



## Ode to the Outdoors!



MESSAGE FROM  
DIANE DALEY, CEO

### Greetings to you and your family, as we usher in the New Year!

We're in the midst of what seems like Ontario's longest season: winter. It's a time when most of us want to 'hunker down' under a fleece blanket with our hands wrapped around a steaming mug of something hot!

But did you know that getting our children (no matter what their age) outside—even during the coldest months of the year—is crucial for their physical health, mental well-being and development?

The evidence keeps mounting.

At Family Day, we were early adopters of the benefits of active outdoor play in our curricula. We believe in building healthier, more resilient communities by embracing active outdoor play as part of day-to-day life.

We are mindful that not all families can easily access safe outdoor spaces in their local community; cost, safety,

proximity, and time limitations are among the barriers they face. Family Day is committed to working in partnership with other leaders in the area of outdoor learning to challenge these barriers, as well as to ensure we are implementing opportunities that support barrier-free access.

Outdoor Play Canada (a national organization headquartered in Ottawa) serves to build and support the growing network of leaders and organizations working together to galvanize an outdoor play movement.

For more than a decade, Outdoor Play Canada has been publishing evidence about the benefits of active outdoor play on children's health and well-being. In the past ten years, research on this topic has increased tenfold, and funding for outdoor play projects has also increased.

No matter what the season, it's important for our children to keep moving all year round. In this issue we offer some no-cost or budget-friendly ideas for you and your family to enjoy one of Ontario's best seasons. We also offer some important safety tips and reminders that are worth reviewing.

Playing outside offers opportunities to connect, explore, and engage in healthy and enriching ways, helping to build confidence.

**Let's make the most of winter!**

—Diane Daley, CEO



# How Embracing Cold and Snow Can Benefit Children

While in winter it might seem logical to stay inside, in reality, embracing the cold and snow offers unique benefits that go beyond physical health. Engaging in outdoor play during colder months fosters creativity and encourages children to discover new interests, from building snow forts to observing squirrels and cardinals. These experiences promote a sense of adventure and help children appreciate the beauty and wonder of the season.

## Physical Health Benefits

- Regular exposure to the outdoors in winter can **help strengthen children's immune systems**, making them more resistant to common colds and flu.
- Even in winter, being outside means the body can make **Vitamin D, which is vital for bone development and overall good health.**
- Playing outside encourages physical activity that is often more restricted in colder months (helping **maintain healthy body weight and cardiovascular fitness**).

## Mental Health Advantages

- Regular outdoor activity can **help mitigate the effects of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**, a type of depression that typically occurs during winter weather.
- Physical outdoor activity (like skating) can **increase serotonin levels, which boosts mood and creates feelings of happiness and well-being.**
- Navigating the challenges of a winter landscape can teach children important **problem-solving skills and resilience.**
- Outdoor winter activities often involve teamwork, such as building a snowman or playing pickup hockey, which **promote social skill development.**

## More Advantages and Benefits

Active outdoor play helps children, youth and adults move more, play longer, and sleep better. When we play outdoors, we engage more and expend more physical energy, which means decreased couch and screen time, which leads to improved sleep.

The great outdoors unlocks a world of rich, hands-on learning experiences that spark curiosity, creativity, sharing and cooperation in children of all ages. Nature also nurtures resilience and adaptability, while supporting social, emotional, and cognitive growth.

Not only does spending too much time indoors contribute to too much couch and screen time—it can also increase exposure to indoor pollutants, allergens, bacteria and viruses.

A healthy balance between time spent indoors and outdoors would be ideal.

## Preparing for the Weather

While the benefits are plentiful, it's essential to ensure that we prepare our children well to enjoy the cold weather:

- **Dress in layers.** Several layers can keep children warm. They can also 'shed' a layer if they get too warm.
- **Wear proper gear.** WATERPROOF is the key word. Aim for waterproof boots, gloves, and a hat. All three of are essential to keep children warm and dry.
- WARM is another key word. We know that we lose most of our heat through our heads, hands and feet, **so it's important to keep your child's extremities protected from cold and wind.**
- **Stay away from cotton clothing as a base layer.** Cotton retains moisture, so when your child sweats (which they will while running, jumping and climbing), it will trap moisture, making children feel colder.



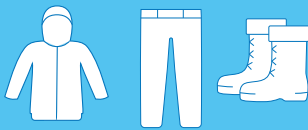
# TIPS FOR DRESSING IN WINTER MONTHS



## Cool Weather (Late fall / Early spring)



**Base Layer:** Long sleeve shirt and pant layer made of synthetic fabric (*not cotton, which absorbs sweat and can make you cold*)



**Outer Layer:** Lined, wind-resistant, waterproof jacket and snow/splash pants

Warm, waterproof boots or rain boots

## Cold Weather (Early winter / Late winter)



**Base Layer:** Long sleeve top and long johns bottom made of synthetic, wool or silk fabric (*not cotton*) and non-cotton socks (*wool is best*)

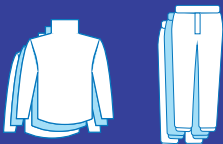


**Insulating Layer:** Sweatshirt and sweatpants, or fleece jacket/pullover and fleece pants



**Outer Layer:** water-resistant snow suit, non-cotton hat/toque, tube neck warmer and water-resistant mittens

Warm, waterproof boots



## Extreme Cold Weather (Mid-winter)

Follow the 'Cold Weather' tips but add one or two additional layers on top and bottom



FAMILY DAY



OPEN DOORS  
FAMILY DAY OUTDOOR  
LEARNING ADVENTURES



# Let's get dressed for Winter Weather!



1



Snowpants

2



Neck Warmer

3



Coat

4



Hat

5



Boots

6



Mittens



## Get Moving!

Movement releases endorphins, which improves children's moods. This can be especially important during the shorter, darker days of winter, which can lead to low energy and irritability.

Winter's wide range of activities (like skating, snowboarding and tobogganing) helps to sustain motor skills development.

Tobogganing is an invigorating activity that almost everyone enjoys. **Keeping everyone safe is a priority;** the Canadian Paediatric Society states that children under the age of five must never go down a hill alone. SickKids Hospital, affiliated with the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto, offers the following safety tips:

- Properly fitted, safety-regulated helmet must always be worn—no exceptions!
- NO long scarves or loose clothing
- STEER CLEAR of hills with trees, poles or water nearby

## Fun No/Low-Cost Winter Ideas

- **Walks in the snow...**on foot, on snowshoes or by sled!
- **Snow sweeping:** Provide your child with a broom or brush to clear off freshly fallen snow from porches, steps and sidewalks, or just have fun moving the snow around.
- **Snow Forts!** Use small buckets, plastic cups, containers and shovels.

- **Ice Bubbles:** Use regular old 'bubble juice' to see how beautiful bubbles look in the cold. Watch as the icy globes land on surfaces or see if your children can catch the bubbles before they pop.
- **Snow Angels:** Have your child lie in the snow and move their arms up and down along the snow from their heads to their legs and their legs out and back. Help them get up carefully and admire their angel creation. It never gets old!
- **Snowball Target Practice:** While your young ones stockpile lots of snowballs, set up buckets, a hula hoop or a snowman for targets.
- **Winter Obstacle Course:** Use snow tunnels, small mounds for climbing, and cones for zigzag running or crawling.
- **Snow Volcano:** With just a few simple ingredients, your young ones (aged 4 and up) can have an erupting good time! Build a small hill or mound of snow, hollow out a small hole in the top, then insert a cup. Fill the cup with 1 tablespoon of baking soda and a few drops of food colouring. Have your child pour in vinegar, then stand back to watch the "lava" flow. As the bubbling slows, add more vinegar and baking soda to get the volcano 'erupting' again.
- **Ice Sculptures:** Search your neighbourhood with your young ones for interestingly shaped leaves, berries, twigs, and nuts, then have them place their finds in containers with plain water or water with several drops of food colouring. Freeze the containers outside overnight, then have your children place them in a backyard, along a walkway or an apartment balcony to make a charming display.
- **Snow Creatures:** For little ones who might not be tall or strong enough to build a classic snowman, how about a number of large snowballs pushed together to make a snow caterpillar? Or a snow beaver or snow turtle?





- **Lace Up Those Skates:** Find a local or outdoor rink and glide together!
- **Snow Olympics:** Organize events like long jumps (comparing footprints), snowball throws for distance, or hurdle jumps over snow piles.
- **Snow Painting:** Use spray bottles filled with water and food colouring to create art on the snow.
- **Snow Kitchen/Bakery:** Use containers and scoops for pretend cooking with snow.
- **Winter Picnic:** Pack hot cocoa and snacks for a cozy outdoor treat.
- **Animal Track Hunt:** Identify prints in the snow or mud.
- **Bird Watching:** Set up a bird feeder and observe visitors.

## Winter Safety Reminders

As with any time of the year, winter comes with a need to stay safe. Here are some timely reminders:

- Many of us forget that **staying hydrated** is just as important in the throes of winter as it is in the dog days of summer!
- The Canadian Dermatology Association recommends **wearing sunscreen all year round** for adults and children alike.

- No matter how safe they may look, **stay away from frozen ponds, lakes and streams.** It's almost impossible to determine the exact thickness of the ice and if it will support an adult or a child or both.
- If the temperature with or without wind chill is **-27 degrees Celsius or lower**, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends **keeping children indoors to protect them from frostbite.**

Keeping all of this information in mind, outdoor winter play is about much more than just having fun in the snow. It offers significant benefits that contribute to a child's holistic development.

When we dress our children appropriately and observe all the safety rules and precautions, winter can be one positively delightful and educational season. It's an ideal time to bond as a family, stay active and embrace all of charms this season has to offer!

Stay warm, stay safe, and have fun!



### Sources:

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