

Benefits of Outdoor Play

Illness – Outdoor play can keep you healthy. Young children suffer fewer illness-related absences from child care when they have opportunities to play outside (Sennerstan & Moberg, 2004).

Healthy Weight – Outdoor play offers opportunities for vigorous, physical activity. Young children are suffering from obesity in record numbers (Baranowski, T. et al 2000; Jago, R. et al. 2005). Spending time outdoors increases the amount of time that infants and toddlers are free to crawl, walk, toddle, climb, and run. In addition to developing skills, regular and ongoing physical activity may improve their overall level of fitness.

Vitamin D - There is worldwide concern that infants, toddlers, and older children are deficient in Vitamin D (Huh, 2008). One of the easiest, most natural and cost effective ways of getting Vitamin D is through a few minutes of sunshine each day.

Asthma - When young children are regularly outdoors amongst trees their chances of developing asthma are greatly reduced (Lovasi, 2008).

Vision - Children who play outdoors are less likely to be near sighted (Rose et al. 2008). Direct exposure to the bright natural light that comes from actually being outside may stimulate the developing eyes in important ways such as focusing on things at a distance (McBrien, 2009).

Social-Emotional - Seeing and interacting with greenspace apparently reduces emotional stress (Wells, N.M., and Evans, G.W. 2003) and behavioral issues (Bell, 2008) especially for populations facing adversity.

Cognitive - A little digging in the dirt might actually improve cognitive skills. A type of bacteria commonly found in soil may reduce stress and improve cognitive function (Science Daily 2010; Wells 2000).

Motor Skills – Playing in nature can improve motor skills. Children who played in a natural environment (a forest) improved their motor skills more than children who played in typical playground. (Fjørtoft & Ingunn, 2001).

Attention – Greenspace can help children pay attention. Parents rated their child's symptoms of ADD as lower after playing in natural environments than in playgrounds or organized sports. (Taylor, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2001). Preschoolers demonstrated better focus after sustained play outside (Holmes, 2006).

Social Interaction – Outdoor play can help you make new friends. Children who played in outdoor settings played with a more diverse group than they usually did, including more interaction with children with disabilities. (Davis, 1986; Mygind, 2009).

Program Design and Management for Supporting Outdoor Experiences

Questions	1 to 10	Ideas for improvement :
When hiring we ask potential employees their beliefs about taking young children outside.		
We offer professional development and resources to families and staff around outdoor play.		
We have staff, volunteers, floaters, and/or parents available to help take children outside.		
Adults have and wear weather appropriate clothing.		
Our program has back-up clothing for children and adults.		
We have a policy around going outside every day.		
Our administration is supportive of getting children outside.		
Our outdoor space is accessible and easy to get to for teachers and young children.		
Our families have access to safe outdoor play areas.		
We have outdoor storage for toys (push toys, water and sand toys, etc.).		
We can do routine care outside (meals, diapering, handwashing).		