



# Know the Facts: The nature of childhood has changed. There's not much nature in it.

Children who spend regular time outdoors are healthier, happier and grow up with a love of the environment. In the last two decades, and even more alarmingly in the last ten years, American childhood has moved indoors. The average boy or girl spends just *four<sup>1</sup> to seven<sup>2</sup> minutes* outdoors every day.

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) encourages all Americans to Be Out There™ and support its national campaign to give back to our children what they don't even know they've lost: childhood's essential wildness and connection to the natural world. [Join the Be Out There movement in 2010](#) for the health of our nation's children.

## Unstructured Outdoor Play is Critical to Children's Health and Development

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 60 minutes of daily unstructured free play as an **essential part of children's physical and mental health** and social development.<sup>3</sup>

Outdoor play increases physical activity levels and builds active, healthy bodies, an important strategy in addressing the **obesity epidemic**.<sup>4</sup>

- Obesity among children (aged 6 to 11) more than doubled in the past 20 years, to 17 percent.
- The rate of clinically obese adolescents (aged 12-19) more than tripled, to 17.6 percent.

Lack of outdoor time and inadequate doses of sunlight are creating a **generation of children deficient in Vitamin D**, setting them up for increased risk of bone problems, heart disease, diabetes, and other health issues.<sup>5</sup>

Increased outdoor time **improves eyesight**:

- Several studies reported *Optometry and Vision Science* indicated children who spend more time outside during the day tend to have better distance vision than those who favor indoor activities.<sup>6</sup>
- A Duke University study found that a child's chances of becoming nearsighted, if he or she has two nearsighted parents, are about 6 in 10 for children who spend 0-5 hours outside a week, but the risk drops to 2 in 10 when outdoor time exceeds 14 hours a week.

Researchers at University of Illinois report findings that indicate exposure to natural settings may be "widely effective" in **reducing attention deficit symptoms** in children.<sup>7</sup>



## American Childhood has Moved Indoors

By the time most children go to kindergarten, they have spent more than 5,000<sup>8</sup> hours in front of a television – *enough time to earn a college degree*.<sup>9</sup>

The average American child (6-12) spends 44 hours per week staring at some kind of electronic screen.<sup>10</sup>





"Sixty minutes of daily unstructured free play is essential to children's physical and mental health."

American Academy of Pediatrics, 2008

"When we go outside, my kids become their best selves. Gone are the petty arguments about whose turn it is to go first or what to do next. Suddenly the kids are creative, digging in the dirt, picking up worms, jumping and laughing,"

Renee Limon,  
mother of two and  
co-founder of  
EnviroMom.com

## References and Calculations

<sup>1</sup> Hofferth, Sandra and John Sandberg (1999), "Changes in American Children's Time, 1981-1997," University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.

<sup>2</sup> Juster, F. Thomas et al. (2004). "Changing Times of American Youth: 1981-2003," Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.  
[http://www.umich.edu/news/Releases/2004/Nov04/teen\\_time\\_report.pdf](http://www.umich.edu/news/Releases/2004/Nov04/teen_time_report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ginsburg, MD, MEd, Kenneth R., Committee on Communications, and Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health. "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds." (2007). American Academy of Pediatrics, Jan. 2007.  
<http://www.aap.org/pressroom/playFINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Division of Adolescent and School Health. Childhood Obesity. 20 Oct. 2008.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/obesity/>

<sup>5</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. "Many Children have suboptimal Vitamin D Levels," *Pediatrics*. October 26, 2009.  
<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/oct2609studies.htm>

<sup>6</sup> What's Hot in Myopia Research-The 12th International Myopia Conference, Australia, July 2008.  
[http://journals.lww.com/optvissci/Fulltext/2009/01000/What\\_s\\_Hot\\_in\\_Myopia\\_Research\\_The\\_12th.2.aspx](http://journals.lww.com/optvissci/Fulltext/2009/01000/What_s_Hot_in_Myopia_Research_The_12th.2.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> Kuo, PhD, Frances E., and Andrea Faber Taylor, PhD. "A Potential Natural Treatment for Attention- Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Evidence From a National Study." *American Journal of Public Health* 94.9. Sept. 2004.  
<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1448497>

<sup>8</sup> McDonough, Patricia (2009), "TV Viewing Among Kids at an Eight-Year High," The Nielsen Company, October 26, 2009.  
[http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/media\\_entertainment/tv-viewing-among-kids-at-an-eight-year-high/](http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/media_entertainment/tv-viewing-among-kids-at-an-eight-year-high/)

### Calculation of > 5,000 hours:

32 TV hrs/wk for 2-5 yr olds \* 52 wks/yr \* 3.25 yrs of watching (based on 5.25 avg age for starting kindergarten) = 5,408 hours of TV watching before starting kindergarten.

<sup>9</sup> Indiana University East: Planning Your Semester. (2009). Retrieved December 23, 2009, from <http://www.iue.edu/ucollege/advising/planningyoursemester.php>

### Calculation for total hours to get a college degree:

120 credit hours for degree \* 2.5 times the hours for studying and class time per week \* avg of 14 week semester = 4,200 total hours

<sup>10</sup> Rideout, Victoria et al. (2005). Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.  
<http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia030905pkg.cfm>

