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Summer Over but Kids Still Need Time Outdoors

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Description

Summertime often provides a reprieve for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but now that school is starting up, the usual parental concerns are at the forefront again. Can my child stay focused enough to keep up with his class work? Will he get the extra attention he needs in the classroom to keep him on task?

Newswise — Summertime often provides a reprieve for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but now that school is starting up, the usual parental concerns are at the forefront again. Can my child stay focused enough to keep up with his class work? Will he get the extra attention he needs in the classroom to keep him on task? There are now 2.5 million children using ADHD medications to reduce symptoms, but there may be a “greener” part of the solution.

Researchers at the University of Illinois have found that exposure to “ordinary natural settings”, like those experienced more of during summertime, may be widely effective in reducing attention deficit symptoms in children. Researchers Frances Kuo and Andrea Faber Taylor recommend that children with ADHD spend some quality after-school hours and weekend time outdoors enjoying nature. And it’s not just kids with ADHD that can benefit from a “green hour”.

Today’s kids are indoors more than any previous generation. Computer time, video games and TV, taking up an average of six hours of a child’s day according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, have replaced time spent running through backyards, front yards, tree-line streets, biking around the neighborhood, and playing in local parks or wooded areas.

“Research says that people get attached to nature by spending time in nature, says Kevin Coyle, Vice President of Education for the National Wildlife Federation. “If we don’t get kids out more, how are they going to experience the wonders of Mother Nature?”

Author Rich Louv, who coined the phrase “nature deficit disorder” agrees, saying the sense of wonder and awe that nature inspires in all of us just can’t be replicated by playing Grand Theft Auto. He also believes that the ravine behind the house or little wooded area at the end of the cul-de-sac can be just as effective as taking your child to Yosemite.

An organization called Playing for Keeps has assembled some particularly troubling data:

Unstructured outdoor activities declined by 50 percent compared to the previous generation.

- More than 80 percent of children under age 2 and more than 60 percent ages 2-5 do not have access to daily outdoor play.
- The average American home with a toddler has the TV on six hours a day.
- The average 2-year-old spends more than four hours a day in front of a TV or computer screen.



Nature provides sense of wonder in kids



Image 1 of 1



- One in six 2-year-olds has a TV in his or her bedroom.

Some researches refer to this phenomenon of people preferring sedentary, electronically-based activities to more active pursuits “videophilia”, a new spin on the old “couch potato”.

Children who fish, camp and spend time in the wild before age 11 are also much more likely to grow up to be environmentally-minded and committed as adults. Researchers at Cornell University sampled more than 2,000 adults, ages 18-90, about their early childhood nature experiences and their current adult attitudes and behaviors related to the environment. They concluded that “participating in wild nature activities before age 11 is a particularly potent pathway toward shaping both environmental attitudes and behaviors in adulthood. When children become truly engaged with the natural world at a young age, the experience is likely to stay with them in a powerful way – shaping their subsequent environmental path.” With the serious environmental threats facing our nation, from habitat loss, to the dangerous impacts of global warming, creating the next generation of conservation stewards is ever more important.

All this research points in one direction. Even though the demands of the school year are back in play, children need to get outside for a “green hour” every day, especially children with ADHD. The result is happier, healthier kids whose creativity and imagination will soar, and a generation of adults who will care for the planet.

Check out the National Wildlife Federation’s web site for Green Hour ideas, <http://www.nwf.org/greenhour>.

The National Wildlife Federation is America’s conservation organization protecting wildlife for our children’s future.

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