

Benefits of Outdoor Play

1. Invites children to learn science
 - a. Climate
 - b. Openness
 - c. Wildlife
 - d. Landscapes
 - e. Learn elements (earth, air, water, fire)
 - f. Learn cosmos (sun, moon, stars, and planets)
2. Creates social interactions and collaborations
 - a. Organize their own games
 - b. Make their own rules
 - c. Help/comfort a friend who falls down
3. Promotes physical health
 - a. Strengthens physical skills
 - b. Opportunities for exercise
 - c. Exposure to sunlight (vitamin D)
 - d. Less concentrated disease organisms than inside
4. Invites contexts for learning
 - a. Use your outdoor space to create intentional learning activities that aren't easy to do inside. (water play, large sand structures, collecting leaves, watching bugs)
 - b. Much more fun to read about nature while in nature!
5. Promotes better sleep
 - a. A study of 2-5 year olds revealed that children who play outdoors sleep better at night. (this could be due to physical activity, stress reduction, or exposure to natural light that comes along with playing outside) (a tired and happy child is one who sleeps well)
6. Gives chance for appropriate risks
 - a. Toddlers are all about taking risks! (pet a dog, climb some stairs, run faster, climb higher, jump farther, etc)
7. Better learning outcomes
 - a. As mentioned before, research studies have shown that older children are more attentive and productive during the school day when recess (outdoor or even indoors) is part of the school day. Voluntary attention vs. involuntary attention. All children need a "brain break"!
8. Supports STEM
 - a. Outdoors provides the opportunities to make that mud pie and build that fort, building, sand water play and investigations of the world and nature. Almost any indoor activity can be brought outside for more exploration.
9. Anchors to the real world
 - a. Children grow more comprehensive knowledge about the world when they have a change to observe, predict, and learn in the moment.
 - b. Talking to children about a bird or bugs, and reading a book about these things is great but, experiencing these things in nature is much better!

Providing the best outdoor environment for learning

1. Create a rich learning environment
 - a. Think about your outdoor play area as an outdoor classroom.
 - b. Use dynamic play materials
 - c. Make sure you continually assess and adapt to meet your children's needs and interests
2. Provide a schedule that allows for play outdoors
 - a. It is recommended that half day programs have one period of extended outdoor play and full day programs have two periods of outdoor play
 - b. One guideline from SHAPE (society of health and physical educators) recommends that children age 3-5 years old should have 60 minutes of structured physical play and 60 minutes of unstructured physical play per day. Half of this is recommended for toddlers.
3. Plan special activities for outdoor time
 - a. Provide mazes for hopscotch
 - b. Bury items in the sandbox, then give children brushes and screens to be archaeologists or paleontologists
 - c. Give children doll clothes to wash and hang out to dry
 - d. Fill spray bottles with water and food coloring spray on snow in winter or old sheet in the summer
 - e. Play games
 - f. Provide chalk for drawing shadows
4. Provide needed props
 - a. When children show interest in something provide them a means to practice it. Provide bug catchers if they want to explore bugs
5. Interact with children
 - a. Playing with them
 - b. Demonstrating and teaching skills
 - c. Modeling enjoyment of nature
 - d. Offering encouragement and providing recognition
 - e. Help the excluded child feel included
6. Meet all needs of all learners
 - a. Supporting children of different cultures
 - b. Supporting children who are overweight
 - c. Supporting children with special healthcare needs
 - d. Supporting children of all ages
7. Assess your environment