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Madison Children's Museum

The new Madison Children's Museum is a dynamic and creative environment designed to support children's healthy growth, development and learning through active, open-ended play. Visitors will discover a wonderland of beautiful spaces and imaginative activities. The building teems with possibilities for play that go far beyond what was feasible in our well-loved but small former home on State Street. At our new museum there are better opportunities for active play like climbing, jumping or even jogging in a human-scale hamster wheel. Long-time visitors will also notice an increased emphasis on open-ended experiences; there are fewer exhibit signs and greater prospects for visitors to navigate the space on their own terms

Play, as our visitors know, is the primary focus of activity at MCM. Play is the most important means by which our children learn about themselves and the world around them. Through their interactions with one another and the play environment, children develop critical manipulative and motor skills and learn to control their bodies. Further, high-quality play also facilitates language development, creative thinking and problem-solving, and helps children learn to deal with complex and sometimes competing emotions.

Over the past few decades, changing social and environmental norms have affected the opportunity and variety of play environments available to children. Less space combined with changing attitudes towards the risks involved in some physical activity has brought about changes in the quality of play. There is nothing new about parents being concerned for their children's safety and well-being. The recent trend toward the exaggeration of the risks involved in children's active play, however, has resulted in less opportunity for kids to engage in numerous beneficial activities that foster learning and development.

Now, practitioners and researchers from many disciplines are beginning to recognize the negative impact such changes are having for children's most advantageous growth and development. This decline in the quality of play environments is increasingly linked to the dramatic rise in diseases like obesity and childhood diabetes, along with delayed or decreased development of motor ability in our children.

This concern has led to a call for play providers to acknowledge children's desire and need for taking risks in their play by providing stimulating and challenging environments that allow children to explore, develop and master their abilities. The new MCM answers this call with its renewed emphasis on creativity and active play. At MCM, the goal is to find ways of managing risk rather than seeking to eliminate it. Supporting children's healthy growth and development through quality play remains our principal concern.