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## I. Why Outdoor Play Is Important

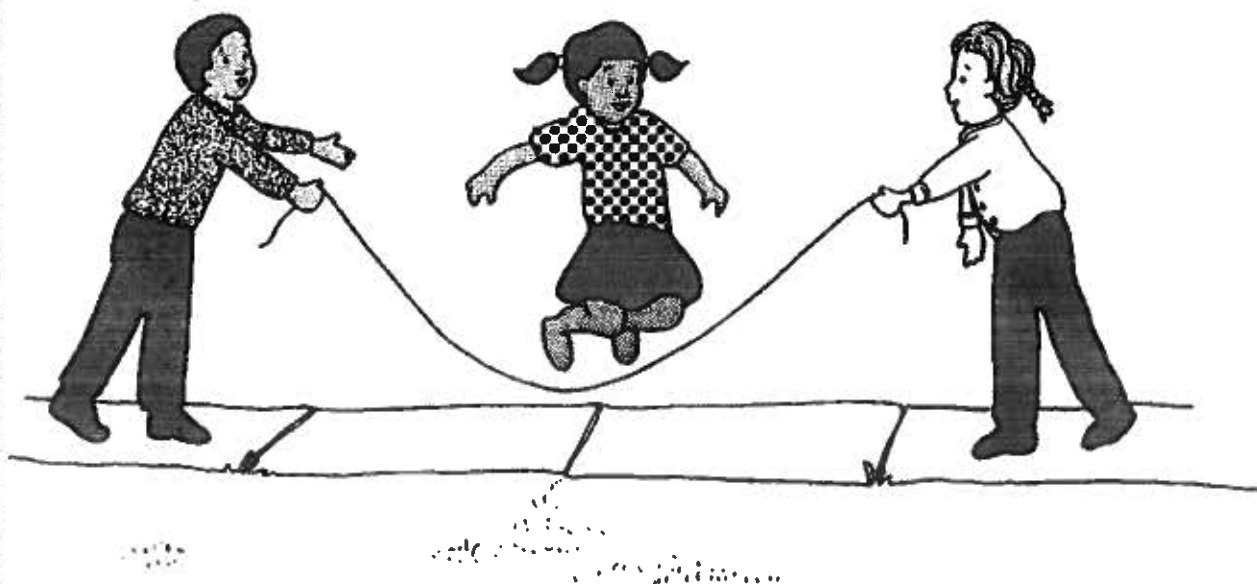
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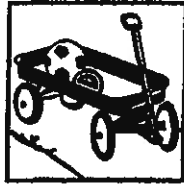
In the outdoor environment, children can engage in all the activities that have been discussed so far, with more freedom and exuberance. The outdoors also offers its own wonders to young children. Outdoor space extends a child's world and provides new and different opportunities for play, growth, and exploration.

Being outdoors means more than just "running around" or "letting off steam." Outdoors, children have the opportunity to explore and observe nature firsthand. They experience the changing seasons and note different types of weather; they watch things grow and die. When children play outdoors they learn about what their bodies can do: they run, jump, climb, and move in a less confined space than indoors. They gain confidence in their abilities as they learn, practice, and refine their motor skills.

The outdoors contains many opportunities for children to be creative and to demonstrate their ideas and feelings. It provides another setting for dramatic play, as children create playhouses with two chairs and an old blanket. They play with sand and water to create castles and tunnels. They play games such as tag and hide-and-seek. They also make up new games using materials such as balls, hoops, and jump ropes.

Being outdoors is also important for children's health. Fresh air, sunshine, and the chance to move their bodies freely all contribute to growth and development.





Here are some of the many opportunities for learning in all areas of development while outdoors:

***Children develop thinking skills by:***

- Using their senses to learn about the world (touching and smelling a flower).
- Experiencing cause and effect (running through a sprinkler and being surprised at getting wet).
- Developing language skills (conversing in the sand box).
- Learning to plan and to solve problems (deciding to play house and creating a space by placing an old blanket behind a large tree).
- Following through on a task (watering a garden they have planted).
- Learning about science (asking why the bird has a piece of string in its beak and finding out about how a nest is built).

***Children develop socially by:***

- Making friends (bringing another child a flower to look at).
- Learning to share and take turns (giving another child a chance to ride the tricycle).
- Learning to cooperate (painting the house with water as a group).

***Children develop emotionally by:***

- Feeling successful and competent (learning to ride a tricycle).
- Learning to be independent (going down a slide at the park unassisted).
- Expressing creativity (making up a new ball game).

***Children develop physically by:***

- Refining small muscle skills (poking in the sand and dirt with fingers).
- Developing large motor skills (learning to jump).
- Coordinating eye and hand movements (using colored chalk to decorate the sidewalk).
- Learning coordination and balance (jumping rope or riding a seesaw).

Once you have thought about the many opportunities for learning that exist outdoors, you can begin to create an interesting outdoor environment. The next section will help you do this.