

Ideas for Parents and Caregivers

Healthy
in nature



How to Use this Information

This is a list of a variety of activities and events that encourage people to spend time outdoors. As recreation and parks professionals, you can use these ideas in your programming or give them to your patrons to encourage them to spend time outdoors. The list includes information about challenges people encounter regarding getting outdoors and ideas on how to overcome them.

▶ Promote the concept!

Use this information to help promote healthy in nature activities, policies and programs in your area.

▶ Spread the news!

- Give this information to your patrons, members of the public, fellow staff members, municipal leaders, community partners and others.
- Incorporate this information in your communication materials such as a recreation newsletter or programming guide or in correspondence with municipal council and community partners.



Spending Time Outdoors



- ▶ As a parent or caregiver, there are benefits and challenges to getting outdoors with your children or family members. However, by focusing on the positive outcomes, any challenges can be overcome. Here is a list of common challenges and some ideas that we hope will encourage you to spend time outdoors with your family.





CHALLENGE 1

Your schedule is overloaded. You don't have time to be outdoors with your children.

- ▶ There are incredible demands on today's families, including changing demographics, family structures and time pressures.
- ▶ Some parents believe it is more worthwhile or socially acceptable when their child participates in organized sport or learns to play a musical instrument rather than take time to play outdoors.

✓ Solutions

- ✓ Start with spending 15 minutes every day outdoors in nature. Parking a few minutes from school and walking your child from school to your car is a good start.
- ✓ Go for regular walks, runs or bike rides in natural settings.
- ✓ If you can walk or bike or take the bus, you will save money, develop resilience and help your child... Walk your child to school or encourage them to cycle to piano or swimming lessons. Get off the bus 2 stops before you need to ...
- ✓ While attending a soccer practice or hockey game (or whatever sport) of one older child, have a scavenger hunt outdoors for another younger child (or group of adults) (find a dandelion, feel bumpy texture of a tree, listen for a bird song).
- ✓ Eat dinner outdoors. Store a picnic blanket in the car. After school or before activities begin, visit a playground or park and have a picnic dinner.
- ✓ Make being outdoors and playing outdoors a priority. Children will follow your example. When the sun is setting, stop in a safe spot, get outside and spend 10 minutes watching the sun go down. Walk your dog together. Explore a nearby creek. Sit on a park bench together to spot and identify birds. Go for a stroll through your neighbourhood. Sit outdoors with your child to eat a snack together. Dress appropriately and then play outdoors in the snow.
- ✓ Children and youth, our stewards of the future, may not learn to value nature or they may be fearful of nature because it is unfamiliar. Stewardship is based on connections to nature.
- ✓ Invest time in nature. Raise youth awareness of the values and health benefits of playing outdoors.
- ✓ Get involved with strategies, interventions, programs and activities that recognize and value that outdoor recreation develops physical and mental health and socialization skills.
- ✓ Encourage parent advisory councils at school to create nature playgrounds and/or gardens.
- ✓ Follow David Suzuki's guidelines – spend 30 minutes outside each day for 30 days. Monitor your family's mood and sleep behaviour.





CHALLENGE 2

Children and parents gravitate toward technology instead of choosing to spend time outdoors.

- ▶ Generally, technology cuts children off from nature rather than inspires them to engage in nature.
- ▶ Although television, computer games, internet and cell phones offer children connections without having to leave home, the connections are not always meaningful or beneficial.
- ▶ Because technology is indoors, it's often marketed as fun and safe.

✓ Solutions

- ✓ Grab your camera or cell phone and encourage your child to take photos outdoors. Have them look for shapes and colours. Can they find new ways to 'see' nature – from above, close up or far away?
- ✓ Read, do chores and balance “screen” time on TV, computer, video games and cell phones with “green” time. Use the healthy habits of 5 2 1 0 . Updated on the website – programming examples Every day, eat 5 fruits and vegetables, have 2 hours or less of screen time (no screen time under the age of 2), 1 hour or more of physical activity and 0 sugar-sweetened drinks.
- ✓ Track and limit screen time by setting a timer and by keeping electronics out of bedrooms at night.
- ✓ Then online, use websites and programs that encourage children and families to learn about nature such as:
 - Footprint Conservation Society's Kidz Zone
 - Get To Know's Virtual Hikes
 - David Suzuki Foundation
 - National Wildlife Federation's Ranger Rick and Family Fun resources
- ✓ Consider the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines to support your resolution to spend time outdoors. The Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology recommends:
 - toddlers (1-2 years) and preschoolers (3-4 years) should have 180 minutes of physical activity throughout the day
 - children (5-11 years) and youth (12-17 years) should have 60 minutes of physical activity every day
 - adults should get 150 minutes of physical activity every week.
- ✓ Screen time (TV, computer, electronic games) is not recommended for children under 2 years of age. For 2 to 4-year-olds, screen time should be under one hour per day. Children and youth (5-17 years) should have no more than 2 hours screen time per day. Motorized transport and extended time spent indoors should be limited. In the U.S., the Surgeon General recommends that everyone spend one hour per day of unstructured time outdoors.
- ✓ Have your children learn to turn off their electronics – focusing on relationships, school work and family life is more easily facilitated when children learn to manage the distractions of texting and twitter.





CHALLENGE 3

You're concerned that if your children play outdoors, their safety may be at risk.

- ▶ There are perceived risks about the natural world including the fear of strangers abducting children and the fear of children getting hurt if they play outdoors.

✓ Solutions

- ✓ Join with other families to organize outdoor play dates and play groups. Share supervision.
- ✓ Be outdoors with your child so you can play with them. Let them teach you what they know and show how they make decisions.
- ✓ Be aware of media sensationalism that it's unsafe to be outdoors.
- ✓ Be aware of society's perceptions that there is little value in being outdoors and that sedentary, indoor activities are fun and safe.
- ✓ Gradually increase the level of independence you grant your child while she is outdoors, such as allowing her to roam up and down the sidewalk, cycle around the block or visit the nearby playground.
- ✓ Provide access to large outdoor areas that are safe, such as fields, parks or playgrounds where kids can move freely.
- ✓ Increase neighbourhood safety by advocating for traffic-calming measures such as speed bumps and roundabouts.





CHALLENGE 4

You think your community lacks good quality play places or you lack ideas and inspiration for encouraging your child to play outdoors.

- ▶ Some people don't live within easy access to a park.
- ▶ It difficult to think of anything "constructive" to do outdoors with the children

✓ Solutions

- ✓ Find natural play places – small parks, walkways, lakefronts, riverways.
- ✓ Have outdoor play dates – invite your neighbor, another child, a Friday night neighbourhood game of tag.
- ✓ Keep it easy and fun. For example, build a fort, have a soccer game, scavenger hunt, kickball game. Teach your child how to play games such as hopscotch, capture the flag and Red Rover. It doesn't have to be complicated.
- ✓ Bring along balls, skipping ropes, equipment and toys to encourage outdoor play – make up a game, change the rules, have the children run the game.
- ✓ Avoid over-scheduling your child. Reduce the number of their structured activities so you can allot time for unstructured play, which helps them use their imaginations and explore the world.
- ✓ Accept that youth need free time to play and direct their own activities without assuming that they're up to no good.
- ✓ Protect available green space in and around your neighbourhood – speak up at City Council, talk to your local recreation department, ?? .
- ✓ Try some of ParticipACTION's Get Moving ideas and tips for parents.
- ✓ Read the Nature Circles website about bringing families together. It lists 10 fun things for families to do together in nature.
- ✓ Join or create a family nature club. Take a look at the Children and Nature Network Nature Clubs for Families Toolkit.
- ✓ Find walking routes and recreation facilities in your area on the B.C. Recreation and Parks Association Walk BC (interactive map).





CHALLENGE 5

You assume that children do not want to play outdoors because they don't want to get dirty, wet or cold. In some cases, parents don't allow their children to get dirty.

- ▶ It's too cold or wet to play outside. Children won't like it.
- ▶ Bad weather is a barrier to being outdoors in nature.
- ▶ Children don't like to get dirty. When they get dirty, it's too much work to clean up.

✓ Solutions

- ✓ Tell your kids it's ok to get messy. Let your kids wear clothes that can get dirty. Be prepared to rinse clothes outside with a hose and have clean clothes and towels ready for when they come in.
- ✓ Let your child make direct contact with soil. Don't worry; it's good for them.
- ✓ Bacteria in soil helps strengthen our immune system and stimulates the production of a brain chemical called serotonin, which improves our moods, enhances our feelings of well-being, reduces anxiety and facilitates learning.
- ✓ "Bake" and decorate mud pies, mix up mud stew or make a nature salad. Build a worm hotel, jump in mud puddles, draw in the mud with a stick, create a mud sculpture, build a mud tower, and dig a trench or moat in the mud.
- ✓ Build a fort with resources you find nearby .
- ✓ Try making a dream catcher or household decoration from the branches that have fallen nearby
- ✓ Can you make a tower or build a town with materials you find in nature
- ✓ Get kid-size gardening tools and have them help you plant vegetables and flower seeds or bulbs.
- ✓ Read National Wildlife Federation's document entitled: The Dirt on Dirt: How Getting Dirty Outdoors Benefits Kids. This was produced as part of their Be Out There movement which reconnects families with the outdoors to raise happy, healthy children with a life-long love of nature. (hyperlink to <http://www.nwf.org/Be-Out-There.aspx>)
- ✓ Be prepared for the weather. Find shade on hot days and have water and sunscreen with you. In the cold, dress warmly. When it's wet, wear a rain jacket, rain pants and boots.
- ✓ Use all of your senses to notice signs of nature and wildlife, whether it's in a local park, your backyard or a rural or urban setting.





CHALLENGE 6

You don't think you're qualified to educate your children about the outdoors or about ecology and conservation and are worried about the risk of playing outdoors. .

✓ Solutions

- ✓ Use and create nature playgrounds out of existing materials in your back yard.
- ✓ Get a book on local ecology from the library and learn about native birds, plants and animals.
- ✓ Go for a tour of a local ecosystem with a naturalist, biologist or ecologist.
- ✓ Join a local parks group or environmental organization and go on their outings.
- ✓ Hang a birdfeeder outside your window and learn to identify different species.
- ✓ Join a community garden or take lessons in gardening or other outdoor activity.
- ✓ Go for a day hike.
- ✓ Plan to visit a natural wonder on your next vacation.
- ✓ Create a demand for outdoor programming by asking your parks and recreation staff. Join with your children to learn alongside.
- ✓ Protecting children from independent and outdoor play can hinder their physical, social, cognitive and emotional development. Outdoors, they can develop new abilities that lead to enhanced confidence and a resiliency to face future challenges.
- ✓ Consider your views and perceptions of the risks and fears of outdoor play. Your views can influence a child's free play experience by encouraging them to play outdoors in nature.



★ Make it a Green Move for Health Day!

Move for Health Day in the second week of May is an event designed to get everyone in B.C. moving. Visit the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association website for resource materials to support your Move for Health Day event, such as posters and promotional tools, resources for planning your local challenge, media tools and other helpful resources.

- ▶ Encourage people to get moving for health in nature. Experiencing nature reduces mental fatigue, diminishes sensations of stress and has positive effects on mood. Get outside and play.
- ▶ Plan a special event for your community:
 - ▶ Plant trees
 - ▶ Walk along a nature path
 - ▶ Have a picnic at a beach or local park and start a pick-up game of volleyball or soccer
 - ▶ Plan an outdoor fitness class
 - ▶ Take kids on a scavenger hunt



★ Join the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada

- ▶ It is a network of organizations and individuals who are working to connect children to nature through education, advocacy, programming, policy, research and the built environment.
- ▶ Access resources, plot yourself on the map and collaborate with other nature play supporters across Canada.
- ▶ The vision of the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada is all children and families in Canada are connected with nature and the outdoors to enhance their health and well-being.

★ Get involved in Nature Play Day on June 15

- ▶ All Canadians are encouraged to celebrate outdoor play and highlight the importance of nature play every year on June 15. Everyone from parents, grandparents, teachers, schools, families, youth and communities can play outdoors with friends, family or colleagues.
- ▶ This annual event is supported by the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada. You can register your Nature Play Event for final voting in the Great Canadian Nature Play Showdown.
- ▶ Here are a few ideas for your Nature Play Day:
 - Play tag in a forest
 - Splash in a mud puddle
 - Climb a tree
 - Look at creatures in a pond
 - Listen to the birds in a meadow



★ Celebrate ParticipACTION's Longest Day of Play on June 21

- ▶ All Canadians can get outside and play.
- ▶ The ParticipACTION website (hyperlink to the above address) has ideas, tips and communication tools to promote the day.
- ▶ You can register your community event so others can join in the fun.
- ▶ Participating is fun and easy and every Canadian is encouraged to log as many play hours as possible engaging in activities on the first day of summer, which is the longest day of the year.
- ▶ Ideas include:
 - Individuals can go swimming outdoors, fly a kite or explore a local park, take your dog for a walk, climb a tree
 - families could go for a hike, tour your community on bikes, organize an event in a local park, visit a local playground, organize a soccer game
 - community organizations could encourage recreation centres to remain open late with free access to programs, plan a community fun fair at a local park, plan a scavenger hunt
 - schools could double the recess, make an extra long lunch, plan a sports day, plan a picnic lunch and hike



★ Join the David Suzuki Foundation Initiatives

- ▶ 30x30 Nature Challenge – get outside for 30 minutes a day for 30 days in a row in May
- ▶ Fall Family Challenge – explore nature in your backyard and beyond starting in September

★ Take a look at Richard Louv's Resource Guide Supplement to Last Child in the Woods

- ▶ Try some of the nature activities for kids and families
- ▶ Read a book from the book list for kids and families
- ▶ Look at the helpful links for more information and ideas about how to enjoy the outdoors



Create an area that supports nature play or regularly visit a neighbourhood park with children

- ▶ Take children somewhere where they can enjoy themselves without adult involvement or confining schedules. Younger children's worlds are small and their attention focuses on pleasures such as individual flowers rather than large gardens, earthworms rather than herds of animals or a patch of dirt to dig in.
- ▶ For nature play tips for parents and caregivers, visit [Nurturing Nature Play: Ten Tips for Parents](#) from the Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood.
- ▶ For ideas on what a child can do in nature, visit [What Can a Child Do in Nature? 101 Ideas for Parent Who Have Forgotten and for Children Who Have Not Yet Learned](#). From the Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood.



Programs and Resources for Teenagers

- ▶ Natural Leaders Alliance (NLA) is an alliance of young Canadians who are working together to give their peers opportunities to get outside and have fun. This is a youth-led initiative of the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, with an aim to reconnect all Canadian youth to nature by empowering a strong network of leaders across the country. Groups have organized events, campaigns and programs such as Amazing Races, camping trips, lake clean-ups, garden building and a Get Outside BC! Youth Summit.
- ▶ Youth can join a provincial network of natural leaders. Get Outside BC is focused on empowering youth and developing a connection to the outdoors. This is a collaborative youth leadership project between the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and BC Parks.
- ▶ Take a look at the [Get Out to Parks](#) website for all things parks and nature. This youth hub has been developed by youth, for youth providing quick and easy access to information about parks, program and jobs in parks across the country. It is an initiative of the Canadian Parks Council.

