



The Weather Outside Might Seem Frightful

The winter season is upon us. Soon it will be time to put on boots, hats, scarves, gloves and get outside to fight the frightful cold weather. Remember the days as a child, when the cold and snow didn't seem so scary. We would go outside build snowmen, snow forts, sled down the neighborhood hills, and even lie in the snow to make snow angels! These times in the life of young children seem to be disappearing. We need to get young children outside to enjoy the snow and the cold. It is good opportunity for them to embrace new sensory experiences, expand large muscle development, and learn about nature and weather in our community.

When getting your infants ready to go outside in the winter, talk to them constantly while you are dressing them. Explain to them about what you are doing. They appreciate being included in the process. They are learning one arm goes in the coat, then the other and now it is time to put on the hat. Take infants outside for about 20 minutes. Once outside, take them on a walk to see the changes in the scenery. Talk to them about the snow on the ground, the bare trees. Point out the sounds of nature. Allow them to touch the snow. Build a sled out of a flat-bottomed plastic infant bathtub, tucking pillows all around them and pull them around in the snow. This time outdoors will give infants fantastic sensory experiences which is so important to their development. Even if infants are only outside for 5 to 10 minutes, dressed appropriately, the fresh air will feel good to them and can help prevent illness.



When getting your toddlers dressed to go outside in the winter, allow them to do as much as possible for themselves but stay close to provide assistance as needed. When your toddler is trying to zip up the jacket or use a Velcro fastener, he is practicing fine motor skills. Allowing him to get ready independently also helps to build self-help skills. Remember, this will take longer then getting ready to go out in the summer, but be patient. He is learning many new skills.

Once you are outside with toddlers allow them to play, run, jump, climb in the snow. Allow them to be involved in getting the yard ready to play, wiping off the climber, slide and toys with a small shovel or towel. Use sandbox toys to build snow castles. Just about anything you do outside in the summer can be done in the winter—along with making snowmen and snow angels. When toddlers are outside climbing in the snow, they are using many of their large muscles, encouraging large motor development. The more they move around, the more cold air they breathe, the more energy they use, the less active they will be once they get back inside. As with infants, even if toddlers are only outside for 5 to 10 minutes, dressed appropriately, the fresh air will feel good to them and can help prevent illness.

When it comes to being outside, most children are warm, happy and excited to be outdoors. It's the adults who are not prepared. Be sure to be prepared to go outside in the cold winter months ahead. Have a pair of boots, snow pants, gloves and hat available, so you are always prepared to get out and have some winter fun with the children in your care.

"If children learn to love being outdoors when they young, it will make them healthier. It will also help ensure they will take better care of our world when they are adults."

Brenda Cobb

Resources:

<http://www.claytonearlylearning.org/files/importance-of-taking-infants-toddlers-outdoors.pdf>. Brenda Cobb
[Child Care Information Exchange 1/96: Caring for the Little Ones](#). By Karen Miller