

Summer Play Boosts Learning

Summer weather is ideal for outside activities. There is an enormous range of potential health benefits associated with physical activity, many of which are particularly relevant for people with disabilities. Studies have shown that physical activity improves spatial learning performance, social learning, motor skill learning, strengthens the ability to pay attention and improves concentration.

Backyard Olympics

The London Olympic Games are almost over and have created a lot of national pride and interest in sports. You can bring some of the enthusiasm close to home by hosting a backyard Olympic Games. Focus on participation rather than winning, and the team work required to organize and host the games. The Olympics feature Para-Olympic events and the backyards activities can be designed to allow everyone to participate.

Getting Ready:

1. Create a mascot for the games, an animal, a symbol, or graphic.
2. Posters for the events, participation sheets and name labels can be created by hand or on the computer featuring the mascot.
3. Invite friends and relatives to participate. Each person can represent a country or place, and can be invited to bring a flag or poster representing their 'nation'. As an additional activity each child could do research on the country they have selected to share or include on their poster.
4. Make an Olympic torch using a decorated flash light or, tape coloured streamers on to a short stick. Give everyone a chance to carry the torch through the neighbourhood or around the yard.

5. Use shiny paper to create a medal for each person.
6. Plan an Opening ceremony with each participant entering the back yard carrying their flag or poster.

The Games:

You can set up as many games as you like. Depending on the equipment, and the abilities of the children, you have you can set up three or four sections for different types of games. For example:

- Track and Field with space for running or jumping, or an obstacle course
- Water Sports with a small pool to race boats, or home made rafts, or wet sponges for throwing
- Gymnastics with a safe surface for tumbling and rolling, or an area for rhythmic gymnastics using a stick with streamers or a hula hoop
- Team Sports such as baseball, basketball, or volleyball

To finish the day, everyone can walk around the yard carrying their poster and then sit down. Each person can be invited to the podium to receive a Gold Medal for participation. The event can end with the group singing favourite songs.

Hide and Seek

The traditional game of hide and seek can be adapted to meet the needs of your child. Hide and seek can be played on hands and knees in the house, outside in the backyard, or in a local park. Each person can take a turn as the seeker.

Scavenger Hunt

A traditional scavenger hunt involves a search for a list of objects. The skill level of the children will determine the number and size of the items that are on the list. The objects

can be hidden in the house, outside or in the neighbourhood. For older children the list could include clues instead of the name of the item.

Treasure Hunt

A treasure hunt usually involves burying or hiding a valuable item and providing the searchers with a map. The treasure can be a bag of candy hidden in the house, or the neighbourhood. The map could indicate areas to be avoided or barriers that need to be crossed.

Letterboxing

Letterboxing is an intriguing pastime combining navigational skills and rubber stamp artistry in a charming “treasure hunt” style outdoor quest. A wide variety of adventures can be found to suit all ages and experience levels. Over 500 letterboxes have been hidden in Ontario and you can find directions to each one on the website:

<http://www.letterboxing.org/canada.htm>

GEO Caching

Another variation on treasure hunts is Geo Caching. This organized activity uses GPS co-ordinates to find a hidden Cache. Once you find the cache, there will be a box with small treasures and a log book. You enter your name to prove you found the location. The locations vary in difficulty but there is likely to be at least one cache nearby in your community. To find out more check the website: <http://www.geocaching.com/>

Orienteering

A more ambitious challenge is to try orienteering. Orienteering is the sport of navigation with map and compass. It's easy to learn. The object is to run, walk, or bike to a series of points shown on the map, choosing routes that will help you find all the points and get back to the finish in the

shortest amount of time. Orienteering is often called the “thinking sport” because it involves map reading and decision-making in addition to a great physical workout.

You can make your own version using a compass or GPS coordinates. Any kind of map may be used for orienteering including a street map, or one you have drawn yourself. Once you have worked out the route, in a park, or on neighbourhood streets, you can set up a series of points with markers. If you have extra help you can have a volunteer at each marker, or you can make a box for the participant to collect a token or leave a token as proof that they were there. To find out more about Orienteering, check the Ontario Orienteering Website at:

<http://www.orienteeringontario.ca/about-orienteering>