

Risky Play: What do Mum and Dad Say? Alberta Parents' Perceptions from Two Studies

Nalini Mohan, Calgary Parks
Megan Myers, Calgary Recreation, Business
and Market Research
Katie Jewitt,
The Early Years Physical Literacy Research
Team
Infant Development Program Consultant
Ministry of Child and Family Development
Golden Family Center





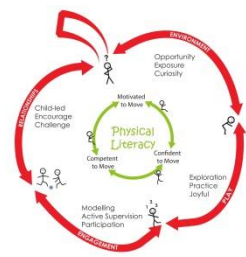
1) Overview and key findings

- **Mind the Gap: Active Energetic Play for Preschool Children**
- **Parental Perceptions of Unstructured Play**

2) Applications

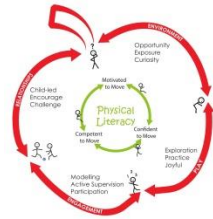
- **Barriers and how to overcome them**
- **Building on the benefits**
- **Role of cities, organizations**
- **Policy and standards**

3) Conclusions



Mind the Gap – Overview and Key Findings

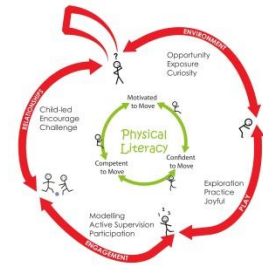
- **Objective:** To better understand potential barriers to providing active energetic/risky play.
- **Method:** Online surveys, focus groups, leadership team
- **Respondents:** Parents (n=370), ECEs (n=373), licensing officers, Health, and Owners/Directors; children aged 0-6
- **Demographics:** Majority was 35-45 years old, varying educational background with children primarily aged 3-5 years old
- **Topics:** Definition of risky play, structured adult-led risky play activities, unstructured child-led risky play activities, supervision



Mind the Gap- Activities Conducted

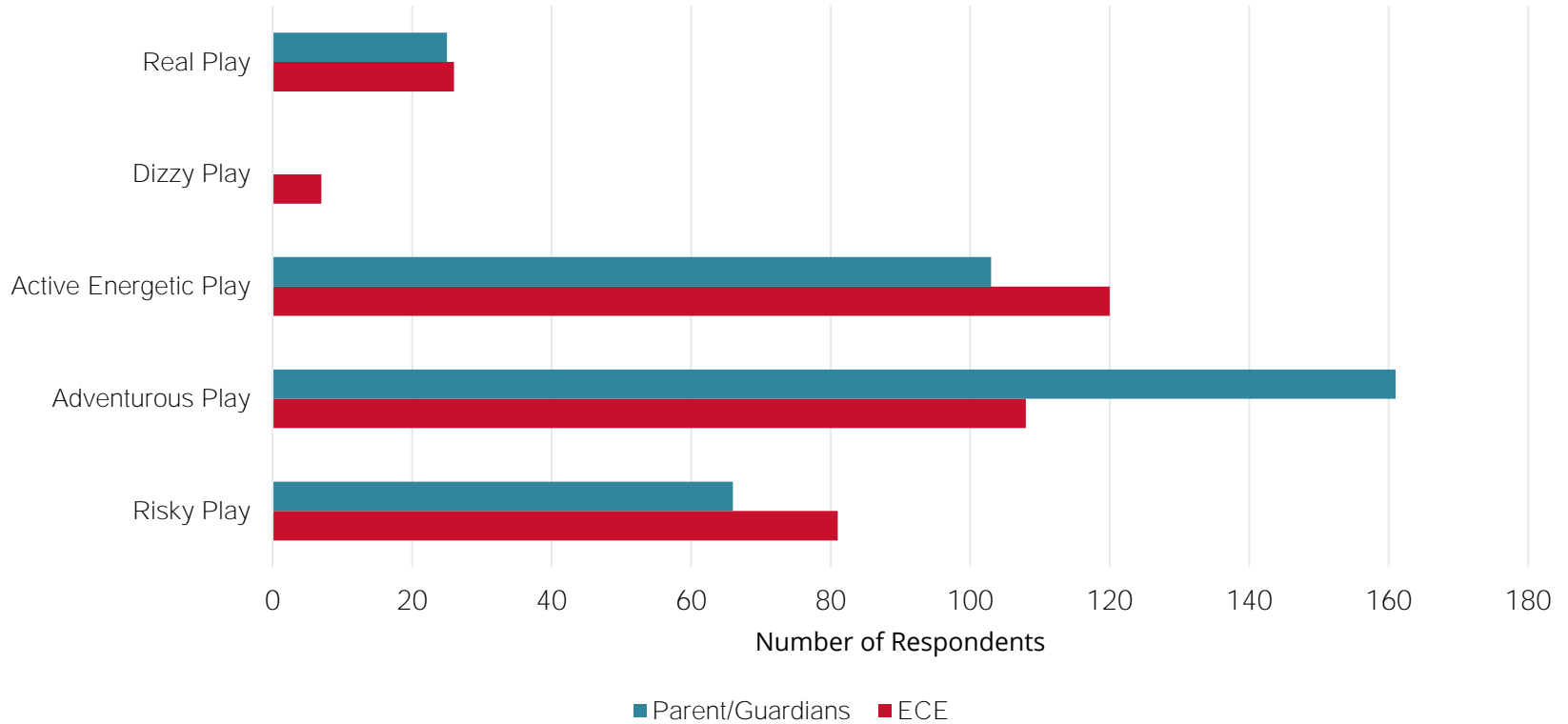
The purpose of this project was twofold:

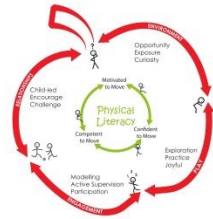
- 1) to explore these potential gaps or inconsistencies by engaging a wide range of stakeholders and
 - Online Survey: ECEs (n=373) and parents (n=370)
 - Focus Groups: Licensing Officers, Health, and Owners/Directors
 - A Leadership Team
- 2) to develop a policy proposal to be submitted to the Ministries of Children's Services and Health that acknowledges, supports, and enables energetic active play in licensed and approved child care settings across Alberta.



Parental Perceptions: Definition

What is the best name for play that is thrilling and exciting and where there is a risk of physical injury?

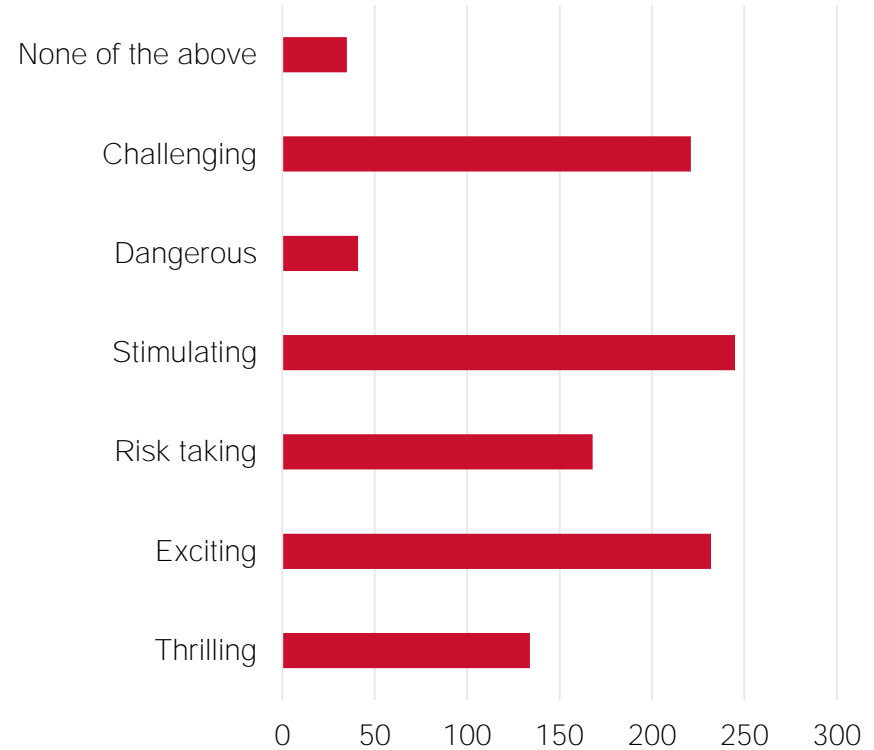
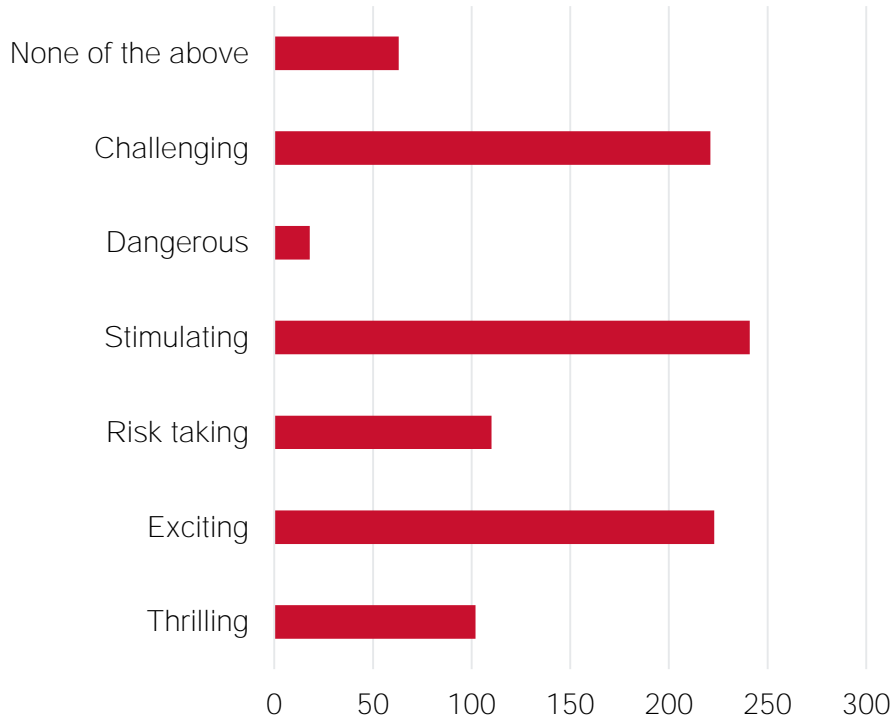


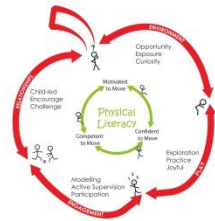


Parental Perceptions: Structured vs. Unstructured

At home, do your children take part in daily **structured** adult-led active energetic/risky play activities described as (please check all that apply)?

At home, do your children take part in daily **unstructured** child-led active energetic/risky play activities described above (please check all that apply)?

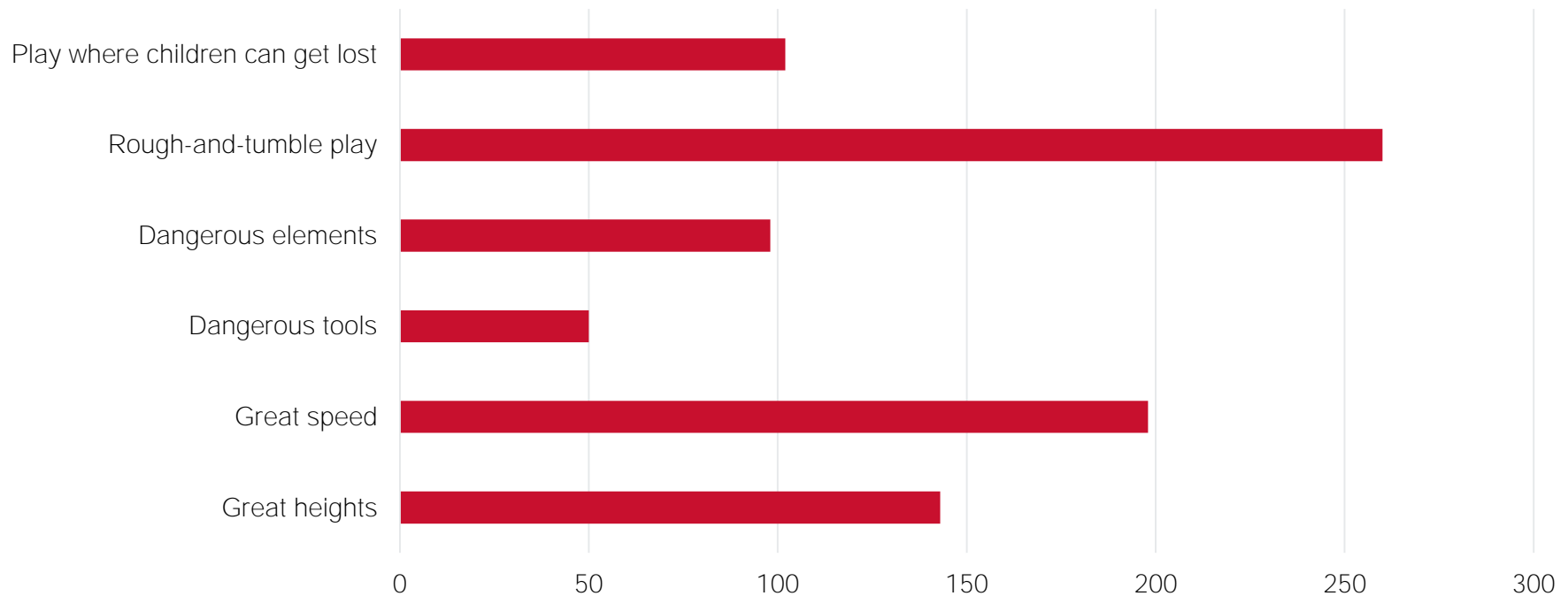


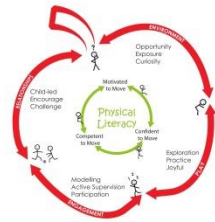


Parental Perceptions: Indoor and Outdoor play spaces

While respondents defined thrilling and exciting forms of play as risky, they indicate that the indoor and outdoor play spaces provide opportunities for rough-and-tumble play.

Active energetic/risky play opportunities during **outdoor** play are available for your children at home (please check all that apply)





Parental Perceptions- Common Barriers

Which of these statements describes common barriers you face in providing active energetic/risky play time for your child(ren) (please check all that apply)?

Respondents comments:

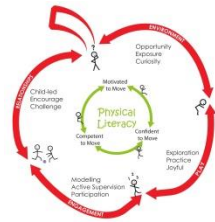
"It's cold outside, and we don't have/can't afford a lot of 'stuff'."

"Time between work and bedtime is limited on work nights so getting out for unstructured free playtime is not always possible."

"Biggest barrier is getting to a good play area quickly. Often we get home just before dinner, then eat, and it is late by the time we can play, especially during winter. We play in the river valley a lot during summer, but getting to more natural areas takes time, and the youngest doesn't have much patience for very long excursions right now."

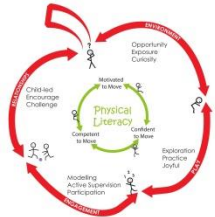
"Lack of play structure outside for sliding and climbing."

"A balance of a small house with a small outdoor space and balancing with trying to do a lot of activities out of home."

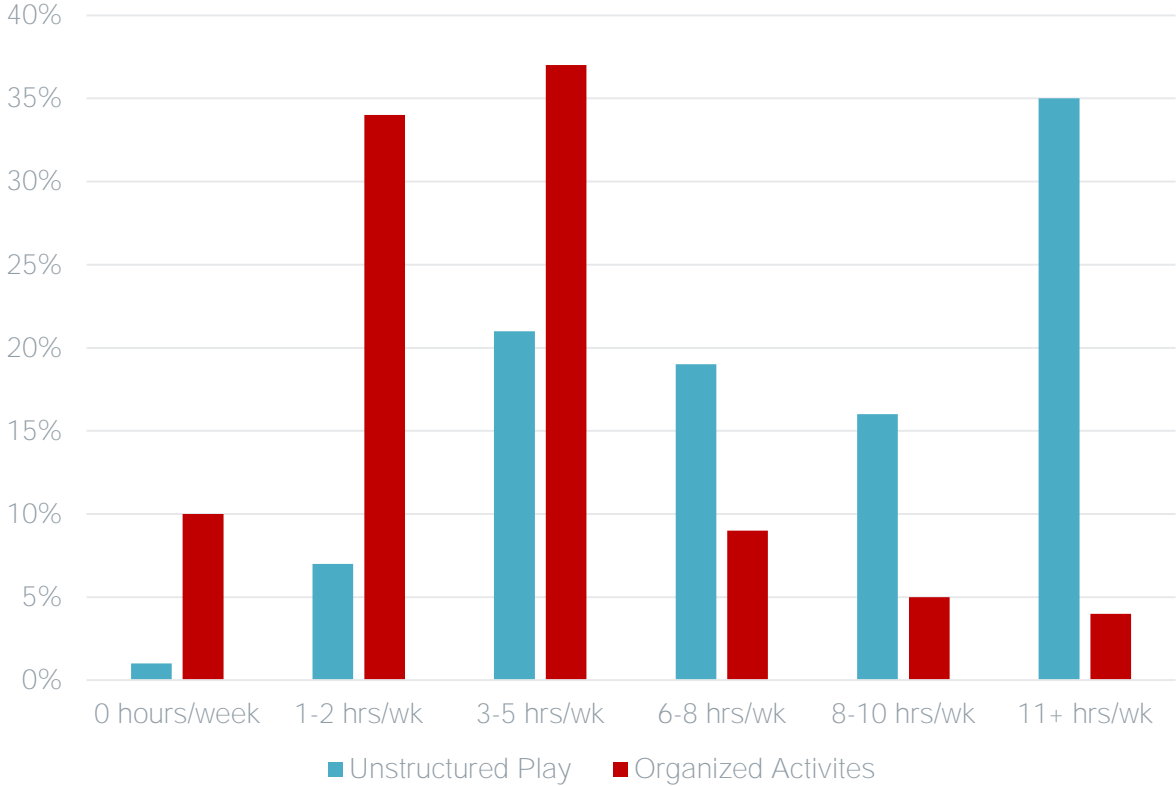


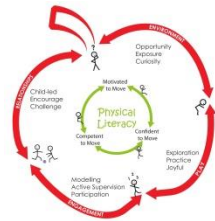
Parental Perceptions of Play – Overview and Key Findings

- **Objective:** Understand Calgary parents' perspectives on unstructured play
- **Method:** Online and intercept surveys
- **Respondents:** 1600 Calgary parents of children aged 5-12
- **Demographics:** Majority was Caucasian female, 31-49 years old, with undergraduate degree or higher and household income of \$75K or more
- **Topics:** Time spent in organized activities and unstructured play; attitudes towards, benefits of and barriers to unstructured play; how to support it.



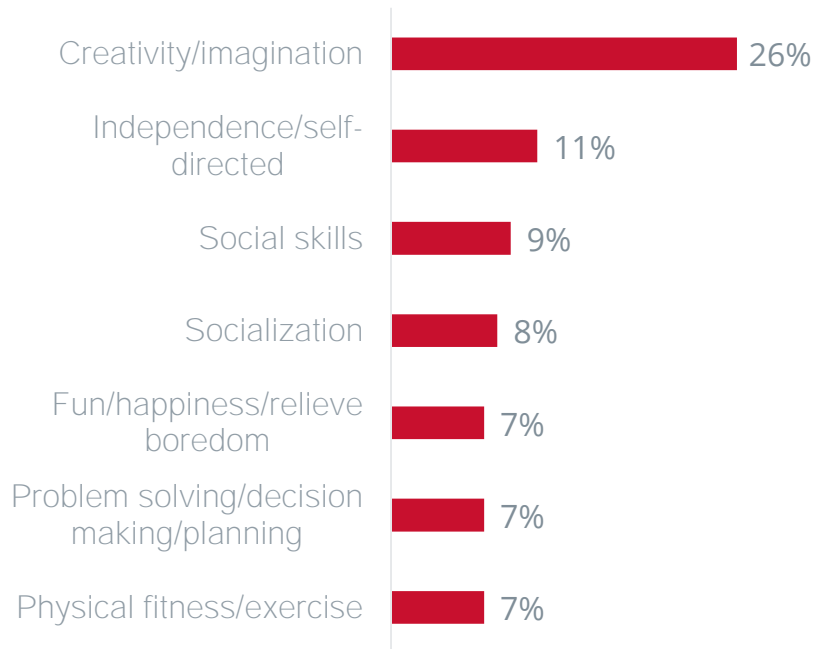
Time Spent in Unstructured Play vs Organized Activities





Benefits of Unstructured Play

Benefits

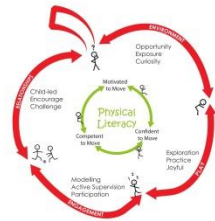


Respondents' comments

“Building social skills. Bonding with siblings. Make new friends. Learn to overcome fears and go out of their comfort zones.”

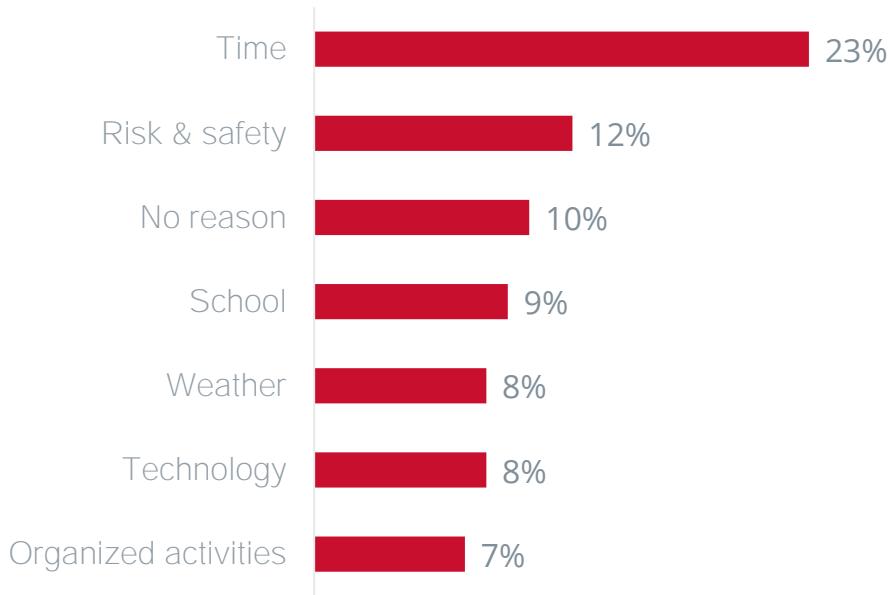
“Goodness. Imagination, the ability to entertain themselves, social skills, negotiation, improvisation, gross motor practice...that's just off the top of my head. They are happiest when doing this kind of play. Unlike a 'class', it doesn't take their energy, it gives them energy.”

“My daughter gets a sense of independence and gets to trial social interaction with her peers without an adult setting the rules. She gets to trial at being a leader, follower, respecting decisions of the group (democracy), negotiating, rule making, learning from peers how to skip monkey bars.”



Barriers to Unstructured Play

Barriers



Respondents' comments

"Lack of time! There's really only two hours of downtime between school and dinner/bed."

"I worry that they will hurt themselves. Also, as odd as this sounds, there is no place for them to do it safely. I could let them loose on the neighbourhood, but what is there for them to do?"

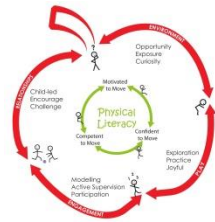
"School system. We have a backwards school day - there should be way more recess and free play."

"My children are not prevented from unstructured play, this is pretty much the only type of play they do."

"If they are too tired from their day or structured activity they just want to play video games."

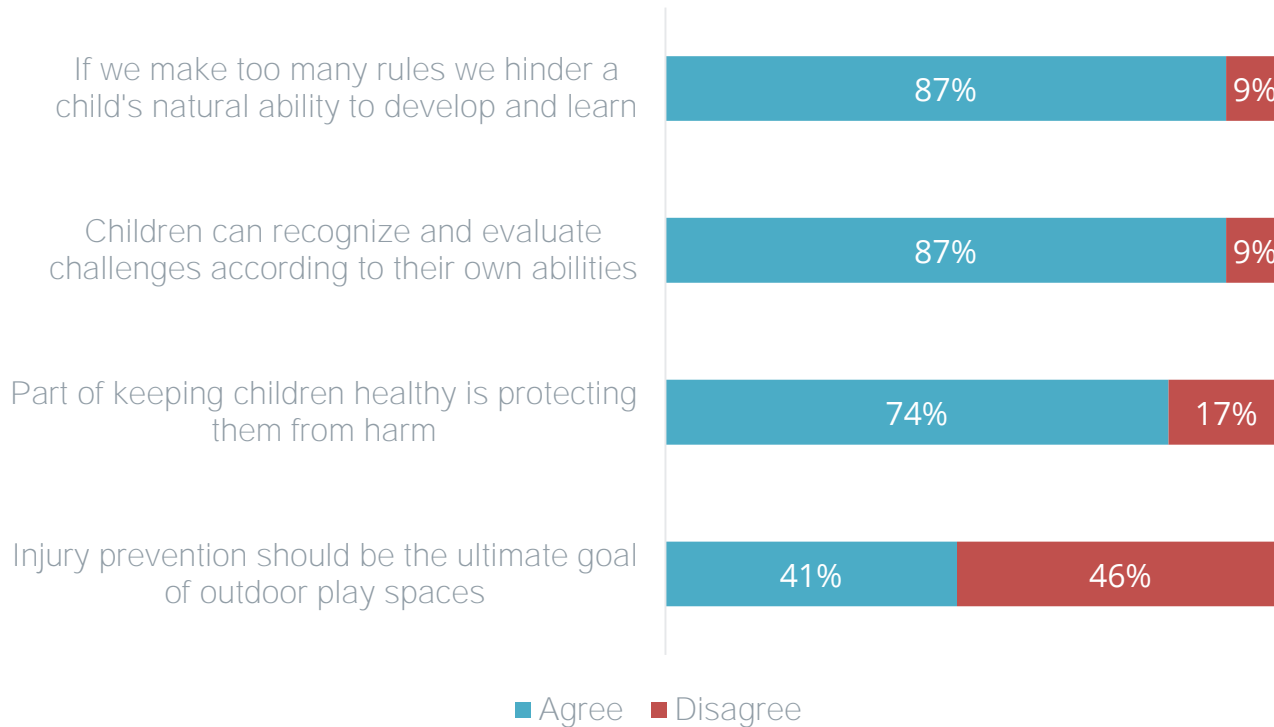
Barriers: Risk & Safety

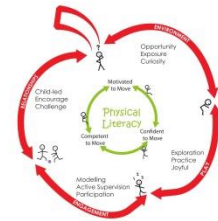




Parental Attitudes about Play

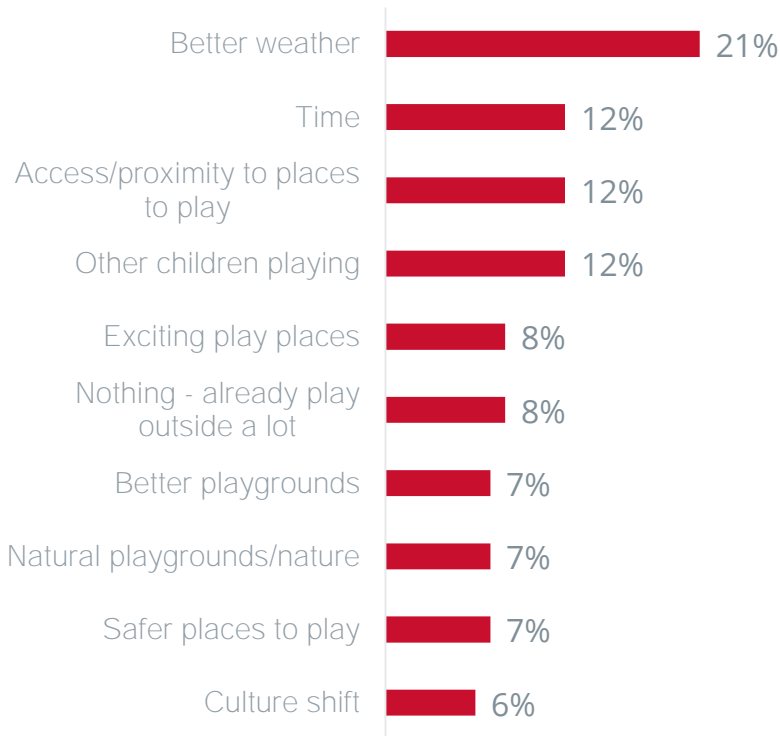
While respondents felt children need freedom to develop and learn, almost half also indicated that public spaces should not present risky play opportunities.





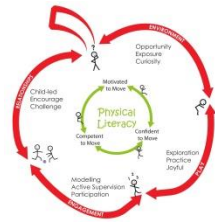
Increasing Children’s Unstructured Play

What would increase your child’s outdoor play?

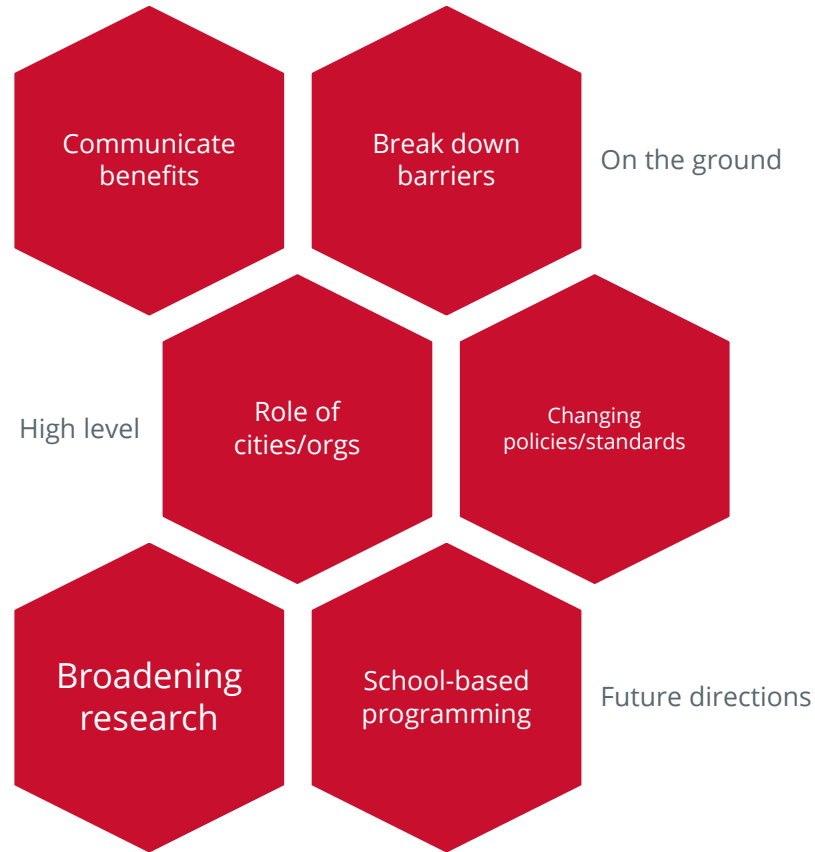


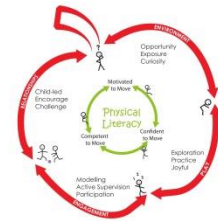
What can the City of Calgary do to support unstructured play?

- Build/update playgrounds
- Maintain current playgrounds
- Community:
 - More community spaces – green spaces, play spaces that are close, easily accessible and safe
 - Allocate space for play in new developments
 - Community play groups
- Educate parents, help shift cultural norms



Tying it all Together



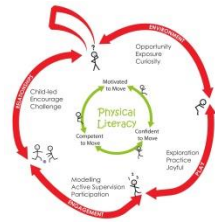


Building on the Benefits

Communicating the Benefits

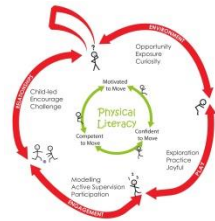
- Many parents understand the benefits of play
- Share other parents' stories and ideas about building creativity, independence, social skills, and socialization.

- Appropriate terminology: adventure play, unstructured play vs *risky play*



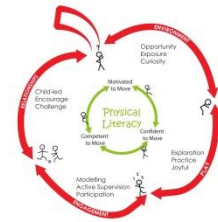
Breaking Down Barriers

- Time & cost
- Weather
- Play places – small, not close to home
- Technology
- Risk & safety



Role of Cities and Organizations

- Develop programming (winter, adventure, unstructured, nature)
- Address the concept of healthy risk with parents
- Incorporate nature into play spaces
- Promote loose parts play
- Work with partners
- Work with other departments to create safer streets and accessibility

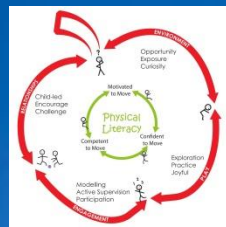


Policy Case, Position Statement, or Protocol Document

Policy Case: Revisions of Child Care Licensing Regulations postponed until 2020; a policy case would not be effective at this time.

Position Statement: A collaborative National Position Statement with all stakeholders; however, Alberta Health Services disagree, in response currently an internal AHS document exists.

Protocol Document: Designed to be a short, clearly written, outline of current regulations. Crucially identifying *agreed upon interpretations* of the regulations.

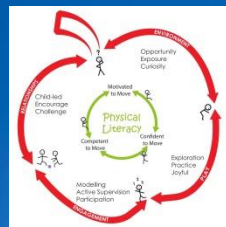


Working together

- Research partnerships
- Play Community of Practice

Additional research directions

- Engage schools: speak to teachers, explore school-based programs
- Broaden parent perspective: ethnic background, males, low-income families



Nalini Mohan, Education Strategist, Calgary Parks

Nalini.Mohan@Calgary.ca

Megan Myers, Research Coordinator, Calgary Recreation, Business and Market Research

Megan.Myers@calgary.ca

Katie Jewitt

The Early Years Physical Literacy Research Team &

Infant Development Program Consultant

Ministry of Child and Family Development, Golden Family Center

katie.j@goldenfamilycenter.bc.ca

LAWSON
FOUNDATION