



## Playing Outside Is A Very Good Thing!

**C**onnecting children to their natural environment is an important job for parents. Besides limiting time in front of the TV and computers, parents can make outside time fun and

irresistible with just a few simple tricks.

Children are adventurous and curious. They love to climb on big rocks and turn small ones over to see what's underneath. Finding a caterpillar or ladybug in the bushes or on garden sunflowers is exciting. Examining these creatures with a magnifying glass is even better. And spying on birds in nearby trees is a real treat with a pair of binoculars. Remember creating forts from loose parts like limbs and boards and cardboard boxes? This is the kind of stimulating, creative play kids need. If enough stuff is available to them, children will find ways to use it. Parents can provide an old sheet to be draped over a tree limb for a clubhouse or hideaway. Kids need

spaces outside to call their own. They can have snacks or a picnic in their outdoor dining room. They can read books, color, and even take a nap.

Playing with "inside toys" outside is another great way to make sure kids get much-needed sensory experiences. Dominoes and cards can be played in the fresh air, doll clothes can be washed, and dump trucks can be loaded and unloaded. Sand and dirt are key components of sensory, messy, and imaginative play. And when water is added, the real fun begins. Art supplies are a natural for outside play. What better place could there be for painting a picture, with nature to inspire the artist? And cleanup is easier—it's a win-win situation!

Don't underestimate the pleasure children take in gardening. You can go all out by making your own compost from apple peelings or eggshells and plant and harvest a garden. Or you can keep it simple by transplanting bedding plants to a few pots. Whatever you have the time to do will benefit children and keep them connected to nature.

Many of us remember our parents saying, "Go outside and play!" It turns out those were wise words from nurturing parents. Research shows that this generation of children spends less time playing outside than ever before. Discretionary "free" time has declined more than nine hours a week over the past 25 years. And the latest research indicates that children ages two to five spend more than 32 hours a week watching television.

\* The benefits of outside play on children's development are clear.

### **Children who play outside regularly:**

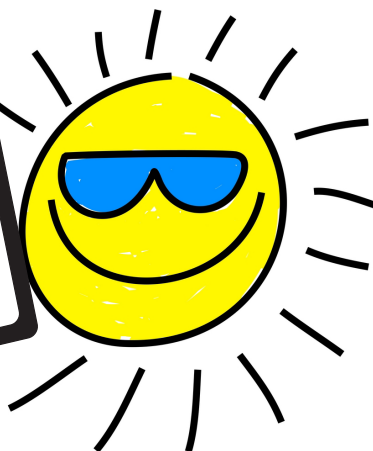
- Are more creative in their play
- Have stronger immune systems
- Are more fit
- Have lower stress levels
- Are more respectful of themselves and others

# PERSONAL PARENTING

## Tips for Applying Sunscreen

### Sunny Day Snack

To celebrate a summer day, let your child make an edible sunny day picture on a graham cracker. Spread the cracker with cream cheese. Lay pretzel sticks side by side to make a picket fence. For the sun, use a slice of banana. The rays can be made from carrot strips cut into 1/2-inch pieces. This snack is just as much fun to create as it is to eat!



How do you get sunscreen on squirming bodies? Try this: With a squeeze bottle of sunscreen, draw a necklace and bracelets around your child's neck and wrists, and then rub it in. Draw a smiley face on his tummy, and then rub it in. On arms and legs, write your child's name, and then rub it in. For faces, draw a tiny mustache and beard or dimples and rosy cheeks with the lotion, and then rub it in. That was easy!



### Break Time!

Need a little break so you can get things done? Give your child a stack of junk mail to open and sort while you make the grocery list or write a thank-you note.



### Which Is Biggest?

Play this simple game with your toddler or preschooler.

Line up some favorite toys, such as a car, a ball, and a stuffed animal.



Ask, "Which is bigger?" If your child isn't sure, give some hints and then line them up from smallest to biggest. For older children, make the game more of a challenge: Choose similar toys that are also closer to the same size, such as miniature cars or blocks.

## May is Physical Fitness Month: Get Physical!

Try some of these ideas to get everyone in shape and keep kids moving!

### Simple Movements

- Try hopping like a bunny, slithering like a snake, and galloping like a horse with younger children.
- For older children, set up obstacle courses that require jumping, skipping, hopping on one foot, jogging in place, and sprinting.
- Count the number of times you can jump without stopping. See how far you can jump.
- How long does it take to race to the mailbox?
- Get out the chalk, and play an old-fashioned game of hopscotch.

### Tape Walking

Place a piece of masking tape on a deck or sidewalk. See if children can walk along the tape without "falling off." Can they sidestep on the tape? Can they tiptoe on the tape? Can they walk back-



# Notes on Napping

**N**aptime can be a struggle. Some children drift off with no problem when they're tired, others have trouble filtering out distractions and have difficulty settling down. Some are afraid if they slow down they'll miss out on the "fun stuff," and sleeping during the day when there are lots of other things to do doesn't make sense! But adequate sleep is vital, and napping or resting during the day shouldn't be negotiable—kids need time to wind down and recharge. Even older children need an opportunity to settle down and have some quiet time, even if they don't sleep. This quiet time is very good for adults, too!

## *Some strategies to make naptime easier:*

- Stay on a schedule. It's ideal if naptime or quiet time is planned for about the same time every day. Children thrive on routines they can count on.
- Beds are boring. Let your child sleep in your bed for a change, or in a tent or a sleeping bag.
- Naptime is a good time for fantasy. Sprinkle imaginary sleep dust on your child's head to help him drift off more easily.
- Soft sounds are soothing. Play soft music, and make sure you talk in quiet tones as you get your child ready for a nap. No roughhousing now!
- Nap with a buddy. Let your child cuddle up with a stuffed animal, lovey, or special doll.
- Create a restful environment. Turn down the lights, and give your child a back rub.
- Help kids wind down by reading or telling a story.
- Clocks are effective. Place a clock in the room to help an older child know when rest time is over.
- Select special toys for quiet time. Let children who are too old to nap choose some books and puzzles to play with quietly in their room.
- Tape your self reading a story or singing a song, and let your child listen to it during quiet time.
- Teach your child to breathe deeply and relax muscles in arms and legs.
- Welcome your child warmly after naptime.



Elizabeth Pantly, author of, *The No-Cry Nap Solution*, offers some gentle ways to solve naptime problems. The book covers the latest research on how much sleep children need, the stages of sleep, catnaps, shifting nap schedules, and a number of other topics.

She offers this wisdom: "A nap is a miraculous, life-enhancing activity. A nap can transform a crying, fussing baby into a cooing, smiling delight. A nap can convert a cranky, whiny child into a happier, healthier, and more adaptable little person. A nap can rescue a grouchy, moody parent and allow the loving mom or dad to reappear. Naps are magical breaks in the day that rejuvenate the entire family."