



Dear families,

Getting outside with children is more than just letting off steam, the rich and amazing ways that children learn through and with the Natural world goes beyond the ABC's and 123's. This means that our programs may look different than others and you may be left wondering: *what in the world is my child learning by being outside?* Let's break that down a little bit for you and see the why behind the things that we do.

1. Let's talk about RISK. I know we often don't like to use the word RISK and CHILD in the same sentence but research is showing us that children deserve environments that are rich with challenges. By giving children the opportunity to take risks, we are giving them time to practice risk mitigation and assessment in an environment with an adult. As much as we want to be, we can't be there in every situation and we see it as a crucial responsibility to provide opportunities for children to practice risk mitigation in a controlled environment with an adult. We know this skill will stay with them for their entire lives. When teachers/caregivers/parents support risk taking in early childhood, we are giving the children the tools needed to grow up in the world safely. Through risk, we are giving children confidence and teaching them to trust their bodies. Children need risk for the benefits to their growth and development. They gain strength, dexterity, executive function, balance, and body awareness through risk taking. Taking risks is how children learn new things! They need experience moving their bodies and trying out their bodies as they grow and gain strength to find out what more than can do with it! So, instead of saying "Get down from there!" or "Be careful!", ask, "Do you feel safe?".
2. But what is my child learning? "Is your child ready for kindergarten?" Have you heard this before? Maybe friends, family, or a significant other have asked this question of you. It can place a fear in your heart that your child won't be 'ready for kindergarten'. But what does being ready for Kindergarten ACTUALLY mean? Most families think it comes down to letter and number recognition, counting, and maybe starting to know letter sounds. This is a very SMALL piece of the 'whole child pie'.

The 'whole child pie' includes all things your child is developing and how they work together to provide the optimal conditions for learning to take place. There are some basic categories that early childhood educators split the pie into. These are language and literacy, social and emotional, physical, and last is cognitive. For a very detailed description, you can find a document called, "[How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy For the Early Years](#)" or the "[Full Day Kindergarten Program](#)".



3. How are children learning through play? Play is often seen as a break from learning. It is seen as the reward for working hard. But in reality, the best learning happens through play! Play can be defined as an activity that is self chosen, self directed and the player can choose to stop when they are done. Real, true play does not start with a teacher or an adult, it starts and ends with the child. Allow your child time to interact with the environment around them. They will discover, inquire, and create accordingly. When we are interested in something, we pick it up very easily. When we are motivated out of necessity, we learn things. The same is true for children. When your child loses an art project because their name wasn't on it, they will pick up a crayon and write their name on the next one. If their block tower topples over because the base wasn't large enough, they will learn through trial and error how to make it tall and sturdy. Your child is learning all day long. ALL DAY. And they don't need a teacher sitting in front of them teaching AT them in order for learning to happen. We are your child's guide. We ask open ended questions to get the brain thinking. We offer suggestions in subtle ways to make connections to what your child already knows. We set the stage for learning through a carefully planned out environment filled with open ended materials. When your child is interested in something, we notice and plan accordingly! Trust your child, trust brain research and trust the teachers. Play is the way!

References

Peterson, Kristen (2022). Learning wild. Retrieved from,
<https://www.kristenrbpeterson.com/family-letters-download>