



Enjoying the great outdoors ...naturally!

For a six-week stretch this summer, Little Traverse Conservancy offered three knee-high programs and one junior naturalist program each week. Knee-High programs were geared for 3 to 6-year-olds and Junior Naturalist programs for 7 to 12-year-olds. These programs were offered at no charge to the community and were highly popular. A total of 252 preschool-aged children attended a knee-high program along with 54 siblings and parents. Nearly one hundred 7-12 year-olds attended a Junior Naturalist program during the series.

"For being so young, I wasn't sure what she would get, but she really learned a lot. She talks about things long after the class. It is one of those moments when I think, wow, she actually was listening!"

Jodi Rogier, mother of 3-year-old Eliza

Mia Helmer, age 7, said: "I liked catching bugs and picking blueberries."

Grandpa Jim Helmer, age 74, enjoyed hiking on and learning about the scenic conservancy properties that fortunately will be preserved for future generations.



A Physician's Perspective

We asked Dr. Josh Meyerson, Medical Director of the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, if he could share his perspective on how important it is for children to get outdoors.

Children (and adults) need to spend time outdoors. Playing outdoors helps promote physical activity that is so important to a child's physical and mental development. The simple acts of playing help develop gross and fine motor skills. This physical activity also helps to promote the maintenance of a healthy weight. Spending time outdoors helps to not only encourage and promote a healthy body but a healthy mind. Natural environments can help reduce anxiety and promote improved mood and the ability to focus. When children are outside, in nature, they experience the calming effects of the sights, sounds, smells, and feel of the environment. It is this stimulation of all our senses - not just visual and auditory but the tactile experience of a cool breeze, the warm sun, the soft grass, that helps create a healthy mind and can promote the development of lifelong learning skills.

Being outdoors also is significant for what children are NOT doing - namely they are not engaged in watching TV or playing video/computer games. Excessive (more than two

hours a day) screen time increases a child's risk of being overweight or obese and can contribute to problems with behavior and overall school performance. Humans are meant to be engaged in their environment, not a sedentary observer. Time spent outdoors is a strong consistent predictor of children's physical activity.

Light exposure to sunlight also is important to promote Vitamin D production for healthy bones. It is for all of these reasons that the 2010 National Standards for Child Care and Early Education developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (and other national groups) includes standards for Outdoor Play that include a minimum of 60-90 minutes during the day of outdoor play time for toddlers and young children enrolled in child care or preschool.

It is for all of these reasons that I consider my prescription to "go outside and play" to be among the most important advice I can give all of my families.

— Joshua Meyerson, MD, MPH



For outdoor activity ideas for our region, visit www.gettingkidsoutdoors.org.

Autumn Education Programs

Fall 2011 Education Program Information

Fall education programs will be held Tuesdays-Fridays from September 20 to November 4. Registration began in late August, but please call Melissa at 231.344.1004 to check for availability.

FALL EDUCATION PROGRAM OFFERINGS

The Shape of Things (Pre K)	Purely Plants (3-4)
Falling for Leaves (K-1)	Dirt Makers (3-5)
Meet the Arthropods (1-3)	Orienteering (6 and up)
Everybody Eats (1-3)	Eco Journals (6 and up)