



**Children’s Corner**

**Why Children Need to Go Outside –**

**Even in the Winter**

We are in the middle of a cold and snowy winter. There are winter days that children should not play outside, but not all winter days! Let us explore the benefits of children going outside during the colder months. Children who are dressed properly won’t get cold. Adults who are dressed properly are more likely to go outside with children. In Minnesota, it is state law that all programs and schools – public and private – must take the children outdoors if it is at least 15 degrees. You can do it!

When is it too cold? – Use the Weather Watch It will tell you which age children can go outside at what temperatures.

(https://idph.iowa.gov/Portals/1/Files/HCCI/weatherwatch.pdf).

**It is an OCFS Regulation.**

416.8(k) – 417/418.8(h) – Daily supervised outdoor play is required for all children in care, except during inclement or extreme weather or unless otherwise ordered by a health care provider.

**Children who go outside in the winter are healthier.**

Fresh air is healthier. We do not get sick from the cold. We can get sick from increased exposure to indoor environments where bacteria and viruses live. Adults and children who spend long periods of time in a heated and poorly ventilated rooms without exposure to fresh air, can easily pass germs to each other.

–Children who spent more time outside had better distance vision and a lowered chance of nearsightedness than those who prefer indoor activities. A recent study from [Ohio State University College of Optometry](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2014/11/28/go-play-outside-kids-natural-light-reduces-risk-of-nearsightedness-in-children-scientists-say/)says that 14 hours a week of outdoor light is effective for better vision.

We all need Vitamin D – [80 to 90 percent of our vitamin D actually comes from sunshine](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/29/vitamin-d-deficiency-signs-symptoms_n_5200408.html) even in the winter. “Vitamin D helps regulate mental and emotional moods, doing so by increasing serotonin levels in the brain. Serotonin plays an important role in regulating mood and keeping us happy. So the more exposure you have to the sun, the higher your serotonin levels will be. It is recommended that you get at least half an hour of playtime outdoors in the winter.” *Keep Kids Playing Outdoors In Winter”*

Children who play outdoors have increased fitness levels. A third of American kids are obese. Running around, climbing, walking, exploring, and getting dirty burn calories and strengthen growing bodies.

[More than 100 research studies](http://www.rff.org/documents/RFF-DP-09-21.pdf) have shown that being outside reduces stress.

**Playing outside in the winter gives new challenges and problem solving opportunities.**

Children need to develop their gross motor development all year long.

Children use their bodies differently outside and use them different playing in snow. Children learn from encountering different challenges which the always changes winter weather gives them. How can I get up and down a snowy hill? How can I walk without falling? Children pull and push each other on sleds. They build snow people. Walking on different surfaces helps develop balance, agility, dexterity, and depth perception.

Messy play is different. There are patches of ice, dry snow, wet snow, and slush. The ground and trees are covered in snow.

**Playing outside increases cognitive development.**

Children who spend time outside improved their critical thinking skills. Studies link physical fitness and academic achievement. Outside, children increase their observation skills.

Just taking a walk outside can increase creativity. Inside environments tend to be the same for long periods. Outside environments change daily and can stimulate the imagination.

Children who play outside have better attention spans, even children with ADHD symptoms. After unstructured outside play, once back inside, they are able to concentrate and remember information better.

“Children are used to the outdoors during the warmer months when everything is green. The changes that children observe in the winter – snow, fallen leaves, brown grass, ice – help them to see the world in a new way and to play in different ways.”

*8 Science Backed Reasons For Letting Your Kids Play Outdoors*

Outside, children become naturalists who understand their local ecosystem. They can learn the names of plants they see and animals they see or whose tracks they find. They learn to love and protect their natural world.

Resources:

* https://www.parent.com/8-science-backed-reasons-for-letting-your-kids-play-outdoors/
* https://www.fix.com/blog/keep-kids-playing-outdoors-in-winter/