in order to understand the next.

THE CONNECTION OF MIND, HEART, BODY AND SPIRIT

This describes how the mind, heart, body and spirit are all equally important in a child’s or person’s development.

DOING AND STORYTELLING AS KEY WAYS OF LEARNING

Using hands-on learning and telling stories that supports development of mind, heart, body and spirit instead of focusing on development of the mind through book—and classroom-based learning.

SPIRITUALITY AS A PART OF CULTURE

Respect for self, others, as well as the land and the spirit world, rather than simply cooperating or getting along with others.



THE ADULT'S ROLE IN OUTDOOR PLAY⁹

Outdoor play is not only about the children! Adults matter a lot. Your actions and involvement can make a big difference in the quality and benefits of outdoor play.

YOUR ROLE IS TO OFFER ↘



PERMISSION

Let children play and allow for child-directed play.

Value play as essential to learning.

Model play by being playful yourself.



TIME



Give children time and opportunity to play.

Allow play to feel endless and uninterrupted.

Understand that joining in adult activities can't replace benefits of child-led play.

See page 36
for more on
Loose Parts

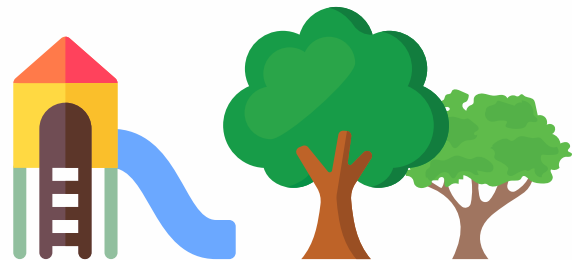


MATERIALS

Offer a variety of options including loose parts that can be moved, combined and handled.

Many loose parts can be items that you would normally recycle or put in the garbage.

Rotate materials in and out of the play space



SPACE

Good play spaces invite play. They include wonder, excitement and the unexpected.

Importantly, the best play spaces are not controlled by adults.



SAFETY: TAKE A LIFEGUARD APPROACH

A helpful way to think about keeping your children safe without getting in the way of their development is the three steps of the “lifeguard approach.”¹⁰

OBSERVE

OPEN ATTENTION

Express interest as you watch, but avoid interfering in their play. Trust that the child can manage the risks and challenges at hand.

CHECK IN

FOCUSED ATTENTION

If something more dangerous than an acceptable risk comes up, check in with the child to see if they are aware of the risk. Ask if they are comfortable managing the risk. If yes, go back to observing.

INTERVENE

ACTIVE PROTECTION

If the level of risk has become too high, it's time for the adult to get involved. Take steps to lower the risks. The goal is to help the child better understand risk when they are playing and give them the confidence to manage it.

Adapted from Dr. Haim Omer (2011)
& Dr. Mariana Brussoni





WHAT TO DO IN THE MOMENT

OBSERVE AND WAIT

Don't interrupt, only join when your child invites you.

BE A LEARNING ALLY

Let your child follow their play needs.

CHECK IN

Ask questions or offer tips.

17-SECOND STRATEGY

Give children time to problem solve on their own.

OFFER A SAFE PLACE FOR PLAY

Provide a safe play space or a secure base (your lap) to get started.

DON'T LET YOUR FEAR BECOME THEIR FEARS

The benefits of outdoor play, far outweigh the risks.



“*Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.*”

—Kay Redfield Jamison



YOUR CHILD'S PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

See page 32
for tips on what
to say instead of
'be careful'.

Children can develop and strengthen their physical skills at any age and are continually building these skills as they age.

Many adults know about crawling and walking and running skills. Other skills such as jumping, falling, lifting, throwing, kicking, carrying, and balancing are also important. As your child ages think about core skills like balance, falling, jumping or throwing and find opportunities for them to try, learn and master those skills. Each age and stage offers a chance to build these core skills towards mastering them. They will then be able to transfer these skills to a physically active lifestyle that can eventually include things like biking, sports, tobogganing, climbing or hiking.

An important period for physical skill development for children is the 0-5 years age range.¹¹

Think about how to offer daily opportunities to play and move in many different ways on a variety of surfaces. On pages 23-25 you will find activity ideas for various ages. Over time adults should ease off leading play and simply provide permission, opportunity, time and materials for child-led play.



WHY DO AGES 0 TO 5 MATTER SO MUCH?

In the earliest years of life, your child's brain is making the most connections for learning, language, knowledge and skills. Every child at this age is like a sponge, absorbing information and experiences, then starting to form understanding and skills.

The image below shows how at age 6, a child's brain is full of connections that have developed and strengthened from birth. It also shows how extra connections, or connections that are not used, are cut back by the time children reach the teenage years. The connections that are kept and strengthened in the teenage years are built on those made in childhood. When children have more variety of experiences in young childhood, they have a better foundation of connections for their teenage years and as adults.

SYNAPTIC PRUNING (DENSITY)¹²

AT BIRTH



6 YEARS OLD



14 YEARS OLD





Outdoor play is a key way to offer this variety of experiences. This will build the foundation of their physical skills (jumping, falling, balancing, running) and their understanding of the world around them (gravity, textures, physics, cause and effect). Outdoor play is the building block to life-long skills, knowledge and sense of self in the world.

Remember, your role is to offer permission, time, space and materials to play. This will help children form those connections and gain skills.

To help children deepen their experiences and make more connections, you can use a “serve and return” approach, which is sort of like a tennis game. You watch what a child “serves” or shows they are interested in, then “return” it to them by naming and describing the object or skill, making the object available or helping develop a skill.

For more information see albertafamilywellness.org
or developingchild.harvard.edu



WHAT IS PHYSICAL LITERACY?

“ *Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.*”¹³

PHYSICAL LITERACY
is the...



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Knowing how to jump, run, throw, balance and fall does not just happen. We need to help children learn these physical skills, and give them the chance to move in a variety of ways and on a variety of surfaces.

A physically literate child is confident in their movements. They understand and react appropriately to what is going on around them. The child wants to move, and as they move, competence, or skill, develops.

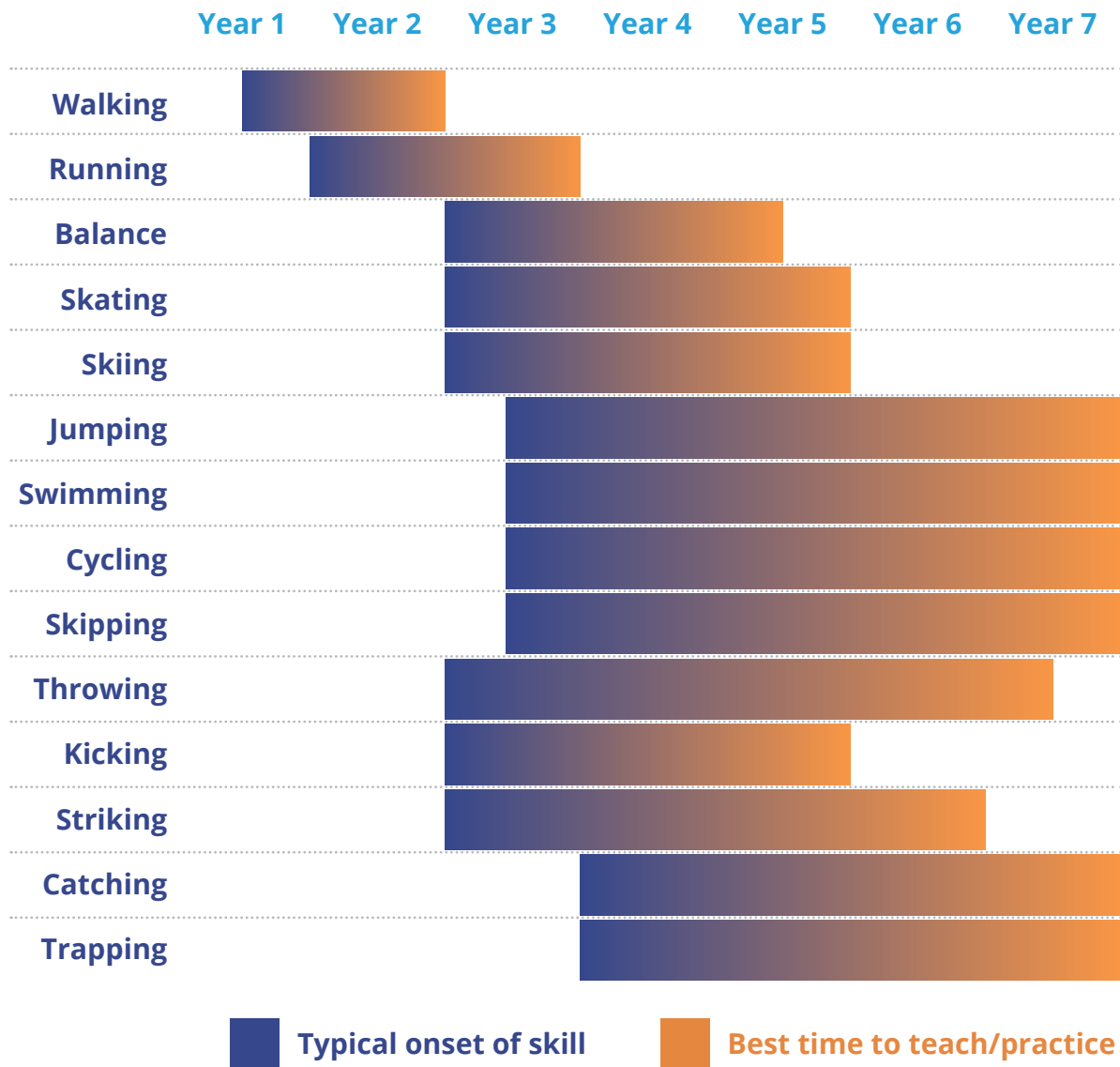
Children also need to be able to learn through mistakes and tumbles. This can be challenging for adults, and we may want to try to stop a fall or slip. Instead of saying “be careful” or preventing a tumble, adults can help children learn how to keep balanced, fall, judge the level of challenge and thereby learn to move their body with confidence and ease.

Read on for tips on supporting physical literacy, and what to say instead of “be careful.”

Source: activeforlife.com



FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILLS BY AGE AND STAGE



Adapted from Bressan and Rathbone (2007)



Note: These are guidelines only. Consider the developmental age and stage of your child and try to meet your child where they are. There are outdoor play options for every child as they grow.

INFANT (0-12 MONTHS)

- Movement of the whole body is how infants develop core strength and build skill over time.
- It is important to offer a lot of time each day for free movement, not strapped into a chair, stroller or child carrier for long periods of time.



SOME ACTIVITIES FOR 0-6 MONTHS

- find ways to explore a variety of touch, see, feel experiences; the outdoors is a great place for this
- letting them lie or sit to play outdoors on a blanket or play mat in warmer weather
- provide opportunities for your little one to turn their head toward sound or movement and to reach or track objects

SOME ACTIVITIES FOR 6-12 MONTHS:

- daily outdoor time and to give them a space to lie, sit, crawl and try standing on a variety of natural surfaces
- putting objects into buckets or baskets, then dumping them out
- pulling themselves up to standing; give them a stool, steady log, or a walking toy to use
- making art outdoors using snow, dirt, leaves or sand
- crawling on grass, under outdoor furniture or through old boxes



TODDLER (1–3 YEARS)

- Spend time outdoors on a variety of surfaces, both even and uneven, as your child begins to walk. Allow them to explore. Follow their curiosity of nature, textures and sounds in the outdoors.
- Find ways to incorporate outdoor items and nature to develop skills like squeezing, pinching, holding and picking up items.
- At 2–3 years the outdoors is a great environment to help your child develop new physical skills like running, swinging, jumping, falling, hopping, pushing, and carrying.
- Make use of sandboxes, beaches, hills, branches, trails, open fields, rocky areas, and playgrounds (sandboxes should be at least big enough for your child to lay down in!)



AT THIS STAGE CHILDREN CAN START TO INITIATE MORE OF THEIR OWN PLAY.

SOME ACTIVITIES MAY INCLUDE:

- throwing and chasing balls
- wheeling, pushing or pulling different toys and objects
- walking, running or jumping around trees, over stones or cracks and into puddles
- blowing bubbles and chasing them away as they float
- playing in sand, mud, or small amounts of water (always supervise water play!)
- lining things up and making collections
- riding balance bikes



PRESCHOOLERS (3–5 YEARS)

- Continue to think about the core skills your child will need to master skills like biking, swimming, skating or playing any sport. Provide opportunities to learn these skills, through both success and tumbles.
- Each child develops at their own pace, however, ensuring they have the permission, opportunity and time to practice and learn is essential. Refer to the adult role in outdoor play to consider when and how you practice active support or simply observe.



AT THIS STAGE AND INTO THE SCHOOL YEARS CHILDREN CAN LEAD MOST OF THEIR OWN PLAY.

SOME ACTIVITIES MAY INCLUDE:

- building forts
- balancing or climbing on logs or curbs, benches
- playing creatively with small and large objects
- playing with mud kitchens and muddy creations
- playing chase, tag, hide and seek or ball games
- climbing or hanging off trees, branches or posts or playgrounds
- doing obstacle courses
- skipping, sliding, biking, beach and sand play
- swinging or hanging off a variety of surfaces
- imaginative play
- gardening, shoveling, washing the car (functional play)

P.23-25 adapted from from Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development. Parenting Series (April 2011) and Developmental Profiles - Marotz & Allen (2013).



“ *Play is precious. Play builds brain pathways for thinking, creativity, flexibility, empathy and many lifelong skills.* ”

—Heather Shumaker



LEARNING THROUGH PLAY: NINE COMMON PLAY PATTERNS

Children's play has repeated patterns that support learning and growth. These patterns are play "needs" that children use to explore and learn. You could consider them an "urge" a child expresses through play. These patterns can seem random, repetitive or uncontrollable.

THE COMMON PATTERNS ARE: ¹⁴

- 1. Containment/dumping:** putting things in containers or closing them into a space, then dumping them out
- 2. Connection and disconnection:** joining things together or destroying whole things
- 3. Movement:** seeing and testing how things and their own bodies move—this could be throwing, jumping, climbing, etc.
- 4. Transporting:** collecting and carrying things in hand, in a container, in a wagon, etc.
- 5. Hiding:** seeing and hiding things or people, including themselves
- 6. Rotating:** watching or making themselves or objects move in circles or rotate
- 7. Placing:** lining things up or placing in some sort of order, e.g. sticks, toys
- 8. Body positioning:** getting a different perspective by changing your orientation, like by lying down looking up at trees or sky, or hanging upside down
- 9. Changing:** transforming items and materials to make them look or feel different, like mixing sand or rocks and water, water and paper, or cooking for real or pretend

When you observe and identify these patterns, you can let them happen without interrupting. If the play urge is happening in a space where it is unsafe or not okay, give the child an option to do it in another spot, or with other materials. For example, if a child is throwing rocks, you could say, "It looks like you really want to throw things. Let's throw in this spot and see what sound it makes," or "Let's get the cotton balls or pine cones out so you can throw with other people around."



YOUR ROLE IN GUIDING PLAY: WHEN AND HOW TO SET LIMITS ¹⁵

You can help children direct their own play while still paying attention to boundaries, risks and appropriate behaviour for the setting. It's best to prepare for this ahead of time rather than just reacting in the moment.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON GUIDING CHILDREN'S PLAY:

SETTING LIMITS

Give clear, realistic rules that are right for the child's age and development.

For example:

"You can use the large, open, grassy area for fast running."

"This is the area for messy, muddy play. This is where we wash up afterwards."

REDIRECTION

You might need to distract a child or give them a different object or activity. For example, if a child is throwing balls where they might hurt someone or break something, you can give them some containers (like boxes, yogurt tubs, buckets) so that they're aiming the balls somewhere safer.

CHOICES INSTEAD OF YES OR NO

Help children make better decisions by offering choices instead of giving yes or no questions.

If redirection is needed, be sure it is a choice and not a threat. "You can use the stairs to get to the top of the slide or you can choose a different activity. Your choice."

POSITIVE WORDING

Children will respond better to what you DO want them to do, rather than what you DON'T want them to do. For example, if a child is throwing balls at a window, you could say "This blank wall is a safe place for you to practice your throwing." Even better, you can ask the child to think about the problems with throwing at a window, and ask them if they can think of a better place to practice throwing.

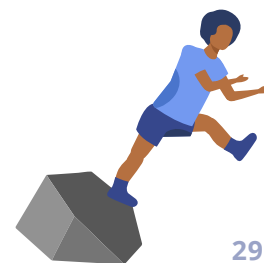
POSITIVE AND SPECIFIC FEEDBACK

You can support children's social and emotional skills by being specific and encouraging instead of offering general praise. For example, imagine a child puts their own outdoor materials away at tidy-up time and then goes to help a sibling. You might normally praise them by saying "Good job!". Instead, try to say something that develops their sense of responsibility and awareness, like "You saw that your brother was having trouble with that heavy plank, so you helped them take it to the shed. That was very helpful. Thank you."

CONSEQUENCES

A consequence is a response or result that follows a behaviour. Children can learn from their decision if the consequences are clear ahead of time, if the consequences relate to the choice or action and if the consequences are consistent.

A consequence could be natural, logical or illogical. **The best way to build children's skills is to use natural or logical consequences.** For example, a natural consequence for a child who throws all of the balls out of reach (like onto a roof or down a ravine) is that there are no balls left to play with. A logical consequence would be to give the child a choice to throw the balls into containers or have the balls put away. An illogical consequence would be to tell the child they will not get their snack. The snack has nothing to do with the ball throwing, so it doesn't make sense to the child.



WORTH THE RISK?

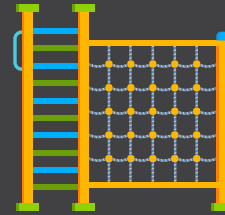
RISKS AND HAZARDS ARE NOT THE SAME!

HAZARD



A danger in the environment that could seriously hurt a child and that a child might not be able to recognize for themselves. It is your responsibility to identify and address hazards. Examples include sharp glass, broken sharp edges, and deep or unsafe water.

RISK



The challenges and uncertainties within the environment that a child can recognize and learn to manage by choosing to encounter them while figuring out their own limits.¹⁶ Taking risks helps children develop their physical literacy. Getting rid of all risks makes children unable to judge danger for themselves.

Adventurous and risky play is thrilling and exciting and involves uncertainty and a risk of physical injury. This type of play gives children the chance to be challenged, test their limits, explore their boundaries and learn about the risk of getting hurt. What counts as risky or adventurous is different for each child and changes as the child grows up.

OR ADVENTUROUS BENEFITS OF RISKY PLAY¹⁷

Everyday life is full of risks and challenges. Children need the chance to learn how to manage risk and make smart choices about risk from a young age. Exposure to risks (i.e. challenges and uncertainties) through play can aid children in better assessing risk as they age.¹⁸

One idea is that some injuries serve as ‘learning injuries’. The reasonable injury that results, such as a scrape, bump or bruise, is a good learning for the next attempt by the child. Adults would continue to pay attention to risk of serious injury, and hazards, while knowing learning injuries have a role in physical skills development.

WHEN A CHILD TAKES RISKS, THEY...

- Develop physical skills like balance, coordination, strength and stamina
- Develop persistence, confidence and resilience
- Become better at thinking and understanding natural consequences
- Figure out how the world works, learning how to use tools and materials safely
- Become aware of what their bodies are capable of, which helps them learn how to judge and manage risk
- Reduce their own risk of injury¹⁹

ADVENTUROUS AND RISKY PLAN CAN BE THOUGHT OF IN SEVEN WAYS²⁰:

1. Play with great heights
2. Play with high speed
3. Play with tools
4. Play near elements of nature
5. Rough-and-tumble play
6. Play where children can “disappear” or have sense of being exploring alone
7. Play with impact and landing with impact



Adapted from the work of Dr. Ellen Sandseter



WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD OF “BE CAREFUL”

For children to learn how to be aware of risks and how to deal with them, they need exposure to a variety of experiences and environments. The goal is for children to be **aware of their surroundings and able to problem solve for themselves**. Focus on the core skills the child is developing, such as balance, falling, jumping, and when support or intervention is needed either help them problem solve or give tips.

Always ask yourself if intervening is about your needs as the adult or what is best for the child. Consider what is developmentally appropriate for the age of your child. You probably don't want to see your child tumble or hurt themselves, but maybe your child is at an age when they need to do so in order to learn.




HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN SAY INSTEAD OF "BE CAREFUL":



- Use your balance! Have a strong belly and look where you are going.
- Bend your knees when you land from the jump.
- If you fall, go floppy and roll.
- Use three points of contact when you're climbing: two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand.
- Stay focused on what you are doing.
- What is your next move?
- Coming down can be harder than going up. What is your plan?
- Go as high as you are comfortable. I will spot you.
- I am here if you need help.
- How do you plan to get across that?
- Black rocks are slippery, so move slowly and thoughtfully.
- What do we need to know about that frozen puddle? How should we test it out?
- Take your time.
- Think about where and how you might fall if you fall from there.
- Those are sharp rocks, so stay low to the ground and move slowly.
- What can we put there to make that height safe to climb?
- Please move thoughtfully and slowly near the (high ledge, river, ice, etc.).
- Looks like you want to be wild and fast, so let's find more room for that.
- Please find more space away from people for that activity.
- What did you learn from that fall/tumble/slip? Want to try again with me right here?
- How do you think we should do this?





Play is the occupation of children, it is how they develop every skill needed for daily life. The best environment for play is outdoors.

MUD KITCHENS: BRING ON THE DIRT AND JOY!

A **mud kitchen** is just an **outdoor play kitchen** where children can make dirt and water creations. It can be as simple as a plank of wood, a bowl, some spoons and containers and a supply of water (tap, puddle or old milk jug). Some families build a mud kitchen from a bowl or pallets along with unused kitchen items or recycled containers.

Children will find “ingredients” like sand, leaves, flower petals or stones. If you don’t have access to a yard, you can collect these things on a walk and then use on your balcony or small outdoor space. You could also bring a few supplies to a local park. You just need to provide permission, uninterrupted time, space and materials (spoons, sieves, bowls, muffin tin etc.) for children to create and explore themselves.



THE BENEFITS OF MUD KITCHEN PLAY

Mud kitchens encourage sensory, exploratory and unstructured play. Outdoor kitchens contribute to language skills, cooperative play, understanding of roles and responsibilities, math and numbers and words and letters. They also help with fine motor and physical skill development and creativity.



HOW LOOSE PARTS MAKE PLAY BETTER²¹

WHAT ARE LOOSE PARTS?

Loose parts are materials that can be moved around, combined and put together, and moved again. Children can play with them however they want; they don't have one specific use or instructions. They're perfect for play because children can use them over and over again in so many ways, with any combination of other materials. They can be manufactured or natural materials, and some of the best loose parts would have been recycled or thrown away items such as tires, milk jugs, tire tubes, cardboard boxes.

LOOSE PARTS SHOULD BE:

- Used however children want to use them; they shouldn't have directions or one single purpose
- Made available and easily accessible so children can use them independently
- Rotated in and out of a play space
- Well maintained; ensure items don't have sharp edges, wires, rust

EXAMPLES OF LOOSE PARTS

NATURAL

- Stumps
- Sand
- Gravel
- Twigs
- Wood
- Straw bales
- Driftwood
- Cornstalks
- Seeds
- Acorns
- Logs
- Wooden blocks
- Shells
- Stones
- Dirt

MANUFACTURED

- Tires
- Plastic tubing
- Buckets
- Tea pots
- Garden tools
- Fabric
- Baskets
- Crates
- Boxes
- Hooks/pulleys
- Hula hoops
- Ribbons
- Milk crates
- Nets
- Wooden planks
- Rope
- Baking pans
- Tarps
- Old keyboards
- Sacks
- Scarves
- Scoops
- Balls

Adapted from playwales.org.uk



DRESS FOR OUTDOOR PLAY SUCCESS!

You may have heard the saying “There’s no such thing as bad weather—you just need to dress for it!” You don’t need expensive clothing, but there are some tricks to making yourself and your children comfortable outdoors year-round.



Adapted from getoutsideandplay.ca



DRESSING FOR COLD WEATHER


The keys to keeping warm in cold weather are to dress in layers, and avoid getting wet.

Base layer: A close-fitting layer next to your skin. Long johns or a long-sleeved shirt or turtleneck and a pair of leggings or track pants work well.

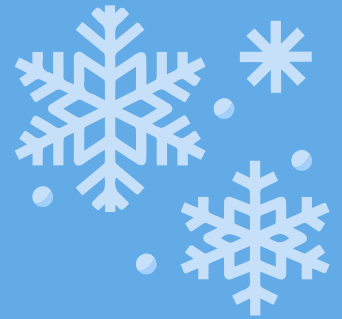
Insulation layer: A warm layer that suits the outside temperature. Colder days and children who get cold more easily need thicker fleece, wool sweaters and vests.

Outer shell layer: This protects you from cold, damp, wet and wind. Depending on the weather it could be snow pants and a winter jacket or waterproof rain gear.

Clothes for fingers, toes and cheeks!: Mittens will keep fingers warmer than gloves. Thick socks in waterproof boots are important; make sure there is wiggle room for feet and toes to keep good circulation. An ear-covering hat, balaclava, scarf and neck warmer will keep heat in and protect sensitive areas from cold and wind.

A photograph of a young child in winter clothing, including a blue jacket and a white knit hat, crouching in a snowy field. The child is playing with snow. The background shows snow-covered trees and a bright sky.

Bringing warm tea or hot chocolate and snacks outside can help extend outdoor play time.



COLD WEATHER PARENT TIPS!

- Ask children if they need the bathroom before getting all those layers on. If your child is still in diapers, change them before going out so there's not too much wetness next to their skin while they're outside.
- How cold is too cold? You need to judge the risk of frostbite in very cold weather and wind. Keep in mind, if children are moving when playing outdoors, their bodies will remain warm.
- Young children will get colder faster, especially if they are not moving a lot. In weather colder than -15°C , check for warmth about every fifteen minutes.
- If a child doesn't want to keep mitts and hat on, and frostbite is not a risk, just have them available to the child if they begin to get cold.

DRESSING FOR WET WEATHER

If it is **COLD WET WEATHER**, use the cold-weather tips. Be sure to use a waterproof outer layer.

If it is **HOT WET WEATHER**, use this as an opportunity to cool down and enjoy the rain! Go out in bare feet or sandals with your regular clothes. Think about having a towel handy at the entrance of your home to make the transition back indoors easier for everyone.



If it is **MILD WET WEATHER**:

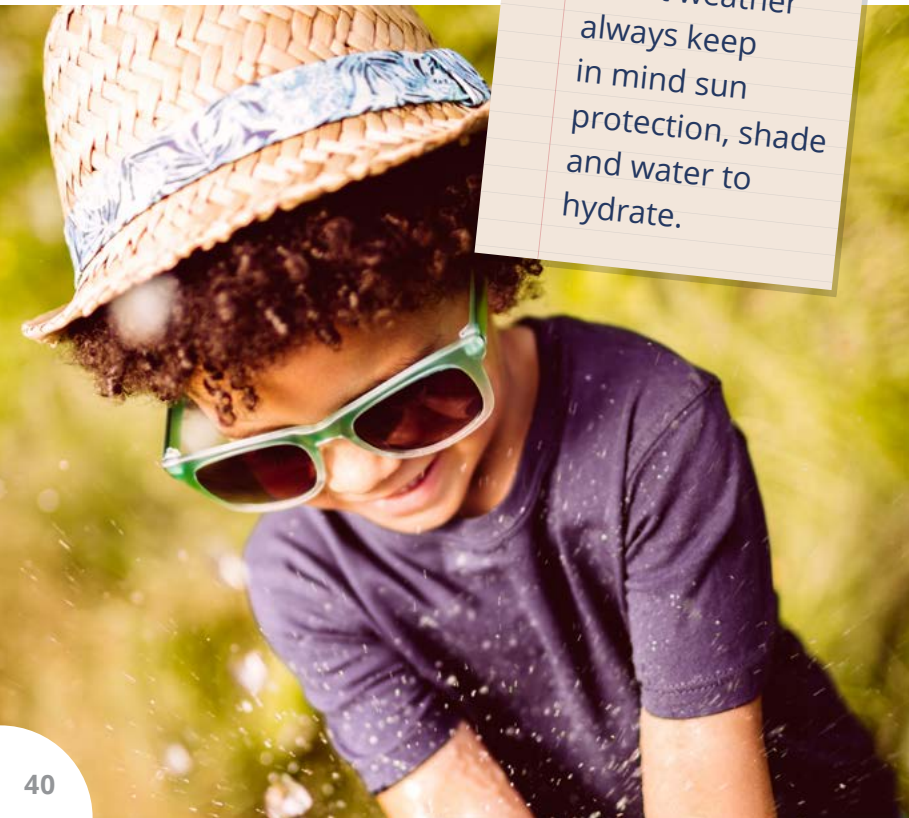
Base layer: Put on a base layer that is comfortable and allows for movement.

Outer shell layer: Add a good waterproof outer layer. It's best to have waterproof pants and top, or even better, a one-piece rain suit.



DRESSING FOR HOT OR SUNNY WEATHER

The wonderful sun lifts our spirits and provides essential Vitamin D. However, too much exposure can lead to sunburn and overheating in the short term, and skin cancer in the long term. Children with skin of all types should wear hats and light long sleeves to protect their skin from the sun. You can also apply sunscreen to any exposed skin—make sure you reapply often, including after children play in the water!



In hot weather always keep in mind sun protection, shade and water to hydrate.



HOT WEATHER PARENT TIPS!

- Because of changes in our atmosphere the sun is stronger than when adults were young, and exposed skin will burn faster. Remember that UV rays also come through on overcast days, so sun protection is always important.
- Be sure to use shade as part of the play or time outdoors. You can use the natural shade of trees or buildings, or create shade with umbrellas or sun shades wherever you are.
- Keep a good supply of water available during and after outdoor play in the sun. Water is the best option to stay hydrated.

See cancer.ca for more information on sun safety

If you are a parent or caregiver reading this – we hope this booklet has been useful. We know parenting is hard! Outdoor play can be one way to ‘grow good humans’ and over time create independence, a joy for play and physical activity and a sense of wellbeing as they age. The benefits of outdoor play are endless!

This project grew out of the work of the South Shore Active Communities. The content for this booklet drew on many established and important resources on outdoor play. Please explore the reference section to learn more about Outdoor Play and the great work being done on this topic.

Thank you to Anna Haanstra for her leadership and vision on this project. Deep gratitude to Gord Tate and Jillian Griffin for their extensive work and commitment. Thanks for Dr. Heather Davis, Jane Cawley and Dr. Angela James for their thoughtful input and contributions.

This is the first edition of this booklet. We fully expect that future editions will include edits and additions. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with others to utilize and adapt this booklet. An electronic version of this booklet will be online. If your organization would like to print copies for distribution, we can share the design files. We do ask that South Shore Active Communities is acknowledged in any reprint or adaptations and all the sources and references are maintained.

We are excited to see the expanding energy and networks committed to advancing outdoor play. Outdoor play is such an essential way to contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of the next generation. We are keen to continue to support parents and caregivers in finding their confidence and comfort zone to ensure their children get the benefits of outdoor play!



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Dear Parent and Caregiver,

Please enjoy this booklet about outdoor play in one sitting or bit by bit. This booklet provides tips for raising children ages 0-12. Our hope is that you reference this booklet as your child ages and as you learn along with them about how to get the fullest benefits of outdoor play for each age and stage. We hope this booklet is useful, practical and possibly ripped, and then taped, over time. Get outside, have fun and enjoy the benefits of outdoor play!

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