

# Reconnecting with Nature

by Noni Young

We are all aware that we are tending to more sedentary lives and research shows that our children are spending considerably less time outside than previous generations. To compound this our environment is becoming more and more urbanised and our connection with nature is compromised. American journalist and author, Richard Louv, has recognised this situation and the impact it is having on our children and has coined the phrase 'nature-deficit disorder'.

Experts around the world, including Australia, are now recognising 'nature-deficit disorder' and its impact on the overall wellbeing of children. Obesity, attention disorders and depression are some of the documented health issues. But it is a phenomenon that can be reversed simply by reconnecting children with nature and allowing them unstructured outdoor play where they can explore and get active. Outdoor play has been shown to improve motor coordination, decision making and social skills as well as the obvious health benefits.

At the time of writing this article we are experiencing our first cold snap of winter. The low temperatures and rain are good excuses to stay indoors but I would encourage you to put on the rain coats and gum boots and get out in the fresh air. It is said that as little as ten minutes walking in the fresh air can boost brain chemicals that improve happiness.

For those of us that live in the City of Whitehorse (Vic) we are lucky to have a relative abundance of nature on our doorstep. The municipality is blessed with green space, parklands, nature reserves and creek lands - great spots to go exploring and connecting with

nature. The newly revamped playground at Blackburn Lake Sanctuary (Central Rd Blackburn) has recently reopened and is well worth a visit.



Look for things for your children to do in your own back garden where they can play and interact with the outside environment. Allow them to climb a tree, build a cubby house out of anything they can find, get on the trampoline or perhaps some animals to look after such as a rabbit, guinea pig or chickens. Get them to grow some vegies, which they will have to tend to on a regular basis and have the pleasure of watching them grow, harvesting and eating. The winter vegie patch should be full of cabbages, broccoli, cauliflower, peas and carrots.

If you have never been there; (or would like to go again) then I would highly encourage a visit to the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne. It is an amazing play space for kids and adults alike!

Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*  
Planet Ark, *Climbing Trees: Getting Aussie Kids Back Outdoors*

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