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The Importance of Recess and Outdoor Play: Part 2

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In *Part 1* of this series, we learned about the importance of daily outdoor play, how much kids need, and what the average American child is actually getting in a day. Here, we will explore more of the benefits of this vital time for children.

Benefits of Recess and Outdoor Play:



- Outdoor, unstructured play helps to rewire the brain, building connections between the right and left hemispheres. It helps kids become more coordinated and better thinkers and problem solvers.



- Gross motor (large muscle movement) play builds muscular and core strength that is necessary for kids to sit up straight in desks, build handwriting and fine motor skills, and combat constant fidgeting and fatigue in the classroom.



- Vestibular and proprioceptive input – the type of sensory information that floods the brain during active outdoor play – promotes body awareness and self-regulation, which leads to more focus and better behavior and participation.



- Kids with sensory processing or attention deficit issues truly *need* this type of play regularly throughout the day to facilitate learning.



- It's also important to remember that recess time at school might just be the only unstructured time throughout the day when kids really have the opportunity to interact with peers without direct adult intervention.
 - This helps to build communication, resilience, creativity, problem-solving, confidence, and conflict-resolution skills.



How Can Recess Help Combat the Excessive Number of Hours That Kids are Inactive During the Day?

Outdoor play helps to balance the number of sedentary hours that kids experience in our modern world and the amount of screen time they are receiving daily.



- Active play helps children build strong muscles, bones, cardiovascular systems, and endurance. Participation in at least one hour of moderate-to-strenuous exercise daily can help to combat the childhood obesity epidemic in the United States and helps kids build the underlying strength and stability they need for school and general health.

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- Outdoor time helps to reset the brain and balances excessive screen time: Screen addictions and drug addictions have been shown on imaging studies to activate the same parts of the brain and cause many of the same neural reactions. Screens can affect the brain's frontal cortex – which controls executive functioning, including impulse control – in exactly the same way that cocaine does. Technology is so hyper-arousing that it raises dopamine levels – the feel-good neurotransmitter most involved in the addiction dynamic – consistently in a way that becomes increasingly harder to chase, especially for fans of fast-paced or violent video games.
- We already noted in *Part 1* of this series that kids are getting on average a whopping 7-8 hours in front of a screen for entertainment each day. Over a year, that adds up to 114 full days of watching a screen for fun.
- Teachers should be encouraged to avoid substituting outdoor, unstructured recess time with screen time if weather is an issue. Students would benefit much more from group activities such as teacher-led yoga, indoor exercise, or free time to play non-digital games or socialize with friends. Teachers and classrooms should be equipped with options and resources for rainy-day play.

- See the *Additional Resources* section, below, for ideas about how to get kids active outside and alternative rainy-day activities.



How to Get Involved:

- It is important for parents to partner with teachers, administrators, and elected officials to protect recess and all of the amazing benefits it can provide for students.
- To learn more about how to get involved with protecting recess at your local school, contact your child's teacher or school administrators to find out how much recess time students are receiving. You can also join your local Parent Teacher Association or Organization (PTA/PTO) or attend public School Board meetings in your community to advocate for protecting or extending daily recess.

References:

- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Making-Fitness-a-Way-of-Life.aspx#:~:text=Kids%20aged%203%2D5%20need,mst%20days%20of%20the%20week>
- <https://childmind.org/article/why-kids-need-to-spend-time-in-nature/>
- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/screen-time-addiction/> and <https://nypost.com/2016/08/27/its-digital-heroin-how-screens-turn-kids-into-psychotic-junkies/>
- https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/pdf/recess_data_brief_cdc_logo_final_191106.pdf
- <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/multimedia/infographics/getmoving.html#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Kaiser%20Family,watching%20a%20screen%20for%20fun>
- https://schoolspringboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Zavacky_2017.pdf

Additional Resources:

- <https://www.gonoodle.com/> (WEBSITE FOR RAINY-DAY CLASSROOM SONGS AND ACTIVITIES)
- <https://childmind.org/article/ideas-for-getting-your-kids-into-nature/> (IDEAS FOR GETTING YOUR KIDS INTO NATURE)
- <https://www.timbernook.com/blog/> (TIMBERNOOK BLOG)
- <https://www.1000hoursoutside.com/> (1000 HOURS OUTSIDE WEBSITE)

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