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Play is a natural, instinctive human behaviour! And children **NEED** to play! It is well-established through research and practice that play is critical to a child's physical health and emotional well-being. Self-directed play, often called free play, is child-chosen and child-led. In free play children choose what, where and when they play so that these activities match their interests and developmental needs.

Through self-directed play children prepare themselves for life:



When they play with others, they make friends and learn to get along, building their self-confidence and their own sense of self;



When they playfully explore various materials and tools they nurture their imagination, creativity and problem-solving skills;



When they explore challenging activities or environments, they learn how to evaluate risk so that they can take on risky play that is appropriate to their abilities and supports their continued development;



When they begin to explore the world around them on their own, with all its challenges, lessons learned and skills acquired during play help them to safely and self-confidently cope with and navigate it.

What is your role?

Adults, including parents, caregivers, education and child-care professionals, play and recreation leaders or providers, planners, and decision makers at all levels of government, play a key role in supporting the child's right to play in Canada by providing children with the time, space, and freedom to play freely, every day.

EVERY CHILD IN CANADA HAS THE RIGHT TO:

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The statements in this Declaration are intended to promote greater understanding of what the right to play means and looks like in the lives of children and youth in Canada.

This declaration can also serve as a starting point to spark discussion about play rights and provision for children's free play in any and all contexts across the country.



1 Play

Play is necessary to the well-being and development of all children. All children have the right to play, regardless of age, ability, gender identity, culture, ethnicity, religion, geographic location, or economic circumstance.

2 Time, space and freedom to play freely, every day

Children benefit from play activities that they choose and lead themselves. They need the time and space, both indoors and outdoors, to engage in their chosen play activities every day.

3 Play in their own way for their own purposes

Play activities should be child-led, without too much direction from adults.

4 Access a range of quality public play opportunities close to their home

All children should have access to a choice of stimulating public play opportunities and spaces appropriate to their age and interest, including the chance to spend time in nature, within a short distance from where they live.

5 Accessible play opportunities and spaces that are inclusive, safe, and welcoming

Play opportunities and spaces should welcome children of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds, where they can play freely and safely without harassment or discrimination. When they play, every child has the right to feel like they belong.

6 Play opportunities that support their whole development, including healthy risk and challenge

Play that provides children with opportunities to challenge themselves is critical for their healthy development. Play should offer children a range of challenges and risks, appropriate to their age and ability, that allow them to test and refine their skills and identity. However, challenging play opportunities should not expose children to unnecessary hazards or unacceptable levels of risk.

7 Play every day, including in challenging or crisis conditions

The opportunity for safe and stimulating free play every day should be a priority for children who face challenging conditions on a daily basis, including but not limited to poverty, public health crises, conflict, humanitarian, and natural disasters, living in remote communities or residential care, hospitalization, or confinement to immigration and refugee centres or detention facilities.

8 Benefit from child-led play opportunities supported by knowledgeable adults who prioritize children's right to play

Adult facilitators who are aware of the value of play in children's lives and put children's play needs at the centre of all activities and decision making can enhance the play experiences of children, through opportunities such as after-school play clubs, outdoor play camps, and adventure playgrounds.

9 Live in a community that is designed to be child- and play-friendly

Every child has the right to use and enjoy public spaces as much as any other citizen. All indoor and outdoor public spaces should allow children to play freely without separating them from others, and be intentionally designed with children in mind.

10 Planning and evaluation of play opportunities and spaces in their community, in meaningful and consistent ways

Children are experts on their own play interests and experiences. Children should be authentically involved in the design, development, and evaluation of play opportunities in their communities, and their needs and ideas should be valued and respected. Children have the right to be consistently involved in these processes and to see evidence of their contributions.