

Why Outdoor Learning Boosts Children's Development

The beneficial effects of outdoor learning and play on children's experiences have been known for thousands of years, but parents seem generally more afraid to let their children explore, play and discover outside by themselves. This is the 'Cotton Wool' generation, wrapped up & overprotected in many ways, allowed hours of technology rather than climbing trees, making mud pies and building dens in the garden. Yet playing outside is the best place to help them blossom, bloom, flourish, explore, create, discover, while testing and challenging themselves through curiously exploring natural landscapes. Every parent knows that children are 'born explorers' and have a natural zest for getting outside as it is a place of natural, abundant unbounded opportunities for kids to learn.

In this hectic, frenetic time where family life seems busier than ever, it's even more important to make a conscious effort to allow your kids to get out in the fresh air to play, have fun, explore and discover.

Add to the mix so much focus on academic attainment & you can easily see why so many children are missing out on outdoor, natural and healthy experiences that will benefit their mental, emotional and physical well-being throughout their lives.

Playing outdoors and outdoor learning has always been a form of exercise that promotes well-being and healthy physical development. Children are naturally drawn to active outdoor play as it allows them to indulge their natural curiosity, discover and explore their environment, develop their muscle strength and coordination, and gain self-confidence. Playing actively outdoors also increases your child's flexibility, their fine and gross motor skills and is related to the development of a wide variety of physical skills, including those involved in sport.

Physically, of course, children's bodies crave a challenge. Their little bones and muscles are anxious to grow strong while their brain is hungry to monitor and record the sensations of climbing, balancing, gripping and swinging for future use. Children innately find physical activities interesting and challenging.

The Joy of Climbing

Climbing, for example, gives children the power to change their perspective – a key underpinning that fosters natural curiosity, discernment, critical thinking, and creative problem solving – all the things children need to learn how to learn.

When a child makes it to the top of anything for the very first time there is no better feeling – whether it's the monkey bars or a climbing frame, it builds confidence through hard-fought, well-earned, whole-body/whole brain achievement.

Climbing always presents a potential safety risk, of course. And when safety is at issue, it is always your decision, day by day, situation by situation.

However, denying a child the experience of climbing, or for that matter, any challenging activity carries its own set of risks. Children who don't push boundaries and push themselves to try new things risk learning to hold back. Perseverance, even in the face of a steep challenge, will hold them in good stead, and believe it or not, simple things like being allowed to climb is a great way for your child to practice for the bigger challenges that life is sure to inevitably throw at them.

Why Swinging Is good

When children are pushed on a swing, or when they propel themselves, they are engaging all of their muscles to hold on, balance and coordinate their body to the rhythm of moving back and forth. Swinging provides children with first-hand knowledge and experience of cause and effect and of understanding spatial learning, (such as up and down and back and forth.) Also, while swinging, children get a chance to see the world from a new and different perspective which is enthralling for a child.

Swinging helps children to learn sensory integration, or in other words, the body's ability to organise its experiences with touch, movement, body awareness, sight, sound, and the pull of gravity. Developing strong sensory integration skills early on establishes a crucial foundation for more complex learning that comes later in life. So, when your child implores you 'Just one more time' think about all the benefits to their learning, and push!

Bikes, Skates and Scooters

Children love cycling – it's fast and fun, and gives them freedom and independence to get around & toys that require balance and coordination, such as skates, scooters and bikes, teach children new skills & encourages their self-confidence and 'Can Do Kid' attitude while satisfying their interest in exploration.

Here's why it's good to start riding bikes young:

- It improves your child's fitness
- It boosts your child's positive mental attitude as cycling can help to relieve stress
- It nurtures naturally your bond with your child
- It introduces a healthy activity to your children while they are young so it becomes a lifelong habit
- It's fun to do something together in the fresh air as a family that's free.

The Early Years Foundation Stage

Educationally, outdoor learning has always been valued and The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Curriculum places a strong emphasis on the importance and value of daily outdoor experiences for children's learning and development, covering birth to the end of the Reception year. In recent years teaching in the Outdoor Classroom generally has become more practised in schools which also includes the innovative educational approach of Forest Schools to outdoor play and learning.

Outdoor learning can be so much fun for kids of any age.

From playing pirates to exploring mini beasts, take your kids outside and build memories that will last a lifetime. It's a wonderful way to spend the day & you'll be developing a healthy, happy, sociable, confident, self-directed and creative learner.

What better gift can you give your children?