Fighting Nature Deficit Disorder

With options for indoor recreation multiplying and becoming ever more sophisticated, parents are all too aware of how much time their kids spend parked on the couch watching TV or glued to a computer/cell phone/gaming system.

Mix these digital delights with parental fear of "stranger danger" (which often is unrealistic), and you get kids spending less and less time enjoying the great outdoors, a trend author Richard Louv dubbed "nature deficit disorder" in his influential book "Last Child in the Woods."

Louv says that in the last 30 years kids have become more plugged-in at the expense of connecting with the natural world. He argues that this could have consequences not only for physical fitness, but also for long-term mental and spiritual well-being, citing "increased feelings of stress, trouble paying attention, [and] feelings of not being rooted in the world."

While that may be difficult to prove, many parents still would like to see their kids get outside more. But how? Urban families might have limited natural places to explore; suburban families might have to drive to area parks; and almost every family is pressed for free time.

Be Creative…..

What this means to you….

Besides spending more and more hours on media diversions (often, up to 7 hours a day), kids are also multitasking — leaving the TV on while surfing online and fielding text messages from friends. It's up to parents to get them unplugged and outside. Unless kids are naturally outdoorsy, convincing them to go out for some fresh air can be a struggle. So be creative. No park in your area? Even a small suburban backyard can be explored (what's under those rocks?), made more nature-friendly with some bird feeders and a birdbath, or be the setting for a family camping night.

Have to drive to get to anything green? Give geocaching a try. This modern treasure hunt phenomenon uses GPS coordinates to direct seekers to spots urban, suburban, and rural for small stashes of fun stuff placed by other geocachers. Engage computer-loving kids by asking them to visit one of the many online geocaching resources to choose which treasures the family should search for. Check out http://www.geocaching.com/

Still getting resistance? The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) suggests baby steps — work toward a daily "green hour" of unstructured play and interaction with nature by starting with a 15-minute excursion into the backyard to, for instance, identify the birds you see there. The NWF and many other organizations offer loads of ideas for outdoor play and exploration on their websites. Make it the mission of your computer-savvy kids to go online and find some activities they'd like to try.

Protect your family from TICKS

Enjoy the great outdoors, but don't forget about the threat of ticks. Ticks can carry several diseases, including Lyme disease.

Inspect your kids each day for ticks — especially behind the neck and ears, in the groin area, and under the arms. Have everyone wear long-sleeve shirts and pants, and remember to tuck pant legs into socks or shoes for extra protection. Wearing light-colored clothing can help you see ticks more easily.

Pull long hair back and tuck it into a cap. Use an insect repellant with 10% to 30% DEET for protection against insect bites and stings in kids older than 2 years, always following the directions for application carefully.

Peach Freeze

½ c. milk
1 c. sliced peaches (either fresh or canned in own juice not syrup)
1 tsp. sugar

Pour milk into an ice cube tray and freeze until solid. Pop the "milk cubes" out of the tray and put them into the blender. Then add the peaches and sugar into the blender. Blend on high until everything is mixed and very smooth. Pour your peach freeze into serving dishes and eat right away.   Enjoy!

Resources

http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/issues_2011/2011_nature.html#cat20859
http://kidshealth.org/parent/index.jsp?tracking=P_Home
http://www.geocaching.com/