

chicagowilderness.org
312.580.2137
Chicago, IL 60603
Suite 900
8 S. Michigan Avenue

Chicago
Wilderness

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chicagowildernessmag.org/issues/summer2007/people.html

For more on the Bill of Rights:
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Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights

An increasing number of researchers and scientists are documenting the benefits to children of outdoor play in nature. Following is a partial list of studies that document these benefits and support the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights. The vast majority of the following studies were published in peer-reviewed professional and academic journals.

Benefits of Children's Access to the Outdoors



Discovering

People who demonstrate a commitment to protect the natural world identify childhood experiences in nature as a critical factor in their actions (Chawla, 2006; Wells & Lekies, 2006). In a study of 400 youths, a majority reported that wilderness challenge programs had major impacts on their physical, emotional, and intellectual development and well-being (Kellert & Derr, 1998).

Camping

Participation in summer camp increases the self-esteem scores of children from low-income areas (Readdick & Schaller, 2005). Participation in wilderness therapy programs is associated with improved functioning in teenagers' school performance, interpersonal relationships, and household behavior (Harper, Russell, Cooley & Cupples, 2007).

Hiking

Walking has been shown to lower high blood pressure, decrease anxiety, and combat obesity (Bove, 1998; Bricklin et al., 1992). Participation in outdoor activities allows children to connect with themselves at the same time as it strengthens their family relationships (Harris, 2003).

Catching and Releasing

Participation in green outdoor activities such as fishing is associated with reduced Attention-Deficit Disorder symptoms in children (Faber Taylor, Kuo & Sullivan, 2001). Children report that being in a natural setting allows them to escape the pressures of everyday life (Harris, 2003).

Climbing

Kindergarten students who spent one to two hours everyday playing in a forested area improved their motor skills more significantly than students who played at a traditional outdoor playground (Fjortoft, 2002). Ninety percent of adults who describe themselves as active started their favorite outdoor activity before the age of 18 (Harris, 2003).

Exploring

The presence of green space around the homes of inner-city children is associated with several dimensions of self-discipline, including increased concentration (Faber Taylor, Kuo & Sullivan, 2002). Investigating plants and animals on the way to school can be an effective and exciting approach to teaching biodiversity to school-age children (Lindemann-Matthies, 2006).

Celebrating

The benefits of outdoor recreation may include the maintenance and nurturing of values important to Latino families (Shaull & Gramann, 1998). There are key differences among ethnic groups living in the U.S. in the meaning of nature and the outdoors, the view of humans' relationship to the environment, and the value of leisure (Cordell, Green & Betz, 2002; Juniu, 2000).

Planting

The presence of vegetation near their homes moderates the impact of stressful life events on children living in rural settings (Wells & Evans, 2003). The presence of natural amenities near the homes of low-income urban children is associated with higher levels of cognitive functioning (Wells, 2000).

Playing

Unstructured outdoor play provides excellent opportunities for cognitive, social, and emotional development in children (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). Childhood play in outdoor environments influences interest in wild lands, outdoor recreation activities, and outdoor occupational environments in teenagers (Bixler, Floyd & Hammitt, 2002).

Swimming

Swimming improves all-round fitness (LifeScript Editorial Staff, 2006). Swimming has all of the cardiovascular benefits of running, works all major muscle groups, and boosts strength and stamina (LifeScript Editorial Staff, 2006).

For more information please contact

Emilian Geczi, Chicago Wilderness
Leave No Child Inside Coordinator
emilian.geczi@chicagowilderness.org
312.545.1007
kidsoutside.info



The Chicago Wilderness Leave No Child Inside initiative promotes a culture in which children enjoy and are encouraged to be outside in nature, and as a result are healthier, have a sense of connection to their place, and become supporters and stewards of local nature. All Leave No Child Inside programs strive to nourish children's curiosity, growth, and creativity through unstructured play time outside in nature and other outdoor recreation activities.



Photo: Bob Long, Fishin' Buddies



Photo: Donna Lee

Every child should have the opportunity to:

- 1 Discover wilderness — prairies, dunes, forests, savannas, and wetlands
- 2 Camp under the stars
- 3 Follow a trail
- 4 Catch and release fish, frogs, and insects
- 5 Climb a tree
- 6 Explore nature in neighborhoods and cities
- 7 Celebrate heritage
- 8 Plant a flower
- 9 Play in the mud or a stream
- 10 Learn to swim