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Play and the Outdoors: What's New Under the Sun?



What's In This Kit?

This training kit is designed to help teachers understand the importance of outdoor play and how to develop curriculum for outdoor experiences that are connected to classroom curriculum plans. It contains:

- Expected educational outcomes
- Preparation instructions
- Training strategies and tips
- Implementation steps
- Follow-up activities for teachers
- Follow-up activities for administrators/directors
- A learning assessment
- A training evaluation/further needs assessment
- A resource list
- The article "Play and the outdoors: What's new under the sun?" by Susan J. Oliver and Edgar Klugman.
- A training certificate to award to teachers for attendance and participation
- A certificate for the trainer and other presenters



Who's the Target Audience?

The target audiences are beginning and intermediate teachers working with children from birth to age 8. This kit will introduce teachers to developing outdoor curriculum that extends classroom curriculum experiences.

Teacher Skill Level

<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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beginning

intermediate

advanced

Children's Age Level

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
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infants

toddlers

preschoolers

school-agers

birth to 8





Kit Timeline:

Preparation time for this kit is estimated at 1.0 - 1.5 hours. Implementation time is estimated at 1.5 hours.



Training Outcomes:

1. Teachers will define their role in outdoor play.
2. Teachers will describe how to use the outdoors as an extension of the classroom.
3. Teachers will explain why outdoor play is important.
4. Teachers will describe the importance of assessment for outdoor play.

These training outcomes address the following American standards:

- 2.C.03-04; 3.4.04; 3.F.01, 3.G.02, and 9.4.04 of the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Performance Criteria (2005), www.naeyc.org.
- Standard 2 and 4 of NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation, Initial Licensure Level (2003), www.naeyc.org.
- 1304.21(a)(5)(i) and 1304.21(c)(1)(vii) of Head Start Performance Standards (Federal Register, Nov. 5, 1996, Volume 61, Number 215), www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/.
- Standard E6 and E18 of the National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs, National Association of Child Care Professionals (2005), www.nacccp.org.

You may want to take the time now to locate additional state and local standards that relate to this topic or requirements of other regulatory bodies specific to your program. Add those to this plan to personalize it.



Preparation:

1. Read the article "Play and the outdoors: What's new under the sun?" by Susan J. Oliver and Edgar Klugman. Locate and read any of the following resources to support an understanding of the topic:

Caesar, B. (March/April, 2001). Give children a place to explore. *Exchange*, 138, 76-79.

Carter, M. (May/June, 1993). Teachers outdoors: Letting the good times roll. *Exchange*, 91, 53-54.

Hurwitz, H. (May/June, 1999). The adventure outside your classroom door. *Exchange*, 127, 55-57.

Jensen, B., & Bullard, J. (2002). The mud center: Recapturing childhood. *Young Children*, 57(3), 16-19.

Miller, K. (May/June, 1999). Caring for the little ones. *Exchange*, 127, 94-95.



- Odoy, H., & Foster, S. (1997). Creating play crates for the outdoor classroom. *Young Children*, 52(6), 12-16.
- Perry, J. (2004). Making sense of outdoor pretend play. *Young Children*, 58(3), 26-30.
- Thornton, C., & Sutterby, J. (2005). It doesn't just happen! Essential contributions from playgrounds. *Young Children*, 60(3), 26-33.
- Wardle, F. (May/June, 2000). Supporting constructive play in the wild. *Exchange*, 133, 26-29.

2. Read through the entire training kit to familiarize yourself with the kit's design, implementation, handouts, training resources, etc.
3. Copy and distribute the article for teachers to read before the training session.
4. Copy the *Curriculum Topics Cards*. Cut out the cards.
5. Create Flip Chart 1: *The Importance of Outdoor Play: How Things Have Changed*, Flip Chart 2: *Role of the Teacher*, and Flip Chart 3: *Ongoing Assessment Outdoors*.
6. Duplicate enough copies of Handout 1: *Taking Curriculum Outdoors* for each teacher to have one copy.
7. Collect items for Scavenger Hunt game. You may use anything available around your school that suggests concepts for children to explore such as patterns, colors, shapes, various blocks, manipulative items, etc.
8. Hide collected objects around the training space. If you have a small group, hide enough for each person to find something. For large groups, plan on two-thirds of the participants finding an object.
9. Duplicate the learning assessment and the certificate of attendance and participation.



Training Strategy:

- Game — Scavenger Hunt
- Small group activity

Training Tip: The Scavenger Hunt game emphasizes the ease with which a simple game can be transformed into a learning activity.

Another Training Tip: The *Curriculum Topics Cards* are a vital part of this training. Make sure time is provided for teachers to share their ideas for integrating the outdoors into their curriculum and assessment techniques. This brainstorming not only presents numerous activity ideas and demonstrates how easy it is to use outdoor play, but also gets the teachers excited about trying the suggested approach.





Implementation:

1. As teachers enter, ask them to take a copy of Handout 1: *Taking Curriculum Outdoors*.
2. Introduce the topic of outdoor play. Review your school's use of outdoor time by asking teachers what elements they like and dislike. Have a few thoughts of your own ready to get the discussion started.
3. Use Flip Chart 1: *The Importance of Outdoor Play: How Things Have Changed* to discuss the reasons outdoor play is important as well as the how things have changed. After the introduction of each issue, ask the teachers for examples from their own experience in the classroom. Be prepared to give a few examples yourself to prompt the discussion.
4. Use Flip Chart 2: *Role of the Teacher* to define the teacher's role in outdoor play. Focus on the following areas: extension of classroom, engagement in activity, different weather conditions, and being a valuable part of curriculum. After the introduction of each issue, ask the teachers for examples from their own experience in the classroom. Again, be prepared to give a few examples yourself, from your own experiences or observations, to prompt the discussion.
5. At this point, explain that there are many ways to connect the outdoors with the classroom. One way is with variations on the game of Scavenger Hunt.
6. Ask the teachers to play Scavenger Hunt to find the objects you have hidden around the room. Describe the type, variety, and number of the items to be found. Allow enough time for all of the hidden objects to be located and found.
7. Reconvene the large group. Explain that this simple game can be used as a model to extend many classroom concepts into an outdoor activity. For example, if children are learning about colors, hide items such as balls, hoops, or even foam blocks of various colors around the play yard. Depending on the age of the children, they can search to find the objects and place them in one basket or sort them by color in multiple baskets. As each child brings the found item to the basket(s), the teacher asks the child to identify the color. To extend the activity, the teacher prompts the child to identify the color of play yard equipment, plants, and flowers. The extension promotes an awareness of the colors surrounding the child. Another example to share with the group is a lesson on shapes. Hide blocks of various shapes in the play yard or in a sand box. After children find the blocks, have them identify the shape. Children can use the basket system for sorting the blocks. Identify each basket for a specific shape by labeling each one with a picture of the shape that will be placed in the basket. For older children, have them find a play yard object of the same shape as the block they found.



8. Display Flip Chart 3: *Assessment*. Discuss ways to incorporate ongoing assessment strategies into the teacher's role. Explain that assessment during outdoor play includes observing for many emerging skills and abilities, including gross and fine motor skills and social interaction skills. Checklists allow teachers to assess gross motor skills and social skills. Anecdotal notes or running records allow teachers to use observation to see what children are choosing to do, learning to do, and practicing, as well as play preferences among and between children. Notes and records may also be effective in documenting the importance and benefits of outdoor play for specific children in specific circumstances. Additionally, collect activity artifacts or products to add further assessment data.
9. Ask teachers to divide into groups of 3-4. Give each group one copy of *Training Materials: Curriculum Topics Cards*. Refer to Handout 1: *Taking Curriculum Outdoors*. Draw a possible curriculum card. Complete Handout 1: *Taking Curriculum Outdoors*. Repeat if time allows.
10. Reconvene the large group and facilitate a summary discussion of the small group experience. Ask for examples for one or two of the curriculum topics. Allow teachers to share their ideas, ask questions, and add to the ideas mentioned.
11. Distribute certificates of attendance and participation.



Follow-up Activities for Teachers:

Collect additional examples of activities that can be transferred from classroom activities to outdoor activities. Add these ideas to your teacher training manual.



Follow-up Activities for Administrators/Directors:

1. Review the outdoor procedures and schedule at your school to create more opportunities for teachers to use their new understanding of the importance of outdoors.
2. Add an article about bringing indoor activities outside to the school newsletter to explain to families the importance of outdoor play. Describe the changes made at school and children's reaction to some of the activities.
3. Compile the curriculum ideas and activities collected by the teachers. Make the collection available in your professional development library or add the materials to your teacher training manual.



Learning Assessment

Ask teachers to complete the learning assessment to validate their understanding of the topic.





Training Evaluation/Further Needs Assessment:

Ask teachers to complete the evaluation. Use the results to evaluate the effectiveness of the training and to identify further training needs.



What's Next?

If the training evaluation and further needs assessment indicates that your staff needs further training in Curriculum: Teaching and Learning, take a look at the remainder of the kits in this category. For a complete list, go to www.ChildCareExchange.com.



Resources:

- Caesar, B. (March/April, 2001). Give children a place to explore. *Exchange*, 138, 76-79.
- Carter, M. (May/June, 1993). Teachers outdoors: Letting the good times roll. *Exchange*, 91, 53-54.
- Hurwitz, H. (May/June, 1999). The adventure outside your classroom door. *Exchange*, 127, 55-57.
- Jensen, B., & Bullard, J. (2002). The mud center: Recapturing childhood. *Young Children*, 57(3), 16-19.
- Miller, K. (May/June, 1999). Caring for the little ones. *Exchange*, 127, 94-95.
- Odoy, H., & Foster, S. (1997). Creating play crates for the outdoor classroom. *Young Children*, 52(6), 12-16.
- Oliver, S. J., & Klugman, E. (July/August 2005). Play and the outdoors: What's new under the sun? *Exchange*, 164, 6-10.
- Perry, J. (2004). Making sense of outdoor pretend play. *Young Children*, 58(3), 26-30.
- Thornton, C., & Sutterby, J. (2005). It doesn't just happen! Essential contributions from playgrounds. *Young Children*, 60(3), 26-33.
- Wardle, F. (May/June, 2000). Supporting constructive play in the wild. *Exchange*, 133, 26-29.

*You can purchase *Exchange* articles at www.ChildCareExchange.com.



Handout 1: Taking Curriculum Outdoors

Using the topic on the curriculum card provided, create an activity that extends the topic into an outdoor activity. Modify the activity for different age groups.

Curriculum Topic:

Activity:

Modification for toddlers:

Modification for preschoolers:

Assessment focus/ideas:

Handout 2:

Training Materials: Curriculum Topics Cards



Fire Safety

Shapes



Farm Animals

Colors



Space

Storybook Characters



Handout 2:

Training Materials: Curriculum Topics Cards (cont.)

 School	Sorting
 Construction	Patterns
Sounds	



Flip Chart 1:

Importance of Outdoor Play: How Things Have Changed

- Increase in the number of working parents:
 - Families are too busy to spend time outside after work

- Increase in use of technology:
 - More time is spent in front of the television, computer, video games, and other media

- Increase in health problems:
 - Rising rates of obesity
 - Increases in asthma
 - Increases in heart problems

- Decrease in emphasis on outdoor play in educational settings:
 - Less unstructured play outdoors
 - Less opportunity to use gross motor skills

- Increase in security and safety concerns:
 - Concerns for safety and security cause families to keep children indoors

- Decreased access to outdoor play spaces:
 - Concrete playgrounds and limited outdoor space narrow children's outdoor play options
 - Lengthening school schedules and homework assignments infringe on children's out of school playtime.



Flip Chart 2: Role of the Teacher

- Extend the classroom:
 - Use classroom curriculum content to also develop outdoor activities

- Engage in activities:
 - Participate in activities while allowing children to direct the play

- Embrace different weather conditions:
 - Use inclement weather as a learning opportunity rather than a restriction

- Integrate outdoor experiences with indoor experiences:
 - Take indoor materials outdoors
 - Connect classroom content and learning activities to outdoor environments

- Refrain from using outdoor play as a reward or punishment

- Complete anecdotal notes, running records, or checklists to document emerging social, gross motor, and fine motor skills and abilities.

- Collect activity artifacts or products to further assess children's emerging skills and abilities and to share with families.



Flip Chart 3: Ongoing Assessment Outdoors

■ Notes:

- Use anecdotal notes or running records to document the benefits and importance of outdoor play for particular children in particular circumstances

■ Checklists:

- Evaluate gross motor skills
- Evaluate social skills

■ Activity artifacts or products:

- Artifacts or products that result from activities such as drawings, illustrations, dictations, photographs, notes about children's successes and challenges, play partners, scaffolding behavior, etc.



Learning Assessment

Play and the Outdoors:

What's New Under the Sun?

Name_____

Date_____

1. True or False: Curriculum experiences in the classroom can be extended into outdoor experiences.
2. Outdoor play is important because:
 - a. Children spend most of their time in front of video games and the television rather than participating in outdoor activities.
 - b. Working parents spend little time with their children outside after work.
 - c. Exercise decreases health problems.
 - d. Outdoor play provides more opportunities to use gross motor skills.
 - e. All of the above.
3. List 3 ways to assess outdoor play:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
4. True or False: Teachers should use outdoor time as a reward and/or punishment.
5. Briefly explain a teacher's role when engaged in outdoor play.
6. Describe how can inclement weather conditions be used as an outdoor lesson.



Learning Assessment Evaluation Rubric

Play and the Outdoors:

What's New Under the Sun?

1. **True** or False: Curriculum and lessons in the classroom can be extended into outdoor lessons.
2. Outdoor play is important because:
 - a. Children spend most of their time in front of video games and the television rather than participating in outdoor activities.
 - b. Working parents spend little time with their children outside after work.
 - c. Exercise decreases health problems.
 - d. Outdoor play provides more opportunities to use gross motor skills.
 - e. All of the above**
3. List 3 ways to assess outdoor play:
 - a. Written notes**
 - b. Activity artifacts or products**
 - c. Checklists**
4. True or **False**: Teachers should use outdoor time as a reward and/or punishment.
5. Briefly explain a teacher's role when engaged in outdoor play.

Teachers need to actively participate in the play with the children, but the direction of the children and not the teacher should define play and roles of the children.
6. Describe how can inclement weather conditions be used as an outdoor lesson.

Accept any reasonable answer.

Play and the Outdoors: What's New Under the Sun?

by Susan J. Oliver and Edgar Klugman

A generation "at two" with the outdoors?

Are today's ever more plugged-in young children developing "nature-deficit disorder"? (Louv, 2005). Will they grow up associating bugs with computers rather than the great outdoors? Do they prefer to play indoors because, in the words of one child, "that's where all the electrical outlets are" (Louv, 2005)?

Whatever the reality, many parents and teachers feel instinctively that childhood today is very different from what it was for previous generations, and a sizable part of the difference has something to do with the changing amount of outdoor play time. Where are the lazy afternoons of exploration in the backyard or local park, lifting up rocks and watching ants race out of sight? What happened to long days in the summer sun, making up games, and setting off on outdoor adventures with neighborhood play-mates? Today's children, noted a recent *New York Times* article, increasingly are "at two" with nature. "The days of the free-range childhood seem to be over," noted *The Times* (McKee, 2005).

Some researchers, however, are making attempts to understand changes we're seeing by asking parents to think back to their childhoods and report their perceptions about what's different for their own kids. In a nationwide study of a geographically representative sample of over 800 mothers of children aged three to twelve, Professor Rhonda Clements of Manhattanville College and immediate past president of the American Association for the Child's Right to Play found that 70% of mothers reported they played outside every day when they were their child's age, compared to 31% of their children who have everyday outdoor opportunities (Clements, 2004).

Changes in outdoor playtime for today's kids

While a bike ride around almost any neighborhood on a sunny Sunday afternoon may leave you asking, "Where are the kids?" there are few studies to confirm that children are getting less play time than a generation ago, says Dorothy Justus Sluss, associate professor of Early Childhood Education at Clemson University. "Because we did not document the amount of time children spent in various kinds of play fifty years ago, it's hard to establish a reliable comparison with today's kids," Sluss explains.

Moreover, a recent study at the University of Michigan looked at the time-use differences between children in the early 1980s and the late 1990s and found that kids aged three to five have one-third less free play time (indoor and outdoor) than a generation ago and nearly triple the amount of time in organized sports (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001a; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001b).

According to an April 2004 study of 300 parents of children under five years old conducted by Youth Pulse, a marketing services company that monitors youth behavior, only 39% of children aged two

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Center, a national non-profit organization dedicated to making play accessible to children with disabilities and the Family Resource Coalition of America, a national non-profit organization committed to building community-based support and resources for children and families.



Edgar Klugman is the co-founder of Playing for Keeps as well as professor emeritus of Early Childhood Education and Care at Wheelock College in Boston, Massachusetts. He is also a charter member of the Play,

Policy, and Practice Interest Forum within the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Among his publications are *Play, Policy and Practice* (Redleaf Press), and *Children's Play and Learning: Perspectives and Policy Implications* (edited with Smilansky; Teachers College Press). He currently serves on the board of New England AEYC.

to five “run around or play outdoors” every day or more often. For children under age two, only 19% have daily outdoor playtime (Youth Trust, 2004).

Helping young children experience “the natural classroom”

As an early childhood educator, you are in a powerful and unique position to make sure that children’s exposure to the outdoors and its ever-changing wonders is woven into the core of your curriculum — and the fabric of their day. The many sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the outdoors make it a natural classroom, and one that fits the exuberant gross motor, construction play, and symbolic play instincts of preschoolers. In fact, research indicates that preschoolers engage in richer symbolic play outdoors than indoors (Shin & Frost, 1995) thanks to the relatively greater availability of low-realistic, low-structured, natural materials, spaciousness, and teacher involvement” (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005) found outdoors as compared to indoors.

Other advantages you’ll find when you step outside with your class include greater opportunities for children to engage in: 1) free play, because adults tend to control indoor play more closely than outdoor play; 2) different types of social arrangements, because the nature of outdoor games and exploration offer children chances to break away from their regular alliances; 3) play that contributes to their movement skills and physical fitness (Sluss, 2005).

Best practices for your outdoor time with children

Whether you let children simply enjoy free play or offer teacher-directed

activities, teacher educators and consultants on outdoor play Barbara Crossley and Beverlie Dietze suggest these six areas of best practice for outdoor play:

■ **Attitude:** Educators should have a positive attitude about outdoor playtime, be ready and willing to work with the weather, children’s interests, gender differences, and more — and should create a play climate that is flexible and supportive.

■ **Health and safety:** Obviously, the physical environment needs to be safe and adequately supervised, with children appropriately dressed for the day’s conditions.

■ **Program planning:** Outdoor play time should be structured so children have sufficient time and facilitation to engage in complex, integrated, in-depth activities or explorations; can exercise their sense of curiosity and creativity; and can participate in a range of developmentally appropriate experiences.

■ **The environment:** Materials and equipment should be open-ended, and the play space should offer variety that can accommodate individual and group play, dramatic play, spontaneous play, gross motor activity, exploration of nature, and more.

■ **Curriculum support:** Materials are sufficient for the number of children, support different types of play, and include some that are interchangeable between indoors and outdoors.

■ **Role of facilitator:** Adults understand the developmental needs of individual children and help children integrate knowledge from various settings and developmental domains. Adults help children accommodate their behavior to the outdoor setting rather than using removal from the setting as punishment.

Nurture with nature: Tips for teachers on making the most of outdoor play

The outdoors is an educational tableau that offers endless opportunities for creative early childhood educators. Here are a handful of ideas for maximizing outdoor time and learning experiences. You’ll have many more. If you would like to share them, send your ideas to Playing for Keeps at info@playingforkeeps.org and we’ll add the best ones to our web site. (Be sure to include your name, title, organization, and address.)

■ **Don’t let the outdoors keep you indoors.** As our colleagues in Scandinavia often say, there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes. If the weather keeps you indoors too often, your children may miss important experiential learning about rain or wind or snow. Work with their parents to provide outdoor clothing that offers the option of going outdoors nearly every day.

■ **Make friends with three square feet of . . . something . . . outdoors.** Have you ever stepped outdoors and focused on a small area — say, three square feet — and spent some time just watching and exploring? What’s happening on the surface? What lives there? What’s growing there and what eats it or sleeps in it or plays in it? What color is it and does it always stay that color? Does it look different at different times of day? What happens when the weather changes or seasons come and go? Does your adopted spot change?

Whether your class has grassy areas to enjoy or piles of dirt or plain cement sidewalks, the kinds of questions children can answer (and ask!) are endless. Encourage the development of their sensory and deductive skills. Pick

small areas to monitor and explore for a fun and educational long-term project — and one easily connected with art, science, and literacy components in your curriculum.

■ **Be responsive to changing outdoor conditions.** So you weren't expecting to talk about rainbows today? If one shows up, are you prepared to make it a magical moment — along with a science lesson? In keeping with your philosophy of a child-influenced curriculum, have books about natural phenomena, science supplies, and art materials ready for those times when Mother Nature serves up a not-to-be-ignored lesson that engages the imagination of your children . . . even if it's as mundane as a snake slithering across the playground or a puffy cloud that looks like a teddy bear.

■ **Move indoor activities outside.** If the weather looks cooperative and the children are settled enough in the classroom for a change of routine, why not take some of your indoor day outside for a change? Are there activity centers you generally keep indoors? If you are in a climate that changes with the seasons, consider moving some of your indoor play centers and materials outdoors at appropriate times of the year.

■ **Bring the outdoors back inside.** What did you see outdoors today? Bulbs half nibbled away? By whom? Seedlings growing through a crack in the sidewalk? How do they do that? A bunny running across the grass? Where was it going? Can you tell a story about it? Draw a picture? Act it out?

What's happening in outdoor play that impacts early childhood educators?

As early childhood educators, what trends can we expect to see in outdoor

play? What can we do to make outdoor play more meaningful and useful to healthy child development? Here are a few directions that we expect outdoor play will take — and ways that early childhood educators can respond:

■ **Assessment will follow you outdoors.** Teachers have long been encouraged to take advantage of the enhanced opportunities outdoor play offers for assessment of each child's development. (You'll find some good strategies and tools in *Outdoor Play Every Day* by Karyn Wellhousen (Wellhousen, 2002.) In our culture of measurement and accountability for kids and teachers alike, however, we can expect that each aspect of the curriculum will be evaluated in some way. Because outdoor play can be an easy target for administrators and others who are looking for more "instructional" time in a child's day, it's a good idea to carefully document the ways that outdoor time is promoting the development of kids in your class *because* they are outdoors.

■ **You need to take an active role in helping parents understand outdoor play.** Parents, of course, harbor many fears for the safety of their children and concerns about the quality of their education. As an early childhood educator, you can expect to play an increasingly central role in assuring parents that their children are reasonably safe outdoors (from strangers, bugs, sunshine, bullying . . . you name it) and in communicating to them the importance of outdoor playtime.

Today's parents hear many media-based messages that heighten their concerns about safety — even though statistics don't warrant the concern — and that promote a highly academic approach to early childhood education.

You can help parents understand how outdoor play, especially free play, is a valuable part of their children's day. If

parents are skeptical about play, sell the idea by sharing information about ways outdoor time helps children focus on more "academic" work when they return indoors (Bogden & Vega-Matos, 2000). Not only will you be building support for your curriculum, you may be training grassroots advocates for recess who will become active if their child's future elementary school threatens to eliminate daily outdoor play.

■ **Outdoor play is becoming more connected to childhood health issues.** With a record 8% of our preschoolers and one of five kids in general overweight (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000), including active outdoor gross motor play in their routine takes on a whole new sense of urgency. We can expect to hear more and more encouragement of outdoor activity from government and private sources, and see more promotional campaigns from companies whose business is tied to children. For example, Nickelodeon has launched a "Let's Just Play" campaign that features a "Worldwide Day of Play" in October — all aimed at getting kids and parents outdoors to play. (See www.nick.com/all_nick/everything_nick/public_ljp_createaday.html for more details and resources.) On its first-ever "Worldwide Day of Play" in October 2004, the network took the highly dramatic step of "going dark", i.e., not broadcasting for that afternoon in an effort to encourage play. This kind of outreach about the importance of outdoor play for physical health can reinforce teachers' efforts to communicate that message for parents.

■ **We're developing better ways to include children of all abilities in outdoor play.** More and better efforts are being applied to recognizing and addressing outdoor play challenges, including better playground design so that children of all abilities can play. According to the National Center for Boundless Playgrounds, five million

American children have some sort of disability that inhibits their capacity to enjoy a traditional playground (www.boundlessplaygrounds.org). Boundless Playgrounds is leading the charge to make more outdoor play spaces universally accessible. As more children with disabilities are included in child care centers and preschools, teachers may be expected to develop skills for helping them fully participate by adapting games, activities, and environments.

■ **Educators are expected to help develop responses to bullying and rough-and-tumble play.** Another playground challenge — children bullying each other — is also becoming a more prominent issue. As a proactive strategy for reducing playground bullying in the elementary years, preschool educators may find themselves expected to address the issue with younger children (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005).

Another troublesome area for many educators is how to understand the rough-and-tumble play — more characteristic of boys than girls (Smith, 1997) — especially since so many early childhood programs are staffed by women who may have difficulty interpreting the signals imbedded in what might be called “boy culture” (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005). We can expect to see continued attention on these areas as more research is completed and as more results from interventions (e.g., Operation Respect’s *Don’t Laugh at Me* curriculum, information at www.dontlaugh.org) are available.

■ **Teachers are on the frontlines of addressing “nature-deficit disorder.”** “There’s no way we can help children to learn to love and preserve this planet if we don’t give them direct experiences with the miracles and blessings of nature,” noted Anita Olds, the late designer with a special gift for

child-centered indoor and outdoor environments (Olds, 2000). San Diego-based journalist Richard Louv has researched the relationship many of today’s children have with nature and expresses his concern that our kids are growing up with “nature deficit disorder” thanks to technology, overscheduling, parental fears, and a litigious, rule-bound culture. The consequences, he predicts, may have serious emotional, physical, and cognitive impacts on children who do not learn how to use the outdoors for reducing stress, stimulating creativity, and building strong bodies (Louv, 2005). Early childhood teachers, in the role of child and parent educator, can help children (and their families) establish the habit of — or better yet, a hunger for — being outdoors and the skills for engaging with natural environments.

Imagine young children’s daily lives if the range of their experience began and ended at the door into their school or child care center, only to re-emerge when it is time to go home. Certainly many would agree that something important was missing from their education. Yet, when they go home, today’s young children are experiencing more and more of life indoors. As an early childhood educator who has impact on both kids and parents, you can be the first line of defense against a culture-wide loss of appreciation for the whole package of developmental benefits our children can only access if they have a healthy relationship with the great outdoors and its natural wonders.

Spread the word to parents, administrators, and others who make decisions about how children spend their time every day. Outdoor play doesn’t require a playground or a park or an hour or a warm, sunshiny day. It only requires a commitment to kids’ healthy development. Nature is standing by — ever patient, available whenever we want — ready to nurture the young children in our care.

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Youth Trust, April 2004 Youth Pulse proprietary data.



EVALUATION

Your Opinion Matters! Please share your perceptions about this session.

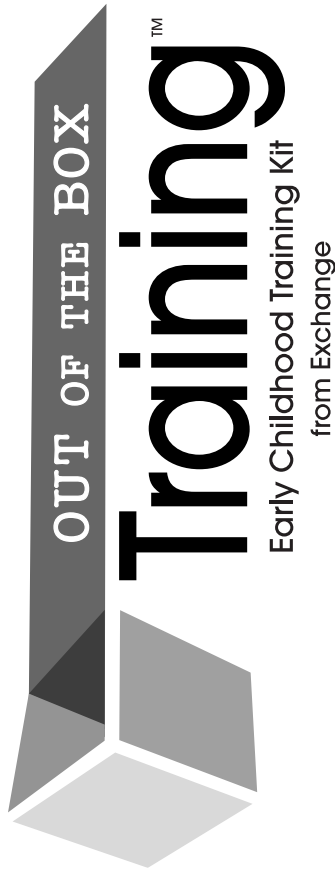
Training Topic: *Play and the Outdoors: What's New Under the Sun?*

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Length and format of the session	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Presenter's instructional style	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Presenter's knowledge of the topic	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Overall usefulness of the information	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Training room comfort	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

The most important thing I learned during this session was . . .

I would like to learn more about . . .





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Kay Albrecht, Ph.D.
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Bonnie Neugebauer, President
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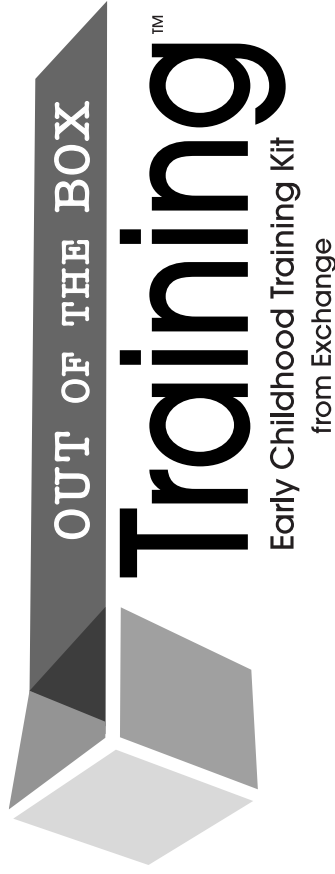
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