

Tips for Parents to reduce screen time and get into nature

- Excessive screen time is an emerging public health issue, particularly amongst kids, and navigating a healthier relationship between kids and screens can be a challenge;
- Spending more time outdoors in nature is a great way to connect as a family, get moving and reap the health benefits;

Find out more and discover ways to disconnect from screens and spend time together in nature.

Read Nature Canada's report about the health impacts of excessive screen time on children.



Quick facts on excessive screen time:

- More time spent on screens (TV, video games, tablets, etc) means *less time for other activities*;
- Promotes *sedentary behaviour*, unhealthy eating habits which can lead to increase in excess weight, and less opportunities for physical activity;
- Too much screen time (particularly at bedtime) can *disrupt sleep patterns*;
- Excessive time playing video games increases the likelihood of being exposed to *cyber-bullying, violence, gaming addiction and even online predators*.

Recreational screen time recommendations as outlined by the *Canadian 24 Hour Movement Guidelines**

- Less than 2 year olds - no screen time
- 2-4 year olds- 1-hour daily maximum –less is better
- 5-17 year olds- 2-hour daily maximum –less is better

*www.csepguidelines.ca

Ways to connect with your children and limit screen time at home

- Model behaviour by limiting your own screen time when around your kids;
- Write a predictable family screen schedule that works for your family (e.g. 30 mins after school, Saturday morning) post it to your fridge and follow it;
- Establish family norms and boundaries around screen use to promote healthy screen habits such as “screen-free zones” (e.g. at the dinner table, in the bedroom);
- Create a morning routine that doesn’t include a screen;
- Create bedtime rituals that ease the transition and do not rely on screen use such as turning off digital devices at least 1 hour before bedtime;
- Make it easy to build outdoor play into your day. Walk to school and give yourself enough time to walk slowly and look at the birds;
- Instead of registering your children for a structured activity, invite your family friends to the park every Saturday morning, rain or shine;
- Plan time in nature together, such as an after-dinner walk or weekend nature hike.



Connect with nature, family and friends

Spending time in nature is as easy as walking out your front door. Time in nature is good for your health AND it's a great way to spend quality time together with your family and friends.

- Plan weekend nature hikes within easy walking or driving distance;
- **SLOW DOWN.** Make time in your walks to stop often, especially with younger children. Let them turn over a rock, jump in a puddle, and listen to the birds. This is how they learn and connect with the natural world.
- Walk or bike to school - give yourself enough time to stop when children see something that interests them;
- Embed unstructured, outdoor play opportunities into your family cultural gatherings and ceremonies.



Benefits of spending time in nature:

- Promotes physical activity;
- Stimulates creativity, encourages co-operation, collaboration and self-regulation;
- Improved moods, and reduction of stress and anxiety;
- Improved memory, focus and concentration;
- Life-long interest in learning and creation of a sense of wonder and natural curiosity.



Ways to spend more time in nature:

1. Schedule time in your calendar

Whether it's 30 minutes after dinner, or an afternoon on the weekend, be intentional with your time. *Taking time for nature requires making time* – especially for busy families. With a little practice and commitment, spending time in nature will be part of your regular routine.

2. Explore your local NatureHood

Canadian cities are fortunate to have elaborate nature trails and parks, and in many regions, there are larger parks nearby. Make it a family challenge to visit a different park or trail each weekend throughout the year and explore nearby natural and protected areas such as, conservation areas, national wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries, and municipal, provincial and national parks.

3. Take your activities outside

When the weather is nice, take your activities outside: eat dinner, read books, do homework, or play games. Incorporate more outdoor time in your day, by walking the kids to school, or planning errands by foot rather than by car.



4. Plan your playdates outdoors

Meet other families in your neighbourhood who are committed to outdoor play and who your children can play with on a regular basis. Give your children freedom to explore nearby natural spaces and parks on their own, and encourage outdoor time after school and on weekends.

5. Join a nature club

Join an organized nature walk or snowshoe walk in the winter, and let someone else do the planning. All you have to do is show up!

Nature Canada's NatureHood partners offer a range of nature-based activities and events for families.

Nature Kids, Scouts, Guides, and Junior Forest Wardens, are examples of organized groups that offer outdoor opportunities for older children.

6. Volunteer stewardship

Sign up for a shoreline or neighbourhood park cleanup and make a difference in your community.

7. Nature Camp

Enroll your child in a forest school or nature camp for additional nature-based exploration and educational learning opportunities.



Nature-based resources and activities:

The Nature Playbook: is a tool to connect young people with Nature, meant to guide and inspire actions that Canadians can take to connect a new generation with Nature.

Pathway to Stewardship and Kinship: is a guide that provides many ideas for nature-based family activities broken down by age to help cultivate a sense of wonder and natural curiosity.

A Walking Curriculum: includes walking-focused activities designed to engage students' emotions and imaginations to broaden their awareness, and to evoke their sense of wonder.

NatureBlitz Toolkit: a DIY Toolkit for educators to deliver NatureBlitz events in the schoolyard. It includes resources, guidance, web-apps and more, all aimed to help encourage students to explore nature.



“Thank you Nature Canada for recognizing the importance of getting away from your screen and getting outside. Nature is right there in your neighbourhood, so turn off your screen and go outside to explore where you live and learn about the animals that live there with you”.

- Richard Louv, Author, *Last Child in the Woods*



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