

## A CASE FOR CONNECTING YOUNG CHILDREN WITH NATURE

### **Today's Children**

- 31% play outdoors every day compared to 70% of their parents when they were kids
- On average spend 30 minutes of unstructured play time outdoors per week
- Average 2 year old spends over 4 hours per day with television or computers
- 29% of two and three year olds have a TV in their room
- More than 80% of children under age 2 and more than 60 % of children ages 2-5 do not have access to daily outdoor play.

### **Why is so little time spent outside playing? Culture of Fear**

- 82% of mothers identified crime and safety concerns as one of the primary reasons for not allowing children to play outside

- Ultraviolet rays
- Wildlife or insect-borne disease
- Forms of pollution

Availability of electronic media

- Virtual replacing the real

Scheduled lifestyles

- 25% less play time ( 1981-1997) Regulations

### **Benefits of Outside Play**

Contact with the natural world through outdoor play is necessary for growth and development of children.

### **Physiological Benefits during preschool years:**

- Highest levels of physical activity when outdoors
- Higher levels of physical activity delay onset of increasing body fat
- Gross motor activity more likely to occur outdoors
- Play in outdoor natural areas on a daily basis increase balance, agility and coordination
- Outdoor activities in more natural setting led to a greater reduction in ADHD symptoms
- Better able to concentrate after contact with nature
- Children who spent more time outdoors were the less likely to develop myopia or get sick

### **Cognitive Benefits**

- Is necessary for optimal brain development in children
- Stimulates learning by engaging all 5 senses
- Results in "profound differences" in children's attention capacities
- Is more likely to expose children to opportunities that require problem solving and higher order thinking
- Fosters more imaginative and creative play that promotes language and collaborative skills
- Improves awareness reasoning and observational skills

**Psychological/Emotional Benefits**

- Buffers the impact of stressful life events
- Has the potential to minimize anxiety, depression, aggression and sleep problems
- Helps develop eco-psychology-children's sense of self in relation to the natural world
- Mood is affected by physical activity and exposure to sunlight
- An indoor, sedentary childhood is linked to mental health problems

**Social Benefits**

- Provides more opportunities to learn social skills
- Reduces anti-social behavior such as violence, bullying and vandalism
- Fosters more positive feelings toward other children
- Aids in development of independence and autonomy

**Environmental Benefits**

- Significant childhood experiences rather than knowledge about the environment determine an adult's environmentally friendly behavior
- Participation with "wild" nature before age 11 results in positive attitudes toward the environment
- Children's positive encounters with nature can lead to the development of an environmental ethic

**Action**

- Preschools/Childcare Centers are the ideal venue for nature exposure and are the highest individual predictor of physical activity
- Naturalized playgrounds are preferable as the level of vegetation influences incidence of play

**What Can You Do?**

- Unstructured free play outdoors
- Open ended discovery
- Develop empathy toward and connectedness with the natural world and other life forms
- Use environment based/outside curriculum
- Enroll your child in a nature preschool as you have done !!!! Way to go!!!!

Courtesy of Magdalena Cabrera, 2014