

Why Have Outdoor Time in Winter?

It is the time of year when inclement weather promotes staying warm indoors, yet stepping outdoors is a simple way to set foot into Mother Nature's curriculum. Even in the winter, children need to play outside as much as possible. In addition to providing a means for children to burn extra energy, outdoor play is very important for healthy development. It provides caregivers an opportunity to help children enhance gross and fine motor skills while expanding language concepts. Simple outdoor activities such as



climbing, jumping, and running enhance large muscle groups. Small movements such as digging in the snow aid with fine motor skills. Taking a walk with a caregiver can build science skills such as making observations and predictions. Being outdoors provides children a sense of adventure. The fresh air is healthier for children than staying in closed quarters where germs can easily spread.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity for toddlers twelve months to five years of age, at least three days a week. In the cold weather months, keeping children

active helps the body stay warmer than standing still. It is important to be prepared with proper clothing — winter coat, snow pants, hats, scarves, mittens, boots, and a change of clothes in case anything gets wet while the children play outside. Programs might be prepared with extra articles of winter clothing and should notify parents that children will be playing outside so parents know to provide appropriate clothing. The Department of Health and Senior Services provides a Missouri State Guideline for appropriate temperatures and timespans related to outdoor play at <http://health.mo.gov/safety/>.

Outdoor Winter Activities

Winter outdoor play is an unending source of fun for children. Here are some outdoor winter play ideas.

Snow Pile Olympics

Long Jump — Draw a starting line in the snow. Children stand at the line and jump as far as they can. Mark where they land in the snow.

Snowball Throw — Children stand at a starting line to see how far they can throw snow balls.

Snow Pile Hurdles — Children can help make piles of snow. They then run through the area jumping over the piles as they come to them.

Snow Obstacle Course — Use the piles of snow from the hurdle course. Set up a course where they jump over one, hop around the next, etc.

Ice blocks

You will need milk containers and plastic containers (from margarine, cottage cheese, yogurt, etc.).

Children can help fill the containers with water and set them outside to freeze. When they are frozen solid, peel away the cartons or dip plastic containers in a bucket of warm water to free the ice block. While wearing mittens or gloves to protect from the cold ice, children can stack and build with the ice blocks.

Let's find it walk

With the children's help, make a list of five things to look for on a walk. The list can be things like a red door, a mailbox, a dog house, etc. or you can base your list on a theme, such as signs of winter. Look for the things on your list as you take the children on a walk. The first person to find all five things gets to make up a new list of five things to find.

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Contact us if you have questions, would like a referral for child care, would like to update your program information, are seeking staff training, or want to get the latest information on quality child care at 573-445-KIDS (5437).

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Snowball target throw

Targets can be as simple as making a circle in the snow where children can aim their snowballs. A hula hoop, or large container such as a laundry basket, can be used as a target. Or, small plastic containers can be put at different distances from the throw line, pushed into the snow, or mounted at angles in snow banks for children to aim at.

Snow maze

Create a snow path pattern for the children to follow. The maze may be simple with straight lines, or it can have lots of twists and turns. Children can walk or run through the maze to see if they can find the quickest way from start to finish. They can pretend they are cars going down the road, or play stop and start games at intersections.

Snow pies You'll need sandbox toys, aluminum pie pans or some sort of flat round container, natural materials.

Children can use sand toys to create their own snow pies. Each child needs a clean aluminum pie pan flat round container to be the "pie plate." They'll love making their own pies with pebble or dirt toppings, layer cakes with leaves, etc. Bird seed or stale bread crumbs can top some pies that can be left for birds to enjoy.



No Snow? A cold weather hike or a cook out with families including hot chocolate will create everlasting memories for children. You can find more outdoor activity ideas at Show Me Child Care Resources or sites such as Pinterest (<https://www.pinterest.com/debchitwood/kids-winter-activities/>).

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Physical Activity. "How much physical activity do children need?" <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/children.html>

Pennsylvania Keys to Quality. "Position Statement." <http://www.pakeys.org>

Child Care Aware® of Central Missouri will be offering the following trainings. For more information or questions, please call Jonni McCaslin, Training Coordinator at 1-800-200-9017 extension 615 or via email at HYPERLINK "mailto:jonni@mo.childcareaware.org" jonni@mo.childcareaware.org

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