



Guidelines for a Healthy Lifestyle

These are a set of common-sense ideas that are truly helpful to children with attentional, learning and behavioral/emotional difficulties. They are part of a lifelong set of habits that help to manage stress, sustain energy for attention and effort to non-preferred tasks, enhance learning, reduce frustration, and improve self esteem.

The key to these simple ideas is to "practice" them regularly. These are behaviors, choices and commitments that have a real benefit when they are a part of a person's daily routine. However regular "practice" serves to eliminate and reduce many of the ups and downs that befuddle children with attention, learning and social/emotional difficulties.

We encourage parents to consider how to make some of these activities into family habits. Do not just "practice" these activities for your kids! Do them for yourself. In addition, your children are more likely to make them a part of their own lifestyle if they see you "doing" rather than "saying."

Going Out in Nature

A study conducted by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has shown that children with ADD/ADHD benefit from spending time in nature. Taking a walk or playing in a park with grass and trees reduced symptoms more than playing on a concrete playground or walking around a city. Studies have been strong enough to suggest that spending time outdoors might even be a substitute for medication in some children. Any natural setting, even just a tree-lined street, is enough for these effects to take place.

Try to take a walk around a nearby park, or even around the backyard, once a day. For example, taking a walk after your child gets home from school, before they begin their homework, will help them focus better while they work.

Other ideas for spending time in nature include gardening, sports, walking the dog, etc. Field sports, such as soccer, baseball, and softball, involve nature and will help your child want to spend time outside by keeping their attention focused. If your child is less competitive, activities such as frisbee, biking, and bird-watching also help your child sustain their attention and spend time outside.

If the weather isn't cooperating, encourage your child to splash around in puddles during the rain, build a snowman while it's snowing, or fly a kite when it's windy.

Books

Louv, Richard. (2005). *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

White, Linda. (2000). *Trekking on a Trail (Activities for Kids)*. Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith. Includes tips for planning hiking excursions and activities for while you're hiking. Recommended for ages 4-8.

Bradley, Care. (1999). *Outdoor Activities for Kids: Over 100 Fun, Practical Things To Do Outside*. London, England: Lorenz Books. A list of activities for children to do outside. Recommended for ages 4-8.

Websites

<http://www.4-adhd.com/greentimeadhd.html> (Information about the University of Illinois study)