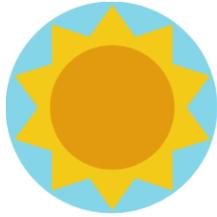




DIRECTOR'S CORNER

>>> SPRING 2019

An effective family engagement system builds connections between home and school and is an essential component to meeting the needs of each child in your program.



TIP#1 PREPARING FOR SPRING

With warmer weather approaching take a look at your "Outdoor Play Policy" and share with families. Policy statements can help child care providers and families understand why outdoor play is so important for children's health, development, and mental state.

Policies describing outdoor physical activity can encourage outdoor play in most weather conditions. This can help families understand the need to make sure their children are dressed appropriately for the weather each day. With this remind parents to bring in weather appropriate

change of clothes as we move from sweaters/coats to light jackets. When new staff start working at the child care program, written policies will help them learn about responsibilities and expectations at the program regarding outdoor play.

All child care programs should have written policies that include the benefits of outdoor play and ways for children to participate in fun active play and connect to nature. When writing or revising policies, include these areas.

<https://www.familyengagementcollaborative.com/outdoor-policy.html>



TIP#2 OUTDOOR/PLAYGROUND INSPECTIONS

Depending on your "Outdoor Play Policy" and the weather it may have been a while since you have been on the playground. So it is a good idea to begin thinking about inspecting your playground equipment to ensure the safety of the children who will play on it. Look for visual signs of wear and tear, structural damage, vandalism or broken glass/other debris that could be dangerous. To prevent children from tripping while at play, correct or remove any hazards, such as exposed concrete

footings, tree stumps and rocks. Check mulch to either add or turn in "fall areas." Warm weather brings snowmelt and a lot of rain. Repair any areas that have inadequate drainage or low spots that would allow standing water. Additionally, adequate playground supervision is another item to reflect on. Prepare your playground for the year by completing proper inspections and maintenance, as well as training your staff.



TIP#3 GARDENING

Gardening is a healthy, fun activity for children and allows them to engage in their natural curiosity and wonder. So start planning your center's garden either indoor or out. If you don't have room for an entire theme garden, take the ideas and miniaturize them for a container or pot. This will be even better if children recycle their own toys or shoes as planters! More info: [https://](https://kidsgardening.org/)

kidsgardening.org/

Gardening provides different forms of engagement for children, including designing, planting, and maintaining gardens; harvesting, preparing, and sharing food; working cooperatively in groups; learning about science, math and nutrition; and creating art and stories inspired by gardens. Center gardens create positive environments that connect with young children's senses, allowing them to plant, grow, harvest, and ultimately prepare healthy eating experiences. Children develop healthy eating habits and preferences at an early age. The more engaged children become with hands-on food education, such as gardening and food preparation, the more likely they will prefer and routinely consume fruits and vegetables later in life. See some gardening ideas below:

- Engage families by hosting a luncheon using the vegetables that were grown in the Center's garden. The children can help cook a simple vegetable soup to share with their families. When children participate in growing their own food, they are more motivated to taste, eat, and enjoy the produce resulting from their efforts. Gardening also helps children build an understanding of and respect for nature and our environment.
- Grow flowers and vegetables and hold a Farmers Market allowing the children to provide a low-income community with the opportunity to purchase (or donate) fresh produce and locally grown goods. This teaches children compassion towards the Earth, people, and animals while giving back to the community.
- Make it a [Sensory Garden!](#) An objective in sensory garden design is to encourage users to interact with the plants, often directly, for instance by breaking off leaves to smell or taste. So all plants must be non-toxic, hardy and sturdy enough to withstand handling. Another reminder is make gardening FUN and that all involved think it is PLAY! Try sharing this idea with families too. Live in a city? See [Urban Versatile Balconies and Decks.](#)



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>>> SPRING 2019



TIP#4 GREEN OR LIVING SCHOOL YARDS

What is a Green Schoolyard? We embrace the [Children & Nature Network's](#) definition of green schoolyards as multi-functional school grounds designed for and by the school community that offer places for students, teachers, parents, and community members to play, learn, explore, and grow. Since students spend most of their weekday hours in school, greening schoolyards is a vital and logical step to support children's overall health and well-being. According to studies featured in [NatureGrounds](#) and [Pathways for Play](#), students in outdoor environments:

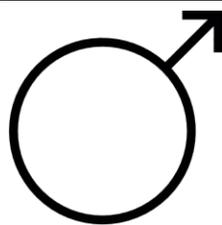
- Demonstrate increased physical activity, focus and cognitive function
- Engage in more creative and self-directed forms of play
- Show reduced symptoms of attention deficit disorders and stress
- Benefit from improved social relations and self discipline
- Have positive opportunities to engage with family and community members

This body of validated research makes green schoolyards an important component in the overall health and success of children, families, schools, and communities. A Green Schoolyard can include:

- Outdoor classrooms
- Native and pollinator gardens
- Stormwater capture
- Traditional play equipment
- Nature play areas
- Edible gardens
- Trails
- Trees and landscape enhancement

Don't have the budget to redo your current playground? Here are some cost effective ideas to participate in this movement and enhance your current schoolyard.

- Bring the classroom outside. [Learn more.](#)
- Download this [Living Schoolyard Activity Guide](#) for ideas on the Green Schoolyard Movement and tons of ideas on how to incorporate learning outside.
- [Green Mansions: Living Willow Structures Enhance Children's Play Environments](#) and/or [download](#) Ideas For Sustainable Nature Play
- Plant trees and gardens. Ask for donations or use classroom fundraisers to buy plants/materials and ask families to come in and volunteer to plant them.
- Use a rain barrel to collect water or is also called rain harvesting. It can be used as an alternative to tap water when it's time to water gardens.
- A [rain garden](#) be beautiful as well as functional. Rain gardens are versatile features that can be installed in almost any unpaved space. They are shallow, vegetated basins that collect and absorb runoff from rooftops, sidewalks, and streets. This practice mimics natural hydrology by infiltrating, and evaporating and transpiring or "evapo-transpiring" storm water runoff.
- Use [natural elements](#) to incorporate into your existing space. Logs and wood slices as stools and pathways. Rock gardens, [sensory paths](#), living walls, mud Kitchens, sensory tables, forts/tents/dens, loose parts, magnifying glasses and outdoor chalk boards.
- Additional Reading: [At Home with Nature: Creating Nature Explore Playscapes for Families](#) and [Nature-Based Learning for Young Children: Anytime, Anywhere, on Any Budget](#)



TIP#5 OH BOY!

The book [Oh Boy! Strategies for Teaching Boys in Early Childhood](#) dedicates a chapter to outdoor play and how it relates to young boys. The book suggests that many of the struggles young boys have in our early childhood programs and schools are not simply a result of bad behavior. Rather, boys struggle because of a much more fundamental problem: a mismatch between how most young boys develop, grow, and learn, and the kinds of expectations, outcomes, activities, and discipline approaches used in programs during the early years. This chapter describes the importance of play for the development of young children and why young boys need lots of play. [Click here](#) to download the chapter and share with your staff.



A resource from your friends at the Family Engagement Collaborative

<http://www.familyengagementcollaborative.com/>