



# Benefits of Outdoor Play

Physical, Social, Emotional, Cognitive, Language, Cultural

## Educator Fact Sheet

### Benefits of Outdoor Play for Children



#### Physical Development

- Increased physical activity - children spend almost 50% of their time in active play while outdoors at ECEC services, compared to just 24% when playing indoors.<sup>1</sup>
- There are greater opportunities to develop fine and gross motor skills (including fundamental movement skills), and better motor co-ordination when playing outdoors.<sup>2</sup>
- Core strength is developed through crawling, throwing, balancing, lifting, rolling, holding and hanging.<sup>4-5</sup> While fine motor skills are developed when children manipulate and play with elements in the outdoor environment.<sup>3</sup>
- Outdoor environments support sensory development of the proprioceptive and vestibular senses. Proprioception is the ability to sense what different parts of your body are doing without even looking at them; vestibular is your awareness of where your body is in space.<sup>4-5</sup>



#### Social Development

- Outdoor play can help children learn how to comfortably participate in a social group and engage in different styles of play.<sup>3</sup>
- Children become strong in their social wellbeing when they "make choices, accept challenges, take considered risks, manage change and cope with frustrations and the unexpected",<sup>6</sup> for example in risky play.



#### Connection to Country and Cultural

- Establishing a connection with nature through gardens, outdoor play environments and nature walks help children to build a strong connection to their world and feel that they belong to the land.<sup>8</sup>



#### Language and Communication

- Children can experiment and practice language in a relaxed environment. Children's language development is assisted through being able to shout without moderating the voice and experimenting with new and fun words.<sup>3</sup>



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### Emotional Development

- Playing in the natural environment greatly improves a child's positive emotions, self-esteem and behaviour. Children are less stressed, have less anxiety and are less likely to have depressive symptoms.<sup>2</sup>
- Children are able to make their own choices about what to play, where to play, with whom, for how long, and what to use in their play. This empowers children, gives them a sense of control and a positive sense of self.<sup>3</sup>
- Engaging outdoor learning spaces supports children to explore and take risks.<sup>2</sup> When children have the opportunity to take risks, they learn that sometimes those risks or decisions result in outcomes that they were not expecting. These small setbacks can be positive in terms of building resilience.<sup>4</sup>



### Cognitive Development

- Natural environments that are constantly changing provide endless opportunities for children to learn about the world in a meaningful way.<sup>2</sup>
- Children...
  - have improved concentration, are more attentive and less impulsive when playing in large and integrated natural areas.<sup>7</sup>
  - can use nature's loose parts (e.g. pebbles, leaves etc.) to engage their curiosity, imaginative and creative play.<sup>2</sup>
  - develop a risk-taking disposition and develop risk assessment skills for use throughout life when given opportunity to take risks.<sup>4</sup>
  - develop environmental awareness and a sense of connection to nature. Outdoor environments provide a context for promoting environmental responsibility, enabling children develop environmental appreciation and engage in environmental education.<sup>2-3</sup>



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### Benefits of Outdoor Play for Families

- Families may notice improved child behaviour, as well as improved physical and mental health of their children.<sup>11</sup>



### Benefits of Outdoor Play for Educators

- Alignment with National Quality Standards and the Early Years Learning Framework for ECEC services.<sup>10</sup>
- Offers greater opportunity for educators to participate in physical activity and experience many of the same benefits as the children.<sup>2</sup>
- Improved behaviour among children,<sup>11</sup> and improved quality of child-educator interactions.<sup>9</sup>
- Greater job satisfaction.<sup>11</sup>



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