



What research tells us...

# UNSTRUCTURED PLAY

benefits healthy child development



## Fun and Creativity

- Unstructured play is **fun** and **promotes creativity**
- This is especially true when using objects that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together



## Social Health and Team Work

- Unstructured play at recess is shown to strengthen **problem solving** and **conflict resolution skills**
- Outdoor play where children can explore independently can improve **social health** indicators



## Mental and Emotional Health

- Unstructured play is important to children's **mental** and **emotional health**
- Unstructured play can promote **positive self-concept** and **self-esteem**
- Active play can help **decrease anxiety** and **depression**



## Physical Health and Gross Motor Skills

- Active, unstructured play helps reduce sedentary behaviours, promotes **healthy weights** and improves **gross motor skills**
- This reduces body fat, improves **musculoskeletal** and **cardiovascular fitness** which benefit physical health



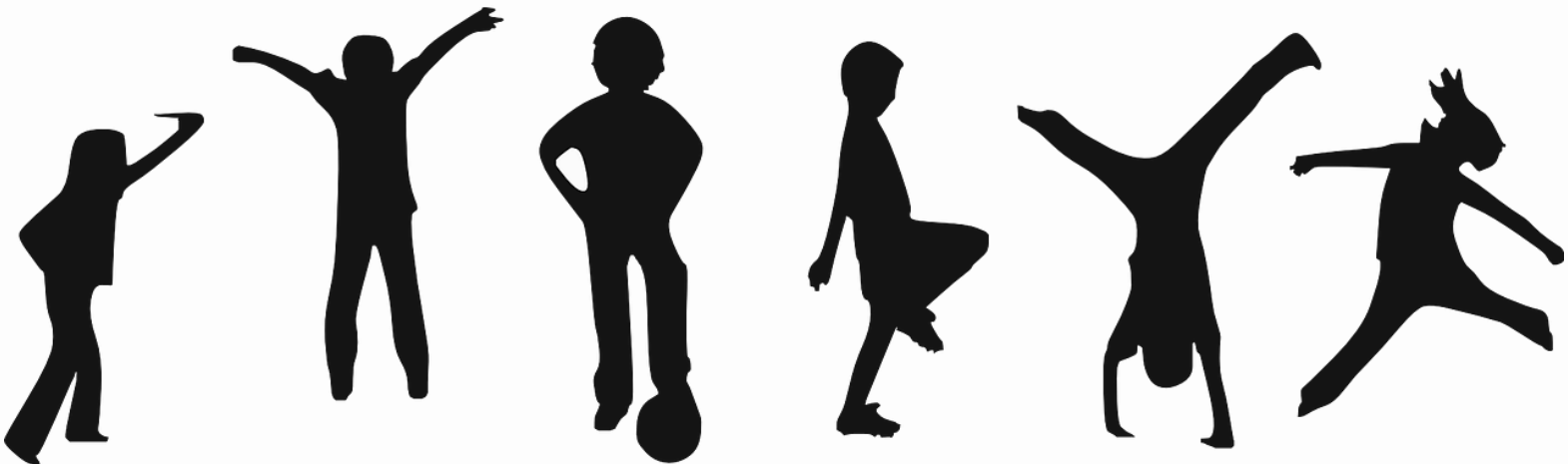
## Learning and Attention at School

- There is a reported association between unstructured play at recess and improved cognitive **skills**, such as **attention**, **concentration** and **memory**, as well as **improved grades** and standardized **test scores**



## Resiliency and Risk Management Skills

- When children experience uncertainty in play they can develop **emotional reactions**, **physical capabilities**, **copng skills** and are better able to **manage adversity**
- These skills promote **resilience** and **independence** to thrive in adolescence and adulthood



**Unstructured play** is child-led and allows children to follow their own interests and ideas without a defined purpose or outcome. It allows the child to explore boundaries and determine their own limits. Play is an integral part of every child's healthy development. It is embedded in **Article 31 in UNICEF's Convention on the Rights of a Child: children and youth need time, appropriate space and opportunity to engage in quality play.**

Most evidence to date indicates that unstructured play provides important health and developmental benefits to children, which supports the need to increase access to this kind of play. Further research is needed to confirm these findings. This project is funded with the generous support of the **Lawson Foundation.**



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