



NURTURING YOUTH WITH NATURE

Supporting youth health and wellness with natural world connections

Today's youth spend less time outdoors, losing their connection to nature and the benefits it provides. Youth ages 8 to 18 now average 7.5 hours of screen time per day¹, and just 28 percent of all youth meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity². Significant, shared mental health challenges also emphasize the need to provide more options to support youth.

- 40%** of high school students experience **persistent feelings of sadness** and hopelessness³.
- 1 in 7** youth ages 3 to 17 have a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral condition; most commonly **anxiety, behavioral concerns, and depression**⁴.
- 45%** of 16 to 25 year olds worldwide report that **anxiety about environmental crises** negatively impacts their daily life⁵.

HOW CAN NATURE HELP?



Stress reduction

Spending 20-30 minutes in nature has been shown to reduce salivary levels of the stress hormone cortisol⁶. Natural environments can help reduce external stress factors and support youth in coping with stress and regulating their emotions⁷. Among youth ages 14 to 24, 51.6 percent report feeling calmer after spending time in nature, with 22.1 percent reporting stress and anxiety relief⁸.



Physical activity

Youth who spend more time outdoors report higher levels of physical activity⁹. Engaging in physical activity is linked to improved cognitive function, better cardiovascular and bone health, healthy weight, and reduced risk for depression, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure¹⁰.



Attention restoration

Spending time in nature positively engages the senses, offering exposure to healthy, restorative stimuli that calms the nervous system⁷. Children with ADHD have shown improved concentration after a 20-minute walk in a city park¹¹.



Healthy development

The natural world provides optimal conditions for youth to physically challenge themselves, develop fine and gross motor skills, and collaborate with their peers⁷. Youth who spend more time in nature have a lower risk of developing myopia (nearsightedness) later in life¹².



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(cont'd)

HOW TO GET STARTED



Aim to spend at least **two hours** per week in nature¹³.



Natural areas with **higher levels of biodiversity** might offer more extensive benefits, though urban parks, views of trees, and even images of nature seen indoors can positively affect mood and wellbeing¹⁴.



Spending time near **blue spaces** such as oceans, lakes, waterfalls, and rivers also helps¹⁵.



Spending time in nature can benefit youth of all ages. Look for developmentally appropriate opportunities that offer a **safe space** for youth to **connect with their peers**, build **self-efficacy**, and engage in **free play** outdoors.



TRY IT!

- **Backyard birding:** Listen to bird songs and look for birds right from home.
- **Art outdoors:** Sketch, color, or paint what you see. Start a nature journal for deeper observation, connection, and creative expression.
- **Practice mindfulness:** Find a favorite place to sit outside and use all your senses to experience the world around you.
- **Get outdoors:** Sarasota County parks, trails, and other natural areas offer immersion in nature and opportunities for a range of healthy activities, like hiking, walking, paddling, and biking.
- **Bring nature indoors:** Play nature soundtracks for a restorative moment, and include beautiful landscape images in indoor spaces.
- **Go for a walk:** Incorporate walks around the neighborhood or at a nearby local park with family or friends into your weekly routine.
- **Gardening:** Tending a garden helps youth learn about healthy eating, gets them time in nature, and allows them to build skills.

Learn More

For opportunities to connect with nature, resources, and more, scan this QR code.



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