



NURTURING NATURE

Integrating the great outdoors into children's daily routines

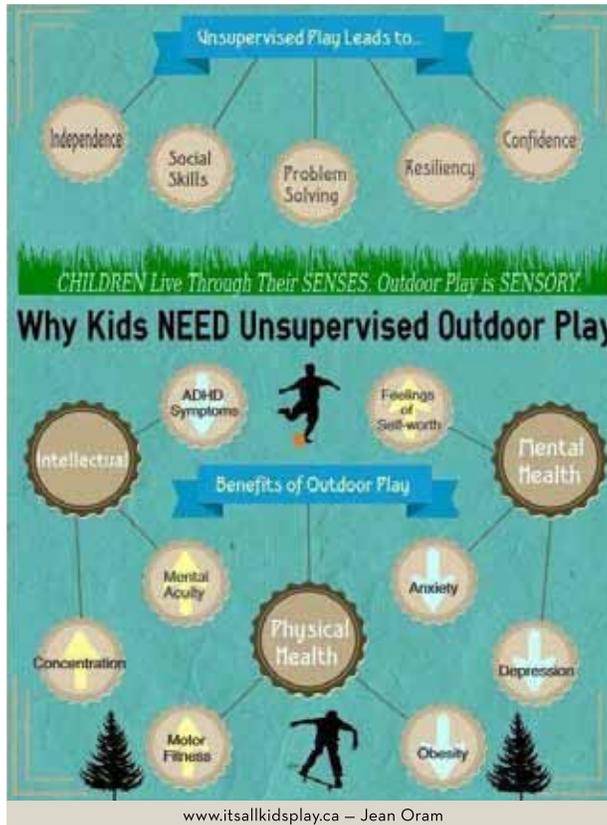
As children, most of us spent our free time climbing trees, stomping through puddles, and playing hide and seek until the streetlights blazed on. Sadly, today's kids are not following in our muddy footsteps.

As video games, tablets and after-school lessons replace sunshine, leaves and grass, our children are being deprived of outdoor play – and it is taking a toll on their health and development.

As a result of this shift, a new “nature movement” is on the rise. This campaign, which one could argue is just a back-to-basics approach, encourages us to be in touch with the natural world, and urges educators to provide children with unstructured, outdoor play on a regular basis.

To this end, approximately 50 Family Day staff put on their rubber boots on a damp day in March and headed to Lake St. George in Richmond Hill to take part in a hands-on nature seminar. The “Learning in and with Nature,” event was held to coach our Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) on the importance of outdoor play and ways to incorporate it into their programs.

“Being outside in nature is more important now than it's ever been,” says Dr. Diane Kashin, RECE, who led the workshop. “Many of us grew up in nature, and then we had kids and stopped being connected to it. If we don't reconnect and start nature training early with children, we are missing their formative years.”



“Nature activities are always going on at our centre, whether it's going on nature walks or planting tomatoes,” says Strang. “It's a natural thing and it's a learning opportunity.”

Some of the activities Strang and staff incorporate include planting, tending and then eating vegetables, and gathering natural materials like sticks and leaves for art projects.

Similarly, Lianne Terry, RECE, Supervisor at Markville Childcare Centre in Markham, says she and staff get children outside on a regular basis; they take nature walks, collect natural materials; and incorporate things like tree trunk stools into their daily play.

“It is very calming for kids, particularly those with high activity levels, to be outdoors year-round,” she says. “As soon as the weather is nice, we take our program outdoors and let the kids be outside all morning long. They feel freer and calmer.”

Nadine Ashley, RECE, sees similar reactions at Willow Way Child Care Centre in Mississauga. She says children at the centre love the freedom of walking through a nearby forest, skipping rocks in a favourite waterfall, and studying insects and plants.

“When you take kids outside, they have more conversations and they learn more,” says Ashley. “And they get great physical education and better fine motor skills.”

Kashin, who teaches at Ryerson in Early Childhood Studies and is Chair of the York Region Nature Collaborative, says the appeal of the screen, the rise of fear in some parents, and the over-programming of children's activities have all led to a lack of outdoor play.

Bringing Nature to the Forefront

The nature workshop was part of a larger initiative to expand Family Day's outdoor play offerings and take children “beyond the fence.”

Candy Strang, RECE, Child Care Centre Supervisor at Philip Pocock Child Care Centre in Mississauga, is one of several Family Day supervisors embracing this initiative.

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Getting Snug with Bugs

Of course, some kids come to our programs anxious about insects or mud, but Ashely says that fear quickly fades as it becomes normalized.

These fearful attitudes are often learned at home where parents might be risk-adverse. To combat this, Terry advocates education – including discussions about activities, and taking photos for parents of their kids happily plodding through the snow.

Even educators might not always be thrilled about going outside on a cold or wet day, but as part of their job, Kashin says they must change their mindset and be prepared.

“You can change your attitude, it’s just a habit of mind,” says Kashin. The more time you give children outdoors, the more you are supporting their healthy development.”

As for combatting the bad weather, she notes: “There is no bad weather, there is only bad clothing.”

Family Day staff strives to make sure parents send their children in weather-



Family Day staff at Lake St. George nature seminar

appropriate clothing so they can be in nature in all seasons.

A Multitude of Benefits

The paybacks of embracing nature are numerous. Kashin points to educational benefits (it helps with language and math skills); health benefits (assisting with things like childhood obesity, diabetes and myopia); and self-regulation benefits (children learn to be alert, focused and calm).

According to Kashin, children need risky (or adventurous) play out of doors – the kind of things they learn from balancing on a log or rolling down a hill.

Says Kashin: “If you don’t practice risk, you don’t know how to deal with it – and it’s a given in our lives. The greatest risk is staying indoors.”

A Heartfelt Thank You



**Message from
Joan Arruda,
CEO**

Volunteers are an important part of our organization. I would like offer a big “thank you” to the Family Day volunteers in our family support and childcare programs. Your contribution of time and knowledge help in so many ways in our numerous programs.

I would like to offer special thanks to the members of our board of directors who oversee Family Day as a registered charity. Our board members provide key strategic leadership and represent a broad community across the three regions in which we operate.

These individuals volunteer with the organization for a

range of personal reasons and bring with them a broad range of knowledge and expertise that includes: financial and business knowledge; human resources and legal proficiency; child and family sector expertise; and, on occasion, a background in government. Our board also welcomes individuals who use Family Day Care Services and can offer first-hand parent perspectives.

Thank you for your commitment to Family Day – in particular the time you have recently spent working with staff to develop new strategic directions that will take Family Day through the next five years. Your contribution is truly meaningful!

Are you ready for the summer?

Whether you enjoy land or water activities during summer, it's important to take steps to keep children safe. Here are some top tips from Safe Kids:



Firing up the Grill

- ✓ Position the grill well away from siding, deck railings etc., and a safe distance from play areas.
- ✓ Keep children away from the grill area by declaring a three-foot "kid-free zone" around the grill.
- ✓ Keep all matches and lighters away from children.



Staying Cool around Water

- ✓ Actively supervise children in and around water, giving them your undivided attention.
- ✓ Teach children to swim with an adult. Older, more experienced swimmers should still swim with a partner every time.
- ✓ Swimming aids (e.g., noodles) are fun toys, but should not be used in place of an approved life jacket.



Enjoying Nature

- ✓ Make sure your children have the appropriate clothing and gear.
- ✓ Give your children a few first aid basics such as when to use a bandage and how to spot poison ivy.
- ✓ Keep a bucket of water and a shovel near your camp fire.

Reprinted, in part, with permission from Safe Kids (www.safekids.org)

That's just how we roll!

More than 200 Family Day staff, parents and agency partners took part in our fifth annual Bowling for Family Day fundraiser on Saturday, April 23. And they helped to raise \$26,000 (and counting).

A good time was had by all at two bowling locations: Markham Bowl and Brunswick Zone Mississauga. Team participants dressed up in costumes, enjoyed funky music and disco lights – and some were

lucky enough to walk away with great door prizes.

Photos: Kevin Cabral, Janine Druery, Cathy Marchese



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An author in our midst

Dozens of people gathered on April 22 at Family Day head office to rub elbows with Family Day's own Jill Javelosa-Alvarez at a special signing of her children's book, *ABC, ABC What Do You See?*

Javelosa-Alvarez, an Early Literacy Specialist, thanked her extended network of friends at Family Day, spoke about her career with the agency, and read her book aloud to those in

attendance. She also donated one dollar per book sold to the SickKids Hospital/SickKids Foundation and Bowling for Family Day 2016.

Register online for camp

Summer is on its way, so be sure to sign your child up for Family Day's summer camp programs. To register your child for our extended-day and school-age camp programs, please visit www.familydaycare.com and click on the home page link to summer camps. Spots are available on a first-come, first-served basis, so register early!



GET READY TO TAKE OUR SURVEY

Parents, take note: our annual parent survey will be launched online in June. We encourage all of our families to participate in the survey as your feedback is important to us. (You'll even have the chance to win an iPad Mini).



FAMILY DAY

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For countless families, Family Day is the only way!