

Outdoor Play Canada: Promoting, Protecting, and Preserving Access to Play in Nature and the Outdoors

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Outdoor Play Canada – Mission & Vision

Our Mission: Outdoor Play Canada (OPC) is a network of advocates, practitioners, researchers, and organizations working together to **promote, protect, and preserve access to play in nature and the outdoors for all people living in Canada**.

Our vision: *Outdoor play is a valued part of daily life for all people living in Canada*

OPC provides leadership to galvanize the outdoor play movement across Canada to promote the health and wellness of Canadians and the environments in which we live.

Outdoor Play Canada – A Brief History

In 2015, we asked:

- Have we, as a society, lost the appropriate balance between keeping children healthy and active and protecting them from serious harm?
- If we make too many rules about what they can and can't do, will we hinder their natural ability to develop and learn?
- If we make injury prevention the ultimate goal of outdoor play spaces, will they be any fun?
- Are children safer sitting on the couch instead of playing actively outside?

The Benefits of Outdoor Play

Children

move more,

sit less,

and **play longer.**



Kids learn to balance **risky play** and their own **safety.**



Active lifestyle associated with improved **blood pressure, cardiorespiration, and musculoskeletal fitness.**

Increased **resilience, self-regulation,**

and skills for dealing with **stress.**



Position



“Access to active play in nature and outdoors – with its risks – is essential for healthy child development. We recommend increasing children’s opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings – at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.”

- *Informed by 2 systematic reviews*
- *Interpreted by Canadian experts from 14 organizations and reviewed by >1,600 stakeholders.*
- *Research-grade report: www.mdpi.com/journal/ijerph.*
- *Public facing document: https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/portfolio_page/the-2015-position-statement-on-active-outdoor-play/*



Impact of the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play

Legal Precedent

District of Saanich ruled not negligent in a case of a child getting hurt during a game of grounders, citing the Position Statement as social fact evidence

Municipal Policy

Peterborough & Region Public Health Policy Position: Outdoor gathering spaces must support healthy free play.

School Culture Shift

A principal in the Renfrew County Catholic Board of Education prioritized outdoor play and student engagement in her school

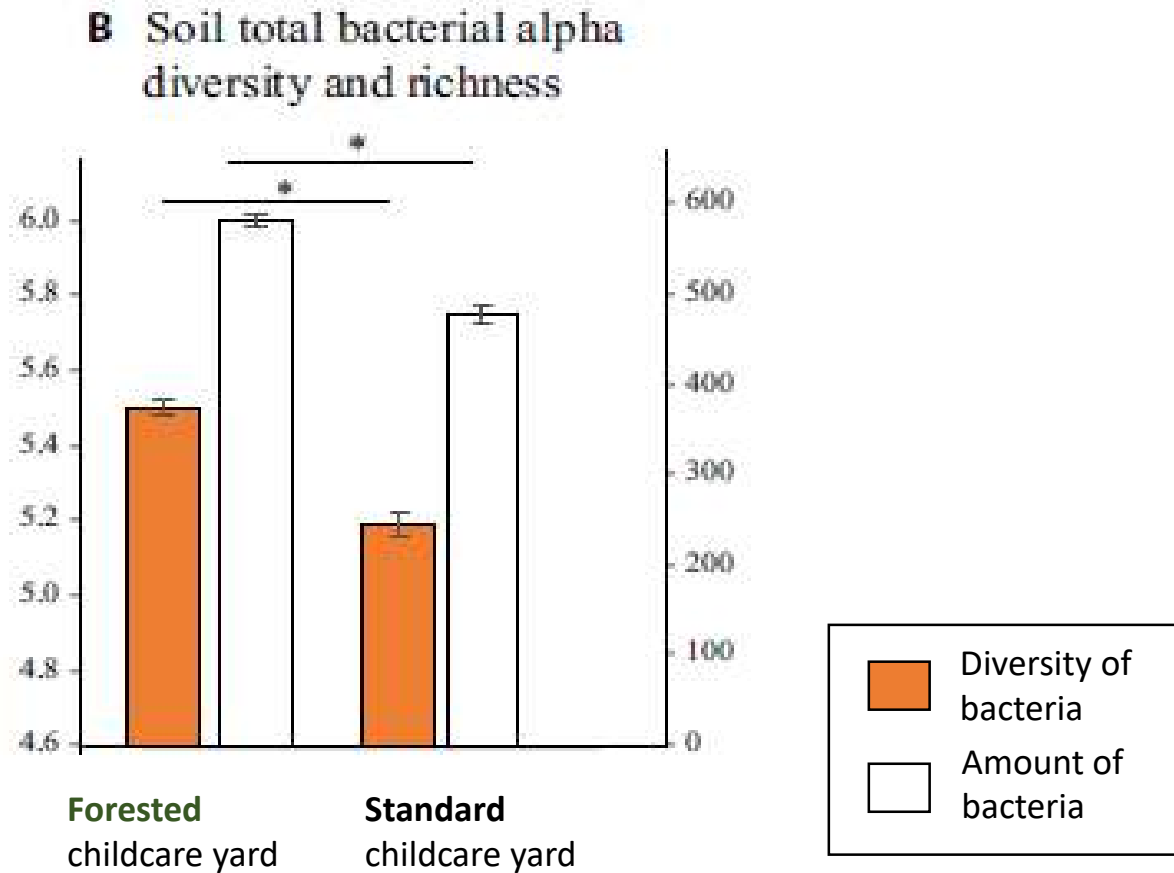
Mental Health Resource: ementalhealth.ca

“Nature and Why It’s Essential For Kids’ Brains: Information for Parents and Caregivers”: An overview of the importance of outdoor play, nature, and unstructured time

Charitable Sector Strategic Direction Shift

The Lawson Foundation invested \$4.5 million in 18 projects between 2013-2018 that support Canadian communities to increase children’s opportunities for outdoor play.

Question: Can spending time in natural environments improve children's immune system?



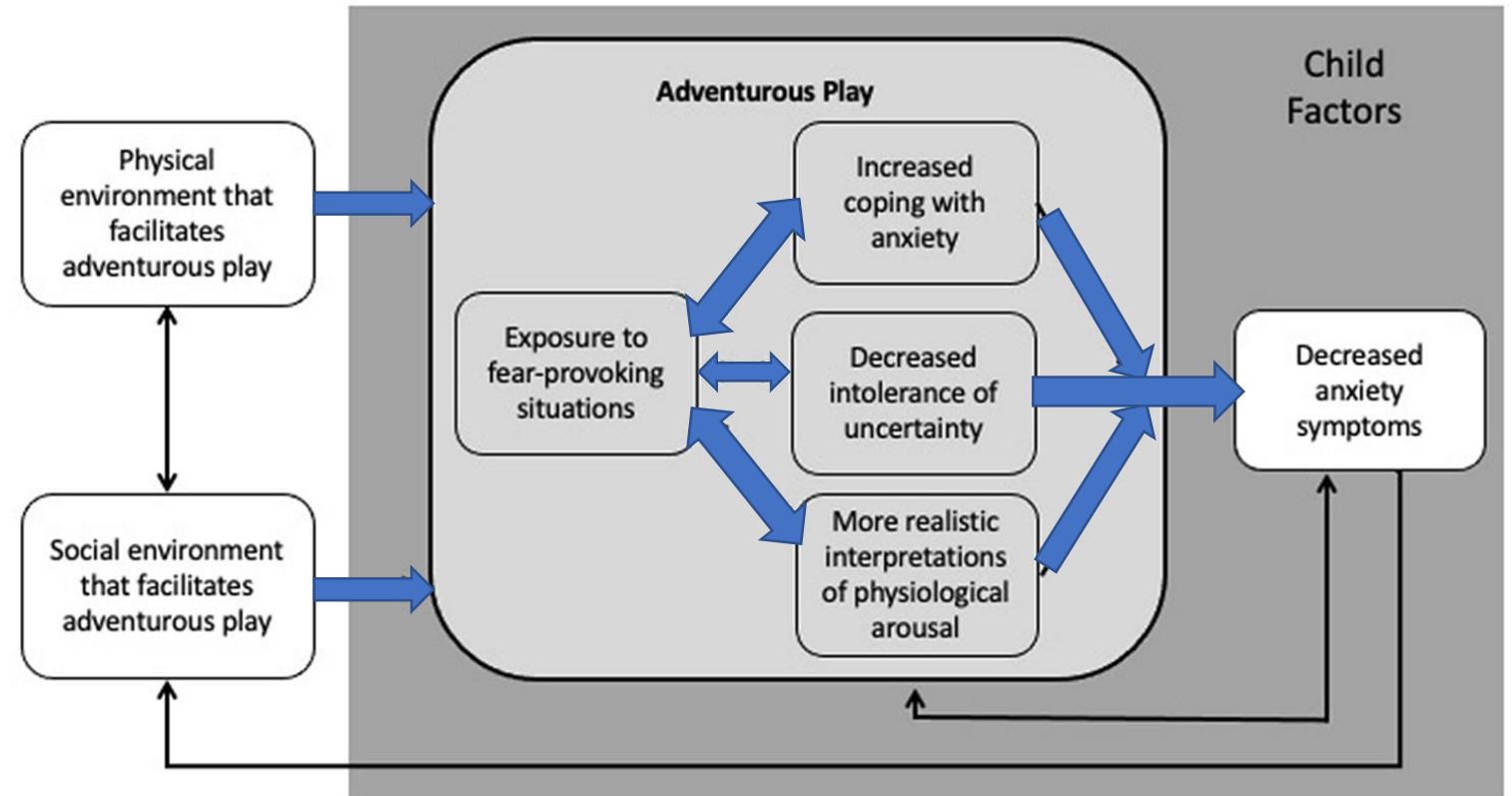
After only one month, the forest-based yard improved the immune system of day-care children.

<https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/6/42/eaba2578/tab-pdf>

Exposure to natural biodiversity & the immune system of day-care children

Adventurous Play as an Antidote to Anxiety

Question: What is the relationship between adventurous, risky play and childhood anxiety?

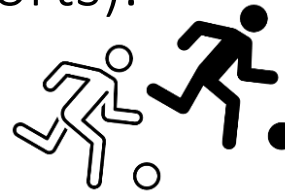


In order for children to learn to tolerate uncertainty, they need the opportunity to feel uncertain.

Question: What type of childhood experiences help form and maintain a connection to nature?



- **Strongest predictor:** Spending time alone in nature is the strongest predictor of connection to nature.
- Secondary predictors: socializing with others (playing with friends, camping, playing sports).



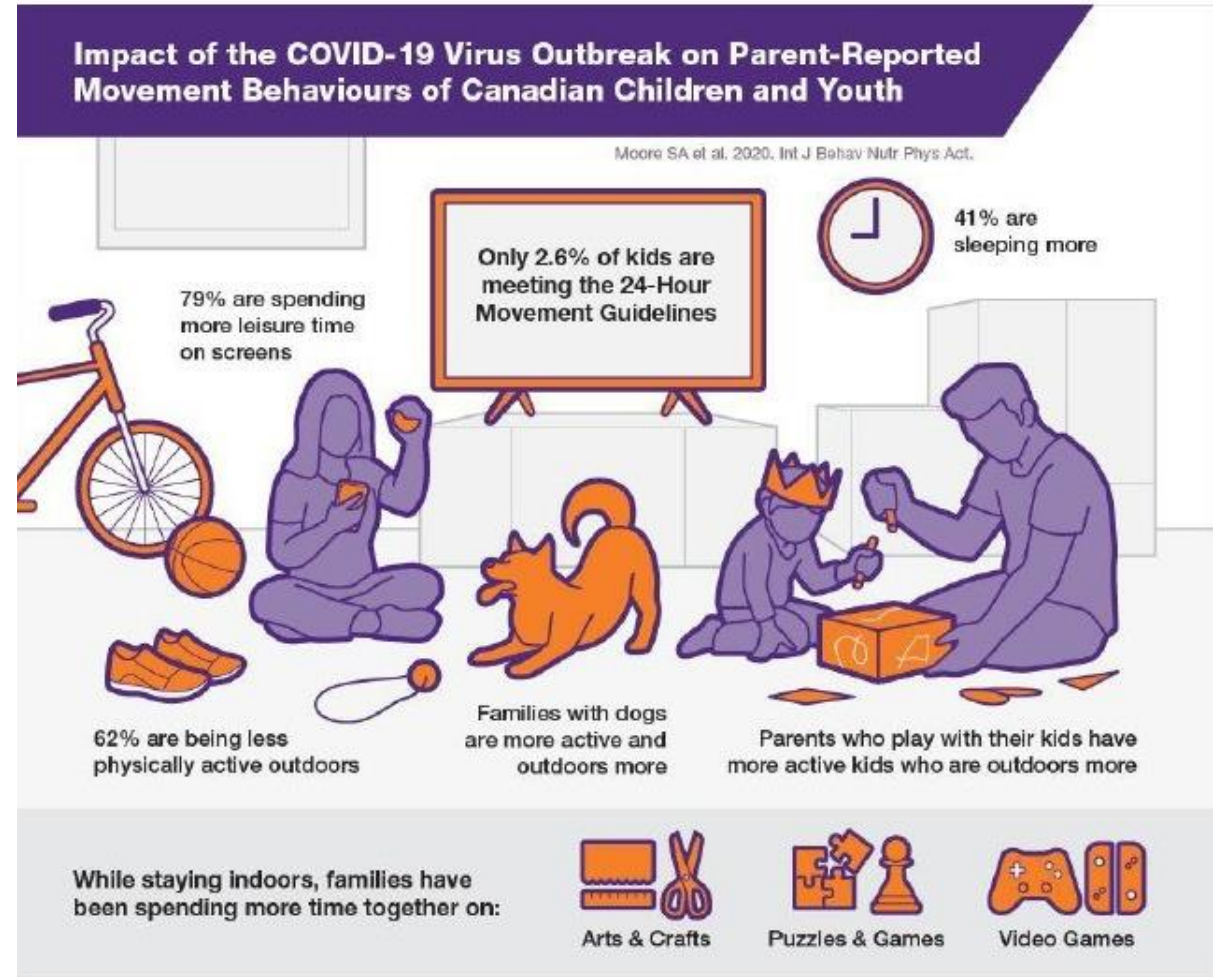
Give children time to explore on their own with little interruption to raise the next generation of environmental stewards.

Does your
child's
outdoor
time
promote
connection
to nature?



National survey on change in movement behaviours of children and youth during COVID-19

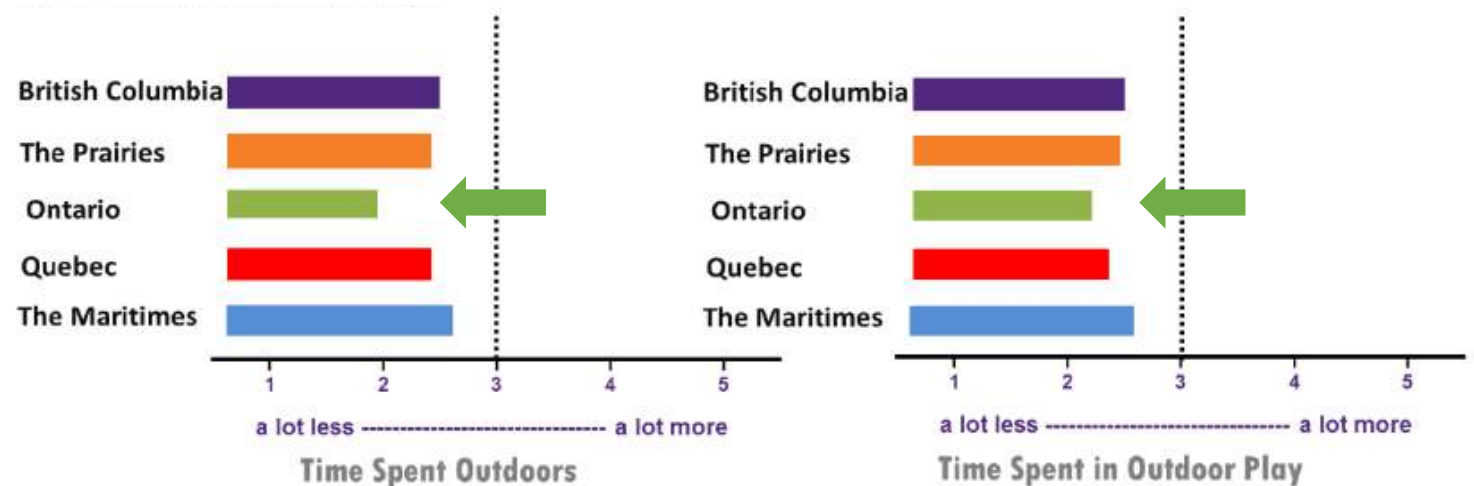
In April 2020, **less than 3% of Canadian 5-17-year-olds were meeting the minimum recommendations in the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines** for physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and sleep – in contrast to 15% before the pandemic.



Regional Differences in Time Spent Outdoors and in Outdoor Play

All regions of Canada exhibited a decrease in time spent outdoors and in outdoor play.

Regional Differences in Time Spent Outdoors and in Outdoor Play



Ontario experienced the **greatest decline** in both time spent outdoors and in outdoor play.

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'Go Outside and Play with Your Family!'
- Dr. Bonnie Henry

Status of Parks & Trails in
65 Cities across Canada on April 30, 2020

- All parks and trails are closed [8]
- Some parks and trails are closed [3]
- Parks and trails are open, but entrances or parking lots are closed [6]
- Parks and trails are open [42]
- Unknown [6]



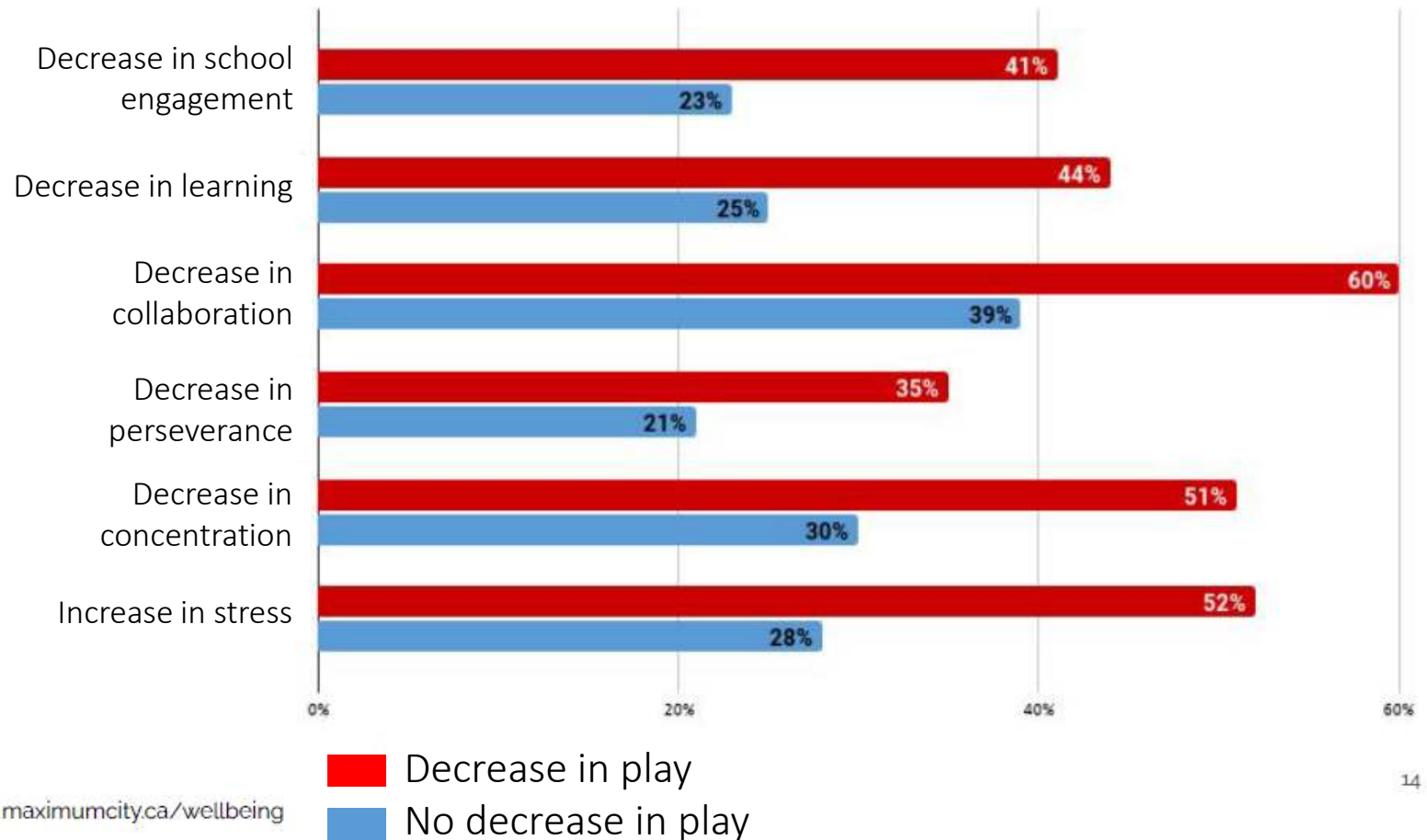
Source: Canadian Urban Institute, *CityWatch Canada*, <https://citywatchcanada.ca>



COVID-19 Child and Youth Study: the role of play and outdoor space

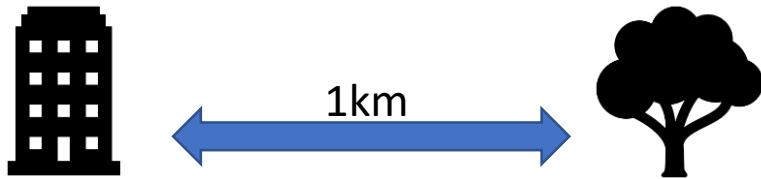
Question: In what ways is play important for Canadian children/youth during COVID-19?

Difference in school experience among children/youth who reported a decrease vs no decrease in play during fall 2020



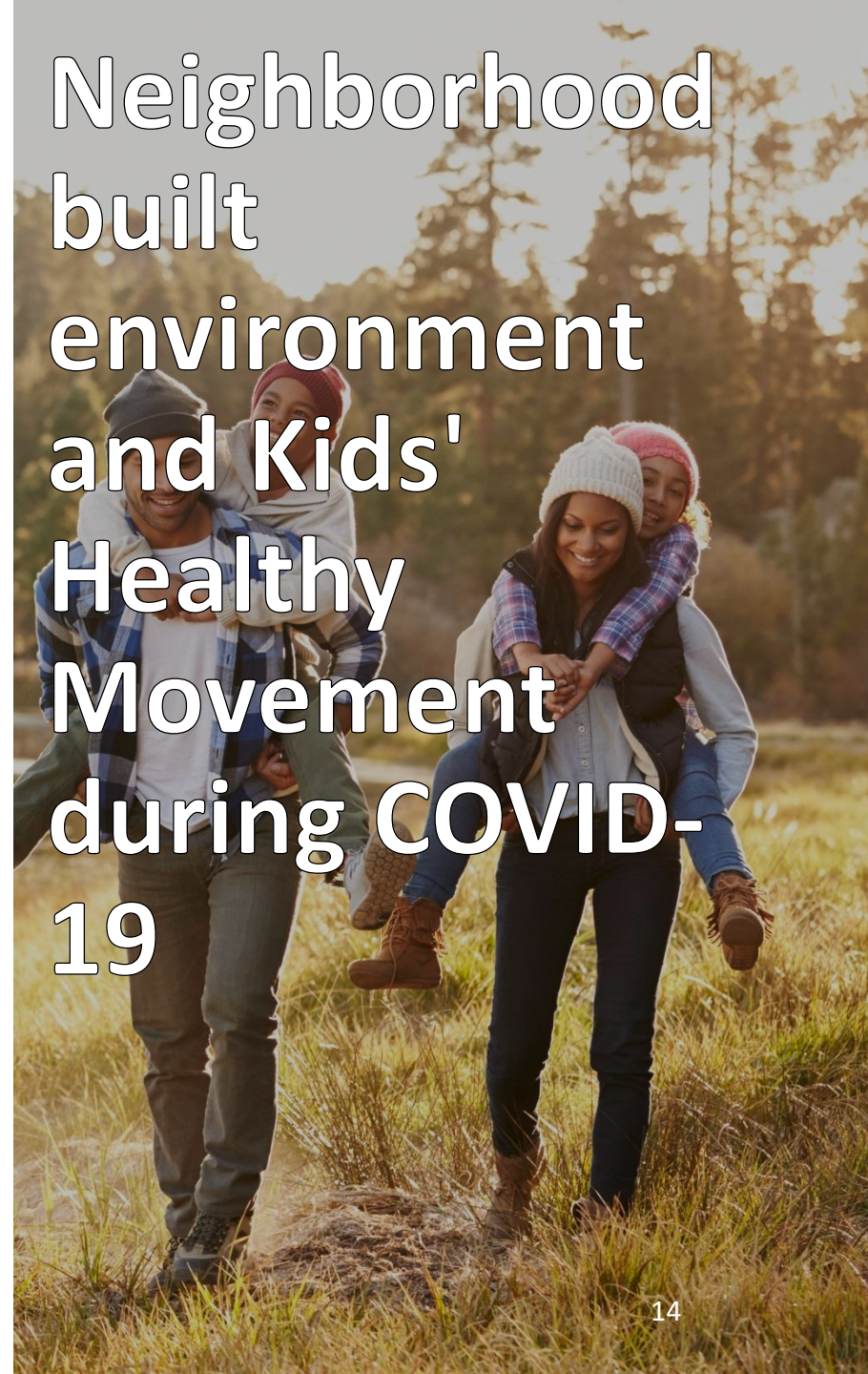
Question: How do we support children and youth in getting outside to play during *and after* COVID-19?

- Children and youth living in houses were more likely to spend time outdoors, compared to those living in apartments.
- Children and youth living in apartments **within 1km** of parks were more likely to spend time outdoors.



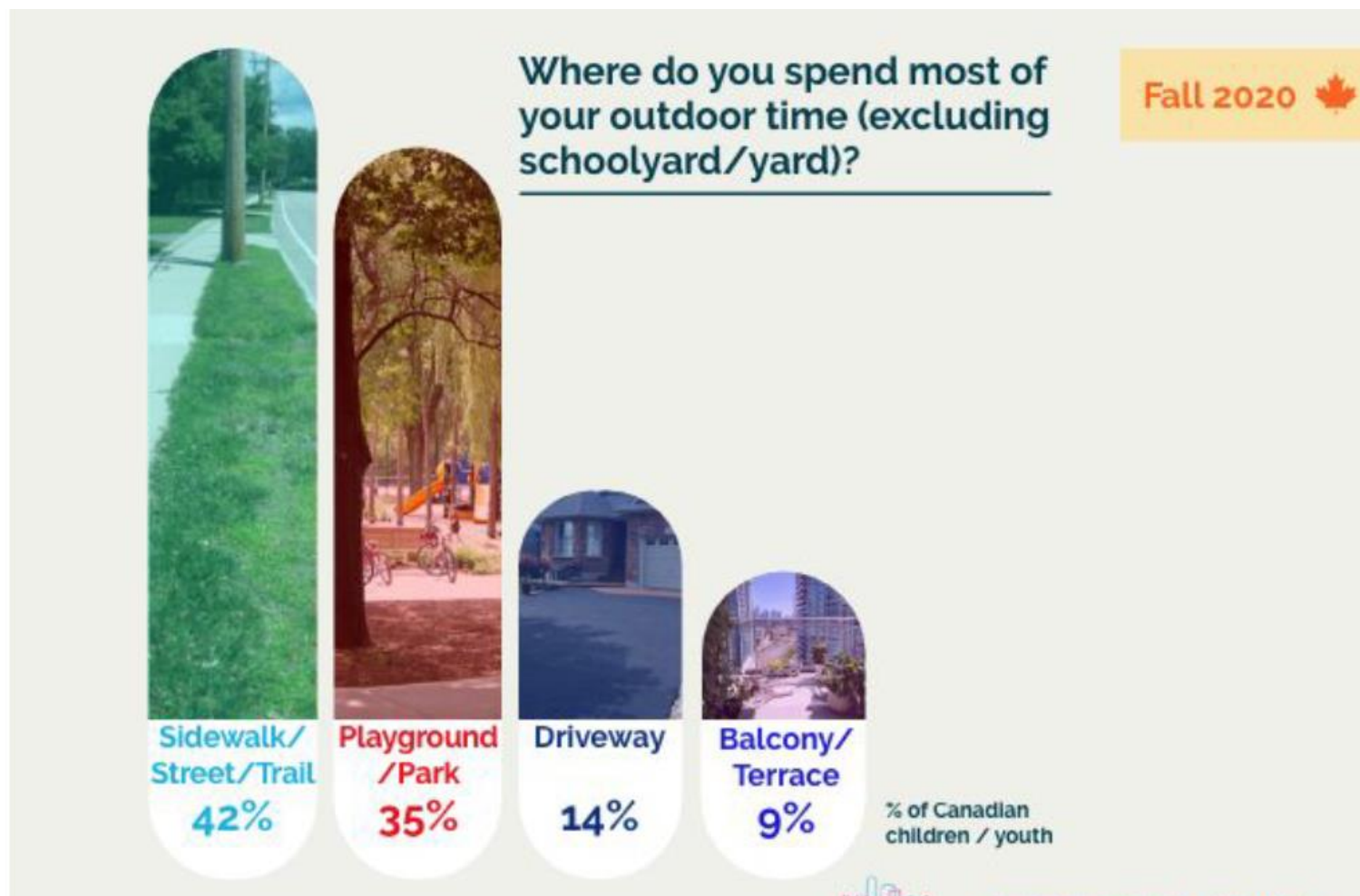
While urban density is a potential factor contributing to local vulnerability during a pandemic, this can be offset by access to outdoor space.

Neighborhood
built
environment
and Kids'
Healthy
Movement
during COVID-
19



COVID-19 Child and Youth Study: the role of play and outdoor space

Question: How do we support children and youth in getting outside to play during *and after* COVID-19?



Reframe what is considered a quality outdoor play environment.

Silver Linings – The Outdoors at the Forefront of COVID-19 Recovery

4/30/2021

TOP 5

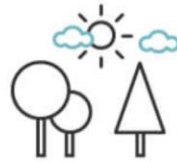
ways Canadians are coping
through the pandemic

sonnet
INSURANCE

PARTICIPACTION

1

Getting
Outdoors



2

Talking
with Family
or Friends
(IRL or online)



3

Eating Well



4

Reading



5

Surfing the
Internet



TOP 3

things Canadians are
placing more importance
on as a result of the pandemic

sonnet
INSURANCE

PARTICIPACTION

1

Mental Health



2

Relationship with
their children



3

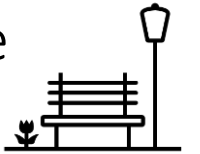
Being Active
Outdoors



On the horizon: Outdoor Play in Canada: A State of the Sector Report

OPC Project: A five-year review of where the outdoor play sector has been, where we are now, where we need to go over the next five years.

- Priorities and actions for the outdoor play sector:
 - Leverage reengagement opportunities with the outdoors during and after COVID-19
 - Promote, protect, and preserve outdoor play environments
 - Expand and enable cross-sectoral connections/collaborations



We want to hear from you! We'll be sending out a stakeholder survey soon; please fill-it out and let us know what you think we need for the outdoor sector to thrive and succeed!

On the horizon – Canadian Centre for Outdoor Play!



Construction of a new, multi-purpose iconic building on National Capital Commission (NCC) property is about to begin!

This building is envisioned to be the home of the Canadian Centre for Outdoor Play (CCOP), a centre of excellence in outdoor play and early childhood education.

This collaborative space aims to:

- Launch demonstration projects
- Inform policy and practice
- Provide professional development opportunities
- Conduct applied research
- Lead nationwide knowledge translation and mobilization efforts related to outdoor play.





Join us!

Join the movement, become a member!

Benefits include:

- Discounts to outdoor play-related conferences and meetings
- Professional identity, cohesion, and engagement
 - Membership certificate
 - Networking opportunities
- Professional development opportunities
 - Reduced registration fees for conferences, training
 - Opportunities to deliver OPC sponsored workshops and webinars
- Stay informed
 - Communication of important events, training
 - Notice of the latest research and ideas in outdoor play
- Recognition opportunities
 - Privilege of nominating candidates for OPC awards
 - Invitation for one representative to attend OPC annual general meeting

<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/#join-us>



Thank you!

LAWSON
FOUNDATION

