

5 Key Findings on Unstructured Play & Mental Health



1



Promotes positive feelings

When children engage in unstructured play, they report feeling **joy, thrill** and **competence**. When they don't, they report feeling bored, sad and angry.

2



Builds resilience

When children experience the uncertainty of challenging or risky play, they can develop **emotional reactions, physical capabilities** and **copng skills** that expand their capacity to **manage adversity**. These skills are important for **resilience** and good **mental health** in childhood and into adolescence.

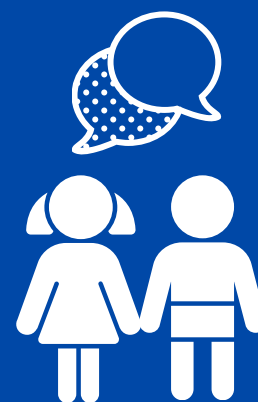
3



Improves concentration

Unstructured play is associated with improved **attention span**, especially in children who have trouble focusing for long periods of time.

4



Helps develop & maintain healthy relationships

Evidence indicates that unstructured play can provide the opportunity to improve **social competence**. This means that children can improve their **problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence**, and ability to **empathize**. Children can become more **self-aware** and are better able to **compromise and cooperate**.

5



Improves undesirable behaviours

Studies with schools report fewer problems with undesirable behaviours like **bullying** when unstructured play is increased. When children lead their own play, they can engage in **social and emotional learning**, such as the ability to **control aggression** and **regulate feelings** of anger and frustration.

In Canada, between 1996 and 2010, the use of health services for youth mental illness increased by 43.8% among ten to fourteen year olds and 34.5% among five to nine year olds. **Evidence shows that play enables factors that support good mental health and is important to children's overall wellbeing.** Further research is needed to confirm these findings. This project is funded with the generous support of the **Lawson Foundation**.



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