

Outdoor Play on Winter Days

Children need to play outside every day, even in winter. Going outside to run, jump, yell, and wiggle allows children to use their large muscles and work off extra energy. Moving out into the fresh air is also healthier for children than keeping them inside a closed building where germs can easily spread.

Outdoor play

National and state health and wellness best practice standards recommend daily outdoor play for young children. *Caring for Our Children's* national health and safety standards state:

“Outdoor play:

- 1) Infants (birth to twelve months of age) should be taken outside two to three times per day, as tolerated. There is no recommended duration of infants’ outdoor play.
- 2) Toddlers (twelve months to three years) and preschoolers (three to six years) should be allowed sixty to ninety total minutes of outdoor play. These outdoor times can be curtailed somewhat during adverse weather conditions in which children may still play safely outdoors for shorter periods, but should increase the time of indoor activity, so the total amount of exercise should remain the same.” (*Caring for Our Children, 3rd edition*)

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture’s ChooseMyPlate.gov initiative recommends that “children ages 2-5 years should play actively several times each day. Their activity may happen in short bursts of time and not be all at once. Physical activities for young children should be developmentally-appropriate, fun, and offer variety.”

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day for children five years and up, including aerobic, muscle strengthening, and bone strengthening activities at least three days a week.

The Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality position statement says that children are expected to go outside when the forecast temperature and wind chill is above 25 degrees F, and there is no precipitation falling.

Dress for the weather.

Notify parents that you will be taking their children outside to play every day. Proper clothes for winter outdoor play are needed for their child — winter coat, snow pants, hats, scarves, mittens, and boots, and a change of clothes in case anything gets wet while the children are playing outside.

Keep children active.

The body stays warmer if you’re active than if you’re standing still, so plan lots of fun activities for outdoor play on winter days. See the next page for example activities.

Snow creatures don’t always have to be people. Try making animals, dinosaurs, birds, fish, or space creatures in the snow.

Snow pile olympics

What to do:

Long Jump — Draw a starting line in the snow. Children stand at the starting line and jump as far as they can. Compare footprints to see who jumped the farthest.

Snowball Throw — Children stand at a starting line to see how far they can throw snow balls.

Snow Pile Hurdles — The children can help make piles of snow, then run through the area jumping over the piles as they come to them.

Snow Obstacle Course — Use the piles of snow from the hurdle course. Set up a course where they jump over one, hop around the next, etc.

Snow maze

What to do:

Create a snow path pattern for the children to follow. The maze may be simple with straight lines, or it can have lots of twists and turns. Children can walk or run through the maze to see if they can find the quickest way from start to finish. They can pretend they are cars going down the road, or play stop and start games at intersections.

Ice blocks

You'll need:

clean milk containers and plastic containers (from margarine, cottage cheese, yogurt, etc – ask parents save containers)

What to do:

Children can help fill the containers with water and set them outside to freeze. When they are frozen solid, peel away the cartons or dip plastic containers in a bucket of warm water to free the ice block. While wearing mittens or gloves to protect from the cold ice, children can stack and build with the ice blocks.

Let's find it walk

What to do:

With the children's help, make a list of five things to look for on a walk. The list can be things like a red door, a mailbox, a dog house, etc. or you can base your list on a theme, such as signs of winter. Look for the things on your list as you take the children on a walk. The first person to find all five things gets to make up a new list of five things to find.

Snowball target throw

What to do:

Targets can be as simple as making a circle in the snow where children can aim their snowballs. A hula hoop, or large container such as a laundry basket, can be used as a target. Or, small plastic containers can be put at different distances from the throw line, pushed into the snow, or mounted at angles in snow banks for children to target.

Snow pies

You'll need:

sandbox toys

clean aluminum pie pans or some sort of flat round container

natural materials

What to do:

Children can use sand toys to create their own snow pies. Each child needs a clean aluminum pie pan flat round container to be the "pie plate." They'll love making their own pies with pebble or dirt toppings, layer cakes with leaves, etc. Bird seed or stale bread crumbs can top some pies that can be left for birds to enjoy.

Resources for more information

ChooseMyPlate <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/physical-activity/amount.html>

Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality <http://www.pakeys.org>

Caring for Our Children, 3rd Edition <http://nrckids.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/children.html>

References

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. 2011. *Caring for our children:*

National health and safety performance standards; Guidelines for early care and education programs. 3rd Edition. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Physical Activity. "How much physical activity do children need?" <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/children.html>

Pennsylvania Keys to Quality. "Position Statement." <http://www.pakeys.org>

United States Department of Agriculture, ChooseMyPlate. "How much physical activity is needed?" choosemyplate.gov

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