



## We Call It the Great Outdoors for a Reason

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Richard Louv in his seminal book, *Last Child in the Woods*, states that the contemporary child suffers from “**Nature Deficit Disorder.**” Louv states that “Nature deficit disorder describes the contemporary child who has less and less exposure to the outdoors. An increasingly large body of evidence affirms that children and nature “*naturally go together.*”

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, a child with limited contact with nature misses out on many positive benefits. Here is a small sample of these benefits:

- a. Outdoor play, more than any other activity, increases fitness levels and builds active, healthy bodies, an important strategy in helping the one in three American kids who are obese.
- b. Spending time outside with exposure to natural sunlight raises levels of Vitamin D, this helps protect from a variety of chronic diseases such as low bone density, heart disease, diabetes and others.
- c. Paradoxically, children who spend more time outdoors have fewer problems with allergies and asthma.
- d. More time in a natural environment results in reduced negative emotions (*such as anger, fatigue, and sadness*).

To help your child discover the fun of the great outdoors, start with these few simple things:

1. Proactively look for opportunities to carve out time in the busy schedule for unstructured outdoor play. If necessary, put it on your calendar.
2. Turn off the TV. Limit total screen time, including TV, videos, and computers and video games each day.
3. As much as possible get outdoors with your children. Share your own excitement and curiosity about the natural environment. Take advantage of the many city and state parks in our area which are free or have minimal entrance fees.