

# Five great ways to unplug and get your kids outdoors

By JAN PIERCE

Family life can be hectic. After a busy day of preparing meals, snacks and overseeing homework projects, breaking up squabbles and keeping up with dishes and laundry, parents are often more than happy to “pop in a video” as they say, and watch their brood settle into wide-eyed, quiet little people.

But I’m also aware that many children rarely see the light of day except when in transit from school to home, where they immediately turn something on — the television, a video player, a computer or a computer game. It’s become a huge problem for children and it’s affecting their health. These technological wonders have their place in both the educational realm and for entertainment, but it has been

said that today’s children have a “nature deficit disorder.” They know little or nothing of the outdoor world around them and don’t care to spend time exploring it. The pull of today’s electronic offerings is extremely strong and it’s hard to manage. But experts say a lot can be accomplished in just a few minutes of outdoor play each day. And once the enjoyment begins, kids will want more.

There’s a growing movement among parents and community

leaders to organize and encourage quality outdoor experiences for today’s children. Virtually no one doubts the advantages of time outdoors for our kids, but bad habits are hard to break. Here are five tips for fun and interesting ways to get the whole family out

of doors to experience the beauty and enjoyment of nature.

**Grow and eat something.** Kids quickly learn to enjoy gardening when they do the work themselves

and when they’re part of harvesting — enjoying the fruit of their labors.

One organization that facilitates such hands-on gardening projects is the Farm-based Education Association. They offer outdoor events for the entire family for an annual fee. Check to see if they or a similar organization is active in your area.

**Observe or collect something.**

When children begin to observe and interact with nature they build a greater respect for the care of the planet. Increase their wonder by taking short excursions for the sole purpose of observing what is under that rock or hiding within the bark of a tree. Begin a nature collection as simple as establishing My Box of Rocks or My Collection of Pinecones. It doesn’t take much to begin the journey to a greater appreciation of nature.

**Recycle or reuse something.**

While some of the action in recycling takes place indoors, the emphasis is on maintaining the beauty



## Strategies

and cleanliness of our outdoor world. At [littlegreenblog.com](http://littlegreenblog.com) you’ll find lots of ideas related to living in sync with nature.

**Build something.** Have some family fun with a building project such as a simple fort (plans online at [www.thisoldhouse.com/how-to/how-to-build-fort](http://www.thisoldhouse.com/how-to/how-to-build-fort)). Kids will spend hours in the out-of-doors with a simple backdrop and the whole family will enjoy the building process.

**Hike somewhere.** Younger children will always enjoy a ramble in the woods with their loved ones. As children get older, they may need the incentive of linking the out of doors to a hobby such as photography or geocaching. Visit [www.KidsUnplugged.org](http://www.KidsUnplugged.org) to find an organization that plans outdoor family events, perhaps in your area. If not, see their listing of many other groups who have banded together for the same purpose: getting kids unplugged and outdoors.

There are many other organizations that care about children and the importance of helping them enjoy our beautiful world. Here are a few more you can learn about online:

- [www.thebigoutside.com](http://www.thebigoutside.com)
- [www.littlefamilyadventure.com](http://www.littlefamilyadventure.com)
- [getchildrenoutdoors.com](http://getchildrenoutdoors.com)

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