

NATURAL PLAYGROUND FAQs



OVERVIEW

Deciding to go against the grain can be a challenge. More often than not, when the conversation about developing a natural playground begins there are many questions about the challenges, benefits and the appropriate approach to take. Fortunately, our team at Bienenstock is well-versed in these conversations and we have a great deal of experience in every phase. To help get you started, we have compiled a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ's) with additional information to begin the conversation.

WHY SHOULD THIS BE IMPORTANT TO ME?

- Average unsupervised daily roam rates for children have shrunk from 10km radius in 1920 to 300m today.¹
- Despite being less likely per capita to be abducted today versus 30 years ago, fear of abduction is most cited as the rationale for reducing children's freedom to roam unsupervised.²
- 'Time in Nature' is now a key health indicator on the Active Healthy Kids Canada report card.³
- This is the first time in history where our children will have shorter life spans than their parents due to the drastic increase in sedentary lifestyles, and lack of nutritional food in childhood diets.⁴
- Average 'screen time' for children 8 to 18 is now over 52.5hrs per week in North America.⁵
- With less and less children connected to nature, the average age of a Parks Canada visitor is now 52yrs+.⁶
- These problems have occurred while we have sterilized playgrounds, purchased play through catalogues with short term risk assessments taking precedence over risk/benefit analysis.⁷
- The simplest way to address these frightening stats is to introduce nature when and where our children play.⁸
- Children's behaviour and school work improve if their playground has grassy areas, ponds and trees.⁹

WHY SHOULD THIS BE IMPORTANT TO TEACHERS?

- It takes a public school teacher an average of 7 to 8 hrs of paperwork to take their class off of school property for a one hour walk in the woods.¹⁰
- Math and language scores increase directly in proportion to contact with nature.¹¹
- The NSTA recently published a doctrine that time in a nature is an important building block for any advancement of STEM scores (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).¹²
- On a traditional play structure, 80% of the physical engagement for large muscle play and fitness is performed by 40% of children (the most agile and physically fit), while 60% of the children (the obese, disabled, unfit, or socially phobic) are almost completely sedentary.¹³
- Natural play spaces provide engagement for all 5 senses, as well as kinesthetic sense, sense of place, and sense of wonder and include outdoor classrooms, spaces for quiet contemplation, creative and dramatic play, fine motor engagement, balance, agility, gross motor, and cognitive engagement.¹⁴
- Dirt is good! It has been proven to increase healthy immune response, decrease irritable bowel and gut based chronic disease while reducing stress and increasing focus and attention spans.¹⁵
- Average time that a child is engaged in spontaneous play on a traditional post and platform play structure is 19 to 22 mins. The average time is as much as 3 times higher in a natural playground (<1hr).¹⁶
- Natural play spaces provide a place of mastery for every child of every ability.¹⁷

WHAT WILL IT COST?

- Natural play spaces cost the same or less than traditional play spaces to purchase, install, and maintain.
- Funding for natural play spaces is accessible through green funds, in-kind, and community support.¹⁸
- Over a 20 year time frame, natural play spaces are significantly less expensive to maintain and replace as they do not require complete demolition and replacement every 12 to 15 years.¹⁹



ARE NATURAL PLAY SPACES SAFE?

- Catastrophic injuries are lower on natural features compared to plastic post and platform playgrounds.²⁰
- Natural play spaces provide challenging environments for children of all ages and sizes, where they learn important risk evaluation skills more effectively (and safely) than on traditional playgrounds.²¹
- Vandalism, aggressive behaviour, and bullying rates are all reduced in direct proportion to the amount of tree canopy and contact with nature in a play space. The more contact, the greater the benefit.²²

SUMMARY

Natural play spaces are better for optimal child development in almost every conceivable way.²³ Today, it is not only anecdotal evidence that proves natural play spaces are better for children. Whether the concern is play value, accessibility, safety or budget, there is an abundance of research that supports the case as well. The Bienenstock team is here to support you every step of the way. Our comprehensive experience in design, training, advocacy, and construction will help bring your dream play space to reality.



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