

Balancing Inside Activities with Outside Play

Tip – Outdoor activities can be a lot more fun if Mom and Dad participate along with the kids.

Today, parents' concerns often focus on inside activities with screens – TV, video games, computer, I-pods – that suck up much of our children's discretionary time. Technology is going to be an even bigger part of our children's lives than it is for us – that's a given.

The key, then, is to ensure that the opportunity for outside, traditional play is readily available and that our children take advantage of it.

Tools – Harriet Heath, Ph.D., psychologist and author of *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire*, advocates deliberately integrating your values into your daily parenting. What would this look like in the case of balancing indoor and outdoor activities? Let's use her step-by-step process for brainstorming a plan on this issue.

1) Describe the situation in your family that needs attention. Parenting Press author Shari Steelsmith recalls when her children were spending more time than she thought healthy on indoor entertainment pursuits involving screens. She was particularly concerned that they got enough outside time – both nature time and time with friends outside.



2) Brainstorm ideas to address the problem. Steelsmith and her husband came up with ideas that they thought would help. Here are a few:

- Encourage bike riding each afternoon it doesn't rain. Establish a once-a-week, family bike ride – perhaps on Sunday afternoons.
- Enforce screen limits for weekdays and weekends.
- Be willing to have friends over more often and have outdoor equipment available – like a badminton set, frisbees, slip-n-slides, and bikes.
- Rotate dog-walking responsibilities so that Mom is not the only one taking advantage of this outside time.
- Mom can invite kids to hike with her in the greenbelt areas surrounding the neighborhood.
- Check with Granddad to see if he is willing to help Dad and the boys build a treehouse in his big maple tree.
- Organize park visits with friends and frisbees along.
- Plan weekend camping trips. Choose locations with hiking trails.
- Include the kids in gardening and harvesting tasks in Granddad's vegetable garden.

3) Make a plan, using ideas from your list that support your values. Steelsmith said her family liked all the ideas generated, but decided to start with weekly family bike rides, screen limits, and to involve the kids in planning camping trips. "We resolved to try and think of pursuits in nature first when we have a free afternoon for a family activity instead of heading to the movie theater."

You'll find more practical tips you can use right now in *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire* by Harriet Heath, Ph.D.