

Learning Through Outside Play

Playing is Learning and Learning Matters!

Play experiences help children learn. These experiences give children a chance to act out real life situations, work through worries and fears, and use their imagination to solve problems.



Nature Play

Spending time outside in nature improves mental health and well-being. There is no need to pre-plan anything or try to control how your child plays. Just being in nature can reduce stress levels for both adults and children. The outdoors provides many opportunities for exploration. For example, children can create different things with natural materials, such as sticks, dirt, leaves and rocks. Playing outside allows children to use their senses to understand the world around them. Children learn from taking risks, exploring and interacting – and it’s fun! When children play outside, they move more, sit less, and play longer, which helps their physical and mental health.

“Exposure to nature can reduce stress levels in children.”

-The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

Free Play

Unstructured, free play gives children the chance to make up their own activities. They can create stories about the world around them, which builds their imaginations and develops their brains. The best part about free play is that it is controlled by your child, which allows them to be very creative. Adults can set up for free play outdoors by providing play materials and a safe space.

Active Play

Play can be as simple as a game of hide and seek, playing tag or ball games, rolling down hills, or dancing. Active play can involve jumping, skipping, running, and hopping!

Exploratory Play

Children play by exploring their natural environment. Exploratory play can help children learn about where they live, become more flexible, and gain confidence. Walk around the neighbourhood as a family and do a ‘scavenger hunt’ to look for various shapes and colours of houses, compare size and number of windows, identify numbers on houses, read street signs, and to find rocks, sticks, pine cones, twigs, and different trees.

Easy Outdoor Play Explorations

- lie on the grass
- count dandelions
- watch the water go down the street grates
- count the stars
- collect sticks, leaves and rocks
- feel the wind
- watch the clouds
- climb
- jump in leaves
- dig a hole
- catch rain drops
- make mud pies and play in the dirt



References

[Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for the Early Years \(2012\)](#)

Early Childhood Centre, University of New Brunswick. (2008). New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care – English. New Brunswick: Government of New Brunswick.

[NB PLAYS! OUTSIDE Recreation New Brunswick](#)

The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

[National Environmental Education Foundation. Children & Nature](#)

[Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play](#)