



Nature Benefits

DID YOU KNOW? That exposing children to environmental problems beyond their cognitive abilities, understanding and control can cause them to become anxious, tune out and develop “biophobia” – a fear of the natural world and ecological problems.

White, R. (2001). Moving from Biophobia to Biophilia. Accessed from www.whitehutchinson.com/children/articles/biophilia.html

DID YOU KNOW? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two-years-old not watch any TV and that those older than two watch no more than one to two hours a day of quality programming. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation: two-thirds of infants and toddlers watch a screen an average of two hours a day; kids under age six watch an average of about two hours of screen media a day, primarily TV and videos or DVDs; kids and teens 8 to 18 years spend nearly four hours a day in front of a TV screen and almost two additional hours on the computer (outside of school work) and playing video games. This interferes with physical activity, time outdoors, and social interactions.

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, www.kff.org

DID YOU KNOW? A U.S. environmental health report notes that most people, including children, spend 90% of their time indoors. Dr. Dennis Ownby says that “maybe part of the reason we have so many children with allergies and asthma is that we live too clean a life.”

Accessed from www.21stcenturycares.org/allergies.htm

DID YOU KNOW? Appropriate interactions with nature help children develop powers of observation and creativity.

Crain, William (2001). How nature helps children develop. Montessori Life, Summer 2001

DID YOU KNOW? Children’s play in natural environments contains more imaginative and creative components that foster language and collaborative skills.

Fjortoft, I. & J. Sageie (2000). The natural environment as a playground for children: Landscape description and analysis of a natural landscape. Landscape and Urban Planning, 48(1/2) 83-97

DID YOU KNOW? Children who spend time in well-designed nature-filled outdoor spaces with nurturing adults develop valuable skills across all learning domains.

Miller, D.L. (2007). The seeds of learning: Young children develop important skills through their gardening experiences at a Midwestern early education program. Applied Environmental Education and Communication, 6(2)

DID YOU KNOW? A little dirt is good for young children. When a child puts things in his mouth, he is allowing his immune system to explore his environment and practice responses. This is necessary to build a healthy immune protection system.

Ruebush, M. (2009). Why dirt is good. New York: Kaplan

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DID YOU KNOW? A study by University of Illinois researchers Andrea Faber Taylor, Frances Kuo and William Sullivan has revealed that the symptoms of children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) are relieved after contact with nature. The greener the setting, the more the relief. Children actually perform better on schoolwork after those experiences. By comparison, activities indoors such as watching TV, or outdoors in paved, non-green areas leave children with ADD functioning worse. Maintaining trees and greenery near home and encouraging children with ADD to go out and play may be a compelling approach to helping them cope.

Taylor, A., Kuo, F. & Sullivan, W. (2001). Coping With ADD: The surprising connection to green play settings. Environment and Behavior, 33 (1), 54-77

DID YOU KNOW? Children who regularly have positive personal experiences with the natural world show more advanced motor fitness, including coordination, balance and agility.

Fjortoft, Ingunn (2001). The natural environment as a playground for children: The impact of outdoor play activities in pre-primary school children. Early Childhood Education Journal, (2): 111-117

DID YOU KNOW? That people freely admit they are afraid of accidents in play and want to minimize risk. Yet playgrounds that offer genuine risk tend to have fewer accidents than traditional playgrounds. "Give children real risk and they rise to it; they learn how to handle it. Give them sanitized play spaces, and children often are less conscious of risk and have accidents, or take outlandish risks for the sheer excitement of it all."

Almon, Joan. (2009). The fear of play. Exchange, March/April, 42-44

DID YOU KNOW? Because the biological process of seeing is one that happens without the need for adult assistance (unlike the process of acquiring language, for example), it is easy for parents and educators to ignore the need for instruction in visual thinking. Being able to see and knowing how to see well are two different things. Learning to make sense of what one sees does not "just happen." Children require adult guidance if they are to develop well-functioning observation skills, high-functioning visual memory and the like...Even if all physical processes are functioning properly, children who are bombarded with visual images often become over-stimulated by the complexity of information their brains are being asked to decode, and either begin a process of 'shutting out' information, or a process of showing marked behavioral changes in response to this over-stimulation.

Hatch, K. & Rosenow, N. (2003). Position Paper: Seeing. Accessed 2011 at www.natureexplore.org/research

DID YOU KNOW? Parents from the Dimensions Research site in Forest Lake, Minnesota described the benefits of regular time in nature this way: improved sleep habits in children, the benefits of physical exercise outdoors to cardiovascular health, increased physical strength, a greater sense of calm and focus, improved mood, a belief that there are fewer germs outdoors than indoors, and a belief that outdoor play gave their children opportunities to exercise distance vision and absorb healthy amounts of Vitamin D.

Bohling, V., Saarela, C., & Miller, D.L. (2011). How can something this good be so simple: Supporting parent engagement in children's learning outdoors. Accessed 2011 at www.natureexplore.org/research