

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

ISSUE NO. 54

DISCOVERY AND PLAY: Children Benefit from the Great Outdoors

Computer screens, the glare of the television, that closed-in feeling from being in a cubicle or office building all day—no matter who you are, sometimes, everybody needs a breath of fresh air. And so do young children. In fact, researchers say that children need to get outdoors every day.

Being outside helps children grow and develop—physically, socially, and emotionally. It may also help them avoid childhood obesity, and give them the chance to burn some of that extra energy from being indoors and inactive.

Even babies can benefit from being in the great outdoors—whether the great outdoors is in the mountains, or on a city street. But what can parents do with their children once they're outside? How can you help your child experience the outdoors and be safe? It's easier than you may think.

Infants: Taking it All In

Why should your baby be outside? Even though your baby might not even be walking yet, it's good for him to see, smell and hear different things. The different colors, people, and sounds will help stimulate his



senses. Even the feel of air at a different temperature can be good for babies.

What can you do together? Bring your baby along as you walk or go on an errand. Point out to her different things you see along the way: birds, other people, flowers, and wherever it is you are going. She will enjoy the different sights and sounds, and listening to you talk.

If you live in an area with parks or playgrounds, they are a great place to bring babies. Generally, parks are a little quieter than the streets, and other children are there. You might also be able to make friends with other parents who have brought their own children.

If you live in a place where the weather is nice and warm, you can take your baby outdoors and sit with her on a blanket. Give her a chance to sit outside—bring toys for her to play with. You can also bring books and read to her. It will be good for you, too, to get outdoors. New parents may feel a little stir-crazy from being inside—this is a great excuse to get out.



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Toddlers: Happy Play

Why should your toddler be outside? Toddlers, who have just learned to walk, need to build their muscles. Playing outdoors is a great way for your child to stay active and develop their large muscles. Toddlers should have between one and two hours of activity a day—both “structured” and “unstructured”. Structured play helps toddlers learn steps and

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activities, while unstructured time is about letting their imaginations take over.

What can you do together?

Structured time can include activities like using water to “paint” the sidewalk, or singing songs together about the birds and trees. Unstructured time is when toddlers play without set activities—a playground is a great place to let them do this. So are backyards and parks. Going with your toddler for a walk in your neighborhood can also be fun.

Watch your toddler, and make sure she is safe. But whether she’s actively running around or playing pretend, she will benefit from being in the outdoors.

If you live in a snowy area, make sure your toddler is dressed warmly, and then think about fun snowy day activities to do. Make a snowman or snow angels. Use water with food coloring to make drawings in the snow.

If you live near a playground with a sandbox, bring sand toys so that your toddler can play in the sand. He may get a little dirty, but he’ll love making castles.

Preschoolers: Organized Fun

Why should they be outside? If your child is a little older, you will want to give him more activities to do. His time outside will help him develop his physical fitness more. Playgrounds have a variety of appropriate equipment for preschoolers, such as swings and climbers. Playing with other children also helps him develop socially and make friends.

What can you do together? At this age, you can play with jump ropes—which is great exercise for children. Jump rope rhymes are an excellent way to develop language skills. You can also play with balls.

It’s also a good age to explore nature a little more. Go on a trip to the national park or even to the park in your neighborhood. You can talk about different types of trees or animals, and give your preschooler a chance to talk about science—for instance, how plants grow with sun and water.

Outdoor Activity in Child Care

Most child care programs have playgrounds outside for children. Providers should try to plan to bring the children outside when the weather is good. Organized outdoor activities for the children every day is recommended.



Outdoor Safety Tips:

- **If it’s sunny, and your child is older than 6 months, make sure she wears sunscreen of at least SPF 15. Keep babies under 6 months out of the sun.**
- **Always make sure your child is dressed for the weather.**
- **Stay close together—and hold hands when crossing streets.**
- **If the weather is too extreme, you can always go outside tomorrow.**

The safest playgrounds are fenced in with equipment in good condition and placed on a soft surface, such as mulch, sand or rubber mats.

Finally, children must be carefully watched when they’re playing outside. The child care program should stick to its teacher:child ratios.

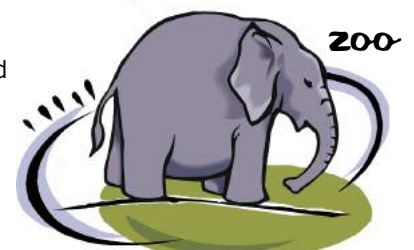
Remember, outside play time, no matter where you live, can help children grow and have fun. So, if you can, go outside with your child and enjoy yourself!

For More Information:

- **NACCRRA,**

www.nacccra.org/parent/quality_indicators.php.

Is this the Right Place for My Child? 38 Indicators of High-Quality Child Care, is a user friendly booklet containing a checklist of 38 questions that parents can ask to evaluate the quality of child care programs and explains why each question is important and how it relates to the quality of care. It includes a section on making sure your child care program is safe and healthy for your child.




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Outdoor Activities for Children

Age	Activity Ideas
Infants	<p>Stroller Rides or Baby Carrier: give your baby a tour of the neighborhood</p> <p>Picnic Lunch: eat outdoors with your baby or even other parents and babies</p> <p>Read Outside: read books with your baby, on a blanket outside</p>
Toddlers 	<p>Leaf Walk: in fall, collect different colored leaves and match them with the trees</p> <p>Shadows on the Sidewalk: use sidewalk chalk to trace the outlines of your shadows together</p> <p>Blow Bubbles: buy some nontoxic bubble water (available at most drug stores) and blow bubbles together; children love to “pop” the bubbles</p> <p>“Paint” the Sidewalk: use water and a brush to make designs on the sidewalk, tree or other things</p> <p>Nature Walk: go to your local park and walk together—point out animals you see or different kinds of plants</p>
Preschoolers	<p>Fly a Kite: you can make your own out of a paper bag</p> <p>Let’s Draw a Map: help your preschooler draw a map of the park, playground or your neighborhood</p> <p>Jump Rope Fun: jump rope together, or use the jump rope to make shapes on the ground</p>

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- **Family TLC, www.familytlc.net**, has family activities—games, sports, crafts, music, cooking, nature and more. Find parenting tips, articles on child development and hundreds of new age-appropriate child activities each month.
- **The Sesame Street Workshop, www.sesame-workshop.org/parents/activity/**, has a database of hundreds of activities to do with your child that you can consider by activity type, your child's age, or learning area.
- **The American Academy of Pediatrics, <http://aap.org/healthtopics/safety.cfm>**, is an organization of 60,000 pediatricians committed to the attainment of optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults. Its website has a section on outdoor safety tips for children.



The Daily Parent is prepared by NACCRRA, the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, with funding from the Citi Foundation, New York, New York. © 2007 NACCRRA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



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