



# Helping Children Develop Healthy Interests

MARCH 2016

## FEATURED ARTICLE:

### Why You Should Encourage Outdoor and Unstructured Playtime for Kids

Baby boomers grew up in an era engrained in outdoor and unstructured playing. Kids in small towns left their homes in the morning, played with friends until lunch, grabbed food at their house or a friend's house, and then usually didn't check in with adults again until supper or dusk. No one had cell phones, no one had video games, and kids probably came home caked in dirt and sporting bruises, but more importantly they returned smelling of fresh air, full of tales about the numerous adventures they had during the day, well exercised and stronger, probably slightly exhausted, and definitely not bored.

Generation X had some of these experiences, but as Generation Y and/or Millennials (eras overlap, and terms are often used interchangeably) rolled around families became busier. Parents are working more and often are connected to work 24/7 through smart phones, kids are heavily or over-scheduled, and lives are completely structured around preset activities. Most studies confirm that active, involved kids do have better grades, show more leadership potential, and learn valuable life management skills. However, many families have taken it too far and thus have inadvertently negatively affected children. The 7 year old going to school studying three languages, taking violin lessons, studying karate, and playing travel soccer may miss out on simple, yet imperative life lessons. Lessons such as learning to problem solve on her own from her independent playing time, mastering friendship skills by engaging children on the playground, and learning how to wind down and enjoy the simple things in life by appreciating nature and stillness. All of these lessons revolve around basic life skills – communication, managing anxiety and stress, focusing and concentration, and core behavioral social skills.

## MARCH FREE WEBINAR: Summer Planning for Your Children

Tuesday, March 15th

12-1 pm and 3-4 pm ET  
11-12 am and 2-3 pm CST  
10-11 am and 1-3 pm MST  
9-10 am and 12-1 pm PST

The summer may seem far off, but now is the time to start thinking about creating a rich and rewarding summer experience for your child. This webinar is designed to help you assess your child's needs, interests, and developmental stage, while you define and explore different summer options.

**TO REGISTER:** Click on the time you would like to attend above.

Or log on to [www.HelloE4.com](http://www.HelloE4.com) with your username and password. Click on "UPCOMING WEBINARS" on the homepage and follow the easy instructions.



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**SO HOW DO I GET KIDS TO PLAY OUTSIDE?**

One way, you join them. You can't do every time, but try to spend unscheduled, unstructured time outside with children. Go on a hike, play hide and seek, or flash light tag at night. Another option is to subtly use an incentive, such as offer your kids the chance to customize the backyard. Ask them what would be fun to have in the yard? You may get the opportunity to plant a flower garden together, build a play house, or hang a tire swing together. Talk to your neighbors. Some neighborhoods have established designated outdoor play times to get kids outside and playing with other children. That is also a great opportunity for you to get to know your neighbors better. If you live in a more rural area, embrace your wonderful location. Plan a scavenger hunt with your kids, together learn to identify insects and leaves, plan a camping adventure, or simply challenge your kids to learn the constellations.

**HOW DO I "PLAN" FOR UNSTRUCTURED PLAY?**

As an adult, you greatly benefit from unplugging, setting all electronics away, and just focusing on living again. "Unplug vacations" are becoming very popular – such as adult camps, trips, and cruises – where phones are placed in a drawer for several days or even weeks. Your kids need this too. Suggest to the kids to create a blanket fort inside and let them keep it up for a few days. Crawl inside and read books together, color pictures, or draw your ideal house together. Go outside and create a safe "obstacle course" for you and the kids. Have a dance party. Grab a bucket of water and some paint brushes and allow small children to paint the house. Or ask your child what they would like to do? Often just being with you, the complete fully attentive you, is all they want.

**BENEFITS OF PLAYING OUTSIDE AND UNSTRUCTURED PLAYTIMES**

- Improves Communication, Organization, and Problem Solving Skills
- Stimulates Creativity and Imagination
- Provides Exercise and the Daily Allotment of Sunshine
- Improves Immune Systems and Increases Motor Skills
- Reduces Stress and Anxiety
- Promotes Aesthetic and Perceptual Development
- And ... "Several studies have shown that regular, unstructured playtime in nature makes kids smarter, calmer, more self-disciplined, more cooperative, and happier."

Dale Carnegie stated, "One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today."

SOURCES: [http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article\\_view.aspx?ArticleID=275](http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=275)  
<http://www.cnn.com/2013/03/22/living/let-children-play-outside/>  
<http://www.niu.edu/ccr/resources/Why%20Children%20Need%20to%20Play%20Outside.pdf>  
<http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/parenting/tips/a12501/kids-play-outdoors/>

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**THIS MONTH, LET e4health  
BE YOUR RESOURCE FOR:**

- Counseling for any issue that's important to you or your children
- Online learning via our webinar, "Summer Planning for Your Children" on Tuesday, March 15th
- Articles, tips, and online resources to help children stay active
- Information and support for special needs
- Daily living services such as locating summer camps, after-school activities, and tutors—as well as other resources and referrals—to give you more time to encourage your kids

**ALWAYS AVAILABLE  
ALWAYS CONFIDENTIAL**

For whatever work or life issue is on your mind, or for anything related to daily living that you could use some extra help with, let **e4health** be your resource. It's free, it's confidential, and it's available to you, as well as your family and household members. Just call or log on to get started.

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