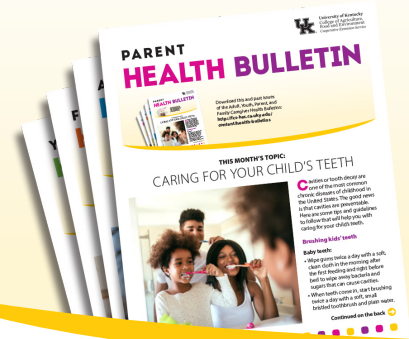


PARENT

HEALTH BULLETIN



JANUARY 2025

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

STEP INTO NATURE: EVEN IN THE WINTER



In the cold, dreary months of winter, it is easy for everyone to spend more time inside. However, children need time to play outdoors year-round. It can be tempting to forgo the extra work of bundling a child up to go outside to play, but there is simply no substitute developmentally for kids playing outside.

Children need unstructured play time outside every day. Their bodies need to be able to move. Even 15 to 30 minutes of outside playtime makes a difference in kids physically, emotionally, and behaviorally.

Physically, children's bodies are growing and developing. They need to use and strain bones and muscles to develop strength and endurance. Lungs and heart need to be used to increase capacity as well. Physical activity is the best way for all body systems to work well, and children

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Maybe you have heard that playing outside when it is wet or dreary can cause your child to catch a cold or feel poorly. However, we know that is not the case. Colds come from the spread of germs.

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need to use energy and move freely. While sports and organized games are great physical activities, children also need unstructured time to explore and learn independently. It is OK for your child to be “bored” outside. Boredom often leads to creativity and ingenuity in both children and adults.

Children process their emotions through their bodies, so they need regular opportunities for physical release. As with adults, spending time outdoors helps to lower stress levels and reduce negative thoughts. Teaching children to use nature as a tool to help themselves feel better emotionally builds capacity and resilience. Adults model using nature as a tool by encouraging children to go outside when they feel poorly and helping them reflect on how being outside affects their emotions and thought patterns.

When children regularly spend time playing outdoors, their behavior indoors improves. Wide-scale studies have shown that physical activity is a mitigator for student behavior in schools. Particularly for high-energy children, or children with attention or hyperactivity disorders, having opportunities throughout the day for unstructured activity decreases reports of problematic behaviors. Additionally, spending time outdoors in green spaces has been shown to increase concentration, problem-solving, and imagination. These are all areas of importance for growing and learning minds.

Parents often cite poor weather as a reason for limiting outdoor play in the winter months. Maybe you have heard that playing outside when it is wet or dreary can cause your child to catch a cold or feel poorly. However, we know that is not the case. Colds come from the spread of germs. This happens much more frequently indoors than outside. Breathing in fresh, outdoor air boosts children’s immune function and helps their bodies fight colds and other illnesses.

If a child dresses appropriately, most weather, aside from storms and extreme cold, is suitable for outdoor play. When it is wet, help your child choose clothes and shoes that will keep them dry, such as rain boots, a water-resistant coat and pants, or a rain suit. When it is cold, instruct your child to wear a coat, hat, gloves, and layers to stay warm, as well as socks and shoes to protect their feet. Winter boots and a snowsuit may also be beneficial.

Encourage kids to go play outside, and then come inside to get warm and dry. Everyone benefits from stepping into nature, even in the winter!

REFERENCE:

https://www.med.upenn.edu/antibiotics/newsletters/2017_5.1_January.pdf

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