

# Healthy Outdoor Playspaces for Children



# What will be covered...

- **Why we started down this path**
- **What we found out**
- **How we engaged community partners**
- **Next Steps**



# Falls - playground equipment

	Children (0 – 4)	Children (5 – 9)	Children (10 – 14)
ED Visits Peterborough	424	839	356
ED Visits Ontario	251	587	207
Hospitalizations Peterborough	<5	55	<5
Hospitalizations Ontario	14	43	9

# Preliminary Research Findings

- Literature review on playground equipment and injuries (Fall 2013)
- Best practice:
  - equipment properly maintained
  - appropriate fall surface
  - adequate supervision
  - age-appropriate use
- Development of a playground checklist based on research evidence



# Shared What We Learned



**Municipal Access to  
Recreation Group**

**School Board  
Representatives**

**Shift from “playgrounds” to  
“play experiences”**

# The Technical Report

## Outdoor Playspaces for Children: An Evidence Review August 2017



Expanded literature review included such topics as:

- play and child development,
- play spaces,
- natural play spaces,
- risky play,
- risk management
- and more...

# Major Takeaways from the Research

- Play is a **human right**
- Unsupervised, **child-led play** is essential to child development
- “**Risky play**” is not a scary word
- **Natural playspaces** are more inclusive, gender neutral and equitable
- Injury prevention can't be the only **driver**
- **Risk benefit assessments** are key

# Engaging Key Stakeholders

- **Municipal:** parks and recreation, planning, public works
- **Education:** school board, principal, teacher, early childhood educator
- **Community:** environmental advocates, landscape architect, accessibility experts





**We interrupt your regularly  
scheduled programming...**

## **Blue and Green Spaces**

**More residents of Curve Lake and  
Hiawatha First Nations, the County and  
City of Peterborough have equitable  
access to health-promoting built and  
natural blue and green spaces by 2022.**



# A word about Spatial Equity

**A space is equitable when its use, size, configuration, amenities, upkeep, and spatial accessibility is fairly distributed across various sociodemographic characteristics (i.e. income, race, education, gender, age, etc.).**



**Back to your regularly  
scheduled programming...**



# Riding a Wave...



**Active Outdoor Play Position Statement from the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health (April 2018)**

**CPHA Position Statement on Unstructured Play (March 2019)**



# Our Next Steps

- **Endorse** the CPHA position statement
- **Create** a tool kit
- **Consult** with municipal, school and community partners
- **Support** the National Play Charter

...to be continued





# THANK YOU!

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**Evidence Review and presentation slides:**  
**[www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/play](http://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/play)**



# PLAY and OUTDOOR PLAY: Findings

- Play is a human right.
- Outdoor play – unique contribution to healthy child development.
- Play spaces need a variety of features for different types of play
- Available and accessible to all children to ensure equity.





# PLAY SPACES: Findings

- **Traditional play structures** have their place but provide limited opportunities
- Play equipment = have **value** only if children use it
- **Natural playspaces** = more **inclusive, gender-neutral** and **accessible**
- Simple **adaptations** enhance the play experience (e.g., **loose parts**)



# RISKY PLAY: Findings

- **Essential** component of healthy child development
- **Elements of risky play:** heights, speed, getting “lost”, rough and tumble, dangerous tools, dangerous elements
- Difference between **risk** and **hazard**



# INJURIES AND SAFETY: Findings

- **Injuries will happen**; majority of them will be minor.
- Proper installation and on-going maintenance of the equipment is essential.
- Better safety practices in **backyard play areas** will reduce the most serious injuries.
- Preventing children from playing in play spaces because of potential risk of harm may **replace one risk with another**—poorer physical and mental health.

# RISK-BENEFIT ANALYSIS: Findings

- Play providers need support to recognize importance of **reasonable risk**.
- Use **CSA Standard** as a technical guide rather than a design guide.
- Incorporate **risk-benefit assessments** in our planning and designs.
- Advocate for more **reasonable liability rules** for our play providers.
- Benefits of **risky play** need to be **promoted**.



# BUILT ENVIRONMENT: Findings



- Collaborative planning and design with users
- Value playspaces by locating on prime land
- Multiple play zones
- Diversity of play elements
- Universal design principles
- Meet safety requirements



# Proposed Design Features

## Geography

Rolling topography ~ **Shade** ~ **Natural elements**  
~ Ground- vs elevated-level elements

## Landscape

Looped pathways ~ **Sand areas** ~ **Water features**  
~ **Pathways** ~ Large trees and shrubs  
~ **Ramped pathways**

## Introduced items

**Boulders** ~ **Logs** ~ **Gardens and edible landscape** ~ Hiding places, tunnels, digging pits ~ **Messy zones**  
~ **Seating for adults** ~ Storage for loose parts ~ **Manipulable materials/ loose parts** ~ **Ramps** ~ **Handrails and transfer systems**

## Philosophy

Freedom to choose different play activities ~ **Universal design**

