
Beat the winter blues with fun activities

It is easy to let winter get you down as you dream of the long, warm days of summer. But since you can't wish winter away, you might as well make the best of it! Look for ways you and your child can enjoy the winter months, both outdoors and inside.

As long as the temperature does not dip too low, try to get outside for a play every day. Be sure to dress your child for comfort and safety. Layer clothing under an insulated jacket and ski pants to trap body heat. Make sure boots are not too tight, and that there is room for warm socks and a bit of movement. Choose mitts that are made of a material that cannot be easily soaked through or wear two pairs. Try to cover as much skin as possible with a toque that covers your child's ears, and a neck warmer that covers much of the face.

There are many fun ways to enjoy cold days outside.

- Sledding, skating, making snow angels or building a snowman are all good activities to get the body moving.

- Study nature. Look for animal tracks or listen for

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PARENTING POINTS

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sounds of winter birds. Use a dark piece of construction paper to catch falling snowflakes and examine them with a magnifying glass.

- Use shovels and sand pails to build snow castles or roads.

- Blow bubbles. Winter bubbles are very different than summer ones. As the bubble freezes, you can watch it roll and bounce across the snow before it pops.

- Set up an obstacle course in the yard or at the park.

- Hide small colourful toys in the snow and have a treasure hunt. You could also hide ice cubes made with coloured water so your child can search for "jewels."

- Bring washable paints outside to decorate snowmen

or other structures made of snow.

When playing outside, watch for signs of frostbite. If you start to see symptoms such as shivering or discoloration of the skin, or your child complains of numbness, stiffness or aches, head inside.

On very cold days you will need to limit your outside play, but that does not mean you can't extend winter play to the indoors as well.

- Scoop some clean snow into a large plastic bowl or bin. Let your child put on some mitts and play in the snow while staying warm in the house.

- Make simple bird feeders. Collect some pine cones, tie on pieces of yarn with a loop for hanging, then spread with peanut butter or lard and roll in bird seed. Or, thread Cheerios onto a pipe cleaner and twist the ends together so it can be hung from a branch.

- Have an indoor snowball fight with balled up socks, build a "snow fort" with sheets and blankets or make a snowman by stuffing pillow cases with sheets and towels.