



### Outdoor Time, Rain & Shine

One rain-laden Tuesday in early March I hurried across the street from my daughter's school and into my car. Out of the pouring rain I huddled before the heat vents for a few minutes, mentally preparing myself to drive to work and make another mad dash through the rain to the office.

Then I saw them. The kindergartners had left the school just after me. They trooped past in the rain and wind, laughing, talking, running—already starting to play well before they reached Volunteer Park. Their raincoats and boots flashed brightly against the dark green of the hedges and rain-soaked grass.

I wasn't surprised. My daughter attended a [Waldorf](#) school, and even though she was in sixth grade I could still remember her playing outside, rain or shine. Outdoor time is part of the rhythm of the [Waldorf](#) day, every day. What struck me as I watched these kids from the warm confines of my car was that they seemed to relish the rain as much as they would have the sun.

Too often as adults we huddle beneath our umbrellas, struggling to control them against the wind as it blows every which way, eager to escape the weather for the warmth of a car or office. But children embrace the bluster and wet as something rich with possibilities; it's just *different* from a summer's day.

Do you remember what it felt like to jump into a puddle when you were a kid? The freedom? The unfettered joy?

We might recall at least a hint of it when summer invites us to explore the abundant beauty of the Pacific Northwest. For most of us the first sunny day sparks a primal urge to *get outside*. We experience a sense of renewal, of possibility. Summer is like an open door.

What if every day were like that?

When we were younger, perhaps it was. Maybe that's why when we see our kids splashing in puddles, building sandcastles, kicking chestnuts through fallen leaves—we feel a surge of joy. Seeing them at play, immersed in the world, we're reminded of the freedom we felt as children.

Statistics show that up to 93% of our time is spent indoors. This in spite of equally compelling data indicating how important it is to get *outdoors*: increase your vitamin D, decrease stress, sleep better, breathe in fresh air . . . The same of course holds true for our kids, with research indicating that outdoor time also supports eye development, increased exercise, social interactions, resilience and more.

Of course, it's also *fun*. That's a vital part of life too. And the benefits follow us inside. We're all happier and healthier. Cognitive function improves: being out in nature stimulates our brains in ways indoor activities don't. Spending time outside is less a luxury and more an investment.

No, scratch that: it's a necessity.

Time in nature is an antidote to feelings of disconnection from ourselves. Nature teaches us something ineffable, something about the mystery of life. That feeling we get staring at an ocean vista or brilliant orange sunset is an important message, even if we can't put into words what it's saying.

More and more, as parents and as a society, we are beginning to realize this. At least, in many schools the so-called "decline of recess" has temporarily paused. On the other hand, the countervailing forces of cellphones, tablets, binge-able TV and more threaten to occupy our minds at the expense of our relationship with the natural world.

This is one reason I was drawn to [Waldorf](#) education for my daughter—the feeling that the developing child is nourished by spending time outdoors. Certainly there is scientific data to support this idea, but there is also that intangible element that draws us outside and inspires us to find ourselves through connecting with nature.

There is, of course, far more to the [Waldorf](#) approach than simply increased outside time. Outdoor activity is part and parcel of a curriculum that interweaves arts, academics, movement and exploration to help children develop holistically, as whole human beings.

But setting those larger issues aside, on that wet spring day it was hard to argue with the obvious joy these young children were experiencing. They seemed so natural, so alive.

The evidence is in: outside time is essential for a child's well-being and development. But a picture is worth a thousand data points, and I could've told you that in a flash the morning I watched those little kids troop past me in the rain. Those kindergartners were doing exactly what they were supposed to be doing.

Scilearn.com Kristina birdson "get outside it's good for your brain."