

The Importance of Outdoor Play in the Early Years By Nicole Thelin,

Outdoor play is of vital importance in the early years of childhood. Active outdoor play increases health and physical development by improving sensory development, reducing obesity and stimulating brain cells.

Health

In an era where child obesity is increasingly common, encouraging children to be active in their youth can improve their health throughout their life. Being outdoors has many health benefits. Fresh air is also beneficial to the body. The physical exercise enjoyed outdoors is critical in decreasing risks of heart disease and diabetes, reducing obesity, stimulating brain cells and encouraging development



Sensory Development

When playing outdoors, children have the opportunity to use all their senses. Active children regularly exercise all of their physical senses. Grass, for example, offers full stimulation to sight, smell, taste and touch. Children are naturally curious and, by allowing them to explore the world around them, they can develop their senses in an exciting and stimulating way.



Coordination

Children need to be able to exercise and use their bodies to develop strength and coordination. Outdoor play allows children to gain a greater mastery of their body by running, jumping, climbing and exploring. This can increase confidence in their physical abilities, which helps them maintain a healthier self-image as they grow older.



Responsibility

Children who play outside are exposed to more choices and dangers than they would be indoors. This teaches children responsibility as they learn to identify and avoid dangerous situations. Children should be taught to keep themselves and others safe by dressing appropriately for the weather, identifying and avoiding hazardous situations, staying hydrated in hot weather, and avoiding contact with unknown adults.

Environmental Awareness

Outdoor play allows children to learn to appreciate and enjoy nature at an early age. This enjoyment can facilitate an urge to protect their planet and environment for generations to come. With an acute environmental awareness, these children can contribute positively to their communities as adults by proactively protecting the environment and improving natural recreation areas.