

# Unstructured

# PLAY

## Perceptions



Structured activities, like organized sports, are more important for my child's development



My child is more likely to get injured during unstructured play than during organized sports



It's safer for my child to stay indoors



My child is more likely to be kidnapped if they're left to play alone



Outdoor street play is too dangerous for my child



Withholding recess as a punitive measure is a beneficial discipline when my child misbehaves



There should not be time allowed for unstructured activities at school



Children with behavioural problems should not play with other children



I am a better parent if I am more involved



Banning activities like cartwheels or snowballs on school grounds will help protect my child

## Facts

Too many structured activities can increase children's anxiety and stress. Several hours a week of **structured and unstructured** activities provide optimal **health benefits**. **Outdoor time** can maximize these benefits.

**Serious injuries are rare.** Children are actually more likely to get injured during organized sports than during outdoor play.

When children stay inside they can be exposed to sedentary screen time and **deprived of the benefits** that outdoor, unstructured play has for **healthy emotional, mental, social, and physical development**.

Kidnapping in Canada is **very rare**; the odds of are about **1 in 14 million**. In 2014, there were 41,342 missing child reports of which only 29 involved true stranger abduction.

A child is **more likely to be fatally injured as passenger in a motor vehicle** than from playing on the street.

Unstructured play at recess can provide opportunity to develop **emotional intelligence, empathy, self-awareness and team work skills**. It can also promote **better behaviour** in class. Thus, withholding recess may be counterproductive.

Outdoor, unstructured play at recess can have a positive effect on **grades, standardized test scores and cognitive skills development**.

Unstructured play can support **social and emotional learning**, such as the ability to **control aggression and regulate feelings** of anger and frustration.

Over-involved parenting can reduce play and physical activity levels. It can be perceived as a **loss of trust**, which can lead to **poor self-confidence** and **psychological problems**.

Limiting unstructured play prevents the chance to develop **resiliency and risk-management skills** for adulthood, like **emotional reactions, physical capabilities, coping skills, and the capacity to manage adversity**.



**Unstructured play** is child-led and allows children to follow their own interests and ideas without a defined purpose or outcome. It allows the child to explore boundaries and determine their own limits. Play is an integral part of every child's healthy development. It is embedded in **Article 31 of UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of a Child: children and youth need time, appropriate space and opportunity to engage in quality play**. Most evidence to date indicates that unstructured play provides important health and developmental benefits to children, supporting the need to increase access to this kind of play. Further research is needed to confirm these findings. This project is funded with the generous support of the **Lawson Foundation**.



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