

# A PARENT'S GUIDE TO OUTDOOR PLAY

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Outdoor play has been declining for years, but maybe the pandemic can help turn things around. Children and adults are spending more time outside, where the risk of infection is lower compared to indoor spaces.

However, there are many more reasons than that to get your kids out of the house. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children play outside as much as possible. **They even urge doctors to prescribe playtime as part of wellness visits.**

Things may be headed in the right direction, but there's a long way to go. Many families with preschool children don't go outside to walk or play on a regular basis.

**Help your family enjoy greater happiness and health.** Learn more about the benefits of outdoor play and how to integrate it into your daily life.

## **Benefits of Outdoor Play:**

- 1. Increase physical activity.** Children move faster and burn more calories when they're outdoors. They also form habits that can help them manage their weight and reduce their risk for heart disease and other conditions linked to sedentary lifestyles. **These habits can support strong health throughout their lifetime.**
- 2. Promote learning.** Research shows that children are more attentive after recess. **Playing outside sharpens thinking** by providing sensory input that helps link body and mind.

3. **Connect with nature.** Green spaces give us energy and brighten our mood. As your child builds their self-esteem and confidence, they may also become more interested in protecting the environment.
4. **Make friends.** Any unstructured playtime is an opportunity for your child to practice their social skills and interact with their peers. They learn how to share and negotiate.
5. **Manage stress.** Are you concerned about how the pandemic is affecting your child's mental health? **Outdoor activities can help them deal with confusion, fears, and loss.**

#### **Strategies for Increasing Outdoor Play:**

1. **Limit screen time.** Children aged 11 to 14 spend an average of 9 hours a day in front of a screen, according to the CDC. You'll have more time for other things if you limit devices to 1 or 2 hours.
2. **Play games.** Team sports provide many benefits, but **kids need unstructured play too.** Toss around a frisbee or jump rope.
3. **Create art.** Set up an easel or give your child a sketch pad they can carry around. Assemble sculptures using sticks, rocks, and other natural objects.
4. **Grow plants.** Start a vegetable or flower garden in your backyard. If you're short on space, see if there's an opening at your local community garden. Many churches also welcome volunteers to help tend their plants.
5. **Splash around.** Visit a water park or create your own attractions. If you're not ready for a pool, you can still run and dance under the spray from your

sprinklers or a hose. Maybe you can even convince your kids that washing your car is fun.

6. **Pack a picnic.** Dine on the grass. Pack a basket and blanket for your next trip to a state park. **Serve takeout or your own cooking on your patio for a family meal.**

7. **Walk your dog.** If you need to be reminded to schedule time outdoors, you can count on your dog. For kids who are animal lovers but can't have pets, you could try a bird feeder.

8. **Contact your school.** Many schools have cut back on recess periods despite studies showing that this may lower academic achievement. Let your local officials know that you support safe opportunities for kids to take a break outside.

**Outdoor play is essential for your child's physical, mental, and social development.** Spend more time outdoors, where your family can connect with nature and each other.