

# Re-thinking Risk: Are children too safe for their own good?

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Dr. Mariana Brussoni

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Photo by M. Brussoni

# Re-thinking risk: Are children too safe for their own good?

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**BC INJURY** research and  
prevention unit



# Outline:

## What, Why and How of Risky Play

- What is it?
- Why is it important?
- How do we make change?



# What was your childhood like?

Q

- Think about your childhood play activities...
  - What was your favorite thing to do?
  - What could you not wait to get to?
  - Where were you?
  - Who was typically there with you?

# POLL QUESTION

- WHERE WAS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE TO PLAY?
  - Inside
  - Outside

# POLL QUESTION

- WERE YOU TAKING RISKS?
  - Yes
  - No

# POLL QUESTION

- WHERE YOU SUPERVISED?
  - Yes
  - No

# What is childhood like now?

Q

- Think about the activities that children today do that they can't wait to get to...



# POLL QUESTION

- ARE CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU REMEMBER?
  - Same
  - Different

# KIDS ACTIVITY - THEN

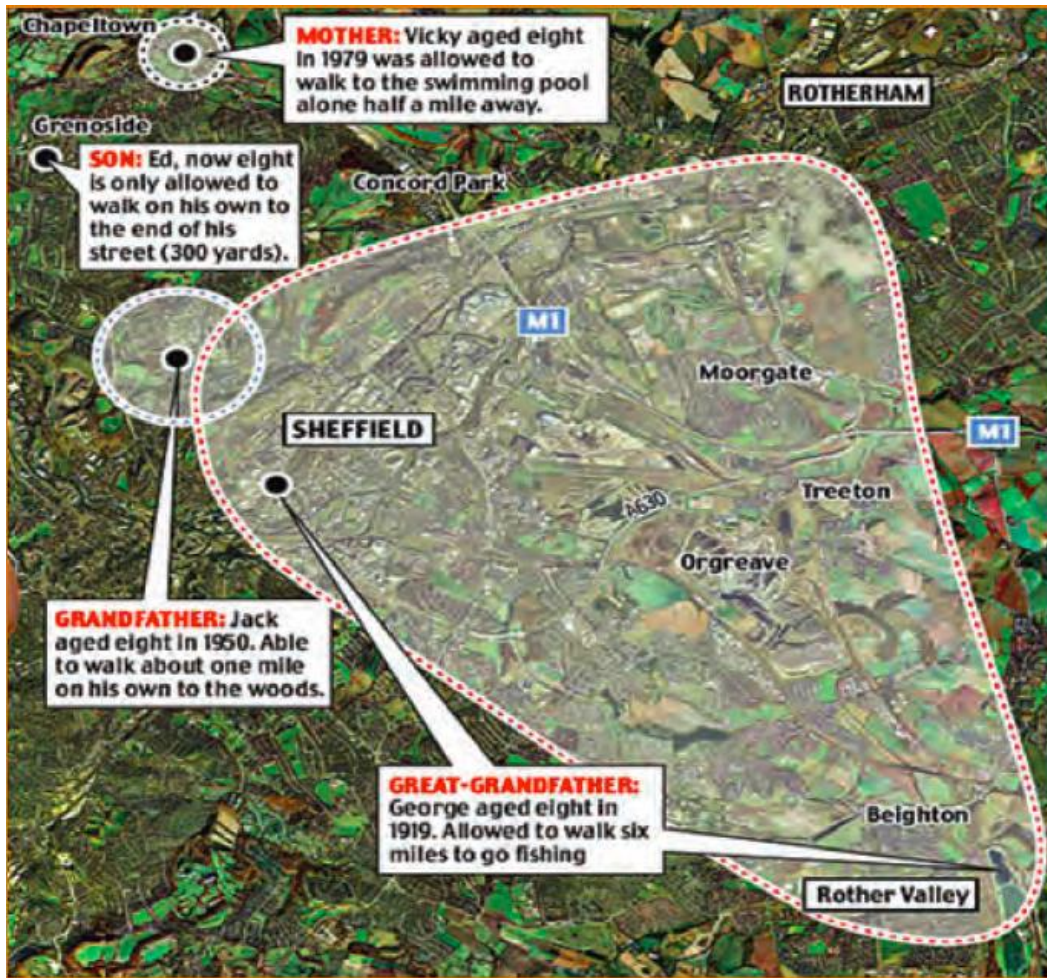


# AND NOW

Let's  
Ferry



# Home Territory of 8-Year Olds



- Great Granddad (1919): 6 miles to go fishing
- Grandfather (1950): 1 mile into woods
- Mother (1979): ½ mile to swimming pool
- Son (today): 300 yards to end of his street

**Figure 26:** The Drastic Reduction in the Home Territory of 8-Year-Olds Across 3 Generations (Source: the Daily Mail<sup>123</sup>).

## Portrait of a Typical Canadian 12-year old

**Canadian children today are taller, heavier, fatter, rounder, weaker, less flexible, and less aerobically fit than in 1981.**

| FITNESS TESTS |               |          |
|---------------|---------------|----------|
| 43 kg         | Grip strength | 40 kg*   |
| 32.0 cm       | Sit-and-reach | 28.2 cm* |



# What is risky play?



*... thrilling & exciting forms of play involving uncertainty and the chance of physical injury*



# Risky Play



Play with heights



Play at high speeds



Play with tools



Play near elements



Play with a chance of getting lost



Rough and tumble play

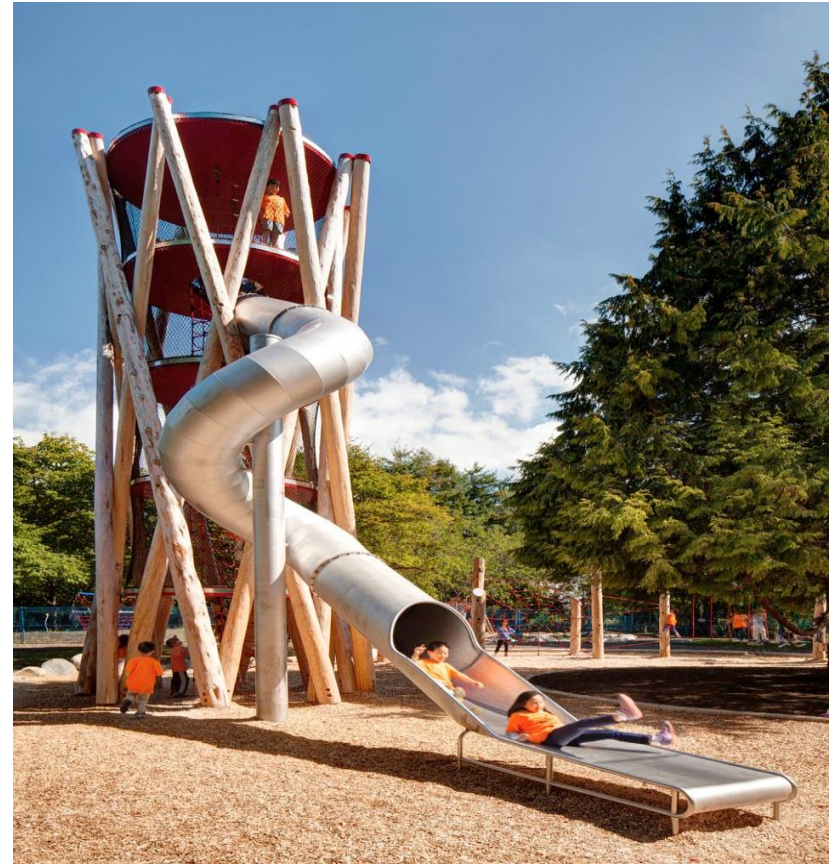
# What Risky Play is Not

- Neglect
- Recklessness
- Pushing children beyond abilities/interests

# Hazard

vs

# Risk



Hapa Collaborative

As Safe as *Necessary*, not As Safe as *Possible*





# Benefits of Outdoor Risky Play



When children are outside, they move more, sit less and play longer






A young child is standing inside a teepee-like structure made of thin, brown sticks. The child is wearing a bright yellow jacket with two dark blue horizontal stripes on the sleeve, light grey pants, and a brown hat with a camouflage pattern. The child is looking towards the left. The teepee is situated in a grassy field with some fallen leaves. In the background, there are green pine branches and a small blue object. A semi-transparent grey box with white text is overlaid on the right side of the image.


Outdoor loose parts play promotes:  
socio-emotional development  
reduced bullying  
higher levels of happiness



A photograph of a young child sitting in a large tree, surrounded by dense cherry blossoms. The child is wearing a white shirt and a colorful, striped skirt. The scene is bright and sunny, with the blossoms in various shades of pink and white. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text.

Access to nature promotes:  
change & challenge  
stress-buffering  
attention restoration  
self-regulation  
environmental awareness



A child is swinging on a rope swing in a snowy outdoor setting. The child is wearing a blue and grey winter jacket, grey pants, black boots, and a red and grey striped beanie. They are holding onto the ropes with green and black gloves. The ground is covered in snow, and there are trees and a wooden fence in the background.

# Access to outdoors: Vitamin D myopia spatial working memory

Photo by Angela Roy  
Provided by Beverlie Dietze

Wyver, 2018; Carson & Predy, (2019) Encyclopedia on Early  
Childhood Development





Outdoor play promotes:  
Curiosity, exploration, learning,  
later academic success



A group of young children are playing outdoors on a path made of flat stones. In the foreground, a child with blonde hair and sunglasses is wearing a dark blue puffer jacket and is stepping on a rock. Behind them, a girl in a purple and white plaid jacket is also stepping on a rock. To the right, another child in a dark blue jacket and red boots is visible. In the background, there are trees, a fence, and a building. The scene is bright and sunny.

Physical activity in context of  
complexity, novelty, diversity  
promotes executive functioning

Photo by Angela Roy  
Provided by Beverlie Dietze

Wyver, (2019) Encyclopedia on Early  
Childhood Development



# Are we overdoing things?



# POLL QUESTION

- WHAT ARE OUR BIGGEST FEARS? (Select all that apply)
  - Injury
  - Traffic
  - Strangers
  - What other people will think
  - Play is a waste of precious time

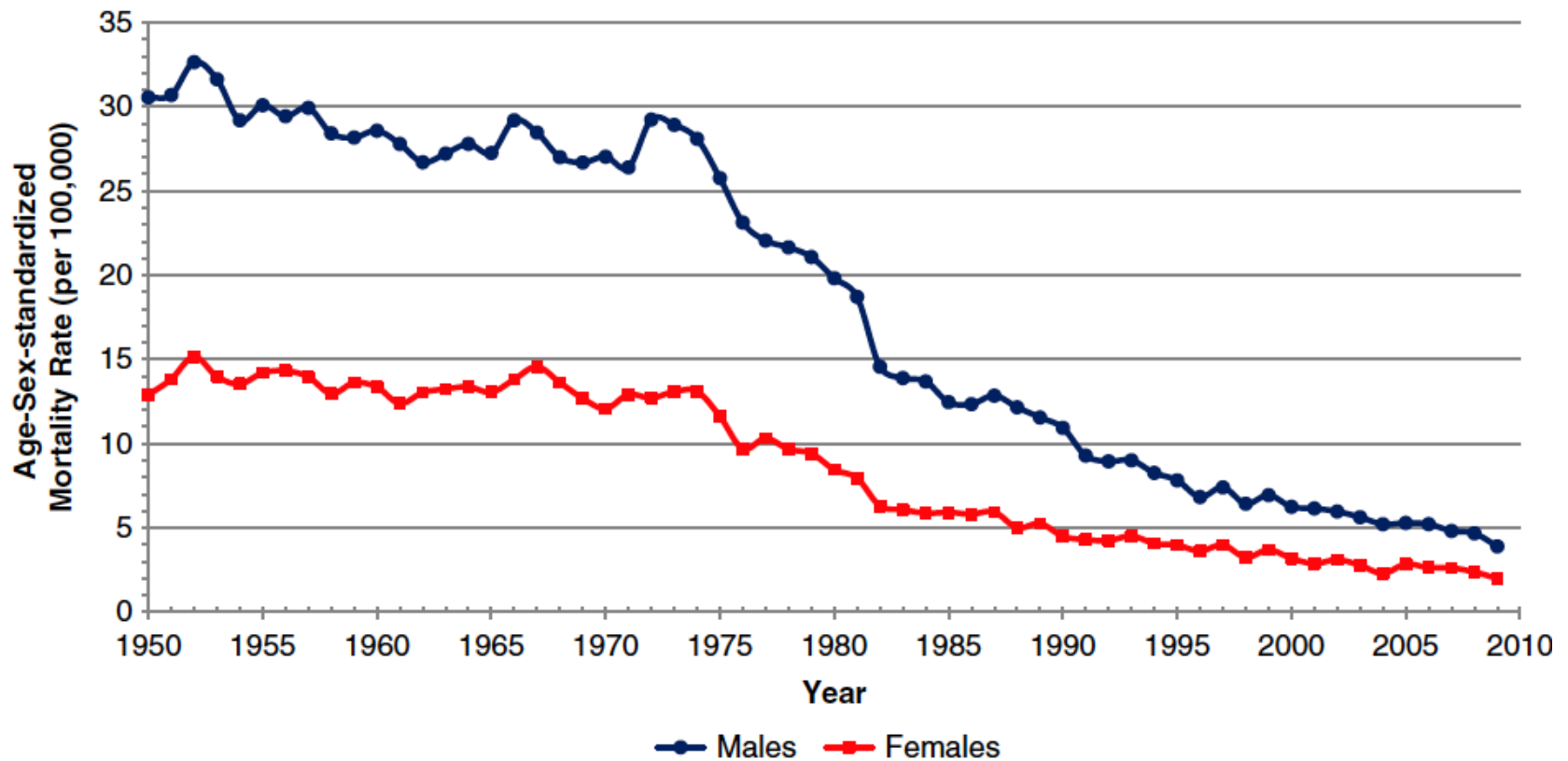
# Stranger Danger

Risk of abduction by a stranger in Canada:  
 $\approx 1:14,000,000$

Leave child  
unattended for  
200,000 years  
Warwick Cairns

# Injuries – The Evidence

Canadian mortality rates for all unintentional injuries by sex, ages 0-19 years (1950-2009)



# Injury Deaths – The Evidence

- Leading Causes of Injury Death, British Columbia, 2015, Males and Females (aged 1-14) Combined
- Counts (Crude mortality rate per 100,000)
- Total of 9 deaths among children aged 1-14 in BC in 2015
- \* fewer than 5 cases

1 - 14

1



Transport  
5 (0.78)



Drowning  
\*



Struck Object  
\*



Suicide  
\*



# Outdoor Play-related Fall Injuries – The Evidence

Death rate for fall from play equipment, ages 1-14, (2007-2013)



1 death in  
 $\approx$  49 million  
kids



Hapa Collaborative

Death rate for fall from tree, ages 1-14, (2000-2013)















0



# Injury Hospitalizations – The Evidence

- Leading Causes of Injury Hospitalization, British Columbia, 2013/14, Males and Females (aged 1-14)
- Combined Counts (Crude rate per 100,000)

|   | 1 - 4   | 5 - 9   | 10 - 14   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | <br>Fall<br>277 (155.9)          | <br>Fall<br>462 (205.2)          | <br>Fall<br>414 (179.1)          |
| 2 | <br>Foreign Body<br>105 (59.1)   | <br>Transport<br>87 (38.6)       | <br>Transport<br>189 (81.8)      |
| 3 | <br>Adverse Effects<br>70 (39.4) | <br>Adverse Effects<br>66 (29.3) | <br>Struck Object<br>181 (78.3) |
| 4 | <br>Poisoning<br>57 (32.0)     | <br>Foreign Body<br>61(27.1)   | <br>Suicide<br>123 (53.2)      |

# Outdoor Fall-related Hospitalizations – The Evidence

Outdoor fall-related hospitalizations  
1-14 year olds, BC, 13 year average (2001/02 – 2013/14)

| Cause of Injury                           | Number of Injuries | Rate/100,000 Population |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Fall involving playground equipment       | 365                | 52.2                    |
| Fall on same level                        | 213                | 28.7                    |
| Fall involving skates, skis, skateboards  | 234                | 24.1                    |
| Fall from high level                      | 92                 | 8.8                     |
| Fall on and from stairs/steps/scaffolding | 13                 | 8.2                     |
| Fall involving ice and snow               | 13                 | 1.4                     |

332 fractures  
7 concussions  
5 internal organ  
4 dislocations  
17 other

634,016 children

# Injuries by Exposure Time – The Evidence

Systematic review


Medically treated injuries, ages 6-12 years:

- Active commuting
- Sports participation
- Leisure time (recreation, play)

# Injuries by Exposure Time – The Evidence

## Systematic Review of Medically treated injuries:

- Active commuting
  - 0.15-0.52 / 1,000 hours
- Sports participation
  - 0.20-0.67 / 1,000 hours
- Leisure time (recreation, play)
  - 0.15-0.17 / 1,000 hours



A child would need to play 3 hours/day for  $\approx$  10 years



# Paradox... Keeping kids safe means letting them take risks

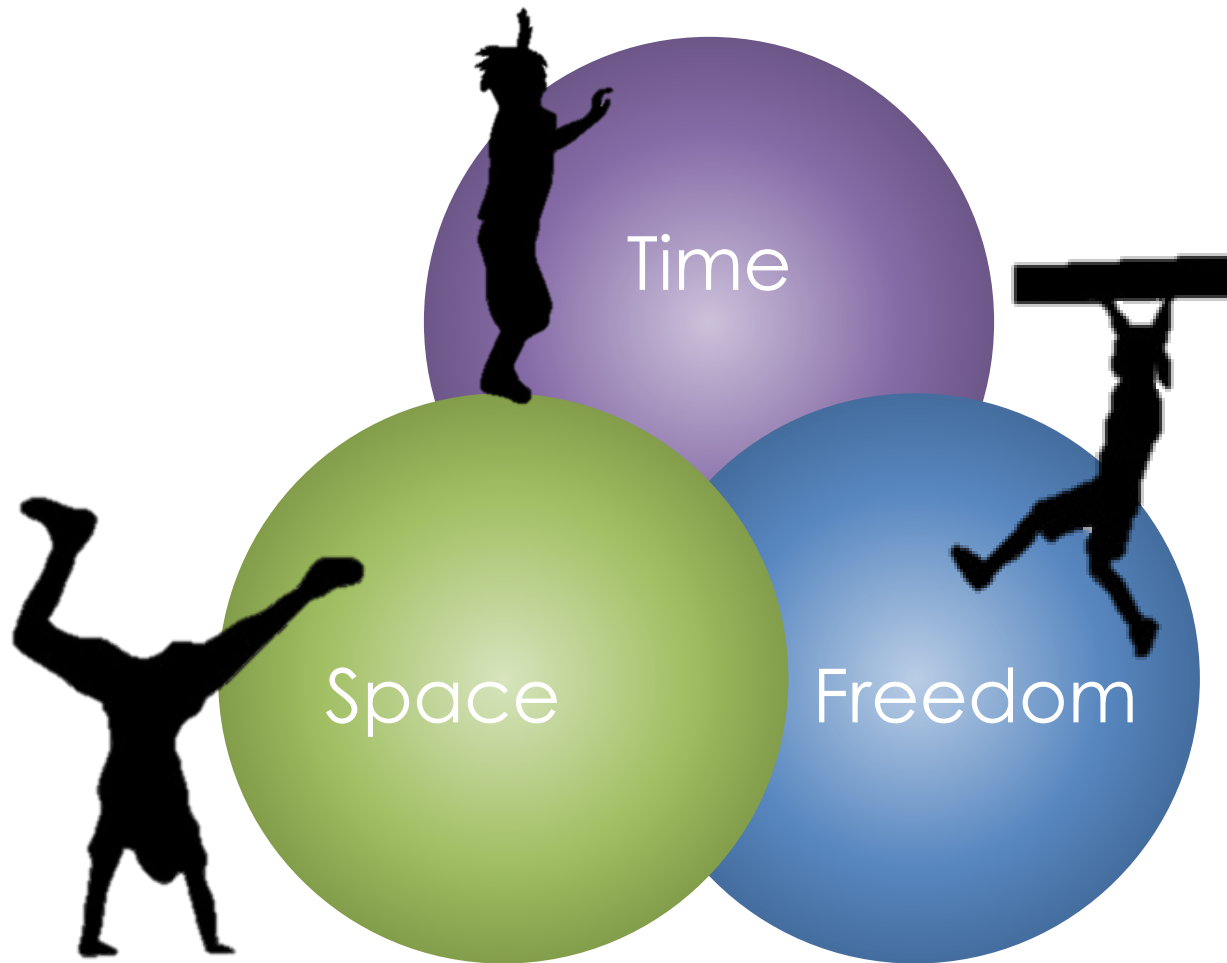




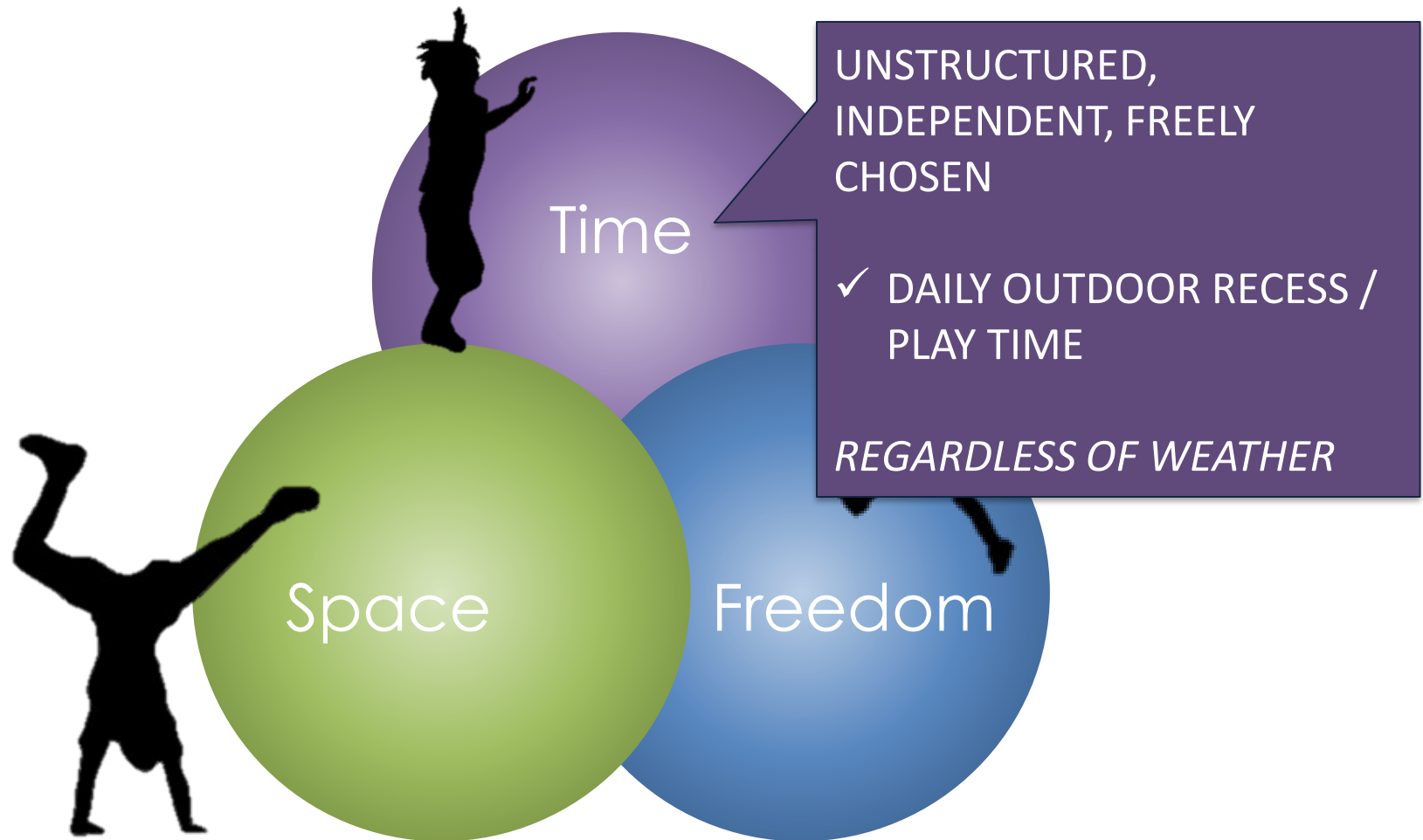
# HOW DO WE MAKE THINGS BETTER?

Childhood: For best results, use outdoors.  
[www.childnature.ca](http://www.childnature.ca)

# OUTDOOR PLAY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS



# OUTDOOR PLAY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

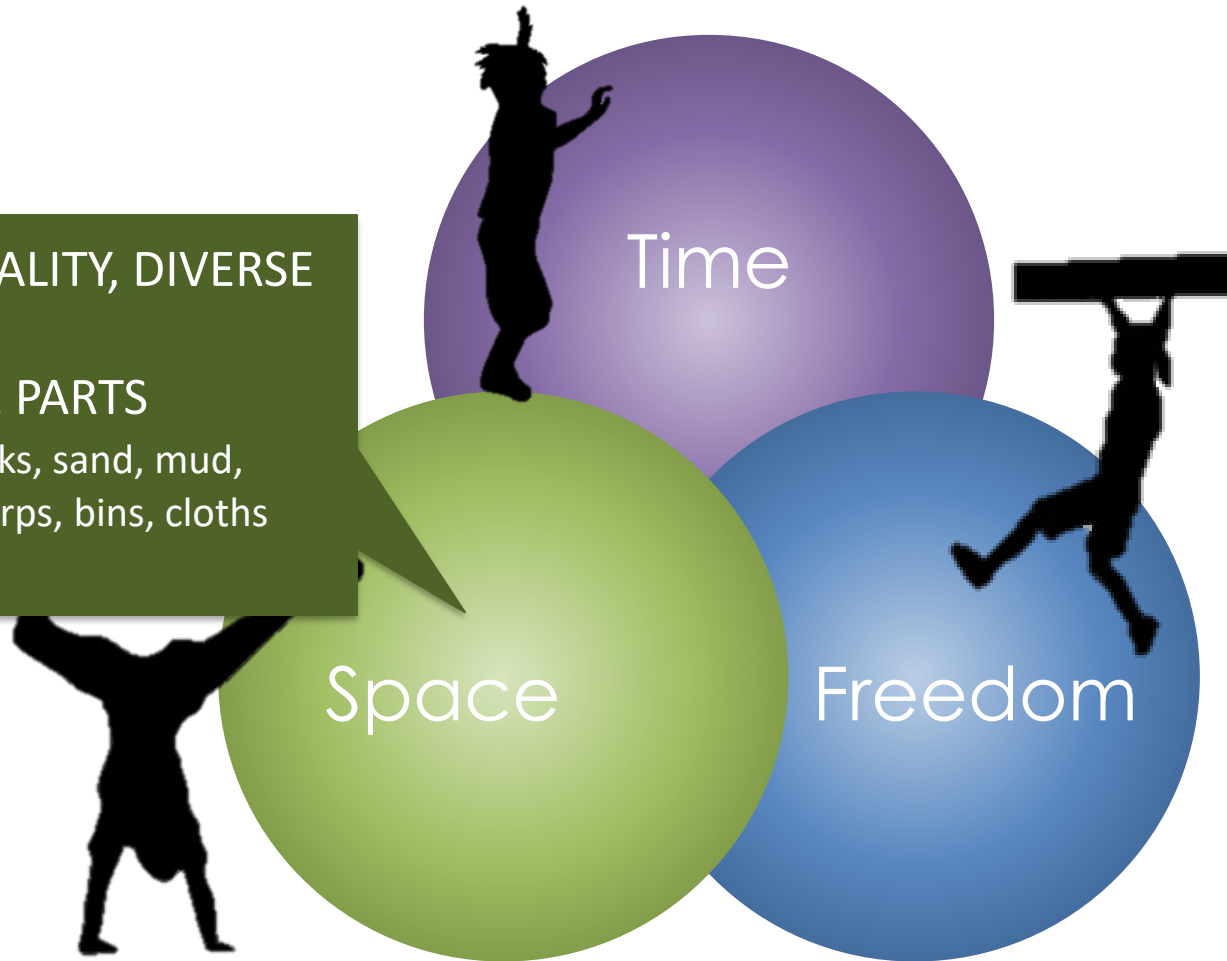


# OUTDOOR PLAY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

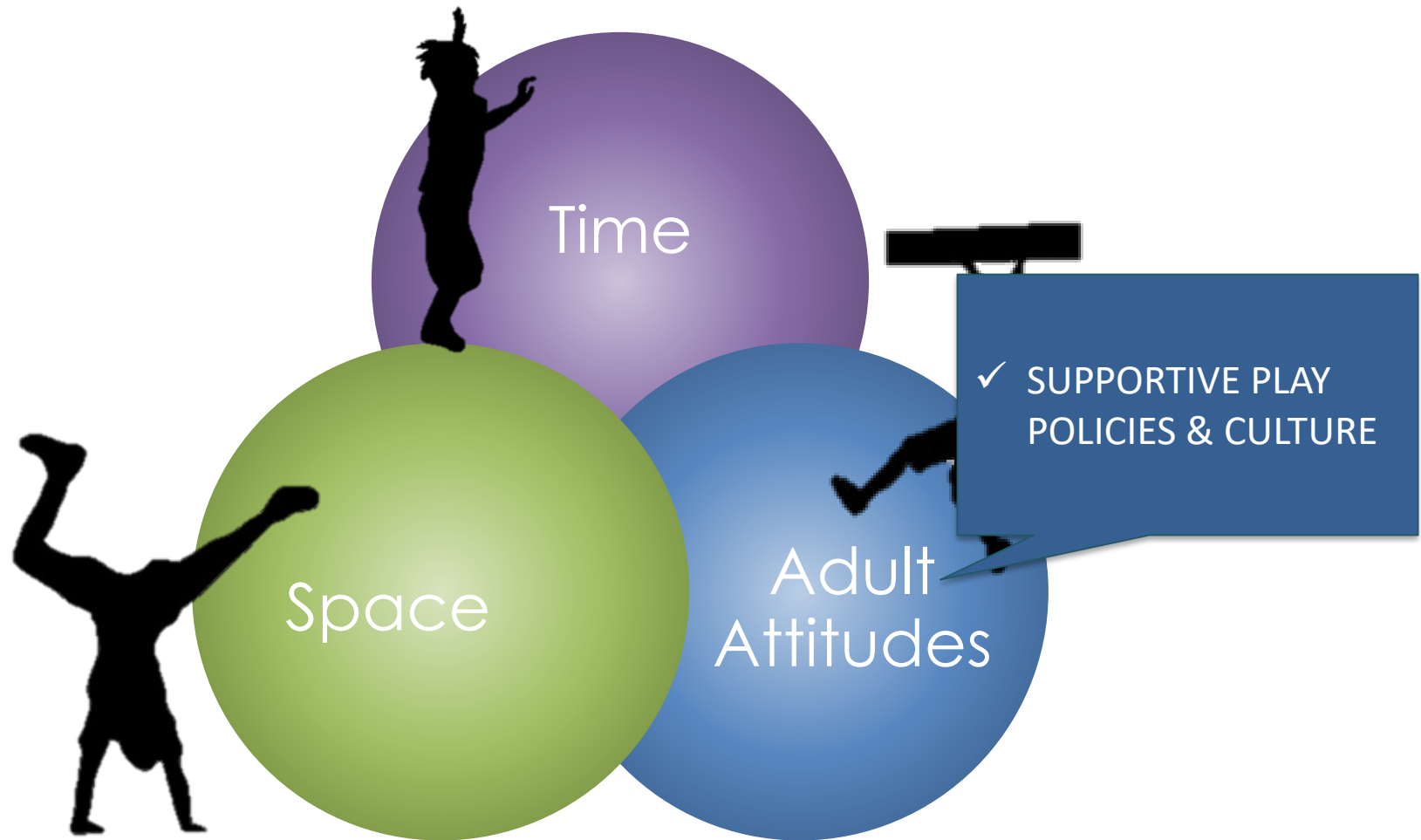
HIGH QUALITY, DIVERSE

✓ LOOSE PARTS

e.g., sticks, sand, mud,  
water, tarps, bins, cloths



# OUTDOOR PLAY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS





# Overview:

Regular and repeated opportunities for outdoor play – with its risks

Life is full of risks and uncertainty – greatest challenges and joys

We must provide time, space, and freedom

Collective action and cooperation



Is there anything I want to change?

Q

- What one thing would you like to do differently?
- How will you do it?
- What help will you need?

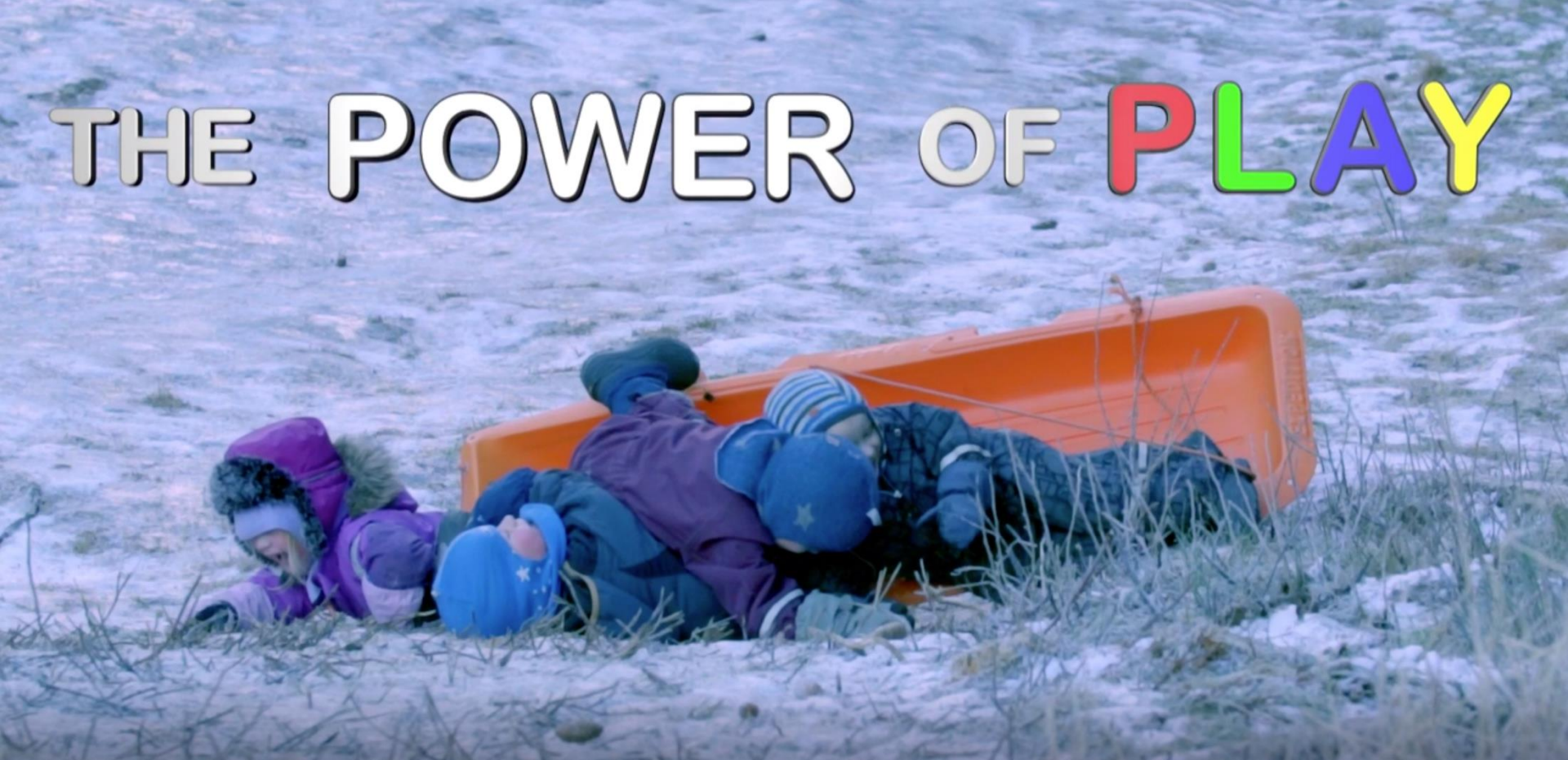
A group of five children are playing on a grassy hill under a clear blue sky. One child in a green shirt is running towards the left, while others in orange, purple, and red shirts are standing or walking. The scene is bright and sunny.

## Brussoni Lab

Children experience the world first through play. Let them experience the world.



# THE POWER OF PLAY





# OUTSIDEPLAY.ca

Take a risk, go play outside!

An online tool to help parents and caregivers **gain the confidence**  
to allow their kids to engage in more **outdoor play**.



*Click to watch video!*

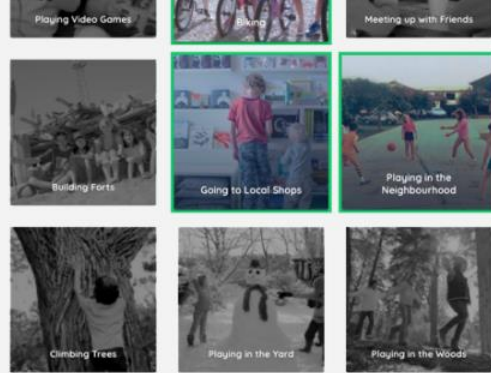


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**Already know what Risky Play is and want to get started?**

[Start Journey](#)

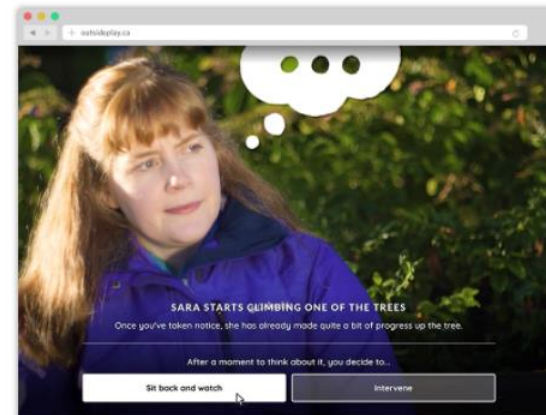


## CHAPTER 1 - THINK OF A CHILD

Do you ever struggle with letting your child take risks and have the same play experiences that you had? Think of a child close to you and remember back to your childhood. Remember some of the things that were great about your childhood and see if there is anything missing from your child's life.

## CHAPTER 2 - WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Put yourself in the shoes of these parents and see what you would have done in their situation. What are some of the things going through your mind? Your choices will impact what happens in the story. Reflect on what influenced your decision and see what you could have done differently.



## CHAPTER 3 - CREATING YOUR ACTION PLAN

A personalized plan to help make changes in your life that can help you promote more risky play activities for your child. Use what you were able to learn on your journey to create goals and the steps needed to reach them. Sample recommendations can give you some ideas.





## Why kids need risk, fear and excitement in play

August 1, 2017 6:22pm EDT

When children test their own boundaries in thrilling play, they develop self-confidence, resilience and risk management skills *Author provided (No reuse)*

Email

Twitter

Facebook

LinkedIn

“Be careful!” “Not so high!” “Stop that!”

Concerned parents can often be heard urging safety when children are at play. Recent research suggests this may be [over-protective](#) and that kids need more opportunities for [risky play](#) outdoors.

Author



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Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia

<https://theconversation.com/why-kids-need-risk-fear-and-excitement-in-play-81450>



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**PROJECT PLAY**

<https://www.cpha.ca/project-play>



# Explore the Toolkit

Infographics

Promising Practices

Research Summaries

Decision Making Tools

Wicked Problems of Play



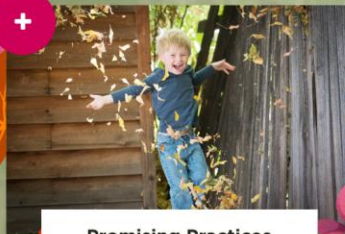
Infographics



Decision Making Tools



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# Thank you!

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# Questions?

Type your questions into the chat box.

OR

Dial \*7 on your telephone to unmute.

Dial \*6 when you are finished speaking to re-mute.

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