



1000 Hours Outside:

Helping Children Succeed Academically



By Ginny Yurich

Topics: Benefits of Outdoor Play

Date: July 16, 2019

What would childhood look like if children spent as much time outdoors as they do in front of screens? If kids spend, on average, 1,200 hours a year on screens, then spending 1,000 hours outdoors seems like a reasonable challenge. The 1000 Hours Outside Challenge is the brainchild of homeschooling mom, Ginny Yurich. For more tips and strategies on increasing outdoor time for your children, check out her blog: 1000hoursoutside.com.

Who wants to track one more thing? You do! Nature time for kids is so valuable for childhood development that we cannot leave this extremely important element of childhood to chance. We all know kids need nature time but emerging research is clear that children need to experience hours of outside free play every day. In America, the average child spends 4 – 7 minutes in free play outside on a daily basis. We are far from where we need to be! A yearly goal is helpful because there are many factors that contribute to the possibility of getting outdoors, such as school schedule and

weather. Over the course of a year, the 1000 hours outside goal, which averages out to just under three hours a day, has provided all the sensory input our kids have needed. We don't worry if the kids aren't feeling well a certain week or if a certain week is full of sub-zero temperatures. We know that we will make up the time when the crocuses emerge or during summer camping trips. This method has worked for us for years in a row!

How can spending time outdoors help children develop an enthusiasm for learning?

So often we when we think of learning we think of paper and pencil. Or maybe we think of watching an educational program or listening to an engaging speaker. It's important as parents and caregivers to know that movement, and especially movement in free play, is a major contributor to brain growth. In fact, movement is the pre-cursor to all learning. Here are three easy ways to ensure your child gets the movement he or she needs for optimal brain development.

1. Give your child lots of opportunities to practice balancing.

Have you noticed how children naturally look for things to balance on (think street curbs and the arms of your couch)? There is an innate drive inside a child to work on their balance skills and to balance on increasingly complex things. An infant is constantly working on balance, moving from rolling to sitting to pulling up. A toddler will try balancing on a log and then jumping a few inches to the ground over and over again. A grade-schooler will also try



As a child's body and muscles become more coordinated, their brain capacity increases.

balancing on a log but one that is suspended over water with the goal of reaching the other side. Middle and high schoolers love things like slack line and ever increasing balancing challenges. As a child's body and muscles become more coordinated their brain capacity increases. Higher academic achievement is always correlated with higher levels of fitness.

So what can you do? Take your kids outside and expose them to different types of terrain. Moving over uneven terrain will help them as they work on their balance. Hike with your kids and then watch as they are drawn to fallen trees and to large rocks to climb on. Encourage them as they test their bodies and work towards more difficult goals. All of that balancing work will contribute to academic success!

2. Give your child a rich sensory environment.

Every one of our senses carries information straight to our brain. Consider all of the senses that are engaged when a child plays in a stream outside. They feel the coolness of the water, rocks beneath their feet, and mud squished between their fingers. They hear splashes, the sound of moving water, and the chorus of insects and birds. They see all sorts of variations of colors. They see reflections. They see items of all different shapes and sizes. They taste the water as they splash. They may even taste some dirt. And of course there's the smell of the great outdoors which will vary depending on where you are.

Every square inch of our bodies is designed to take in information and send it to our brain.



The more time we allow children to be in sensory rich environments, the greater the opportunities for brain growth.

The more time we allow our children to be in sensory rich environments the greater opportunities there are for brain growth.

So what can you do? Take your kids outside and let them explore with all their senses. The longer the better! Try and find differing environments: a field, a stream, a beach, a forest. The great thing about nature is that even if you frequent the same place often those places are ever changing and will always have something new to offer your child.

3. Give your child lots of eye-strengthening opportunities in nature.

When I think about movement I don't tend to think of my eyes but vision is actually closely related to movement. Every single time we move, our eyes adjust and take in new information. The more our eyes move together, the stronger they become and the stronger the connections to the brain become as well. Tracking with our eyes is an extremely important part of reading and so we want our children to have developed muscles when they reach the age where they are physically ready to read.

Think for a moment about the differences between looking around inside versus looking around outside. Outside the stimuluses are almost infinite. Moving clouds, flying birds, swaying leaves, small insects moving along the ground, etc. Additionally, even in the same location the outside stimulus will change day to day due to weather, season and other factors whereas the inside walls remain largely consistent. Outside the lumens from the sun enter right through your eyes and go straight to



Outside the stimuluses for the eyes are almost infinite.

the brain elevating the mood. A child in a relaxed and good mood is in a much better state to learn than one who is anxious or depressed. Consider your baby's eyes when you take her on a hike. As you carry her on your hip or in your baby carrier her eyes are constantly adjusting with the up and down of each step. As you do this you are helping to strengthen her eyes and organize her brain.

So what can you do? Expose your kid's eyes to the vastness of the outdoors by allowing them to be in nature frequently for lengthy periods of time. It's always worth your time to let your kids play outside! Give yourself a goal. Schedule it as one of your first things. And be confident that it will contribute to greater academic success over time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ginny Yurich



Ginny is a home-schooling mum of five children in Southeast Michigan, USA. Through their journey of parenthood, she and her husband Josh have noticed that parks, trails, campsites and nature-scapes are often devoid of children. They wondered why, and while researching, they read that 4-6 hours of outside time within a day is ideal for children. Though they initially thought this seemed excessive, they gave it a try and have never looked back. Ginny and Josh and their children experience the many varied benefits of time spent in nature, and find that if they spend 20 hours outdoors per week, this amounts to about 1,000 hours each year. Now they encourage others to get outside too—take a look at their website for more inspiration.

www.1000hoursoutside.com