

The Benefits of Barefoot and All-Weather Play

Nature Play SA | Thriving Learners

Dear Families,

This year, we are highlighting the benefits of barefoot play for children and encouraging them to enjoy outdoor activities in any weather. Research shows that playing outdoors in different seasons and weather offers many benefits for your child's development and wellbeing.

WHY BAREFOOT AND ALL-WEATHER PLAY?

- Walking on different surfaces such as mud, pebbles, grass, bark, rocks, and sand, provides valuable sensory stimulation for children.
- Barefoot play activates the sensory receptors in children's feet, boosting balance, coordination, and body awareness. It teaches kids to feel where their feet are, even without seeing them (proprioception).
- Going barefoot makes feet and ankles stronger, more agile, and less likely to get hurt by helping kids become more aware of themselves and their surroundings. It also helps build strong arches, flexible ankles, and better posture, which prevents foot problems.
- Playing in all kinds of weather lets kids see and feel the changes in seasons and weather, helping them learn more about nature firsthand. They get to watch and explore how weather shapes the world around them, sparking curiosity and a sense of wonder.
- Playing outdoors in different weather helps kids build strong immune systems. Their bodies get used to different temperatures and weather, making them less likely to get sick and keeping them healthier overall.



FURTHER READING

Balanced and barefoot: how unrestricted outdoor play makes for strong, confident, and capable children by Angela J. Hanscom. *Freely available to borrow via the South Australian Public Library Network.*

Will You Catch a Cold if You Get a Chill? ABC Health and Wellbeing Factbuster by Raina Macintyre. *Freely available to read via web.*

Risk in Outdoor Play and Why a Balanced Approach is Needed by Tim Gill. *Freely available to read via web.*

REFERENCES

The influence of footwear on the prevalence of flat foot. A survey of 2300 children by Rao, U. B., & Joseph, B. 1992.

Katie Bowman and the Biomechanics of Human Growth: Barefoot Babies. Breaking Muscle.com. Crawford, N. 2013.

Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development by Mariana Brussoni, 2012.

Whether the weather be cold, or whether the weather be hot... children's play preferences outdoors across a year in one private pre-school setting. Heather Elliott, 2021.

The importance of outdoor play for young children's healthy development. Gabriela Bentoa and Gisela Diasb, 2017.





WILL KIDS GET SICK PLAYING IN COLD OR WET WEATHER?

Playing in cold and wet weather doesn't make children sick. In fact, it has important benefits:

- Cold weather doesn't cause coughs and colds. Time spent outdoors in fresh air can actually help prevent the spread of illness.
- Playing outdoors in different weather helps kids build strong immune systems. Their bodies get used to different temperatures and weather, making them less likely to get sick and keeping them healthier overall.

WAYS TO SUPPORT BAREFOOT AND ALL-WEATHER PLAY:

Distinguishing Between Risks and Hazards:

Risky play helps kids learn judgment and decision-making by taking calculated risks in a safe setting. They can explore and push themselves while staying safe. Hazards are dangers that kids can't predict which should be pointed out or removed.

Play after the storm: Consider starting with all-weather play immediately after a rain storm so children can learn to navigate slippery and challenging conditions. Always avoid playing during lightning storms, hail, and heavy rain.

Dress for the weather: With the right clothing, kids can comfortably enjoy outdoor activities in any weather.

Make prints in the sand: Push your feet and hands into some sand and leave your prints for someone else to discover.

Feel the ground under your feet: Go for walk on different surfaces - pebbles, dirt, grass, sand and pavement are a good start.

Find textures in nature: Use feet and hands to find examples of smooth, rough, warm and cold textures in nature.

