



Connect Children & Nature

The Possibilities are Endless!

Our Changing World

The American people, especially children, spend less time playing outdoors than any previous generation. Recent research shows that our nation's children are suffering from too much time inside. Kids today spend an average of 6.5 hours/day with television, computers and video games. In fact, a child is six times more likely to play a video game than ride a bike.

What does this mean? If a child is raised with little or no connection to nature, they may miss out on the many health benefits of playing outdoors. Nature is important to children's development - intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically.

In past years, as children's connection and time spent in nature has diminished, childhood ailments and medical problems have vastly increased. Children's health has been showing some signs of decline over the last several decades:

- Childhood obesity rates for children age 6-11 have risen fourfold since 1971;
- Type 2 diabetes in children and adolescents has skyrocketed from 2 to 4% of all childhood diabetes before 1992 to 16% by 1994;
- The number of children on prescription medications to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has increased by 100 fold in less than 50 years; and
- Prescriptions for antidepressants for children have doubled in 5 years.

"I sincerely believe that for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not half so important to know as to feel."
 – Rachel Carson



Phyllis Cooper/USFWS

More than fun: nature is good for you!

You probably remember how much fun it was to play outdoors as a child, but you may not know that it was good for you! Children who play outdoors regularly enjoy better motor skills, physical fitness and general health:

- Children who interact with nature have better cognitive and creative skills than their more housebound counterparts;
- Interaction with the environment can help children deal with stress; and
- Children with symptoms of ADHD may have their symptoms and need for medication alleviated through regular outdoor interactions.

Playing with nature is good for the environment too.

A connection with nature, whether it's hiking, fishing, camping, hunting or simply playing outside, helps children develop positive attitudes and behaviors toward the environment. Children's positive interactions with the environment can lead to a life-long interest in enjoying and preserving nature.

What can you do?

Get outside and connect a child to the wild!

Spending time outside is fun for the whole family. And it doesn't have to be somewhere far from home. Spending time outside can be simple and safe:

- Take a walk in the woods;
- Lie on your back in your backyard and watch the clouds roll by;
- Turn over rocks in a stream and look for critters;
- Catch lightning bugs;
- Climb a tree;
- Fish at a local pond;
- Draw a picture of a tree and all the animals that live in it;
- Stomp around in a swamp; or
- Picnic at a local park.

Whether it is your own backyard, a local community park or a national wildlife refuge, there are lots of outdoor places you can visit. Start by doing something small, and see what happens from there! The possibilities are endless.

Whether you are an educator, grandparent, parent, or child, nature can be the inspiration to turn off the wired world and get outside.

References for this information can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/children>.



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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
800-344-WILD
<http://www.fws.gov/children>

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