

Getting Children & Teens Outside While Physical Distancing for COVID-19

Getting outside as a family is a great way to spend time together. But what can you do outdoors while staying a safe distance from others during the COVID-19 pandemic? Think nature exploration!

Read on for ways that you and your children can get a physical and emotional boost from being outdoors while still practicing good social distancing.

Exploring the outdoors while social distancing

Nature all around us. Exploring outside with proper social distancing can happen in your yard, a table-top garden, or even virtually (though not with all of the benefits).

Bringing out baby. Even infants and toddlers can play and learn in nature. If you will be in public areas like a park, it may be safest to keep them in a carrier or a stroller. If they are in your own private space, it's fine to have them explore even more.

- **Nature sculptures** can be built with twigs, leaves, cones, rocks and more by sticking the collected items into a play dough base. Notice what kind of patterns are created by different items. Or, let your child play in mud with old pots, pans, utensils, and household tools to develop senses and motor skills.
- **Bike or walk with the family** while keeping your distance from others. If you have a child bicycle trailer or stroller, get some exercise while enjoying the outdoors with your baby. Describe what you see along the way to your baby or preschooler. Use a lot of details to help them learn new words.
- **Take story time outside.** Grab a blanket, some books and find a shady spot to read with your child outdoors. Pick books that talk about nature and help your child make connections.

Challenge older children & teens. Stay engaged with the outdoors as a family. Take advantage of this time to bond over games and activities you all enjoy.

- **Hold a nature scavenger hunt or start a nature collection.** Hunt for plants, trees, animals, and birds. Collect rocks, acorns, leaves or pinecones. See how many items children can find on a list, or gather objects to add to a collection.
- **Leave a trail.** Organize with parents of your children's friends to send kids on "secret spy missions." One family goes on a walk with sidewalk chalk, drawing arrows and letters along the way to spell out a secret message. The other family must then follow the arrows along the way to record the letters in the message.

- **Have a ball.** Kicking a soccer ball or playing catch together can be fine if you are apart from each other and avoid sharing sports equipment with others outside your household.

The benefits of being outside

Getting outside provides more than a fun break for children and teens. It is also good for their physical and mental health and development. Children and teens who spend time enjoying nature can be:

Physically healthier. Children play harder outdoors than indoors. Especially without the structure of preschool, school or afterschool activities, children especially need opportunities to move. More outdoor time is linked with improved motor development and lower obesity rates.

More engaged in learning. Playing outside promotes more curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. Studies have found that children who spent more time in nature exploration had improved learning outcomes.

More positive in behavior. Research has found that when children spent time in natural settings they had less anger and aggression. Impulse control also improves. This might be especially important when normal routines have changed for children.

Mentally healthier. Stress and depression are lower for all people who spend time in nature. Children show increased focus and reduced symptoms of for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Remember

Take advantage of the healing power of play in nature—in your own backyard or on a walk. Be sure to follow local public health guidelines about wearing masks and keep at least 6 feet from others not in your family. Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer during and after your adventure. Getting outdoors, being in nature, and moving our bodies is good for everyone!

Stay informed

Families are encouraged to stay up to date about this situation as we learn more about how to prevent this virus from spreading in homes and in communities.

For more parenting information from the AAP, visit www.HealthyChildren.org.

For the latest developments from the CDC, including travel warnings, new cases, and prevention advice, visit www.cdc.gov.

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