



Why Outdoor Play Is Essential for Healthy Development

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Why Outdoor Play Is Essential for Healthy Development,” from the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Discuss the benefits of engaging infants and toddlers in outdoor play activities.
- ◆ Describe ways educators can partner with families to engage infants and toddlers in fun, developmentally appropriate outdoor play activities.
- ◆ Plan to engage infants and toddlers in inclusive outdoor play activities designed to meet their individual needs.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ Use the questions below to reflect on how you can support infants’ and toddlers’ gross motor skills through outdoor play experiences.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support gross motor skills.

When children run, jump, climb, throw and kick balls, and ride toys that require balance, they also build gross motor skills and start developing a habit of being active.

Kathy Kisner

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the article? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ Reflect on your values and beliefs about being outside. How do these feelings influence the opportunities you provide for children to develop their gross motor skills outdoors?

- ◆ Consider the perspectives and values of the families and children in your care related to spending time outside engaged in gross motor activities. How are they similar to or different from your own values and perspectives?
 - If you're unsure, how can you gain an understanding of their feelings related to gross motor outdoor play?
 - How can you partner with families to gather more information about children's individual needs and plan appropriate outdoor play activities while respecting their unique situations and values?

- ◆ The third benefit of outdoor play mentioned in the article makes a connection between gross motor skills and physical health for young children. Reflect on the individual needs of the children in your care.
 - How are children currently benefitting from gross motor outdoor play?
 - How would you tailor outdoor play activities for children who need additional support or challenge?
 - What support do you think you may need as you plan fun, developmentally appropriate outdoor play activities for all children?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting infant and toddlers' gross motor skills:

- ◆ **Source:** PennState Extension
- ◆ **Article:** Connecting with Nature in a Concrete Jungle
- ◆ **Link:** <https://extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare/news/2018/connecting-with-nature-in-a-concrete-jungle>
- ◆ **Description:** This short article highlights different ways that educators can notice nature and provide opportunities for children to observe and be curious about it, especially when nature is absent.

- ◆ **Source:** Nature Explore
- ◆ **Video:** Nature for Infants and Toddlers
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJOhRAe2GbM>
- ◆ **Description:** This video explores the challenges of being safe outside during outdoor play and details the benefits of outdoor play.