



# Outdoor Play for Every Day



**A parent's guide to overcoming common obstacles for kids and outdoor play**

# Spending Regular Time Outdoors

helps children grow lean and strong, enhances imaginations and attention spans, decreases aggression, boosts classroom performance, and makes kids better future caretakers of the environment.

***With benefits like those, why aren't all children doing it—every day?***

There are several common challenges that today's parents face when trying to incorporate more green time into their children's lives:

- Being overloaded and just too busy
- The lure of exciting technology
- Concerns about child safety
- Lacking good **play places**, **ideas**, and inspiration
- Misconceptions about nature and weather

***If any of the items on this list sound familiar, read on!***

This guide includes tips, activities and information to help overcome these common obstacles with confidence so kids can do what comes naturally, playing outdoors.



# Finding Time When You are Just Too Busy

Between school, homework, and afterschool activities it can be hard to squeeze in the Surgeon General's recommended **one hour per day** of unstructured time in the outdoors. Try these ideas and watch baby steps become big benefits.

## *Divide and Conquer*

Can't do one hour every day? That's okay! Try starting with 15 minutes every day either before school, or immediately after. Or squeeze in 30 minutes twice a week. The biggest challenge is getting out the door; once you are there, you might find it hard to go back inside!

## *Sibs on the Side*

Every spring and fall younger brothers and sisters are sidelined at big sibling's soccer games. Get them into the game by having them go on a **mini-scavenger hunt**: have your child find a dandelion, listen for bird songs, and feel the bumpy texture of a tree and give a sticker or small prize when the hunt is completed.

## *Carpool Picnic-Me-Up*

Many parents are familiar with the drive-thru dine and dash; meals gulped quickly in between afterschool activity drop-off and pick-ups. Why not make it more civilized? Pick up a healthy, convenient supper and enjoy dinner "al fresco." Map out parks, playgrounds, and picnic areas on the route (visit [www.nwf.org/naturefind](http://www.nwf.org/naturefind) for help) to your kids' activities and keep a picnic blanket and coupons to favorite take-out spots in the car.

## *Walk to School*

Live in an urban area? Try walking to school with your child and simply notice the birds, trees, clouds, and nature all around you. Recruit neighbors to join with you!



# Combating The Lure of Exciting Technology

Kids today spend more than 7 hours each day in front of electronic media and far less in unstructured outdoor play. Here are some suggestions to **balance "screen time" with "green time."**



## Angry Birds 3D

### MATERIALS:

an outdoor space  
some shoe boxes  
paper cups  
magic markers  
rubber balls

### DIRECTIONS:

Kids decorate the rubber balls as Angry Birds and paper cups as pigs. Build a wall out of shoe boxes, then set up paper cups along the wall. Take turns knocking down the pigs with the Angry Bird.



## Picture This

Take photos of nature with your child. Capture a lady bug on a leaf, a muddy worm, or a hot pink sunset and upload them to Ranger Rick's Photo Contest ([www.nwf.org/rrphotocontest](http://www.nwf.org/rrphotocontest)). There's no deadline and great prizes, so go outside and snap away!

## Geo-What?

Use technology kids love to your advantage - go geocaching! This new kind of adventure allows kids to use GPS technology to find objects hidden in the great outdoors. Visit [www.rangerricktrails.com](http://www.rangerricktrails.com) and learn how to get started.

## Pay to Play

Encourage kids to earn screen time by balancing it with equal amounts of reading, chores, or physical activity. Len Saunders, author of *Keeping Kids Fit* and father of two, suggests that for every hour of physical activity, kids earn 30 minutes of tech time.

# Addressing Concerns about Child Safety

We've all seen high-profile cases where children are taken from homes or yards; it's no wonder parents are reluctant to let kids play outside. But how safe are kids inside? Children who grow up indoors are at risk for **mental and physical health problems** ranging from learning issues, depression and anxiety, to obesity, vitamin D deficiency and myopia. What are thoughtful, caring parents to do?



## *Safety in Numbers*

Join with other families in your neighborhood to make outdoor play dates, play groups, and kid-watching co-ops (texting is a great tool for this). That way everyone's child gets time outside, but the supervision (and time commitment) is shared. Moms even get some time to socialize and catch up - great multi-tasking!

## *Get Educated*

Arm yourself with knowledge so you can make informed decisions about letting your children play independently. While a large number of children are reported missing each year, the numbers of children who are abducted by a stranger—true stranger danger—are much lower, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Of 797,500 children reported missing in one-year, 115 were the victims of stereotypical kidnapping.

## *Join Them*

Outdoor time is good for you too! A great way to get kids outdoors while keeping them safe is to **Be Out There with them**. Rekindle your own love of nature and have fun together. Visit [beoutthere.com/activityfinder](http://beoutthere.com/activityfinder) for some great outdoor play inspiration.

# Good Play Places, Ideas, and Inspiration

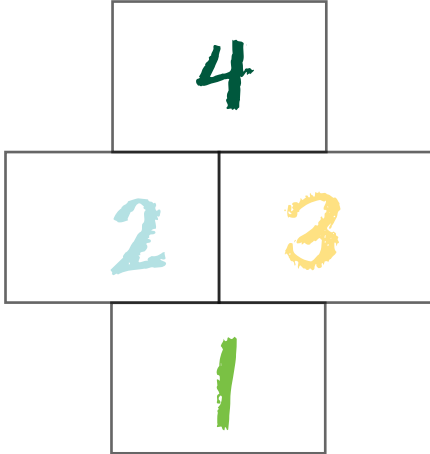
You played outside as a child for hours each day, but somehow when you get outdoors with your own kids, it's hard to think of something to do. Don't stay inside because you're worried the kids won't be entertained—it's a lot easier than you think to have fun outside!

## *Find Play Places*

If you don't have a backyard, check out [www.nwf.org/naturefind](http://www.nwf.org/naturefind) to see what hidden gems may be close to home. You may be surprised with what you find!

## *Let Necessity (Not You!) Be the Mother of Invention*

Why not get out of their way? Kids with an overload of scheduling and structure don't have a lot of time to be—gasp—bored. But that moment of boredom is when imagination kicks in. And that's where the best outdoor memories are born.



## *Retro Fun*

Teach your kids to play outside the old-fashioned way. With some in-expensive supplies you can transport yourself back to a simpler time. Build a storehouse of outdoor props and let **oldie-but-goodie games**, such as hopscotch, Double Dutch, Red Rover, and Capture the Flag begin.

## *Find Ideas for Outdoor Fun*

You won't have to look very far. Visit [www.beoutthere.org](http://www.beoutthere.org) for all the inspiration you need!



# Embracing Nature and Imperfect Weather



Protecting children's health is paramount. But when childhood is a sanitized, climate-controlled environment it does children no favors. Kids love **dirt**, puddles, and **bugs**, and guess what? They're not dangerous—in fact, a mud pie a day turns out to be pretty good medicine.

## *Get Dirty*

Kids today have been bathed in hand sanitizer since birth and may not see getting messy as a good thing. It is. Studies have shown that playing in the dirt isn't just fun, it boosts overall happiness and health due to naturally occurring bacteria in soil that help fortify children's immune systems and stimulate the production of serotonin, improving mood.

## *Be Prepared*

Far from harming them, taking kids out in different weather builds their mental and physical flexibility and resilience. **On hot days**, seek shade, slather sunscreen and offer water and popsicles. Bundle up **in the cold**, coat lips with petroleum jelly, and keep hot chocolate on hand. When it's wet, wear boots...and don't forget to **sing in the rain!**

# Join the Be Out There movement



National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) **Be Out There** is a national movement to give back to American children what they don't even know they've lost - their connection to the natural world.

With a wealth of activities, events, and resources, Be Out There reconnects families with the great outdoors to raise happy, healthy children with a life-long love of nature.

Join us and take the pledge to Be Out There  
[www.BeOutThere.org/Pledge](http://www.BeOutThere.org/Pledge)



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