



Mental health in infancy and early childhood affects every aspect of individuals' lives throughout their lifetime, including social functioning, psychological well-being, and physical health.



Benefits of Nature for Young Children

When you think back to your childhood, what kinds of play do you remember? Many probably remember a lot of unstructured play, much of which was in the outdoors. Whether this play was alone or with friends, it was critical to our social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and cognitive development.

Does the current generation of children get the same quality and quantity of unstructured, free play as we did? Do they get to spend as much time outdoors? Some do, but many do not. Structured and supervised play, expanded urban areas, organized activities, safety concerns, and electronics have all played a role in decreased outdoor, unstructured time for our children.

Past articles in this newsletter (<http://tinyurl.com/lwd2uz2>) have focused on the importance of unstructured play.

Structured activities and games that have rules and specified roles have some benefits, such as learning cooperation, improving focus, socializing, physical development, and problem solving. However, they do not foster creativity, role playing, experimentation, exploration, self-awareness, and freedom. Time playing outdoors provides opportunities for all of this.

Children learn best during play where they can freely explore their environment and lead their play. In addition, research has shown that children who have time to play outdoors do better in school and are healthier overall. Children who play outdoors are also more likely to be active than those spending time indoors. This allows for the development of gross and fine motor skills through natural activities. It also helps to prevent obesity and other health issues related to sedentary lifestyles.



One of the many benefits from interacting with nature is an increased understanding of ecology. Children who are allowed to grow their own gardens have been shown to have better levels of nutrition as they are more likely to eat the vegetables and fruit that they have taken care of. These children are also more likely to be stewards of the environment.

Lastly, children who have been allowed to play in nature have decreased stress levels. Some studies have shown that symptoms associated with Attention Deficit Disorder can also be reduced. Playing in nature allows children to naturally develop resiliency skills so that they can use the skills they learn in nature in other environments.

There are many initiatives that seek to increase children's interactions with nature. One such example is Forest School (<http://tinyurl.com/lm8hkuw>), also known as outdoor preschools. Forest schools offer a program that is based on emergent, child-based play and interactions with the natural environment. Although there is some structured time, most of it is unstructured. Other programs include "Nature Kindergarten" (<http://tinyurl.com/kn4rjk5>) and "Fresh Air Learning" (<http://tinyurl.com/kylnn2s>). How can you incorporate unstructured time in nature for children within your programs? How can you encourage families to do the same?

References

- Burdette, H. & Whitaker, R. (2005). Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children. Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation and Affect. *Archives of Adolescent Medicine* (159).
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http://naturalearning.org/sites/default/files/Benefits%20of%20Connecting%20Children%20with%20Nature_InfoSheet.pdf
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<http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/NearbyNature.pdf>

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute Conference, Professional Development Opportunities, and Events

Influences on Prenatal Brain Development

Webinar: Free

April 14, 2015 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Brain development begins in the very early stages of pregnancy and continues throughout. There are a number of factors that can influence the brain development of a fetus, including nutrition, exposure to alcohol, and maternal stress. This webinar will outline these positive and negative influencers as well as provide strategies for sharing this information with clients.

<http://tinyurl.com/p9g6px5>

Mother's Mental Health Toolkit Training 2-Day Workshop

Registration: \$75.00

November 5 and 6, 2015

La Ronge Inn and Suites

More information and registration can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/ko8jdlj> after April 10, 2015.

Prevention Matters Conference 2015

Registration is now open.

Until March 31: \$325.00

April 1 – July 31: \$375.00

August 1 - September 20: \$425.00

One Day Only: \$200.00

<http://tinyurl.com/pghoc4>



The Unique Role Fathers Play and Why it Matters

Webinar: Free

September 16, 2015 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Every parent has a vital role in their child's life. Their involvement affects the children's well-being and the choices they make throughout life. However, many people don't realize the unique influence fathers play. In fact, fathers not only have an impact throughout their child's life, but on the choices their partner makes during pregnancy and beyond. As educators and service providers, we often are asked about the role of fathers, why it matters, and how to support the role of the 'dad'. This webinar will focus on the many areas fathers have influence within their family and how to raise community awareness around the importance of father involvement.

<http://tinyurl.com/p9g6px5>

Reaching In, Reaching Out Resiliency Training 2-Day Workshop

Registration: \$75.00

November 3 and 4, 2015

La Ronge Inn and Suites

More information and registration can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/mtc2gra> after April 10, 2015.

Please feel free to distribute this information to others. If you or someone you know is interested in participating in the network, please contact Lee Hinton at lhinton@skprevention.ca.

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preventioninstitute
our goal is **healthy** children

1319 Colony Street
Saskatoon, SK S7N 2Z1
Bus. 306.651.4300
Fax. 306.651.4301
www.skprevention.ca