

Relationships that Nurture

Monthly tips provided by St. David's Center in partnership with Mom Enough

Getting Kids Outdoors

Audio can be heard here: [Getting Kids Outdoors](#)

All children (and adults) benefit from time spent outdoors and in nature – it is good for our minds as well as our bodies. Studies show that time in nature supports attention, learning and problem solving, the development of motor and sensory skills and social emotional health. It also supports our immune system functioning, decreases stress and improves sleep.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children spend a minimum of 60 minutes each day in unstructured outdoor play and that electronic media be limited to two hours a day. Easier said than done?

Here are things you can do to help get your children outdoors:

I. Be an active role model and create expectations for your child to be active.

Plan family outings and support your child in learning new skills. Walk, ride bikes, rollerblade, skate, swim, play ball games, hike or camp together.

II. Create family routines and shared activities that include nature and the outdoors.

Time spent together in nature and doing outdoor activities builds family connections and shared emotional memories. Take a walk after dinner. Go to the park. Build a snowman or snow fort. Plant and tend a garden. Do outdoor chores together. Go on a picnic. Visit a nature area. Camp out in the backyard and look at the stars.

III. Show curiosity about and encourage interest in learning about nature.

Direct experiences in nature build our knowledge of the world and provide us with a sense of wonder, discovery and empathy toward other living things. Look at field books on animals, birds, plants, rocks and bugs. Look at science books about the earth, stars and weather. Go for a nature scavenger hunt in your neighborhood to see what you can find; follow your child's lead.

IV. Explore your neighborhood and discover new places together.

Play in natural areas is more varied than play on playground equipment and enhances learning, attention, sensory and motor skill development. Encourage open-ended, unstructured exploration. Find a special tree or place that you visit together in different seasons. Open fields, a park, a creek, a pond, a path in the woods or a neighborhood garden. Be open to the unexpected -- discovery is part of the fun!

V. Provide opportunities for your child to explore in your own yard.

Even a small space can become a magical area when loose materials are provided. Think about: a collection of twigs, sticks and leaves; a place for water play; sand or dirt to dig; a space for a special hideaway or fort. Include containers and tools for filling, pouring and digging. If you have more space, add boulders, logs, stumps and a rope swing for jumping, climbing, swinging as well as a variety of loose materials for construction and imaginary play.

VI. Join other families for planned outings in nature.

Visit natural areas and state parks. Go hiking, fishing, camping or boating. Walk along a beach and look for stones. Gather leaves in the fall. Go ice skating, sledding or skiing.

VII. Provide opportunities for appropriate risk taking.

Let children learn about their own limits by climbing trees, balancing on logs, stepping across boulders on a creek, jumping over branches, etc. If your child is fearful, provide encouragement and assist to their level of comfort as skills and confidence increase.

VIII. Encourage kids to experience all of their senses.

Let them get messy! Dig in dirt, make mud pies, splash in puddles, pour water and spray hoses, run through sprinklers, build sand castles, roll down a grassy hill, jump into leaves, kiss frogs.