

Knowledge Base: Combating 'Nature Deficit Disorder'

By Mick Foran - Bornhoffen Co-Manager

A lack of routine contact with nature may result in slower development. This unwanted side-effect of the electronic age is called **Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD)**. The term was invented by author Richard Louv in his book *Last Child in the Woods* to explain how our society's disconnect with nature is effecting today's children.

Louv says we have entered a new age where a lack of natural outdoor space, heightened focus on risk and increased 'screen time' all prevent kids from spending unstructured time in nature.

But, as Louv presents in his book, the agrarian, nature-oriented existence hard-wired into human brains isn't quite ready for the overstimulating environment we've carved out for ourselves.

Some children adapt. Those who don't may develop the symptoms of NDD, which include attention problems, anxiety, obesity and poor gross motor skills. They may not learn the life skills they need including how to assess and make choices about risks. How do you learn if you never have the chance to try and fail?

If you take the time to reflect, most parents, teachers, and other adults see the value in unstructured nature play.

Like the idea but don't know what to do next?

These tips are a good place to start (I particularly like number 6 – remember, you're only there to watch over and be a guide – not to lead):

1

Travel down memory lane

Apply the "test of remembered childhoods." Use your own good memories of nature play to guide the experiences you'd like today's children to enjoy.

2

Preach it, brother or sister !

Be an advocate for nature play. Talk it up with friends, teachers, parent organizations – anyone who can influence children's lives and might join in efforts to restore nature play. And ask about folks' own memories of childhood play; it's a great conversation starter!

3

Plan on no plan

Forget structured activity plans and your adult expectations. Get the kids to a rich natural area and let them decide what to do, where to explore, and how to play.



4**Trust in nature**

It's a fun place that doesn't need fancy or expensive play equipment. And don't give up if you hear, "I'm bored." Be patient, and kids will start exploring on their own.

5**Embrace flex time**

Stay off the clock as much as possible; let the kids' discoveries and active engagement determine the schedule. Watch their play, not your watch.

6**Be a lifeguard, not a teacher**

Let nature be the children's play partner, not you. Intervene only if danger seems imminent, or if you're asked to help.

7**Small is beautiful**

Nature play works great with very young children, too – and they only need small bits of nature! Even crawling babies can delight in the smells and textures of a little herb garden.

8**All kids come in wash and dry**

Dirt don't hurt, and don't sweat the wet! So what if it's messy? You can hose them down at the end! Keep old plastic bags handy to protect car seats from wet kids.

9**Wash, rinse, repeat**

Frequent nature play is what best builds kids' lasting bonds with the natural world. Make nature a favourite friend for them to play with, time and time again!

10**There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing**

Play outside in all safe weather conditions. Why not play in the rain or get outside in the dark with a torch and explore your neighbourhood or a nearby natural area.



Bonus Tip: Put your smart phone on silent, put it in your pocket and commit to not checking it – be completely present for your children.

For more information about Nature Play (including 51 Things to Do Before You're 12), visit www.natureplayqld.org.au

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We offer group accommodation with healthy and tasty catering provided or the option to self-cater. You have the option of our team providing a Leadership Development Program for your school or community group or running your own retreat, event or gathering. To find out more, call (07) 5533 6154 or visit www.bornhoffenpcyc.org.au

Ten Tips Source: Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood www.greenheartsinc.org

P: (07) 5533 6154 | www.bornhoffenpcyc.org.au | admin@bornhoffenpcyc.org.au