

SUPPORTING BETTER OUTDOOR PLAY AT SCHOOL

Earth Day Canada has partnered with the Toronto District School Board to introduce Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) strategies in schools across Toronto.

The OPAL program will bring together school administrators, teachers, lunch supervisors, parents and support staff to develop school play policies and help enrich outdoor play during recess, lunch hours and after school.



The benefits of outdoor play for your child

Self-directed play is a necessary and important part of every child's life.

- Research shows that self-directed play supports the development of the whole child – cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills -- and contributes to school success.
- Your child will spend 8 years in school from Kindergarten to Grade 6. While most of that time is dedicated to curriculum, 1.4 years of that school time is spent outdoors during recess and lunch. This is valuable time for hands-on learning and enriched exploration.
- When we improve play at school, both children and schools benefit. Children who play are ready to learn; they experience fewer behaviour problems and have a more positive attitude toward school. Schools that plan for great play spend less time dealing with unnecessary problems and experience fewer playground incidents.



Why Is Play Important For Me?

1. Play is what I do when I follow my own ideas and interests, in my own way, and for my own creative reasons.
2. When I play, I am learning to negotiate, take risks, make decisions and solve my own problems. I am becoming resilient.
3. Play is essential for me; it's how I explore and discover myself and the world around me.
4. I need you to support my play, NOT direct it. Follow my lead and, when I ask, help me.
5. I am the expert of my own play; you may not understand it, but it is what I need to do to discover and learn about myself.
6. I don't have the same freedom to roam outside and play in the ways you did; I need permission, space and time to be myself and play as I want.
7. My play equipment consists of simple, everyday materials. I don't need fancy toys or electronics. I learn best by doing.
8. When I play, I may get scratches and bruises, and that's ok. I am testing my body and learning new skills.
9. I can get messy when I play – digging in sand, stepping in mud, splashing water. This is how I connect with nature and my environment.