
IT'S OUR  COMMUNITY



PLAY AND GROW

Boys & Girls Club preparing for full
slate of activities, Page B1

PRIMED AND READY

Nashua Silver Knights well armed
for 2022 season, Page C1

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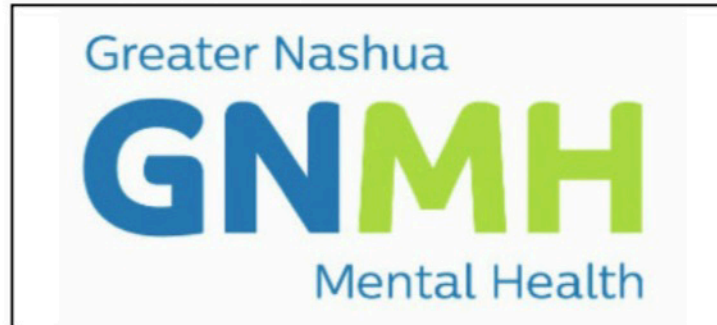
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Physical activity, play and mental health: They are related

By LINDSAY C. B. MURPHY
Guest Columnist

What ever happened to Four Square?

Let me turn back time for a moment. It is 3:30 in the afternoon and I just got off the bus and am finally home from school. My afternoon time is split between homework and playing outside. I grew up in rural New Hampshire, with afternoons in the woods, riding bikes and playing games with my friends. Most “older” generations reflect on the times when they were growing up and how different life is now. In particular, during this pandemic, behaviors have shifted, but this is not another article about the effects of COVID-19. This article seeks to remind us as parents and guardians about the importance of physical activity, of playing. The world has evolved, and the advancements in technology through social media, television and digital gaming have made playing outside seem less than appealing to youth. In September of 2021, an article published in the Association of Child and Adolescent Mental Health addresses the positive outcomes and benefits of physical activity for children and adolescents



who struggle with mental health challenges.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Physical activity in the form of structured exercise, organized sports or simple play offers our youth several physical health benefits. Physical activity improves the cumulative physical health of our children by supporting a good metabolism, maintaining a healthy weight, heart health, optimal sleep patterns and increased bone density. The use of their muscles through various movements in play develop strength and stability.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Physical activity in adolescents support cognitive and academic functioning. Playing

gives the brain an opportunity to attend to different types external stimuli and practice focusing and giving attention, both important with academic success. It offers the brain a fresh way to respond to the environment and problem solve in fun, unpredictable ways.

MENTAL HEALTH

Physical activity is safe, inexpensive and a useful intervention that decreases mental health symptoms associated with depression, anxiety, and ADHD. Typically, physical activity and general “play” increases social time with peers decreasing the effects of loneliness and isolation. Physical activity is linked to positive self-esteem and self-confidence both are associ-

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ated with improved quality of life. Physical activity releases “feel good” chemicals in the brain that decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety. Physical activity connects the body to the mind!

HOW TO PLAY

Depending on the child, the location, duration, and activity may vary. It is less about the “what” of the activity and more about the “why.” Some children and adolescents may benefit from participating in organized youth sports, but others are not interested. However, there are options for the non-sports enthusiast as well. New Hampshire has a robust geocaching environment to stimulate the intellectual and the physical. Other

options to get your children outside include scavenger hunts, walking the dog, even collecting rocks. And what about Four Square? A little sidewalk chalk and a ball of any size, make the rules that fit your family and invite the neighbors.

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Lindsay C. B. Murphy, LCMHC is associate director- child, adolescent and family services.
