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# Kidtelligence

## KIDS AND THE OUTDOORS



As the COVID-19 pandemic wanes and life begins to get back to some semblance of normal, one area of change that many parents hope will last is kids spending more time outside.

During the pandemic with schools closed and lockdown orders in place, kids found two retreats from boredom; increased screen time and increased time outside.

In the early days of the lockdown kids' bike sales increased more than 100% while sales of outdoor toys and sports equipment leapt up 51% by more than \$193 million in April 2020 alone.

This re-found love of the outdoors is great for kids.

At the same time, parents are struggling to rein in the relaxation of screen time rules that occurred over the past 18-months.

While Zoom play dates and Discord gaming sessions may have been sanity savers for kids and parents during a time when kids needed to be occupied and stay 6-feet away from each other, all that screen time has had some negative effects on kids mental and physical health. "Having all that screen time all day for a whole year, their nervous system is really disregulated, and those symptoms need to be reversed," said Victoria Dunckley, a child psychiatrist.

"Nature play, or time spent in nature, boasts many benefits. One study of school children in Colorado and Maryland showed that access to natural areas – for elementary and high school students – is associated with reduced stress, increased focus and competence, and the ability to form supportive social groups."

– Katey Hurley, LCSW – "Nature as Stress Relief for Kids"

Adults can help model the way out. Recent studies investigating children's contact and connection with nature found that families with adults who take time to connect with nature were far more likely to have children who do the same.

Many families found solace and space in the outdoors during the pandemic. It was a safer place to gather with friends and family and provided endless opportunities for exploration, time together, and time away from screens.

All signs point to this increase in nature time sticking around for the foreseeable future with record breaking pre-season ski pass sales already being seen by resorts ahead of the 2021-2022 ski season and a five-fold increase in the number of families camping outdoors for the first time. iNaturalist, an app that identifies wild plants and animals, saw a 62% increase in users during the pandemic.

But nature doesn't have to be vast green spaces to provide benefits, "A walk in the park, or even just looking out a window at some trees, decreases blood pressure, stress hormones and symptoms of anxiety and depression." (Sadie Dingfelder/Washington Post).