

## The Great Outdoors

By Melissa Greco

When you go outside these days, it is rare to hear the laughter of children playing. This is because in the age of technology, children are often found with their eyes glued to a television, computer, phone, or tablet. This has proven to be detrimental to children's health.

When children go outside and play, their imagination runs wild. No longer bound by the confined spaces of the indoors, they are given the opportunity to think freely, rather than a television or computer doing the thinking for them. Children's senses are stimulated by the great outdoors, between the bright colors, the open air, the movement of the trees in the wind, the sound of birds chirping, and the smell of freshly cut grass, the sky's the limit on the mind-opening stimuli that the outdoors offers. This gives the children the space and the open air to begin thinking for themselves and experience the things they watch happen on television or in video games. Whether it be playing soccer in the backyard, drawing on the sidewalk with chalk, playing tag, or making up a new game to play; children who play outside get more out of staying inside and begin to learn new things while having fun!

It is very common that children associate learning with school, but little do they know they are learning essential life skills while playing outside. They get to learn how to live an active lifestyle, how to be careful, how to think outside the box, how to use the resources available to them, how to cooperate with others, how to be a good friend, and how to make their own decisions. Skills like these cannot be taught and enforced as much when children are indoors. Not only does playing outside benefit children mentally, it provides a strong source of vitamin D, even when there are clouds in the sky and during winter time. Vitamin D has been proven to create a positive mental attitude, improve moods, and prevent children from developing Rickets, a softening and weakening of bones in children, usually due to a lack of Vitamin D. Physical activity will also improve your child's overall health, allowing them to build up muscle, strengthen their heart, lower their blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and strengthen their bones.

Physical activity affects more than just children's physical health, it improves their mental health as well. When anyone does exercise, their nervous system and brain secrete a hormone called endorphin, an endogenous opioid neuropeptide and peptide that will trigger a positive feeling, reduce pain, relieve stress, and provide energy for the body. This is especially important for children since they may already feel stressed by school or other factors, and without it they may feel sluggish or depressed. Lucky for us, endorphins can help with all of these issues!

Playing outside will give children a sense of independence, since they may feel more free outside of their home and may feel as though their parents are not as on top of them. Children playing with other children outside will develop and strengthen their social skills and allow them to express themselves, since the great outdoors is typically less crowded and therefore less

overwhelming than indoors can be. This allows children to make friends more easily and embrace/accept themselves and each other more. While playing with other children away from their parents, children are forced to teach themselves how to share, take turns, be a good friend, and more. Thus, making them self-reliant and teaching them self-discipline, two vital parts of becoming more responsible.

Children grow mentally and physically when they play in the great outdoors. You must think of them like chameleons. Chameleons will grow much larger out in the wild compared to when they are held captive. Wild chameleons grow up to five feet in length while domesticated chameleons only grow up to about two and a half feet in length. Children that are given the outdoor space to play will grow much smarter, stronger, and healthier than those kept inside most hours of the day. Bring your kid into the great outdoors for at least a few hours of the day, let your child spread their wings, grow, and learn.

Citation:

“Seven Benefits of Outdoor Play for Children.” [www.fawns.co.uk/blog-posts/seven-benefits-outdoor-play-children/](http://www.fawns.co.uk/blog-posts/seven-benefits-outdoor-play-children/), Playtime by Fawns, February 11, 2018, Fawns Recreational Services Ltd, Great Britain.