

The Benefits of Sensory Play

Nature Play SA | Thriving Learners

Dear Families,

This year, we are exploring the benefits of sensory play using natural materials such as clay, sand, dirt, water (mud), twigs, plants, and flowers.

Spending time in nature forms part of a 'balanced diet' of childhood experiences, supporting healthy development, well-being, and fostering a love for the environment.

WHY SENSORY NATURE PLAY?

- Sensory play is important for children's health, development and wellbeing.
- Regular playtime in nature helps kids feel happier and healthier. It boosts their memory, attention, and learning skills. Nature play also helps children build self-confidence, make friends, and manage stress better.
- Mud play allows children to explore and create freely, building critical thinking, fine motor skills, and sensory awareness, while fostering creativity and problem-solving.
- Time in nature is linked to positive outcomes for children's physical and mental wellbeing.
- Learning in natural environments can boost creativity, critical thinking and problem solving.



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.

Magnificent Mud: An essential ingredient to childhood. Nature Play SA. Freely available to read via web.

The Magic of Maud Toolkit for Teaching and Learning. Nature Play SA. Freely available to read via web.

REFERENCES

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

Play in children's development, health, and well-being. Goldstein, J., 2012.

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

The impacts of unstructured nature play on health in early childhood development: A systematic review. Kylie A Dankiw, et al. 2020.

Does Access to Green Space Impact the Mental Well-being of Children: A Systematic Review Author: Rachel McCormick, 2017.





“In relation to children and play, mud should not be viewed as mess - but a key ingredient to childhood.”

*- Jason Tyndall,
Nature Play SA*

WHY CHILDREN NEED A CONNECTION TO NATURE MORE THAN EVER:

Children’s lives today are significantly different than they were just 1-2 generations ago. As a general rule, children today have fewer opportunities for outdoor free play or regular contact with nature. Their physical boundaries have shrunk and they experience less autonomy today than previous generations.

Schools and early learning centres have a vital role to play in providing opportunities for children to experience time in nature, healthy risk taking, rich sensory play, and unstructured free-play.

THE PERCEPTION OF MUD

When you hear the word "mud," what comes to mind?

Messy? Dirty? Inconvenient?

These might be the initial thoughts leading you to conclude that mud play isn’t worth the hassle. But let’s rewind to your childhood. Confronted with mud, what words would have come to mind then?

Fun? Exciting? Joy?

For children, maybe it is worth the hassle.

