

Snow much fun!

Have fun with snow with your kids!



By Katharine Fletcher

With snow blanketing the ground it's time to get outside and play. Regardless of whether your home is an apartment, a home with a backyard, or a rural country property with a "back forty," these ideas should work.

First things first: Parks in the city

Urban parks exist throughout the city, from the Glebe's Brown Lake, to Nepean's Andrew Haydon, to Lowertown's Major's Hill, and to Gatineau's Jacques Cartier. (Browse the City's website at ottawa.ca to discover a list, plus maps.)

Especially after a fresh snowfall, it is both healthy and fun to get outside and play.

Second: Safety tips

Because it's cold, kids need bundling up. Ensure they're cosy and dry before heading outside, and that they are wearing a snowsuit, with mittens, boots, tuque and scarf. If you'll be out for a while, take thermoses of hot chocolate and treats.

Second safety layer is to make cautionary rules about throwing snowballs (which can hurt especially if they're icy or if a piece of gravel gets inside) and making snow tunnels and forts (which can collapse). Tip: Be safe and closely supervise what's going on as you have snow much fun outside. Sound obvious? Good!

Third: City organized sports

Check the City of Ottawa website for its list of 246 outdoor skating rinks and 50 approved sledding hills, (or, call 613-580-2424, ext. 37017; or e-mail seasonalrecreation@ottawa.ca). In addition, the Mooney's Bay Ski Centre offers

cross-country ski lessons for children, youth and adults. Why not take family lessons? Information: Mooney's Bay Ski Centre (613- 247-4883).

Fourth: Snow games 4 U!

Here are some games but remember: not all snow is created equal. Some is good for packing, some is fine for sliding.

Make an impression!

Lie on the ground and although you could make snow angels (by opening and closing your legs and moving your arms up and down) here's a new twist. While lying down, bunch snow around your body and get up carefully. Then, add a dragon's tail and head to the impression of your body – or a Pooh Bear's head and a nearby honey pot. Let your kids be who they want to be.

Building snow sculptures

Everyone's heard of snowmen and snowwomen, and they're really fun to both build and decorate. Why not build your family? That should provoke lots of giggles and laughs. Or, help kids build an animal: Why not try a bunny sitting on its hind legs, with its ears standing up straight?

Hat toss

Now that your snow person or bunny is built... try tossing a hat onto its head. Ask everyone to stand back say five good paces (or whatever won't frustrate your littlest one) and draw a line in the snow from which everyone will throw. Why not try a straw hat or baseball cap? Tip: Remember, this game requires a light, high throw. So ... now that you know why you made the snow sculptures, make them short, otherwise your child won't be able to throw high enough!

Playing house

Everyone likes a snow fort so build a house without a roof (so it won't collapse... remember that safety tip?). Walls can be reasonably tall but take care again that they won't fall over... Knock out windows (that's so much fun) so you can look outside and welcome guests – who can sit on the snow chairs at your snow table... and drink their hot chocolate.

Roller derby

With teams of kids, see who can roll the fattest snowball. When the team cannot move theirs any further, they're finished. Can the next team roll a chubbier one? Remember: Slower rolling produces a rounder ball which may not fall apart as easily as a fast-roll. If a team's ball breaks, they start over – or, make up your own, fair rules!

Scavenger hunt

Just like the Easter Egg hunt, you'll need to both collect some items to look for, and also go outside and hide them before inviting your kids and their friends to search. Why not teach orienteering skills for older kids, and create a map they can follow. Youngsters know all about pirate maps, so draw a pirate map in the snow, and look for hidden treasures.

Get the [snow] drift?

What's important about all these ideas? Being together as a family. Playing with your kids. Then, coming back inside and enjoying everyone's rosy faces, bright eyes... and tucking them into their cosy beds. Come to think of it, you might get tuckered, too! Fun!

Katharine and Eric Fletcher are currently working on the fifth edition of their book, Quebec Off the Beaten Path, a guide to the province. Find this and other books at Mountain Equipment Co-op and independent bookstores in the region.

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