

## PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD MEMORANDUM

**FROM:** The Office of the City Manager    **DATE:** August 5, 2019  
**SUBJECT:** Outdoor Play Awareness Campaign  
**PRESENTER:** Vickie Loftice, Managing Director

### **SUMMARY:**

Staff will provide an update on the Parks and Recreation Department's upcoming public awareness campaign on the importance of natural areas, parks, outdoor play for children and overall health benefits for all individuals.

### **GENERAL DESCRIPTION:**

There are many ways in which this generation's childhood is different from that of the last generation, but one of the most abrupt contrasts is the degree to which it is being spent indoors. There are lots of reasons, including the marked increase in time spent interacting with electronic devices, the emphasis on scheduled activities and achievements, concerns about sun exposure — and, for many families, the lack of safe outdoor places to play. It's not just children; adults are spending less time outdoors as well.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits and importance of outdoor play and the benefits of being in nature. It's not only good for children but adults as well.

Lack of outdoor play time has its consequences for children's health. Studies have found relationships between the time children spend outdoors, their proximity to a park or greenspace, and being of a healthy weight.

The mental health benefits extend to children, too. Children with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are able to concentrate better after spending time outdoors, according to numerous studies and time spent in nature can also help to reduce stress in children. We often forget that children are not immune to the stresses of the world and require an outlet to relieve some of the anxiety and pressure they may feel. Playing outdoors helps them return to their most natural state — simply being a kid.

Researchers found that adults who took a 90 minute walk in a natural setting were less likely to focus on negative things than those who walked in an urban setting. Other studies have shown that exercise in green environments, particularly those with water, lead to improved mood and self-esteem, two things from which most parents could benefit.

There are many more benefits of having access to nature including the ability to explore, development of muscle strength and coordination, self-confidence, social development,



increased imagination and problem solving and gaining knowledge and appreciation for the natural world.

Given all the benefits of outdoor play and the increased need for children to spend more time outdoors, staff will implement a public awareness campaign highlighting the benefits of our natural environment and the importance of outdoor play.

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*Excerpted from:*

*Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, "6 Reasons Children Need to Play Outdoors"*

*Early Child Education Blog*

*"Play, Development and Early Education", published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA*