

# 5 Key Findings on Unstructured Play & Mental Health



1



## Promotes positive feelings

When children engage in unstructured play, they report feeling **joy, thrill** and **competence**. When they don't, they report feeling bored, sad and angry.

2



## Builds resilience

When children experience the uncertainty of challenging or risky play, they can develop **emotional reactions, physical capabilities** and **copng skills** that expand their capacity to **manage adversity**. These skills are important for **resilience** and good **mental health** in childhood and into adolescence.

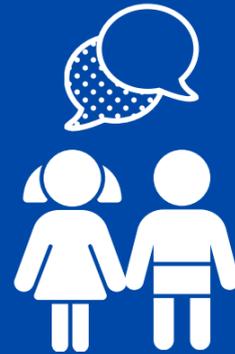
3



## Improves concentration

Unstructured play is associated with improved **attention span**, especially in children who have trouble focusing for long periods of time.

4



## Helps develop & maintain healthy relationships

Evidence indicates that unstructured play can provide the opportunity to improve **social competence**. This means that children can improve their **problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence**, and ability to **empathize**. Children can become more **self-aware** and are better able to **compromise and cooperate**.

5



## Improves undesirable behaviours

Studies with schools report fewer problems with undesirable behaviours like **bullying** when unstructured play is increased. When children lead their own play, they can engage in **social and emotional learning**, such as the ability to **control aggression** and **regulate feelings** of anger and frustration.

In Canada, between 1996 and 2010, the use of health services for youth mental illness increased by 43.8% among ten to fourteen year olds and 34.5% among five to nine year olds. Evidence shows that play enables factors that support good mental health and is important to children's overall wellbeing. Further research is needed to confirm these findings. This project is funded with the generous support of the Lawson Foundation.



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