

Call to Activity: Getting Kids Moving in the Great Outdoors

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There is growing evidence that today’s children are gravitating away from the natural world, the opportunities to explore and play there, in favor of sedentary indoor activities.

This trend may have a negative impact on the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development of our children, and fail to provide experiences that help them understand how their lifestyle choices impact the environment. Limited time in the outdoors may prevent them from enjoying future outdoor pursuits.

Parents and caregivers are the primary influences on a child’s decision to participate in an outdoor recreational activity.¹ Therefore, it is important for parents and caregivers and those who influence them to understand the benefits of and encourage participation in outdoor activity.

Evidence on the positive relationship between active outdoor play and children’s health is growing. This “Call to Activity” highlights a number of scientifically established relationships between health and physical activity, including time spent in the outdoors. Use this information to facilitate discussions on the need to ensure children have adequate opportunities to actively play and recreate safely outside.



The Facts

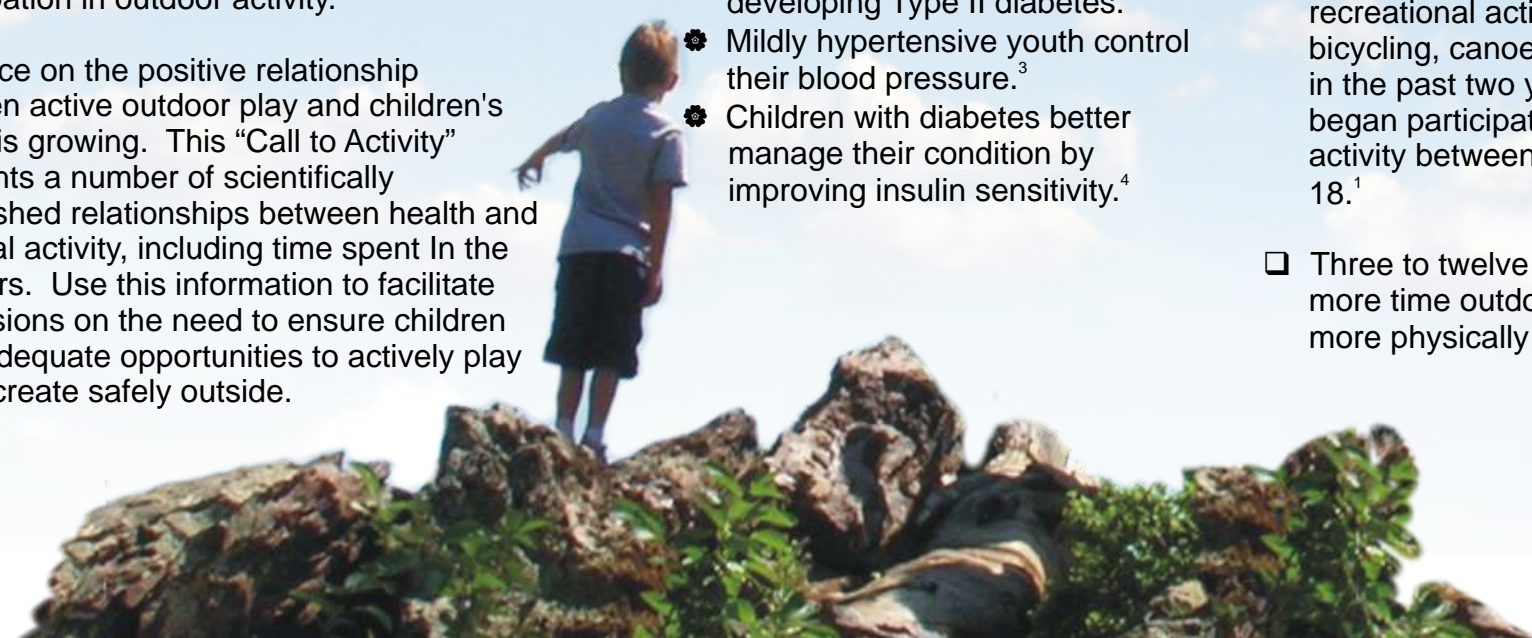
...on Health & Physical Activity

- ❑ Participation in regular moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity (activities that produce a noticeable increase in heart rate, such as brisk walking, biking, and active outdoor playing) is important for healthy growth and development among children and adolescents. There is strong evidence showing beneficial effects of physical activity on muscle strength and endurance, bone health and cardiovascular health.^{2,3} A positive association has also been found between physical activity and improvements in concentration, memory, and classroom behavior.³
- ❑ Regular moderate intensity physical activity can help:
 - ⚙️ Overweight youth manage their weight and lessen their risk of developing Type II diabetes.⁴
 - ⚙️ Mildly hypertensive youth control their blood pressure.³
 - ⚙️ Children with diabetes better manage their condition by improving insulin sensitivity.⁴

- ❑ Historically, active play has been the means by which children become healthy and fit. Due to environmental constraints (lack of safe, convenient places to play) and busy schedules, many children don't have a chance to participate in unstructured, child-centered play.⁵

...on Environmental Education and Outdoor Recreation

- ❑ Environmental learning that integrates science, math, social studies, and language arts using real world instructional activities to help students better understand the world in which they live can positively influence student achievement.⁶
- ❑ A survey of U.S. citizens aged 16 years and older who participated in at least one human-powered recreational activity (such as, hiking, bicycling, canoeing, or snowshoeing) in the past two years found that 90% began participating in an outdoor activity between the ages of 5 and 18.¹
- ❑ Three to twelve year olds who spend more time outdoors are likely to be more physically active.⁷



What Can I do?

- ❑ Implement daily physical activity or active physical education time that helps children learn new skills and is of at least moderate intensity. Children need at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week (preferably daily). This activity should be something the child enjoys.
- ❑ Promote outdoor activity among children by providing access to the outdoors through unstructured play time, conducting classroom lessons that incorporate the outdoors, and ensuring activity-friendly environments (such as, accessible playgrounds and roads that have sidewalks and crosswalks).
- ❑ Help children and parents learn about the health and environmental benefits of choosing to walk or bike to school, work, or to run errands. Create or identify routes that help make these choices easy and safe.
- ❑ Encourage further exploration on the role of green space or outdoor activity on learning, activity levels, and social skill development.



- ❑ Encourage parents and caregivers to:
 - ⚙️ Take note of how much physical activity a child gets every day. Sedentary activities, such as watching TV or playing computer or video games, should be limited to less than two hours each day.³
 - ⚙️ Allow a child to try a variety of outdoor activities in order to find some he or she likes. Look for programs hosted by a local parks and recreation department. Outdoor nature-based programs that teach children about their natural surroundings (insects, plants, and animals) may serve a dual purpose by also easing safety concerns.
 - ⚙️ Ensure children have proper safety equipment and knowledge. For example, register the whole family for a bicycle safety class.
 - ⚙️ Take an afternoon, weekend, or week-long trip to a local, state, or national park, forest, or wildlife refuge. Many of these public lands are close to or within urban areas.
 - ⚙️ Volunteer for a trail, park, river, or roadside clean-up day. Children and adults can learn first-hand the importance of conservation and preservation and will be able to share that message with others. Plus, working outdoors on these types of projects can be good physical activity!
- ❑ Share this information with your colleagues, friends, and family.

Play it Safe!

Concerns about child safety may lead to limited access to outdoor experiences. These concerns may pertain to safety while riding a bike, stranger danger, and exposure to animals, plants, or insects. Educating parents and children on ways to prevent injuries and avoid potentially dangerous situations may help alleviate fears. This may include knowing the safest times to ride a bike, being able to spot poisonous plants and berries, and being properly protected from the sun, heat, and other inclement weather. While outdoor activity poses some risk, precautionary steps can be taken to lessen that risk and the benefits of being active, regardless of where that activity occurs, are numerous.



What research suggests:

Girls with a more natural view (trees, grass, shrubs) performed better on standardized performance measures of concentration compared to girls who looked at a more barren setting (buildings, dirt, or paved surfaces).⁸

Children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) had milder ADD symptoms after engaging in play outside versus playing inside. The “greener” the play setting (parks, farms, places with tall trees, grass, or natural water sources), the milder the symptoms.⁹

References

References can be found at:
http://www.fitness.gov/publications/council/council_pubs.html

For More Information

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.hhs.gov

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: www.cdc.gov

National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov

President's Council on Physical Fitness & Sports: www.fitness.gov

U.S. Forest Service: www.fs.fed.us

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion: www.cnpp.usda.gov

Cooperative State Research, Education, & Extension Service: www.csrees.usda.gov

Bureau of Land Management: www.blm.gov

Fish & Wildlife Service: www.fws.gov

National Park Service: www.nps.gov

Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov



Published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – February 2008