

MENTAL HEALTH MEMO: WHY GETTING OUTSIDE MATTERS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Most studies agree that kids who play outside are smarter, happier, more attentive, and less anxious than kids who spend more time indoors. Why is this? Research has shown that being exposed to nature can reduce the symptoms of anxiety and depression as it reduces muscle tension, blood pressure, and levels of cortisol (the stress hormone). Being in nature also increases levels of endorphin and dopamine (which promotes happiness). Nature can also help with the grief process. This is because exposure to nature causes better coping, including improved self-awareness, self-concept, and positively affected mood.

Here are some specific ways why nature is good for your child's mental health:

- It builds confidence because outdoor activities are less structured and allows them to have more control over their actions.
- It promotes creativity since unstructured play allows them to meaningfully interact with their surroundings and think more freely.
- It teaches responsibility as they learn to treat and care for the environment properly.
- It activates more senses (they can see, hear, smell, and touch outdoor environments) than indoor activities.
- It makes them think and creates a sense of wonder.
- It reduces stress and fatigue by engaging them in mindful attention.

Click on the link for activity ideas:

<https://childmind.org/article/ideas-for-getting-your-kids-into-nature/>

For more information, please contact the RRDSB Mental Health Leader: tracey.idle@rrdsb.com

