



Get out of their way and let them play

The 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth reveals that kids move more when they are outside and have some freedom to roam unsupervised. But, our tendency to constantly watch over them or keep them indoors to ensure they are safe from risk limits their opportunities for physical activity, endangering their long-term health.

Let's recognize the difference between "real danger" and "risk" and increase children's opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings - at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature. Tips for parents:

Ease your fears about letting kids play freely outdoors.

- Host a "street-proofing course" with kids to teach them basic safety precautions while they play outdoors, including how to be safe pedestrians and cyclists.
- Encourage kids to play with a buddy.
- Recognize that kids are competent and capable – let them test boundaries appropriate to their age group and encourage them to go out and explore.
- Understand that risk doesn't mean courting danger, but rather giving kids the freedom to assess and manage risk, allowing them to build confidence and learn limits.

Kick them out ... side! And, encourage fun, self-directed outdoor play.

- Give kids the opportunity to play freely and spontaneously after school and on the weekends by letting them decide what outdoor activities they like to do – this will keep them more engaged in the activity and outside longer.
- Encourage children to engage more with their outdoor environments in a variety of weather conditions. With the right gear, even playing in the snow or rain is fun!
- Encourage school boards and municipalities to revisit play-specific rules and regulations, such as "no ball playing" or "no tobogganing," that inhibit fun, free play outdoors.
- Choose natural elements over pre-fabricated playgrounds and paved areas for children to play freely in – after all, children are more curious about, and interested in, natural spaces.

Reduce screen time, all the time

- Turn screen time into active time by encouraging outdoor play, rather than turning on the TV.
- Remove TVs and computers from kids' bedrooms.
- Make sure kids know decreased screen time is not a punishment.

Be a good role model

- Make sure you live an active life. It's important for kids to see adults being active and spending time outdoors, doing things such as running, walking, gardening or lawn work.
- Put away your cellphone or tablet and enjoy the outdoors.
- Display a positive attitude that being active outdoors in all weather conditions is fun and feels good.
- Challenge municipal by-laws and school policies that restrict opportunities for active outdoor play or certain activities that are perceived to be risky.