
Outdoor Play is Essential to Whole Child Development

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Our Proud Heritage: Outdoor Play is Essential to Whole Child 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

- ◆ Consider how accessible outdoor play is for children.
- ◆ Reflect on your current practices and determine strategies to increase access and time to outdoor play for all children.
- ◆ Plan ways to promote active exploration with increased access and increased time through outdoor play.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ Use the questions below to guide your reflection and action plan to support children to actively explore during outdoor play.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support preschoolers’ active exploration.

“One of the driving forces behind the park project was the belief that for the United States to fulfill the promise of being a truly democratic country, beautiful parks and natural spaces had to be preserved for all citizens, not just the wealthy.”

Joe Frost and John A. Sutterby

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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

- ◆ This article provides a comprehensive history of the evolution of outdoor play spaces for young children, highlighting the importance of outdoor play for children's development. The article also addresses inequities of the resources available to all children, based on location. Reflect on your current space for active exploration outdoors.
 - How accessible is outdoor play for the preschoolers in your learning environment?
 - Can children move freely through all areas independently?
 - What barriers exist that prohibit all children to have equal access to outdoor play?
 - Is there enough space for all children to play?
 - Is the outdoor space unobstructed, allowing children with all physical needs to easily use?
 - Are there any safety concerns that exist in your outdoor space that prevent any child from actively exploring around them?

- ◆ The authors also address the importance of ensuring that all children have opportunities for open-ended play while playing outside. Children tend to be most active when outdoors, which supports active exploration that moves them towards mastering motor skills as well as other areas of development. Reflect on your approach to promote unrestricted play experiences for all children to be active outdoors.
 - What open-ended opportunities to engage in active exploration are available to all children?
 - Identify ways you can promote all children in engaging with your outdoor space.
 - Are you engaging with the children during active play to promote active exploration of the outdoor environment while allowing children to lead play experiences? If not, how can you join in their play while still promoting autonomy?
 - Are there materials that you can bring outdoors to promote active exploration?

- ◆ The article recognizes the importance of providing all children active outdoor play time to ensure they receive active play opportunities to combat the current appeal of technology and sedentary play, which is important for healthy development for all children.
 - How are you intentionally balancing your schedule to allow for active exploration outdoors?
 - What barriers are you facing in providing such opportunities for all children?
 - Identify resources and supports you may need to gain access for all children to have opportunities for active exploration outdoors.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting children's active exploration through outdoor play

- ◆ **Source:** UNICEF
 - ◆ **Article:** The Necessity of Urban Green Space for Children's Optimal Development
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/stories/necessity-urban-green-space-childrens-optimal-development>
 - ◆ **Description:** This article highlights how children's development is enhanced by engaging with nature.
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- ◆ **Source:** Defending the Early Years
 - ◆ **Podcast:** Equitable Access to Play and Nature
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://dey.org/podcast/access-to-nature-and-outdoor-play/>
 - ◆ **Description:** This podcast features an educator who increased outdoor experiences in their schools through a play-based approach.