

CASE STUDY 6

Improving Childhood Development with Nature Play

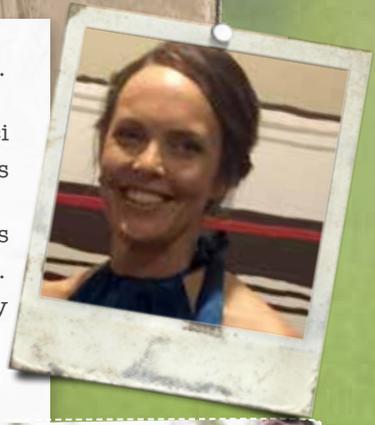
Occupational Therapist:
Jump Up Occupational Therapy

Contact: Madeline Avci

Location: Northern Brisbane Suburbs
(mobile service)

Age of Children: 0 to 15 years

Nature Play QLD Involvement:
Nature Play Passports, forum panelist, Nature Play QLD events, Nature Play Symposium, Nature Play Activity Provider, Nature Play QLD event register, 'Things to Do' lists



Madeline Avci has been an Occupational Therapist for children for over 20 years and has noticed a change in children's play and the landscape of childhood over the last decade.

"Children today are not moving as much, and this has a detrimental effect on the development of their motor skills and ability to process and use information from their senses. Movement is vital for children's development and there is nowhere easier to get moving than when you're outside," says Mrs Avci.

Mrs Avci says that the Nature Play Passports and the 'Things to Do' lists have been useful tools in her Occupational Therapy practice to help her get kids moving again. When kids are engaged in activities on the lists or in the passport, they are developing a wide range of skills, including awareness of where their body is in space, balance, how to use both sides of the body at the same time and how to plan and carry out accurate and coordinated movements, to name a few.



"I use the Nature Play QLD resources as part of my home program with kids, to try and encourage them to do activities in which they're using their bodies and starting to develop some of these skills. When children get to school, these skills form the basis for learning and help children regulate their energy levels, pay attention and be available for learning," says Mrs Avci.

"The ability to focus and pay attention in the classroom is vital for children to be able to learn, and more and more children are having difficulty in this area," she adds.

While Mrs Avci acknowledges that there are many factors contributing to this shift, she admits that increased use of technology and increasingly sedentary childhoods have played a significant factor.

"We're starting to see the trend of kids playing indoors and on screens a lot more. The consequences of that in the classroom have caused a shift in the types of difficulties children are experiencing and the frequency of these," says Mrs. Avci.

"One of the biggest areas of difficulty, and I'd say a lot of teachers would agree, would be kids learning to regulate their energy levels, and their ability to focus and attend in class."

Core strength and muscle control is another big issue that's arisen from less active childhoods, which is having an equally detrimental effect on their education.

"There are kids that are coming into school situations that literally cannot sit up without support. So they can't control their core muscles to sit on the carpet or stay sitting on a chair. This is linked really closely to not moving as much and in many varied ways in their younger years," she says. Mrs Avci adds, "If you're sitting on a couch playing on a screen-based device, there's no need to engage your core muscles or move very much at all."

The Nature Play QLD resources help Mrs Avci to tackle these issues, not only by getting kids interested in the many enjoyable things to do outside, but also by giving parents ideas and prompts about the types of activities that are really beneficial for the healthy development of their children.

"When parents are involved and understand the benefits of outdoor play, it really enhances the benefits that can be gained from Occupational Therapy and is more likely to result in longer term changes and benefits for the child and family," says Mrs. Avci. She believes the passports help build parents' confidence and encourage them to try new things.

"From an OT point of view, if I'm really trying to target getting kids outside and I know it can be difficult for a particular family, then we'll go through and pick a couple of passport missions for that particular week or fortnight. Then they come back and we talk about them and choose a few more, knowing that they'll be checking back in with some increases in the likelihood that the family will follow through with the activities. Before you know it, the family is excited to tell you about extra missions that they did or ones they made up on their own," she says.

Although the passports are a good tool for motivating families and giving them lots of ideas about how to play outdoors, Mrs Avci believes that sustained use is unlikely unless parents remain engaged in the activity. The Nature Play QLD 'Things to Do' lists are a preferred resource for Ms Avci, as there are less steps involved compared to the passports, making them simpler for children to use independently. They do not need to engage with a device to access the 'Things to Do' lists, and they are a quick and easy visual tool.

