



What the MDI Measures

- Organized Activities
- How Children Spend their Time
- After-School Places
- Children's Wishes

OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

As children age their social world expands and they begin to draw support not only from their family, but from multiple sources such as school, peers and organized activities outside of school (Heath and Thornock, 2022). The MDI asks children to report on the activities they engage in and the places they frequent, at different time points including after school, evenings, and weekends. Children also report unstructured activities such as screen time and socializing with friends. A healthy balance of structured out-of-school programs, social opportunities, and physical activity, as well as play and rest, are important experiences that promote children's thriving and resilience. Opportunities to learn and explore outside of school allow children to develop skills and independence in a wide range of environments. Long term benefits, such as better academic outcomes, higher employment rates, and positive social behaviour have been linked to participation in out-of-school time supportive activities (Vandell et al., 2015; Heath and Hornock, 2022).

research

GENERAL RESEARCH ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

- Children and youth who participate in out-of-school activities in childhood and adolescence are more likely to participate in similar activities in adulthood (Simpkins et al., 2023).
- Neighbourhood safety and availability of recreation areas are linked to higher participation in out-of-school activities and better well-being (Wang et al., 2023).
- Middle school students were 2.5 times more likely to participate in out-of-school activities when subsidy programs were accessible (Meyers et al., 2023).
- Taking part in organized out-of-school programs in the middle years is linked to less risk-taking and impulsivity at age 15 (Vandell et al., 2020).
- Out-of-school time should include a variety of activities. For example, quiet reflection time is just as essential to brain health and social-emotional development as active and focused activities (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019).
- Excessive screen time and social media use have been linked to some negative psychosocial outcomes (Alonso et al., 2021). However, screen time can be a source of connection for some children and youth (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019) indicating that moderation is key.

MDI FINDINGS ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

- MDI data from 2022/23 show 80% of children in Grades 4 through 8 participated in out-of-school activities two or more times per week. Previous MDI research showed that students who shifted from not participating in out-of-school programs in Grade 4 to participating in after-school team sports in Grade 7 had a greater sense of peer belonging and, in turn, better mental health than those who did not take part in after-school activities in Grade 7 (Oberle et al., 2019).
- Recent MDI data also show that 34% of children in Grades 6, 7, and 8 reported social media use of more than two hours per day. Those who reported two or more hours of social media use were more likely to report lower levels of thriving. Interestingly, MDI data show that for almost all types of screen time a little bit of usage, such as one hour per day, was associated with higher thriving than those with zero usage. Hence, developing a healthy relationship with screen time may be a good goal for youth and the adults in their lives.



OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

AT HOME

- Ask children what types of out-of-school activities they would like to take part in. If they are not offered in your community, reach out to your school or community centre to suggest the activity. Out-of-school programs offer opportunities for children to reap benefits from activities that may not be available during the school day (Simpkins et al., 2019).
- Plan ahead to avoid barriers—find out about subsidies, bursaries and transit/carpool options at your school or community program.
- Create a family bucket list of activities at the start of every season. Allow each family member to choose one or two activities that you can enjoy and bond over as a family.
- Continue to encourage children and youth to balance recreational screen time with other activities to stay within the recommended limit of 2 hours per day (CSEP, 2021).

AT SCHOOL

- Ask children: “What is your school already doing well to help you and your friends participate in interesting out-of-school programs?” Then make a commitment to continue to do so.
- Encourage children who are not taking part in out-of-school programs to try them. Coordinate with community programming to offer space in your school to reduce barriers to participation, improve school attendance, and school connectedness.
- Organize volunteers to pick up students at school and walk them to nearby programs so that children whose parents cannot pick them up can also participate in out-of-school programs.
- Distribute information to families about available out-of-school programs in the community as well as any available bursary opportunities.
- Continue to educate children on appropriate conduct and safety practices online. Helpful tips can be found at [Mentally Healthy Schools](#) and [media smarts](#).

IN COMMUNITY

- Ask children: “What out-of-school programs would you like to participate in?”
- Work with local MPs and government to create safe areas in your neighbourhood for children to access during out-of-school times and increasing the availability of subsidies.
- Provide training for community program leaders in modelling and promoting social and emotional skills in children (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017).
- Evaluate programs for their ability to foster a sense of autonomy, belonging, and competence and inclusion to maximise the psychological benefit for children. Letting children know that you believe they can succeed leads to even greater gains (Ntoumanis et al., 2020).
- Youth benefit most from programs that allow them to create positive relationships, stay connected to the community, gain new skills, and experience a sense of agency (Rose-Krasnor & Hamey, 2018; Heath & Thornock, 2022).

For more resources and ideas on how to use MDI data to catalyze action, visit discovermdi.ca.



Middle Years Development Instrument
discovermdi.ca

HUMAN
EARLY LEARNING
PARTNERSHIP



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