

Play outside (0-6 years)

Why outdoor play is important for your child

Outdoor play is a big part of healthy growth, learning, development and well-being for your child.

Playing outside gives your child the chance to explore the natural environment and have adventures. He can play games, test his physical limits, express himself and build his self-confidence.

When your child is outside, he probably has more space and freedom for big movements, like running, jumping, kicking and throwing. Physical activities like these are good for his health, fitness and physical development. And a bit of safe play in the sun can be good too – small amounts of sunlight exposure can help boost vitamin D levels.

Tips to help your child play outdoors

If you have a yard, outdoor play can be as easy as sending your child out the door and letting him come up with his own games. You could also try these ideas:

- Many younger children love to 'help' with everyday tasks like watering plants or hanging out clothes outside.
- Visit the park or playground. Your child will probably have more room to run around there and might meet other children.
- If you can walk to the park or take a bike or scooter, you can also teach your child about road and pedestrian safety on the way.

Wet weather does not mean you and your child have to stay inside. You could try walking with an umbrella and raincoat, watching leaves float after rain, and jumping into or over puddles.

Outdoor play for different ages

Outdoor play helps **your baby** learn about different surroundings and can make him feel more comfortable with the world around him. Here are some ideas:

- having tummy time on a blanket or towel.
- crawling on grass, under outdoor furniture or through old boxes.
- watching tree leaves and branches move and listening to birds.

Your toddler is probably keen to explore the world around him and test out his growing physical skills. Outdoor play for your toddler might include:

- throwing and chasing balls.

- walking, running or jumping around trees, over stones or cracks in the footpath, or towards favourite objects.
- blowing bubbles and chasing them as they float away.

Your **preschooler** is learning to play with other children. He also likes make-believe. You can help your child make the most of this stage with outdoor play ideas like:

- playing chasing games, hide-and-seek, or throw and catch.
- crawling through tunnels or climbing over tyres.
- going on a walk together and naming all of the different sounds you hear.

Your **school-age child** is becoming more involved in structured play, like sport, but it is still important to make time for free play outside. At this age, your child will still enjoy:

- building and creating with equipment, furniture or other things he finds outside.
- playing chasing games.
- climbing ropes.

[Staying safe while playing outside](#)

It is natural to worry that your child could hurt himself when playing outside. Sometimes your child might be worried about trying something new. This is all a normal part of outdoor play, and these worries should not keep your child from playing outside. Children who have been kept away from these outdoor experiences are more likely to get seriously hurt when they do have outdoor experiences.

Most injuries in the playground aren't very serious. It is OK for your child to push the play boundaries outside, where he has room to run faster, climb higher and jump further. It might mean some tears, a scrape or a fall, but 'risky play' helps your child learn from mistakes and bounce back.

The best way to help your child avoid bumps and bruises in playgrounds is to actively supervise your child at play. And as part of supervising your child, why not get into playing with him? This can be great fun for both of you.

These tips can help you keep your child safe in parks and playgrounds:

- Buckle your child into the swings – he's far less likely to fall out.
- Gradually introduce your child to activities on monkey bars, climbing frames, swings and slides. For example, start with equipment that's close to the ground and activities that your child is comfortable with.
- Look for a playground away from roads. This will help to stop young children from escaping on to the road. It also makes it much easier if you are looking after several children at once.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [101 things for kids to do outside](#)
- [Balanced and barefoot: how unrestricted outdoor play makes for strong, confident, and capable children](#)
- [Let's Go Outside: Outdoor Activities and Projects to Get You and Your Kids Closer to Nature](#)