



Outdoor Play for Children and Youth

Truro Parks, Recreation & Culture

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Prepared by: Uplift Partnership, Dalhousie University; and
Town of Truro Department of Parks, Recreation & Culture

Rationale:

- Shifts in the way children are spending their time have been shown to have negative impacts on their health and wellbeing. Children's lives are more planned, media focused and sedentary. They are less engaged in unstructured play—particularly to play outdoors. The value that families place on recreation and their engagement in it has significant influence on the incorporation of recreation—and its benefits—in children's lives.¹
- People have an inherent need to connect with the natural world. It is associated with improved mental, and physical health, as well as improved ability to think, learn and remember. It is also known to enhance creativity and positive social behaviours. As a result, community designs are increasingly incorporating opportunities for exposure to natural environments.²
- The Town of Truro recognises that outdoor experiences give children a freedom that is uniquely different to what they may experience in an indoor setting. We also recognise that outdoor play is vital for the well being of our community, and that its provision through a wide range of safe and stimulating play opportunities aids in healthy mental and physical development.
- Outdoor play is a significant resource in helping the Town of Truro achieve its physical activity goals as expressed in the recently approved Physical Activity Plan.
- The Town of Truro has many parks, trails, open spaces, programs, and events that provide outdoor play opportunities for the whole community. A policy will ensure these are maintained and improved in a strategic manner.
- Opportunities to create more play space will be explored through strategic planning, ongoing greening initiatives, and streetscape upgrades. Future spaces will be developed with opportunities for play in mind.
- New regulations in the Municipal Government Act in 2019 identify Recreation Facilities and Public Open Space as a new mandatory component.
- There has been a decline in outdoor play in Canada and many other jurisdictions. This has been caused by several factors including increased screen time, adult concerns about child safety, and an increase in organized sport and recreation.
- Levels of health enhancing physical activity have been low for some time. Statistics Canada research shows that only 33% of children and youth 5–17 meet the guidelines of an average of 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. (Colley, 2015)³ A significant number are close to achieving the standard. Outdoor play is a significant asset in helping the Town of Truro achieve our goals, as expressed in the recently approved Physical Activity Strategy.
- Canada wide research in 2020 with parents sponsored by ParticipAction and universities shows that the Covid 19 pandemic has decreased outdoor play and increase screen time.⁴

¹ Shared Strategy for Advancing Recreation in Nova Scotia – October 2015 – Recreation NS and Government of NS
Dept of Health & Wellness

² Shared Strategy for Advancing Recreation in Nova Scotia – October 2015 – Recreation NS and Government of NS
Dept of Health & Wellness

³ Colley RC, Carson V, Garriguet D, et al. Physical activity of Canadian children and youth, 2007 to 2015. Health Reports 2017; 28(10):8-16.

⁴ Moore et al. Impact of the COVID-19 virus outbreak on movement and play behaviours of Canadian children and youth: a national survey. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (2020) 17:85

Scope:

- This policy will address outdoor play, but not organized sport and recreation.
- The policy will consider the role of all Town of Truro municipal departments and not only the recreation department.
- Children and youth are often divided into three age ranges: 0–6, 7–12, and 13–19.
- The intent of these policy actions is to identify those areas that are the responsibility of the Town of Truro and its mandate to provide accessible recreation for all citizens.
- The policy actions will complement what public education and day care systems do in facility design, recess, after school sport and recreation, physical education curriculum, and use of outdoors settings to enhance academic learning.

Vision:

The Town of Truro will be a community where the right to play is available to all children and youth, regardless of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, or economic circumstances. The Town of Truro envisions a child friendly environment where play is everywhere, not simply in playgrounds.

Opportunities will be close to home, freely chosen, with permission but without undue direction by adults, intrinsically motivated, stimulating and fun. Play will have risk at a level appropriate to their age and ability. It will immerse them in natural environments as well as using formal play spaces and loose parts.

Every child should have play opportunities and spaces where they feel comfortable, can explore, play safely, and experiencing challenges and risks inherent in outdoor play.

The Town of Truro is continuously identifying opportunities to include outdoor play in public spaces in the community.

The vision will be achieved through policies, planning, guidelines, and standards that result in:

1. Children and youth engaged in outdoor play and program planning.
2. Increased walking and biking options to compliment outdoor play spaces.
3. A network of formal and informal play spaces that are designed and managed so that all children feel welcome and included.
4. Parents and key decision makers will be informed about the benefits of and opportunities for Outdoor Play and Active Travel within the Town of Truro.
5. Outdoor play considered in all Town of Truro projects and initiatives.
6. Children and youth learning fundamental movement skills (balance, locomotion, coordination) and connecting with nature.
7. Children and youth having regular access to outdoor play equipment.

Policy actions

Leadership and Planning

- A. The Town of Truro will provide leadership and advocacy for outdoor play in the community, during out of school time periods.
- B. The Town of Truro will review its policies and bylaws to ensure there are no unintentional barriers to outdoor play.
- C. The Town of Truro will support community groups with training on outdoor play and the development of initiatives such as skateboard parks, community gardens, nature play, loose parts, and play streets.
- D. The Town of Truro shall host mini gatherings or workshops for organizations that have an interest in outdoor play. These will focus on success stories, learning about outdoor play, and possible partnerships.

Youth engagement

- A. The Town of Truro will use a variety of methods to engage children and youth in planning and design of outdoor play spaces.
- B. The Town of Truro will regularly ask children and youth about play preferences and satisfaction with and awareness of existing spaces and places. E.g., The Town of Truro will focus on a different age group each year.

Land use planning and outdoor play spaces

- A. Town of Truro land use policies shall encourage formal and informal outdoor play spaces. All improvements to public spaces will be considered as an opportunity to create space for spontaneous or incidental play. Spaces shall incorporate micro elements that encourage participation. Conditions for nature play will be considered a priority in play spaces.
- B. The Town of Truro Director of Parks, Recreation & Culture will be consulted regarding the need for outdoor play space in any land use planning initiatives.
- C. The Town of Truro will build on existing play spaces and develop a network of multi functional play spaces, using a system such as neighborhood play space (within .5km) of home; community play space (1km from home) and destination play space (within Town limits, and easy to get to).
- D. Vacant and unused lands will be inventoried and assessed for suitability as play spaces (not necessarily a playground).
- E. All development agreements shall consider the inclusion of play spaces to satisfy amenity space requirements.
- F. Develop a system to review and renew playgrounds and play spaces to ensure safety, lifecycle maintenance, appropriate signage / directions that are consistent with child and youth needs for challenge and risk. Children and youth should participate in the review.

- G. Play spaces and facilities will be audited using an equity lens and Universal Design Guidelines. This is consistent with new provincial legislation on Accessibility.
- H. Play equipment will be made available where children do not have access to playgrounds and play spaces. E.g., The Town of Truro Equipment Loan Programs.

Develop active transportation routes to connect community and public spaces

- A. Develop and maintain sidewalks and bike lanes and supporting infrastructure. In a survey of 190 Truro junior and senior high school students, 45% said sidewalks would have the biggest impact on their decision to walk or bike to school. 23% said bike lanes would impact their decisions.
- B. Street design will be modified to slow traffic and incorporated into transportation plans.

Programs to support outdoor play

- A. The Town of Truro will maintain and enhance its equipment loan programs.
- B. The Town of Truro will develop opportunities for children and youth to learn skills and knowledge that enable participation in outdoor play. These opportunities should complement what is learned at school about outdoor play.

Communications and Awareness

- A. The Town of Truro will plan and implement a communications strategy on Outdoor Play. The key audiences are parents and local decision makers. A key message for parents is the 3-step lifeguard approach developed by Dr Marianna Brussoni. Observe, check in and intervene.
- B. The Town of Truro will use the existing Fundy Connect database to promote its sport and recreation programs, facilities, greenspaces and parks.
- C. The Town of Truro and community agencies shall use special events, information, and pop-up installations to promote outdoor play in public spaces, parks and streets.

Accountability:

The Town of Truro, Director of Parks, Recreation & Culture will report annually to the PRC Committee on implementation.



Appendix A – Definitions

Play is what children and youth do when they follow their own instincts, ideas, and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons. Play is freely chosen (a child chooses when, if and how to play), intrinsically motivated (a child plays because they are motivated internally to do so), and personally directed (a child individually or collectively directs their own play).

Outdoor Play is play that takes place outside and includes concepts of risky play and nature play. Outdoor play is the umbrella term that assumes the above definition of *play* and takes place in a very broad continuum of spaces that include urban, rural, suburban, and wilderness settings. Children need time and space for play at a variety of durations and intensity levels. Some play will be short and intense while other play may be longer and less vigorous. Children are attracted to play with peers and friends, but some children will choose to play alone for a period of time.

Nature Play is play that happens primarily outside in a natural environment and/or involves play with natural elements and features, such as water and mud, rocks, hills, forests, and natural loose parts, such as sticks, pinecones, leaves, grass etc.

Risky Play is thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve uncertainty and a risk of physical injury. Risky play provides opportunities for challenge, testing limits, exploring boundaries, and learning about injury risk.^{7,8} Risky play is subjective and changes for each child.

Loose Parts are materials used in play that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. They are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials. Source: Outdoor Play Canada

Youth engagement means actively involving youth in creating services, opportunities and supports that they need and use. This means offering youth opportunities to develop, learn skills, and work on issues that are important to them. Source: UpLift Partnership

