



# Combating Nature Deficit Disorder in Winter

It's cold outside so why send the children out to play? Aren't they going to get sick, hurt themselves and come back cold and miserable? Actually -- just the opposite.

The average North American child spends less than 15 minutes per day outside but up to five hours a day playing video games or watching television. It's probably even more in the winter. Playing in the winter wonderland is good for our children, helping them stay healthy and fit.

## **Fat and unhealthy**

With childhood obesity on the rise, (it's more than doubled in the last 30 years) pediatricians are urging parents to get their children outdoors during the winter months when everyone tends to gain weight from a more sedentary lifestyle.

## **Benefits outweigh the problems**

Parents worry about children catching cold and getting sick. However, it's been proven that it's not necessarily the cold weather that brings on the flu but time spent indoors without the benefit of fresh, circulating air. Getting outside for some fresh air actually helps to cut down on colds and flu.

## **Good for body and soul**

Another reason to get our children outside is to keep them connected to nature. "Based on previous studies, we can definitely say that the best predictor of preschool children's physical activity is simply being outdoors," says James Sallis, program director of the Active Living Research Program, "and that an indoor, sedentary childhood is linked to mental-health problems."

## **Get over your fears**

Parents play the biggest role in getting our children up and moving. With the majority of humanity now living in cities -- more detached from nature than ever before -- and with the decline of rural space, the rise of parental safety concerns, and liability restrictions on unsupervised play, children's opportunities to simply enjoy neighboring woods and streams has become limited.

"A kid today," writes U.S. author Richard Louv, "can likely tell you about the Amazon rain forest" but not about the last time he or she explored the woods in solitude, or lay in a field listening to the wind and watching the clouds move." This sense of "nature loss" led Louv to coin the term "nature deficit disorder," explored in his book [Last Child In the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder](#).

## **Fear of the open**

Claiming that our society teaches young people "to avoid direct experience with nature," Louv

writes that this lesson is taught by schools, families, even outdoor education groups. "Our institutions, urban/suburban design, and cultural attitudes unconsciously associate nature with doom --while dissociating the outdoors from joy and solitude."

Louv cites numerous psychological studies indicating the importance of time in nature for a child's development and in helping to overcome a wide range of medical and psychological problems, from attention deficit disorder to obesity, depression, and even diabetes.

### **Turn off the TV**

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than one to two hours of total screen time per day (that includes TV, videos, and computers and video games). Use that free time for physical activities.

### **Winter games**

Enjoying winter can be as simple as taking a frosty walk together, building a snowman or constructing a snow fort.

### **JUMP SNOW HURDLES**

Lightly pack a bunch of basketball-size snowballs and then use them to build a course of hurdles to jump over in a round of follow the leader.

### **SNOW MOLDS**

Just like sand, snow is wet and dense--and can be formed into shapes. When you go outside...take out the sandbox toys, buckets, containers and molds. Create a snow castle (instead of sand castle) -- Create and have fun!



For More Information Visit:

<http://www.greenlivingonline.com/article/combating-nature-deficit-disorder-winter>



Provided by:

Community Alliance and Services for Young Children  
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