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Play in Nature: Implications for Child Development, Occupational Science, and Occupational Justice

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In recent years, there has been increasing concern that the multisensory experiences afforded by environments such as the outdoors are being replaced by two-dimensional interactions with television and electronic media, possibly contributing to problems such as obesity, sensory integration dysfunction, and feelings of disconnectedness from nature. In addition, researchers are beginning to show that engagement in outdoor occupations is linked to enhanced physical, psychosocial, and cognitive performance. Because it is one of the primary modes of experiencing the natural world in early life, childhood play is the main focus of my examination into these relationships. Of particular interest is how occupational science can be used to understand the effects of exposure to wilderness environments and how playing in such greenspaces might enhance children's development and overall well-being. A potential agenda for future research in occupational science is outlined, as well as preliminary recommendations for policy enhancement using the occupational justice frame of reference to encourage communities to advocate for the provision of safe and accessible outdoor playspaces.