

SAFE PLACES TO PLAY

The United Nations says that every child has the right to rest and leisure and to engage in play and recreational activities that are age appropriate. Safe play is fundamental to healthy growth and development in children, but it is also important for everyone aged 0-100 (and more!).

When you think of safe places to play, you may think of your neighbourhood park with play structures meeting the latest safety standards, or maybe of the recreation centre down the street that offers supervised programming. While guidelines, standards, and supervision all have a role in creating a community that is free from hazards and

minimizes the risk for serious injury, having a safe place to play is a much broader concept.

Have you ever walked into a recreation centre or park or biked along a path and had a feeling that something isn't quite right? It may have caused you to turn around, head for home and changed your mind about being active that day or every day after. In some cases it may be something in the built environment that makes you uncomfortable. Or it may be part of the social environment that impacts your feeling of safety and sense of belonging.

So how do we create places to play that are welcoming and safe for all ages, abilities, genders, and cultures?

BUILT ENVIRONMENT:

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IS OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD. IT INCLUDES ALL PARTS OF OUR PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS THAT ARE BUILT FOR PEOPLE BY PEOPLE. THIS INCLUDES BUILDINGS, SIDEWALKS, ROADS AND PARKS. THE PATTERN OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT SHAPES WHAT WE DO AND WHERE WE GO EVERY DAY. IT CAN ALSO AFFECT HOW MUCH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WE GET, AND HOW SAFE WE FEEL.



HOW WE DESIGN AND MAINTAIN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS, STREETS, AND PARKS SHAPES OUR PERCEPTION OF SAFETY.

- **NATURAL ELEMENTS & LANDSCAPING** – studies show that people prefer environments that are natural. Adding vegetation and water elements improves the visual appearance and sense of safety.
- **UPKEEP** – people tend to feel more comfortable in orderly, neat and well-kept environments. Graffiti and vandalism add to our feelings of fear and uncertainty.
- **OPENNESS** – having an unobstructed view allows individuals to see what is ahead. Walking along a street where there are places for someone to hide can evoke fear. The use of glass and open fencing (like widely spaced picket fencing or wrought iron fencing) can define space without fully enclosing it.
- **LIGHTING** – having appropriate lighting can impact the sense of safety into the evening after dark.
- **NATURAL SURVEILLANCE** – you may have heard the term “eyes on the street.” Windows overlooking areas where people are active, along with sidewalks and seating are great amenities to encourage pedestrian traffic and add to the appeal.

WE CAN ALL DO OUR PART, IN OUR OWN WAY TO MAKE WINNIPEG A WELCOMING PLACE THAT SUPPORTS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT:

The strongest independent predictor of being physically active is the social environment. The social environment is made up of the people, places and policies within our community that influence our behaviour. They help shape our norms and can provide opportunities or set up barriers to being active. Here are a few ways our social environment can impact our feeling of safety and encourage participation.

- **Social supports and networks** – Social supports are the resources provided by others. Our family and friends can be our biggest cheerleaders and can add to the feeling of safety in numbers. Having an active role model or someone to be active with can positively impact our choices. Facilities and programs can offer a “buddy system” or mentoring opportunity. The degree to which you are interconnected with others in your community can impact your health and well-being.
- **Discrimination** – discrimination can negatively impact one’s sense of safety and belonging. Having a diverse workforce, displaying artwork or images of diversity in facilities, and providing service in many languages are all ways that programs and facilities can be more inviting.



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For additional information and resources to be physically active, visit winnipeginmotion.ca