Outdoor play and risk: Essential for healthy child development

Dr Mariana Brussani
Department of Pediatrics
School of Population & Public Health

What was your childhood like?

Q

• Think about your childhood play activities...
  • What was your favorite thing to do?
  • Where were you?
  • Who was typically with you?
WHY OUTDOORS?

When children are outside, they move more, sit less and play longer.

Outdoor play promotes: Curiosity, exploration, learning, later academic success

Carson & Predy; Wyver; Deitz & Kashin, forthcoming
Physical activity in context of complexity, novelty, diversity promotes executive functioning

Independent mobility promotes:
- Physical activity
- Spatial knowledge
- Social engagement

Wyver, forthcoming

Wyver, 2018
Loose parts play promotes:
socio-emotional development
reduced bullying
higher levels of happiness

Access to nature promotes:
change & challenge
stress-buffering
attention restoration
self-regulation
environmental awareness

Wyver, forthcoming
Wyver; Carson & Preedy; Gill, forthcoming
Access to outdoors: Vitamin D, myopia, spatial working memory

Wyver, 2018; Carson & Predy, forthcoming

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
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Norway
RANKED 1ST

Canada
RANKED 25TH

Chile
RANKED 41ST

What is it like to grow up in Canada?
How can we make it better?

As part of UNICEF Canada’s One Youth initiative, we launched a survey asking Canadians what they think growing up is like and how it could be better. They talked to people in their communities of all ages. They asked questions about lots of different topics and looked for ideas to learn how we can help make Canada the best place in the world to grow up. Here’s some of what we learned.

We asked Canadians to tell us their favourite thing about being a kid in Canada:

- "Playing outside." 27%
- "It’s the best country in the world" 22%
- "There are cheap and healthy food" 22%
- "People are nice and friendly" 21%
- "The climate is nice" 21%

We asked people to think about what might be different for kids in 2037:

- "Adults are more environmentally friendly" 70%
- "Childhood is longer" 62%
- "Children are more independent" 52%
- "Children are more educated" 52%
- "Children are more healthy" 52%

"Children learn in different ways" 52%
"Children learn in different things" 52%
"Children learn in different subjects" 52%
"Children learn in different places" 52%
"Children learn in different ways" 52%
"Children learn in different subjects" 52%
"Children learn in different places" 52%
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What is it like to grow up in Canada? How can we make it better?

WE ASKED CANADIANS TO TELL US THEIR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT BEING A KID IN CANADA

“Playing outside.”

What tonight this mean for child well-being? Countries where kids have more free, outdoor play also tend to have better overall well-being. Being over-scheduled and over-supervised isn’t good for kids.

Global Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being

Canada ranks 29
Global Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all
Canada ranks 8

Global Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Canada ranks 19
Global Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Canada ranks ?

Diminishing play opportunities

- Safety fears
- Screens
- Overscheduling
- Academic focus

Wyver; Carson & Preedy; Gill; Dietz & Kashin, 2018
Outdoor play time in Canada???
3-4 year olds
• home care: 1.6 h/day
• child care: 2.1 h/day

Carson & Predy, forthcoming
OUTDOOR PLAY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

- **Time**
- **Space**
- **Freedom**

UNSTRUCTURED, INDEPENDENT, FREELY CHOSEN

- DAILY OUTDOOR RECESS / PLAY TIME
- REGARDLESS OF WEATHER
OUTDOOR PLAY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

- Time
- Freedom
- Space

HIGH QUALITY, DIVERSE
✓ LOOSE PARTS
  e.g., sticks, sand, mud, water, tarps, bins, cloths

OUTDOOR PLAY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

- Time
- Adult
- Space

✓ SUPPORTIVE PLAY POLICIES & CULTURE
POSITION STATEMENT ON ACTIVE OUTDOOR PLAY

Position
Access to active play in nature and outdoors – with its risks – is essential for healthy child development. We recommend increasing children’s opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings – at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.

Tremblay et al., 2015, IJERPH, 12 www.haloresearch.ca/outdoorplay

Resources

Toolkit to increase unstructured play

- Outdoor play policy framework
- Loose parts play policy framework
- FAQs about play
- Standard of care checklist
- How to foster collaborative decision-making

https://www.cpha.ca/resources?topic=68
Thank you!

Dr. Mariana Brussoni
mbrussoni@bcchr.ubc.ca
+1-604-875-3712
@mbrussoni
brussonilab.ca