

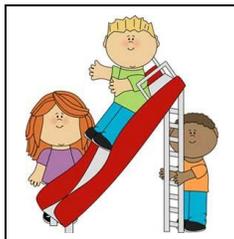


The Importance of Outdoor Play

Playgrounds are places where children's play can take off and flourish. Good outdoor playgrounds are large enough and designed in such a way that children's play can come to full expression, where children can make a mess, run, jump and hide, where they can shout, whistle and explore the natural world. A variety of factors determine the quality of a playground for young children from infants to eight-year-olds. These include design of the play area, safety issues, play equipment, accessibility, and adult supervision. Particular emphasis should be placed on how playgrounds must encourage all forms of play. There is a critical need to develop a disposition for outdoor physical activities in our young children. Outdoor play should not become too academic and too teacher controlled.

Purpose of Outdoor Play

There are two fundamental reasons why outdoor play is critical for young children in our early childhood programs and schools. First, many of the developmental tasks that children must achieve—exploring, risk-taking, fine and gross motor development and the absorption of vast amounts of basic knowledge—can be most effectively learned through outdoor play. Second, our culture is taking outdoor play away from young children through excessive TV and computer use, unsafe neighborhoods, busy and tired parents, educational accountability, elimination of school recess, and academic standards that push more and more developmentally inappropriate academics into our early childhood programs, thus taking time away from play. The following sections describe the main reasons why outdoor play is critical for the healthy development of young children.



Physical Exercise

Children need to develop large motor and small motor skills and cardiovascular endurance. Motor development and movement skill acquisition of young children must be encouraged in outdoor playgrounds. Extensive physical activity is also needed to address a growing problem of obesity in North American children.

Enjoyment of the Outdoors

Outdoor play is one of the things that characterize childhood. Children need opportunities to explore, experiment, manipulate, reconfigure, expand, influence, change, marvel, discover, practice, dam up, push their limits, yell, sing, and create. Some of our favorite childhood memories are outdoor activities. This is no accident.

Learning about the World

Outdoor play enables young children to learn lots of things about the world. How does ice feel and sound? Can sticks stand up in sand? How do plants grow? How does mud feel? Why do we slide down instead of up? How do I make my tricycle go faster? How does the overhang of the building create cool shade from the sun? What does a tomato smell and taste like? What does a chrysalis change into? Do butterflies have to learn to fly? Much of what a child learns outside can be learned in a variety of other ways, but learning it outside is particularly effective—and certainly more fun! In the outside playground children can learn math, science, ecology, gardening, ornithology, construction, farming, vocabulary, the seasons, the various times of the day, and all about the local weather. Not only do children learn lots of basic and fundamental information about how the world works in a very effective manner, they are more likely to remember what they learned because it was concrete and personally meaningful.

Learning about Self and the Environment

To learn about their own physical and emotional capabilities, children must push their limits. How high can I swing? Do I dare go down the slide? How high

can I climb? Can I go down the slide headfirst? To learn about the physical world, the child must experiment with the physical world. Can I slide on the sand? Can I roll on grass? What happens when I throw a piece of wood into the pond? Is cement hard or soft to fall on? An essential task of development is appreciating how we fit into the natural order of things—animals, plants, the weather, and so on. To what extent does nature care for us by providing water, shade, soft surfaces, and sweet-smelling flowers? And to what extent does it present problems, such as hard surfaces, the hot sun, and thorns on bushes? We can discover this relationship with the natural world only by experiencing it as we grow up, develop, and interact with the natural environment.

The Surplus-Energy Theory

The surplus-energy theory of play hypothesizes that play allows people to release pent-up energy that has collected over time. Many teachers and administrators believe that after intense (and often inactive) academic classroom pursuits, children need to “let off steam.” To some extent, educators also believe that outdoor play enables children to “recharge their batteries,” to reinvigorate themselves by engaging in a very different activity from their classroom experience. This recreation theory of play enables children to get ready to return to the important work of academic learning. These theories view outdoor play as an essential component to academic learning, not as an important activity in its own right.

Health

Everyone who works with young children in early childhood programs and schools knows how quickly bacteria and viruses spread in these environments. One way to reduce the spread of infection is through lots of fresh air. Outdoor play enables the infectious agents to spread out and be dissipated; it also enables children to get fresh air and exercise. Outdoor play also enables children to enjoy the natural environment and learn to seek out exercise, fresh air, and activity. There is something fundamentally healthy about using the outdoors. Thus outdoor play develops disposition for the outdoors, for physical activity, and for care of the environment. Children who engage in lots of physical activities at school tend to engage in more energetic activities at home, while children who have child care and school experiences that lack active physical activity, engage

in more sedentary behaviors at home, such as watching TV and computer. Children who learn to enjoy the outdoors have a much higher likelihood of becoming adults who enjoy hiking, gardening, jogging, bicycling, mountain climbing, or other outdoor endeavors. This is critical as obesity becomes an ever-greater national concern and as we must all learn to care for and protect the environment.

Allowing Children to Be Children

Using open space to fulfill basic childhood needs—jumping, running, climbing, swinging, racing, yelling, rolling, hiding, and making a big mess—is what childhood is all about! For a variety of obvious reasons many of these things cannot occur indoors. Yet children must have these important experiences. Today children’s lives are more and more contained and controlled by small apartments; high-stakes academic instruction; schedules; tense, tired, and overworked parents; and by fewer opportunities to be children. Outdoor environments fulfill children’s basic needs for freedom, adventure, experimentation, risk-taking, and just being children. Children need the opportunity to explore the unknown, the unpredictable, and the adventurous. They also need to be able to wonder at nature, from the worm gliding through the newly turned dirt in the garden to the monarch butterfly emerging out of the chrysalis and gracefully fluttering away in the summer breeze.



Encouraging Different Kinds of Play Physical Play

In general, physical play should be encouraged by climbing equipment and swings, tricycle paths, and large areas of grass and hills on which preschoolers can run and crawl and infants and toddlers can lie, crawl, and roll. Climbing equipment for infants and

toddlers should be very basic, including a crawling tunnel, small steps, and a slide. Because toddlers are very insecure on their feet, special attention should be paid to barriers—the railings and sides of raised equipment. A variety of sloped areas help children learn to adjust their balance on differing surfaces. Although it is important to encourage specific motor skills such as fine and gross motor development, it is more important to support the development of the brain and nerve functions and growth. Thus rolling, crawling, running and climbing, and swinging on swings are all absolutely critical activities for young children.

Constructive Play

Research continually shows that constructive play is the preschoolers' favorite kind of play, probably because they can and do control it. Constructive play is encouraged by using sand and water play, providing a place for art, woodwork and blocks, wheeled toys, and lots of loose objects throughout the playground. Constructive play occurs in sandboxes, in sand and water areas, on flat surfaces, even on grass.

Social Play

Children need lots of opportunities outside to develop basic social skills and social competencies: pushing each other on the swing, pulling a wagon carrying another child, playing together in the sand, and so on. Clearly, physical play, constructive play, and sociodramatic play also involve social play, especially if the equipment encourages the engagement of more than one child. Projects such as gardening, observing the weather in a separate science area, and having a picnic can be—and should be—social activities.



Sociodramatic Play

A good playground must have playhouses, forts, and other structures that children can change, adapt, reconfigure, impose their own meaning on, and use to expand their imagination. These structures encourage rich sociodramatic play; further, they are an ideal place for the playground to reflect the cultures of the children who use it.

Dramatic play requires children to impose details, information, and meaning into their play. It is richer and more beneficial because they do so and dramatic play structures should be very simple and basic in

design and construction. A basic structure of four walls, a roof, and a window can be the children's home, a classroom, a doctor's office, or a castle.

Games with Rules

The well-known games of Red Light—Green Light, Simon Says, and Follow the Leader, are all simple games with rules, the highest level of cognitive play. Children need places outside to play these games, and to “all fall down” is much more pleasant on grass than on concrete.

Providing for the outdoor play needs of young children is a complex and challenging task, but can be accomplished. A variety of factors must be considered, including the various play needs of young children, supervision, and safety. However, because our children experience fewer and fewer opportunities to explore nature, run, roll, climb, and swing and because outdoor play is part of being a child, we must find a variety of ways to provide quality outdoor play experiences for children.

Source: communityplaythings.com

Craft Ideas

Bird Finder Binoculars

Materials: toilet paper tubes, yarn (different colours), coloured tape, small scissors, liquid glue, masking tape, hole punch.



1. Start by taping down one end of a piece of yarn to the tube. Wrap the yarn around the roll and then tape the other end to the tube. You can use one colour or wrap as many different colours as you'd like.
2. Have the child put a line of glue down the outside of one tube, to secure to two tubes together. Use a long piece of tape, run along the inside of the tubes, for added security.
3. Punch two holes on either side of the rolls.
4. Tie a long piece of yarn to the holes, to create a neck strap.

Source: artbarblog.com

Handprint Fish Puppet

Materials: scrapbook/cardstock paper (different colours/patterns and orange), rhinestones, any decorative supplies (i.e. glitter, stickers), popsicle sticks, pencil, scissors, google eyes, glue.



1. First, trace the child's hand on the paper and cut out the handshape.
2. Cut fish lips out of orange cardstock and glue them at the wrist end of the handprint.
3. Glue a google eye so your fish can see!
4. Customize! Children can glue rhinestones on, add glitter.... and make the fish their own!

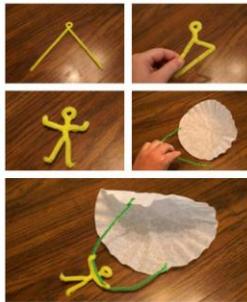
Source: gluedtomycraftsblog.com

Coffee Filter Parachute Guy

Materials: pipe cleaners (various colours), basket coffee filters.



1. Twist one pipe cleaner in the middle into a small loop for the head. Bend back both ends for the arms, twist those ends together for the torso, then what's left is the legs. You can bend up the very tips of the ends for the feet.
2. Take a second pipe cleaner and poke one end through the edge of a coffee filter. Fold over once to secure. Take the free end and run through the 'hands' of the stick figure (his arms are loops) and connect the free end to the other side of the coffee filter.



For more creative license, children can decorate the coffee filters with markers, before securing the pipe cleaner 'guy'. Take your parachute guys up to a second floor balcony or deck, and let go. No need to throw these up; they will just float gently to the ground once released. Look out below!

Source: stlmotherhood.com

Ice Painting

Materials: large piece of ice, frozen in a plastic container, watercolour paints, paintbrush, plastic tray to catch the melting ice.



1. Pour water in your plastic container and allow it to freeze overnight. Right before beginning the activity, remove the ice from the container onto a tray. Set the watercolour paints on the tray, too, to keep the mess contained.
2. Invite the child to brush the watercolours on top of the ice block.
3. Observe with the child: what happens to the colours as the ice starts to melt?
4. Once the child has completed their painting, you can press a piece of paper gently on top to make a print of their work!
5. Clean up is a breeze—dump the ice block in the sink and rinse the tray!

Adapted from: teaching2and3yearolds.com

Outdoor Activities

Tinfoil River

Using a roll of heavy-duty tinfoil, make a river! Fold up the sides to hold in the water and make your river as long as you want it. You can double up the foil, before folding up the sides, to make a narrower river. Tinfoil is very forgiving, so no need to worry about it being perfect. Just be sure to press down in the middle so that the water flows better. If you have a slight slope in your yard—even better. You can watch boats float down the river.



Add some rocks for interest, to use as obstacles, and to add weight to hold the tinfoil down. Hook the garden hose into one end of the river, and turn it on!

The river is the most fun if you can keep the hose running while you play. If you are concerned about water waste, set a bucket at the end of the river and use the collected water for the garden.

Ask the children to build river dams using rocks, and see what happens to the water flow. Break out the boats and see if they can make it from one end of the river to the other. Have fun with it!

Adapted from: frugalfun4boys.com

Giant Outdoor Memory Game

Making a memory game from paper plates is easy, and playing with this paper plate memory game is fun! One can play outdoors, if the weather permits, or take it inside too. This game is great for developing visual memory skills.



To make this memory game you will need:

- Paper plates
- Sharpies/markers or paint

There are many options depending on the child's age: colors and/or shapes, sight words, word families, phonics pictures, or even numbers for older kids.

Note: this game can be used as a pairing game for younger children. Lay out all the plates so that you can see each one and ask the child to pair up the plates!

Adapted from: 123homeschool4me.com

Pool Noodle and Balloons

Get set: Cut a few swimming noodles in two, so that you have one half for each player. Scatter 20 or so blown-up balloons on the ground around a laundry basket.

Cooperate: Give players five minutes to move as many balloons as possible into the laundry basket without

touching the balloons with any body part. The catch?

The only tool they can use is their pool noodle. At first, players may try batting the balloons into the basket, but they'll soon



realize that they must pair up and use two pool noodles like giant chopsticks to lift the balloons into place.

Source: parents.com

50 Summer Activities for Kids

1. If you have a chance camping in the backyard is a must, if not indoor camping will be fun too!
2. **Picnic in the backyard.** You don't have to plan a trip to the park to have a wonderful picnic. Instead of eating lunch indoors prepare your meals together pack them into the basket and outside you go.
3. Your sidewalk is due for a makeover with chalks!
4. **Build a fort** from cardboard boxes.
5. Have a theatre **show for the whole family.** Children can write a script, make a scene and props, make their own costumes and masks (printable mask templates: <http://www.itsybitsyfun.com/free-printable-masks.html>).
6. Go to the library and borrow a book about **local vegetation.** When on walks let the kids gather flowers and other plants and then try to identify them. They can even make a herbarium!
7. **Make a book!** Take a classic fairy tale and have the kids draw and write their own pages. Have it laminated and bind.
8. Fairies need new homes. Gather natural materials and make **fairy houses.**
9. Have a snowball fight using balled-up socks. Yes, it is possible in the summer!
10. Water play - water balloons, water squirter, sprinklers, swimming pool...
11. Have a **random acts of kindness day** - volunteer in local shelter, retirement home...
12. **Make hats** to shield the heads from the sun! Here's a lovely newspaper sun hat tutorial: <http://www.redtedart.com/2012/03/07/easter-bonnets/>
13. **Make your own marble run** - kids will love

constructing it and later on playing with it. You can make an indoor marble run (<http://lemonlimeadventures.com/recycled-marble-run/>) if it's rainy or a marble run version that's perfect for outside (<http://frugalfun4boys.com/2012/07/13/pool-noodle-marble-run/>) on sunny days.

14. Make sand castles! No beach or sandboxes near by? Get a small pool from the dollar store and a bag of sand from the hardware store.
15. Ice cream factory day! Get all kinds of fruits and compete who mixes the best ice cream or popsicle.
16. Make a lemonade stand together and sell lemonade!
17. Have a banana split or fruit salad party.
18. Make a water-blob (<http://www.clumsycrafter.com/2012/05/water-blob-tutorial/>). Seriously you are going to love this!
19. Board games are always fun! Why not make your own?
20. Make a kiddie car wash!
<http://www.momendeavors.com/2012/07/diy-kiddie-car-wash.html>
21. Make a unique T-shirt with textile markers (pens to draw on textile)
22. Bubble time! Blow bubbles and not just the regular kind - make them super big or super small.
23. Make an obstacle course outside and throw a competition.
24. Make a bird house. Or a new house for your cat, or a dog :).
25. Play reporter - pick an interesting neighbour (who has time) and interview him or her about their job, childhood... Make a mini newspaper.
26. Pinata with balloons full of water.
27. Print out a **star chart**. At night watch the stars and try to spot constellations - mark them down on the chart!
28. Invent a dance! Come up with a choreography and even give it a name!
29. Make a giant scrabble (<http://constantlylovestruck.blogspot.ca/2012/05/so-much-fun.html>) to play in the backyard.
30. Dedicate a day to **science**! Open up an outdoor (or indoor if it's rainy) laboratory and do lots of kid friendly and fun science experiments (<http://kidsactivitiesblog.com/50127/fun-science-activities>).
31. Have a camera? Make a movie! You can do a remake of a fairy tale, cartoon, movie or you can make a script of your own.
32. Have a random country day! Pick a country at

random, anywhere in the world. Dedicate the whole day to that country, make a traditional dessert, do crafts that relate to that country (flag...), learn basic words and sentences in their national language (hi, thank you, please, my name is, I love you...) Learn about their culture, art...

33. Go into the woods with a bag of plaster. Find animal tracks and make casts of them.
34. Fundraise for a local charity - collect old newspaper, clothes, have a bake sale...
35. Don't forget the classics - go to the park, jump on the trampoline, go hiking...
36. Check if there are any classes suitable for kids and adults in your area - you could learn knitting, baking, pottery...
37. Make a giant Ker-Plunk game!
<http://www.allparenting.com/my-home/articles/968327/diy-backyard-ker-plunk-game>
38. Bowling in the backyard. Make bowling pins out of old cans or bottles.
39. Summer Olympics! Dedicate a day to sport activities - running, gymnastics, jumping. At the end of the day also have a medal ceremony.
40. Spend a few hours in a store (toy store, dollar store) window shopping. Make a imaginary list of things you would have if you had a million dollars. Or give kids a few dollars they can spend however they want.
41. Have a fashion show.
42. Throw a themed party just for your family! Be sure to print free printable party supplies!
<http://www.itsybitsyfun.com/printable-party-kits.html>
43. Make bow and arrows and do some target practice.
44. Potato sack race.
45. Check the local library if they have any summer activities for kids planned.
46. Come up with pranks and hidden camera scenes to do to your friends and family.
47. Start a herb garden.
48. Make a kite.
49. Make origami and recycled boats and have them float in water.
50. Make a sun clock.

Adapted from: itsybitsyfun.com



Science Activities

What Melts in the Sun?

This activity is so easy, and really interesting for the preschool and kindergarten crowd! Wait for a very hot, sunny day and then fill a muffin tin with an assortment of objects, such as:

- A Lego brick
- Ice
- A wooden block
- A rock
- Butter
- A cube of cheese
- A marble
- A quarter
- A square of chocolate
- Three crayons
- A cube cut off a bar of soap



Set a timer for 10 minutes and then have the children check the tin. (Caution them against touching the hot metal!) Did anything melt? Does anything look different?

Set the time for 45 minutes and check again. Has anything changed?

Older children can make an observation chart to record their guess (will it melt?) and what actually happened.

Adapted from: frugalfun4boys.com

Sink or Float?

Start with a nature walk and have the child collect small items you find on the walk. Providing the child with a basket for them to carry their findings makes the hunt more fun! Look for things such as:

- Flowers
- Sticks
- Rocks
- Leaves
- Acorns

After the walk, fill a large container with water. Clear glass or plastic works best, but you can use any container.

Talk about which objects the child thinks will sink or float, in the water. Have them separate their guesses into two piles.

Begin the experiment! Does it sink? Does it float?



Take the experiment one step further and hunt for items around the house, such as:

- Small toys
- Coins
- Food that doesn't dissolve in water (i.e. hard cheese, cucumber slice, etc.)
- Crayons
- Spoon
- Wine cork

Conduct the experiments outside— easy clean up!

Adapted from: buggyanbuddy.com

Tasty Treats

Kid-Friendly Taquitos

Ingredients:

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon garlic powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 cup shredded Mexican cheese blend or cheddar cheese

12 corn tortillas

Olive or canola oil spray



1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Place chicken in a steamer pot over boiling water and steam for 10 to 15 minutes, or until cooked through. Set aside to cool slightly.
3. Use a fork to shred the chicken into small pieces. Set aside to cool.
4. Combine the chicken in a bowl with the garlic powder, salt, cumin, and cheese.
5. Place 2 corn tortillas at a time in between 2 damp paper towels and microwave for 20 to 30 seconds to soften them (this will also prevent them from cracking when rolling).
6. With 1 tortilla in front of you, place 2 tablespoons of the chicken mixture on the side closest to you and roll it up. Repeat with the rest of the tortillas and filling.*
7. Place the taquitos seam-side down on a foil-lined baking sheet, spray the tops lightly with olive or canola oil spray, and bake for 25 minutes, or until crisp.
8. *At this stage, the taquitos can be frozen in labeled zip-top bags for up to 3 months. When ready to eat, continue from step 7.

Tip: If you have leftover rotisserie chicken, use 2 cups and follow from step 4.

Source: popsugar.com

Easy Pizzas

Ingredients:

English muffins or Italian bread slices (or any other appropriate bread type product you have handy)

Spagetti sauce

mozzarella cheese

chopped tomatos

deli sliced

pepperoni

fresh basil



Directions:

Layer your

ingredients on

whatever type of bread you have. Start with sauce,

add a little mozzarella, then add your favorite

toppings. Add more mozzarella on top, so that you get

that gooey goodness and it holds everything together.

Cook at 400F for 5 minutes. Watch these closely!

They are ready when the cheese is all nice and melty.

For younger children, do wait a bit before biting in.

That cheese is hot!

Source: momcreiff.com

Strawberry Yogurt Bark

Ingredients:

- Yogurt (honey Greek yogurt is recommended, but you can adjust based on flavour preference)
- *Dried strawberries

** Use freeze dried*

strawberries,

available in many

supermarkets, to

avoid the

moisture/mushy feel

and frozen texture.

You can substitute

fresh fruit, or even

nuts, or any mix-in's of your choice.



Instructions:

1. Line a flat pan with sides with parchment paper and spread evenly with yogurt. Make sure it's not too thin so that it breaks easily-- about 3/8 of an inch thick is good.
2. Sprinkle with your mix-in (fruit, nuts, etc)
3. Freeze for a few hours until completely frozen. (Average time is about 4 hours for an 8" square pan.)
4. Remove from frozen yogurt from the pan and peel off the parchment paper. Break into pieces and enjoy!

Source: hellowonderful.co



Summer Vacation: A Reminder for Parents

Please be sure to notify you child care Provider and your Child Care Advisor if you plan to take summer holidays.

alanna@totlot.ca or **613-727-0010 ext. 2**

desiree@totlot.ca or **613-727-0010 ext. 3**