

MOVEMENT & PLAY POLICY: NATURE YARD

The West County First 5 Center wants to provide a safe, natural playspace where families can play and be physically active outdoors. We are proposing a unique nature play yard very different from a traditional playground. Natural landscapes “tickle the imagination and surprise the senses…they offer endless possibilities for play and discovery as children find places to run, climb, dig, pretend, hide, and explore.” (Natural Playscapes-Creating Outdoor Play Environments for the Soul, Rusty Keeler.)

**For young children, outdoor nature play…**

• Helps prevent obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other health issues

• Encourages cooperative play, leadership, and communication

• Helps with problem solving, creative thinking, and cognitive skills such as reading and writing.

• Reduces stress and anxiety

• Increases attention span and reduces ADHD symptoms

• Increased exposure to natural sunlight elevates mood and other health benefits

• Improves vision

• Increases children’s interest in outdoor play while decreasing interest in screen-time

•Instills a love of nature, along with a positive environmental ethic

**For adults, outdoor nature play…**

• Improves performance at work and school

• Improves mood and mental health

• Encourages parents to model healthy behavior for young children and others

•Helps parents become more aware of nature’s benefits for young children

•Helps parents learn simple ways to increase children’s exposure to outdoor nature play

•Allows time for cooperative play with their children

•Supports parents with ways to decrease screen time for their children

• Reduces risk for chronic diseases and the need for associated medical costs

**The West County First 5 Center is committed to creating a natural play environment and implementing activities that support families with young children to be active in outdoor nature spaces at our First 5 Center.**

Examples of activities and policies to be adopted include:

•Contract with a landscape architect to design a blueprint for the nature yard that includes participant input. Our initial vision includes natural items and play structures made from natural items or recycled materials, including logs, huts, tunnels, boulders, art, pathways, music, plants, sand, water, loose play materials, and more.

• Creation of the nature yard

• Create formal and informal programming that utilizes the nature yard

• Elicit feedback from participants to determine effectiveness of completed nature yard in increasing outdoor nature play

• Implement workshops for parents highlighting the benefits of outdoor nature play and how to incorporate it into their lifestyle

• Implement workshops for staff highlighting the benefits of outdoor nature play and how to incorporate it into their classes and conversations with parents at the Center

• Conduct staff meetings and gatherings in the nature yard to increase familiarity with the staff