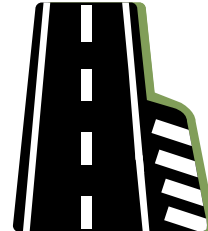
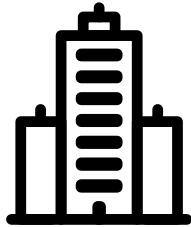


BUILT ENVIRONMENT

ECO-HEALTHY CHILD CARE® HELPS EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS TO BE AS HEALTHY, SAFE AND GREEN AS POSSIBLE BY REDUCING CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO TOXIC CHEMICALS.



WHAT IS A BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Built environments include the buildings, sidewalks, streets, play structures and other human-created spaces around us. As our cities develop and population grows, we create schools, apartments, shopping centers and other spaces for all to live, learn and work. The built environment is critical because it affects our physical and mental health and well-being by encouraging or discouraging healthy activities.

Communities (often black, brown or low-income) that do not have access to safe parks or green spaces and clean air are often less active. It is important that all child care facilities provide regular natural learning opportunities, e.g. visiting local parks or arranging field trips to community gardens, to promote physical, mental, and social activity for the children being cared for.

The built environment can also contribute to poor health if the structures we live, learn (child care facilities) and work in are not maintained properly--if they have peeling or cracking paint, leaky pipes or poor ventilation. Child care facilities that are located next to or nearby polluting facilities such as: dry cleaners, nail salons, gas stations or former hazardous waste sites will put the staff and children at-risk of developing health issues.

HEALTH CONCERNS

Indoor contaminants: housing materials and consumer products, such as particle board, paint, cleaners, air fresheners and carpeting, can release gasses that cause indoor air pollution, trigger asthma and may be toxic in ways that can damage a child's long term health. See [EHCC's Air Quality fact sheet](#). Children can also be exposed to lead by ingesting or inhaling paint particles and dust from chipping, peeling or cracking pre-1978 contaminated paint. See [EHCC's Lead fact-sheet](#).

Outdoor Air Pollution: placing a child care facility near sources of pollution can increase children's exposure to air pollutants. Optimal locations for early learning programs would be away from factories, highways, gas stations, dry cleaners, nail salons and agricultural businesses that use pesticides. See [EHCC's Safe Siting fact-sheet](#).

Children are particularly vulnerable to air pollution because their lungs are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults do. Poor air quality is correlated with: decreased lung function, asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, and even some types of cancer.

Importance of Physical Movement: The built environment can contribute to obesity, diabetes, asthma and heart disease, if there is not access to safe places for children to exercise and play.

NATURAL LEARNING

Learning and playing in the natural outdoor environment offers children: fresh air, opportunities to learn about nature, larger spaces for physical activity, and stimulation of their senses. **Help to improve children's brain development and overall health by providing opportunities for vigorous physical activity and access to green space every day.**

- Walk or bike: Take children on a walk whenever possible – to local parks, playgrounds or other nearby locations. Encourage caretakers to walk or bike their children to child care and to the grocery store, drug store, bakery or coffee shop.

NATURAL LEARNING (CONT.)

- **Arrange field trips:** visit a local park, community garden or local farm. Arrange for experts in the community to provide learning experiences related to their work.
- **Grow organic vegetables and fruit:** plant seeds in window boxes or in a raised bed outdoors. Watch them grow and enjoy the yummy vegetables at a picnic. *Make sure to first test your soil's lead concentration before growing food in it.* You may need to bring in clean soil if you have high lead levels and/or use raised, lined, and sealed beds. See [EHCC's Lead Fact-Sheet](#).
- **Promote hands-on learning:** let children hold a ladybug or beetle instead of simply reading a book about insects.
- **Go exploring:** after talking about various types of bird nesting habits, go outdoors and instruct children to look for nests in trees. Have them point out other places where animals live.
- **Find space for active play:** children should have 15 minutes of "unstructured" physical activity for every hour they are in child care. Free play is essential for social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones and managing stress. Preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time (except when sleeping). Children who learn about nature and play outside are more likely to build lifelong healthy habits.

HEALTHY BUILDING TIPS

- **Consider potential environmental contaminants when choosing a new location of a child care facility.** Visit the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's (ATSDR) Choose Safe Places web page for more information, www.atsdr.cdc.gov.
- **Maintain your child care facility** to minimize lead hazards like chipping, cracking or peeling paint.
- **Renovate safely.** If you are planning to paint, renovate or remodel a child care facility built before 1978, use contractors certified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for lead safe-work practices. Visit www.epa.gov/lead for info.
- **Test your water and bare soil for lead.** See [EHCC's Lead-Safe Toolkit](#).
- **Improve your indoor air quality.** See [EHCC's Air Quality fact-sheet](#) for tips.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT RESOURCES

- National Environmental Education Foundation's Children and Nature Initiative
www.neefusa.org/health/children_nature.htm
- Natural Learning Initiative
www.naturalearning.org/
- National Center for Safe Routes to School
www.saferoutesinfo.org/
- Lead-Safe Toolkit for Home-Based Child Care
www.nchh.org/tools-and-data/technical-assistance/protecting-children-from-lead-exposures-in-child-care/toolkit/
- Eco-Healthy Child Care®'s Safe Siting fact-sheet
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AbjZFzdjb8LOdFATPArJBH2Wj9qyx-VV/view?usp=sharing>

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Call: 202-543-4033, ext. 13
Email: ehcc@cehn.org
Visit: www.cehn.org/ehcc

