

# Adventure in a Natural Play Area

As children, most of us spent our weekends, summers and evenings playing outside. We climbed trees in the backyard, played hide-n-seek with neighborhood friends or rode our bikes at the local park. We caught crayfish in a stream, lay on our backs imagining the clouds were animals or explored the woodlots close to home.

For most kids today those days are gone. Families are busy with activities, parents are afraid to let their children roam freely, kids are consumed with electronic gadgetry and there is less access to natural areas. According to a new study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average American child ages 8-18 spends almost 8 hours a day watching TV, playing video games or sitting in front of the computer.

Author Richard Louv coined the term nature deficit disorder to describe this trend where kids are spending less and less time outdoors. In his bestselling book "Last Child in the Woods," Louv examines this phenomenon and the dramatic negative effects this may have on an entire generation.

Unstructured play in a natural environment has been shown to have a strong positive effect on the social and psychological

developmental needs of children. To help kids and their families get back to nature Metro Parks has set aside areas at seven Metro Parks. We invite you and your kids to come out to our sensory-rich natural play areas for a treasure trove of experiential learning, imagination and wonder.

You and your kids are free to go off trail and climb trees and rocks, dig in the dirt, play in streams or build a fort.

Metro Parks has seven Natural Play Areas. At Battelle Darby Creek, the area runs along Big Darby Creek and can be accessed from the Indian Ridge parking lot or along the Terrace Trail. Blendon Woods has a 10-acre area with a wooded hillside and ravine, turn left at ranger station. Highbanks' natural play area runs along the Olentangy River and is accessed from the Big Meadows Picnic Area. At Prairie Oaks the area surrounds Beaver Lake and runs along Big Darby Creek. Sharon Woods has a 7.5-acre play area accessed from the Apple Ridge Picnic Area. Slate Run's 7-acre wooded hillside is bordered by a creek and can be accessed

from the Shady Grove Picnic Area. The natural play area at Three Creeks is alongside the Evergreen Trail in the Confluence Trails Area. ■

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