Highlights from the 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card

About the 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

- ParticipACTION takes over leadership of the Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth from Active Healthy Kids Canada.
- For the first time, the ParticipACTION Report Card includes a Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play, and takes a stand on outdoor and risky active play.
- The Position Statement finds that access to active play in nature and outdoors – with its risks – is essential for healthy child development.
  - The Position Statement was developed and supported by HALO-CHEO, ParticipACTION and a group of 12 other organizations, and reviewed and edited by over 1,600 stakeholders from across Canada and around the world.

The 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card reveals kids move more and sit less when they play outside and have some freedom to roam unsupervised and take risks

- Ontario preschoolers spend twice as much time being active when play is outdoors.\(^1\)
- Students take 35 per cent more steps in physical education class when it is held outdoors.\(^2\)
- Canadian kids aged nine to 17 who play outside after school get 20 more minutes of heart-pumping activity per day, and are three times more likely to meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines.\(^3\)
- Grade 5 and 6 students who are often or always allowed to go out and explore unsupervised get 20 per cent more heart-pumping activity than those who are always supervised.\(^4\)
- Adventure playgrounds and loose parts playgrounds, which support some exposure to risky elements, lead to an increase in physical activity and decrease in sedentary behaviours.\(^5,6,7,8\)
- Self-directed outdoor play also helps foster healthy social and cognitive development:
  - Children who engage in active outdoor play in natural environments demonstrate resilience, self-regulation and develop skills for dealing with stress later in life.\(^9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27\)

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• Outdoor play that occurs in minimally structured, free and accessible environments facilitates socialization with peers, the community and the environment, reduces feelings of isolation, builds inter-personal skills and facilitates healthy development.  

However … fear of risky outdoor play leads to over supervising kids and keeping them safe indoors

• Parental safety concerns (e.g., worry about strangers, bullies and traffic) are the primary barrier to independent active free play.

But … keeping kids safe by over protecting them could be affecting their long-term health and development

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• Children and youth are less likely to engage in higher levels of physical activity if a parent or supervising adult is present.\textsuperscript{39,40,41}

• Three-to-five-year-old kids are less likely to be active on playgrounds that are designed to be “safer,” because many kids equate less challenging with boring.\textsuperscript{42}

• Hyper-parenting limits physical activity and can harm mental health (e.g. increased anxiety and depression).\textsuperscript{43,44,45,46}

It’s time … learn the truth about risky outdoor play

• Risky outdoor play is not about courting danger – e.g. skating on a half-frozen lake or letting a preschooler walk alone to the park.

• Risky outdoor play is about play that is thrilling and exciting where kids independently test their abilities and limits.\textsuperscript{47,48} It’s what many adults today did as children – like exploring the woods, tumbling and rough housing, moving fast or playing at heights.

• Broken bones and head injuries unfortunately do happen, but major trauma is uncommon. Most injuries associated with outdoor play are minor.\textsuperscript{49,50,51,52,53,54,55,56}

• The odds of total stranger abduction are about 1 in 14 million based on RCMP reports. Being with friends outdoors may further reduce this number.\textsuperscript{57}


\textsuperscript{40} Janssen I. Hyper-parenting is negatively associated with physical activity among 7-12-year olds. \textit{Prev Med.} 2015;73:55-59. Note: a custom analysis by the author also informs the key finding.


\textsuperscript{42} Copeland KA, Sherman SN, Kendeigh CA, Kalkwarf HJ, Saelens BE. Societal values and policies may curtail preschool children’s physical activity in child care centers. \textit{Pediatrics.} 2012;129(2):265-274.

\textsuperscript{43} Janssen I. Hyper-parenting is negatively associated with physical activity among 7-12-year olds. \textit{Prev Med.} 2015;73:55-59. Note: a custom analysis by the author also informs the key finding.

\textsuperscript{44} Ginsburg KR. The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. \textit{Pediatrics.} 2007;119:182-191.


\textsuperscript{50} Canadian Institute for Health Information. National Trauma Registry Minimum Data Set, 1994-1995 to 2012-2013. URL: \url{www.cihi.ca/CIHI-ext-portal/internet/en/document/types+of+care/specialized+services/trauma+and+injuries/ntr_metadata}

\textsuperscript{51} Rubie-Davies CM, Townsend MAR. Fractures in New Zealand elementary school settings. \textit{J Sch Health.} 2007;77:36-40.


Now ... get out of the way and let them play outside

- Although we see an alarmingly low percentage of Canadian youth and children meeting Canada’s Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines, it’s the first time this year we see four of the 11 grades in the Report Card increase and none decrease. Although the needle is moving in the right direction, we still have a ways to go, so it’s important to step back and let kids play outdoors.

- Value long-term health and fun as much as safety, by recognizing the difference between “real danger” and “risk” to increase children’s opportunities for independent play outdoors in all settings - at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.

- The [Position Statement](#) and [ParticipACTION Tips Sheet](#) include recommendations directed at parents, educators and caregivers, health professionals, injury prevention professionals, school and child care administrators, media, attorneys general, governments and society at large to help increase all children’s opportunities for self-directed play outdoors.

To download the 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card Highlight Report, including the Position Statement, or the 58-page Full Report, please visit [www.participactionreportcard.com](http://www.participactionreportcard.com).

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