

## Children and Nature

*Submitted by Sandy Goodspeed*

After attending a Coverts Project workshop for volunteers, I decided to read and share with you a meaningful book, *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder*. The author, Robert Louv states, "The children and nature movement is fueled by this fundamental idea: the child in nature is an endangered species, and the health of children and the health of the Earth are inseparable." In his book, Louv cites many studies that show direct exposure to nature is essential for a child's healthy physical and emotional development. The campaign is this: Leave No Child Inside.

Throughout the book, Louv references copious studies showing how trends are separating us and our children from nature. We no longer think much about the origin of our food, the understanding of our relationship with other animals is increasingly intellectual, and wild animals are invading our towns and cities. Some communities have outlawed unstructured outdoor play, primarily due to threats of lawsuits and concern with order. As open space shrinks, overuse increases. This all sends a chilling message to our children: islands of nature are to be seen and not touched – your free range play is unwelcome; being in the woods is to be feared and forbidden. Families have less leisure time, more of that precious time is spent with the TV and computer, and obesity is greatly increasing due to sedentary lifestyles.

I urge you to read this book and discover for yourself more about why these things are happening, what is being done to change the situation, and more specifically, what you can do within your own environment. At the very end of the book, Louv lists 100 things we can do to help our children reattach to nature. While there is not room here to list them all, I did pull out a few to whet your appetite for more and, most importantly, inspire you to *take action!*

1. When speaking with your children, eliminate the words "be careful" and in their place say, "Pay Attention." Not only will this reduce fear (a major cause of staying away from the woods), it tells them they can make good decisions when they have all the facts.
2. View nature as an antidote to stress. Children *and* parents feel better after spending time in the natural world, even if it's in your own back yard.
3. Tell your children stories about your special childhood places in nature, then help them find their own.
4. Help your child discover a hidden universe. Find a scrap board and place it on bare dirt. Come back in a day or two, lift the board and see how many species have found shelter there.
5. Revive old traditions. Collect lightning bugs at dusk, release them at dawn.
6. Encourage your kids to go camping in the backyard. Buy them a tent or help them make a canvas tepee, and leave it up all summer.
7. Be a cloud spotter; build a backyard weather station. A young person just needs a view of the sky and a guidebook; cirrostratus, cumulonimbus, or lenticularis.
8. Make the "green hour" a new family tradition; time for unstructured play and interaction with the natural world. Even fifteen minutes is a good start.

9. Adopt the “sunny day rule.” One father reports, “Even though it causes dissension and complaining at first, I’m serious about it.” TV and inside games are appropriate if it’s rainy or cold outside. “I tell them, Go! Go build something!”
10. Take a hike. Or be the stroller explorer. Find 10 critters. Discover footprints and mole holes.
11. Go for a family walk when the moon is full.
12. Keep a “wonder bowl” for acorns, mushrooms, rocks, etc.
13. Learn to use all of the senses at the same time; sit under a tree and consciously listen to every bird song and bug call, watch and be aware of what the body is touching, what the nose is smelling.
14. Encourage your children to build a treehouse, fort or hut. You can provide raw materials, sticks, boards, blankets, boxes, ropes and nails, but it’s best if kids are the architects and builders. Pay attention to safety issues and damaging the trees

If you want information about Coverts, or you’d like to share comments about the book and/or your thoughts about Epping children in particular, please send me a message. I’d love to hear from you! [sandygoodspeed@comcast.net](mailto:sandygoodspeed@comcast.net).