

Changing Child's Play

Joshua Dyer

As time progresses, change is inevitable. Whether it is modes of transportation, the rise and fall of countries, or which footwear is in style, one thing is certain: change will happen. Depending on the opinion, it can be for the good or the bad. One area of change has been subtle, and it involves our youth and the time they spend outside. Current research tells us that the youth of today are spending less time outside than they did 50 years ago. Why is this important? Spending time outside has important perks beyond the obvious benefit of an appreciation for nature. Health and education are vital aspects we impress upon our youth and can be positively affected by increasing the amount of time they spend outside.

Running, jumping, crawling, rolling, climbing.....these are activities youth engage in when playing outside. When they sit in front of a television screen all of those activities and more are not being done. Obesity rates are on the rise with our children. With obesity, an array of health disorders is made manifest. Diabetes, asthma, heart related issues, depression, and elevated stress levels are just a few that stem from a sedentary lifestyle. Allowing children time to play outside gives them a chance to run, roll, crawl, and climb- to be active. When trying to climb a tree, walking across uneven ground or fumbling through an overgrown area, motor skills are also developed. In children with ADHD, it is found that when given a chance to play outside, they are more attentive when they return to class. It can be assumed to work for children who aren't labeled as well. Case in point, as an adult I have sat through meetings and seminars. I welcomed the opportunities to take a break and step outside, stretching and walking around the facility; and the stress from taking in information is alleviated, allowing for a fresher mind. Spending time outdoors can aid in a helping our youth lead healthy lives, but it can also improve a child's scholastic studies.



Statistics show that the United States is lagging behind other developed nations in educating our youth. Playing "army", building a fort, flopping a log with the assistance of a friend, imagining you are in a different land and trying to get out.....these outdoor activities encourage imagination and help build physical, cognitive, and emotional strengths. This, which current research strongly suggests, translates into improved test scores. Outside play allows a child to "be in charge" of their life.

With a hurried lifestyle, when does a child get the opportunity to think for themselves? Here's breakfast; go to school; eat your lunch; go home; watch T.V.; let's go to practice; eat supper; do your homework; go to bed. Let's give them a chance to focus on one singular activity, or even give them a break from focusing! Rolling a rock over or lifting a piece wood builds their curiosity to discover on their own. Trips outside create excitement and the desire to explore, while covertly helping that child improve their studies.

As a kid growing up in Crawford County, I was either told to stay inside and help mom do chores, or get out of the way and go outside. Were there times when I just wanted to be lazy and lounge? Sure! However, given the choices, I opted out of sweeping, dusting, and dishes, and instead, took to the yard. There wasn't a tree in our yard that my brother and I didn't try to climb; heavy downpours and their puddles (without lightning) provided relief from summer heat; snowdrifts were bored to create tunnels; anything that we could flip over, was; who knows how many plastic, little army men went MIA in the garden. Even when visiting kin in town, it was the same story. Looking back at your childhood, what are your fondest memories?

Some of the statistics involving children not playing outside and its relation to their education and health would be considered epidemic if the numbers were for a flu outbreak. A wise old sage has often told me "It's civilization! You can't stop it!" It's true, we can't stop it. However, by allowing our youth more time outside, their health, education, and in the long run, their land stewardship, can be changed for the better.