



PROVIDING OUTDOOR PLAY FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

As the snowy weather and cold, winter months are upon us, do you find it more challenging to get your infants and toddlers outside? Here in Northwest Pennsylvania, winter time may feel like a difficult time of the year for your little ones to engage in daily outdoor play. From the stress of getting all those little hands and feet into mittens and boots to parents who do not send in appropriate winter clothing, it may seem like there are too many challenges to overcome.

However, along with the cold weather comes stuffy, closed up classrooms which allow an increase in germs spreading among children and staff. Many people believe going outside in cold or wet weather can cause colds or sickness; however, colds and flu are caused by germs, like bacteria and viruses. Therefore, when children and staff spend long hours together indoors, illness spreads easily as everyone re-breathes germs throughout the day. One way to freshen the air indoors is to open the doors and windows in the classroom for 15 minutes before the children arrive. This allows the fresh air to circulate throughout the classroom

and clear some of the germs out of the air. Fresh air is beneficial and outdoor play, even when it is cold outside, can help keep children and staff healthy. Also, the outdoor play provided to infants and toddlers during child care may be the only opportunity they have to engage in daily outdoor active physical play.

As Thelma Harms, one of the authors of the Environment Rating Scales has said, "There is no bad weather, only bad clothes." Additionally, the PA Position Statements for the Environment Rating Scales expect one hour of outdoor play (for full day programs). When planning high quality outdoor play experiences for infants and toddlers keep the following in mind:

- Explain to parents and staff the benefits of outdoor play to children's physical, cognitive and social development and the foundation it builds for literacy, math and science concepts.
- Develop a strong outdoor play policy for your program and encourage parents to provide appropriate outdoor clothing as well as a change of clothes in case children get wet or dirty. Start a clothing donation box so

your program has extra clothing on hand.

- Encourage teachers to bring appropriate outdoor clothing that will allow them to engage in outdoor play with children. Teacher participation can stimulate and enrich outdoor play and maximize learning opportunities for children.
- Provide appropriate space for walkers, crawlers and non-mobile children. For non-mobile infants, a large tarp or play mat over the snow adds a layer of protection from the cold and wet. Blankets can be placed over the tarp or mat for added warmth.

