



# The Value of Play and Reconnecting to the Outdoors

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# A Century Ago.... The First Play Movement



Jane Addams

- Established Chicago's Hull House in 1889 to improve civic and social life, promote education
- Created the first model playground – almost an acre in size
- Wrote *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, where “...she alerted the public to the importance of play in meeting basic human needs and countering the effects of poverty and misery prevalent in American cities.”

# A Century Ago.... The First Play Movement



Jacob Riis

- Observed a child being arrested for “playing in the streets.” Later became instrumental in the establishment of the Playground Association of America.
- Wrote that schools, especially kindergartens in NYC, had:

*“Organized the life out of it all...A harassed teacher was vainly trying to form girls into ranks for exercises...They held up their hands in desperate endeavor to get her ear, only to have them struck down impatiently – They did not want to exercise – They wanted to play. I tried to voice their grievance to the “doctor” who presided. “Not at all,” he said decisively, “there must be system, order!”*

# A Century Later...



Tina Bruce

*“It is becoming increasingly clear through research on the brain as well as in other areas of study, that childhood needs play. Play acts as a forward feed mechanism into courageous, creative, rigorous thinking in adulthood.”*

~Tina Bruce, Professor  
London Metropolitan University

# What's happening today?

- Kids aren't going out to play
  - Do you remember?
- Stranger Danger
- 70% of mothers reported playing outside when they were young; 31% of their children are allowed to do so today.
- Children are spending on average 44 hours per week in front of TV or computer screens
  - More time than they spend in school
- 24-hour media
- Social networking

# Play Deprivation

- “The consequences of **play deprivation** are profound-- a growing crisis that threatens children’s health, fitness, and development. As free, outdoor play declines, fitness levels decline, waistlines expand, and a host of health problems follow, including obesity, heart disease, rickets, and a spiraling upturn in emotional and social disorders. The solutions are complex and require massive, coordinated action.”



-Dr. Joe Frost,  
Professor Emeritus,  
University of Texas

# Realities of Play Deprivation

- Fewer than 25% of school children participate in daily physical activities
- Many schools are cancelling recess, yet 40% of school children already show signs of cardiac risk



# Realities of Play Deprivation

- Diminished cognitive development
  - Decision-making
  - Creativity
  - Imagination
- Diminished social development
  - Social interaction
  - Rage control
  - Attention-Deficit Disorder



# Realities of Play Deprivation

- Brain development
  - Frontal lobe development requires free play for full development and a child/adult's success.
  - Hara Marano, *Psychology Today*; Comments at The Summit on the Value of Play
- Breakdown of community



# Realities of Play Deprivation

- Obesity

- 4% of children were obese in 1960
- National Average: 19.6% in 2008
- 11% of adolescence in Kansas are obese
- Since 1992, the prevalence of obesity in adults has risen by 70% in Kansas.
- 74 million children under the age of 18 are either dangerously overweight or obese according to a CDC study
- Current generation of youth may be the first to live shorter lives than their parents due to sedentary lifestyle



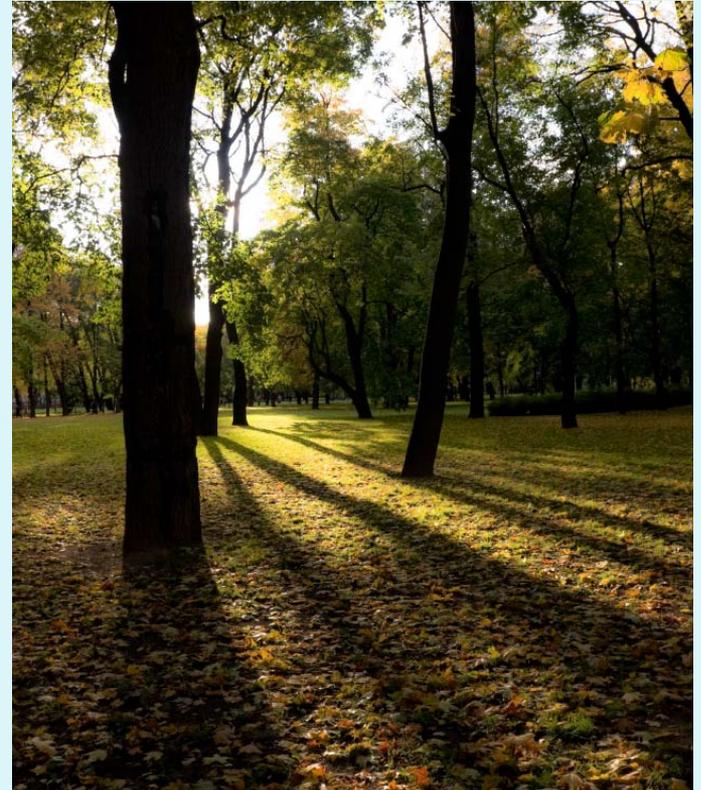
# Associated Health Issues

- Restorative Benefits of Nature:

*“Natural environments turn out to be particularly rich in the characteristics necessary for restorative experiences. An integrative framework is proposed that places both directed attention and stress in the larger context of human-environment relationships.”*

-Dr. Stephen Kaplan

University of Michigan



# Associated Health Issues

- Dr. Howard Frumkin, Former Director of the National Center for Environmental Health, & board member of the Children & Nature Network:

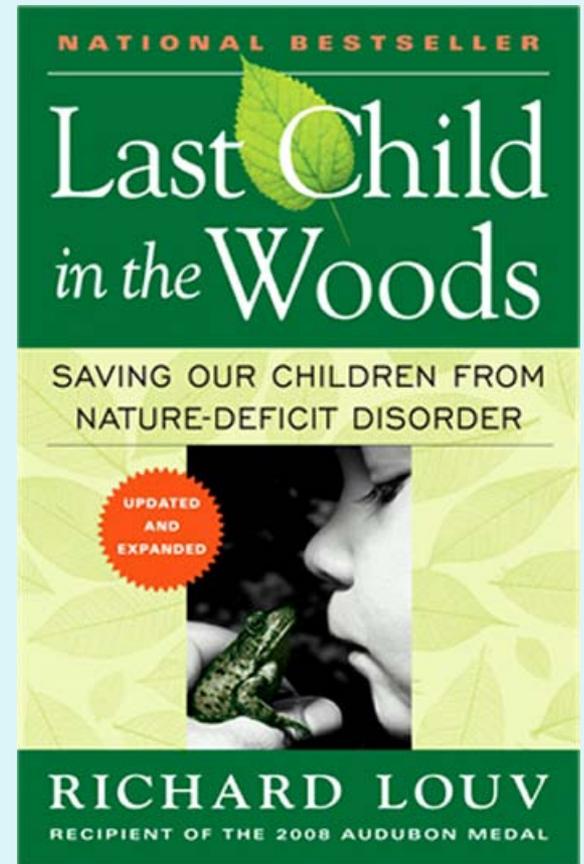
*“Evidence suggests that children and adults benefit so much from contact with nature that land conservation can now be viewed as a public health strategy.”*



Dr. Howard  
Frumkin

# Richard Louv and Nature Deficit Disorder

- Last Child in the Woods: Saving our children from nature deficit disorder
- “Describes an environmental dissatisfaction or dejection flowing from children's fixation on artificial entertainments rather than the natural wonders.”
- “Miss the restorative effects that come with the nimbler bodies, broader minds and sharper senses that are developed during random running-around at the relative edges of civilization.”



# Richard Louv and Nature Deficit Disorder

- The benefits of connecting to nature include:
  - **Happier:** Nature play increases self esteem, improves psychological health and reduces stress. Children learn self-discipline and are more cooperative.
  - **Healthier:** Nature play improves physical conditioning and reduces obesity.
  - **Smarter:** Nature play stimulates creativity and improves problem solving. Children do better in school.

# Facts and Benefits of Play

- Play enables children to explore their world, develop cultural understandings, helps children express their thoughts and feeling and provides opportunities to meet and solve problems. (Joan Isenberg & Mary Renck-Jalongo, *Creative Expression and Play in the Early Childhood Curriculum*)



# Facts and Benefits of Play

- Many of the skills children need to develop into functioning, productive adults originate from play. These skills include literacy, mathematical reasoning, creativity, and social skills. (Bettye Caldwell, author of *Playing for Keeps*)



# Facts and Benefits of Play

- Physical activity and free play are essential to maintaining a **healthy weight**
- People are less active than ever- many of the conveniences we use, such as elevators, cars, and the remote control for the television, cut activity out of our lives.
- American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that children get 30 minutes of vigorous cardio respiratory exercise (play) at least 3 times a week.



Stanford School of Medicine, *Building Generation Play*, 2007.

Hirsh-Pasek, et al. (2009). *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool*. Oxford University Press.

# Facts and Benefits of Play

- Regarding academic performance, an article in the *Journal of Pediatrics* reported that students who have periods of recess built into their curriculum perform better academically than students who do not have recess.

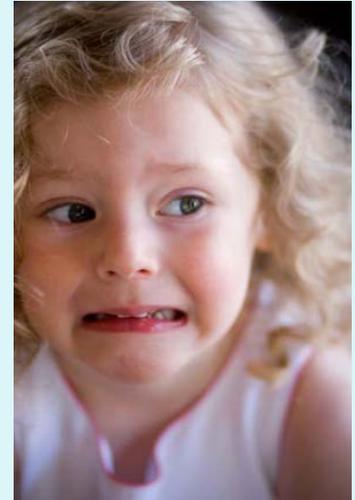


# Facts and Benefits of Play

- In a groundbreaking Gallup Poll from February 2010, researchers found:
  - Four out of five principals report that recess has a positive impact on academic achievement.
  - Two-thirds of principals report that students listen better after recess and are more focused in class.
  - Virtually all believe that recess has a positive impact on children's social development (96 percent) and general well-being (97 percent).

# Facts and Benefits of Play

- **Increases in depression** and anxiety appear to be linked to a lack of unstructured playtime
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children spend **at least 60 minutes each day** in open-ended play



# Facts and Benefits of Play

- Time spent playing outdoors significantly **reduces the severity of symptoms of children with attention disorders**



Kuo and Taylor. (2004). A Potential Natural Treatment for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *American Journal of Public Health.*

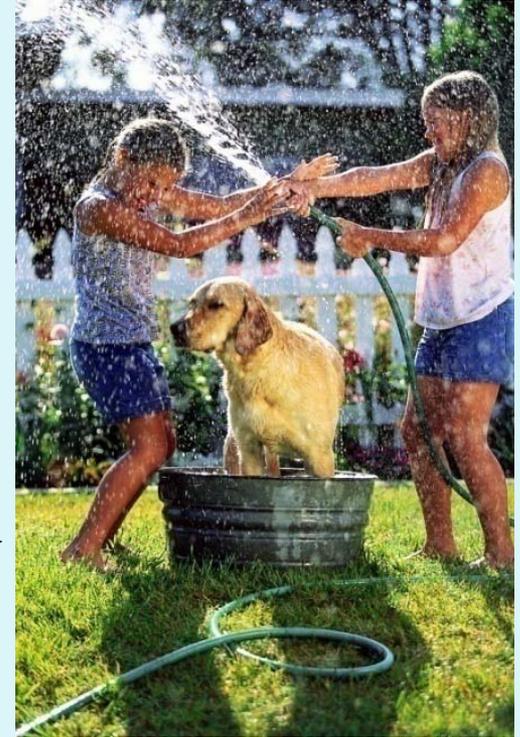
# Facts and Benefits of Play

- A randomized controlled study of 129 children, ages 9 to 24 months, exhibiting stunted development found that **weekly play sessions had significant long-term benefits** for *psychosocial functioning, including reduced anxiety and depression and fewer attention problems*



# Facts and Benefits of Play

- In a survey of nearly 1,700 parents
  - 80% agreed that children's unstructured play is extremely or very important
  - only one in six said it is only somewhat or not at all important
  - less than 4% said that outdoor play was unimportant



KaBoom!/Harris Interactive Survey, 2009.

# Actions Underway

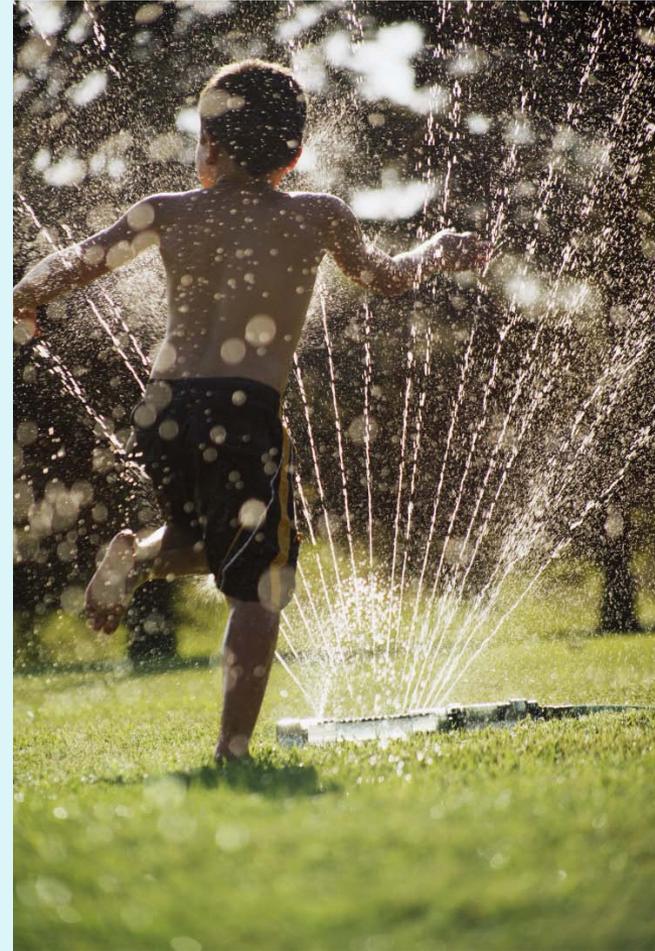
- Let's Move Outside – The First Lady's Let's Move Outside campaign gives parents the tools they need to get their families moving outdoors.



- America's Great Outdoors – President Obama signed a memorandum establishing the Great Outdoors Initiative, Friday, April 16, 2010.
  - Outdoor Alliance for Kids (OAK) is drafting to legislation to fund initiatives that connect children to Nature

# Actions Underway

- Children & Nature Network
  - Toolkits
    - Nature Clubs
    - Parenting
  - Natural Leaders program
  - <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>



# Actions Underway

- Other Legislative Actions
  - No Child Left Inside Act
    - The No Child Left Inside Act of 2009 features bills that have been introduced in the House (H.R. 2054) and the Senate (S. 866) and will most likely be included in the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act if considered
    - More than a dozen Kansas groups have joined a coalition aimed at its passage.
  - Children's Rights:
    - California, Connecticut, Florida, Ohio, Tennessee, Kansas!
  - Obesity Bill
    - Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI) and the NRPA contributed to the drafting of a comprehensive obesity bill.



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# US Play Coalition

- ▶ The US PLAY Coalition: A Partnership to Promote the Value of Play throughout Life is made up of individuals who and organizations that recognize play as a valuable and necessary part of a healthy and productive life.



- <http://usPLAYcoalition.clemson.edu>

# The Conference on the Value of Play

- **February 6-9, 2011**
- Madren Conference Center, Clemson University
- Focus on education, health, and parks and recreation
- Opportunities to be a speaker or present posters
- Honorary Program Chair is Dr. Joe Frost, Emeritus professor, University of Texas
- Dr. Joe Frost and play worker Penny Wilson from London will be the keynote speakers
- Three \$3,000 grants will be awarded to play researchers
- Other members of the steering committee include:
  - Co-Chairs: Dr. Brett Wright, Fran Mainella
  - Committee: Dr. Dee Stegelin, Tom Norquist, Dr. Bob Becker, Dan Hendy, Eric O'Brien, Jackie Epping, Jodie Adams, Joel Agate, Ken Kutska, Larry Allen, Rich Dolesh, Teri Hendy, Tom Kalousek

# It's Your Time To Lead!

- US Play Coalition—Join! It's Free!
- Attend the Conference on the Value of Play
- Involvement of play in all your programs
- Use our list of benefits and facts on play and nature to help you
- Together we can bring play back to everyone's lives!



# Contact information

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