

### **Kids Home? Tell Them, As Your Mother Used to Say, “Go outside and play!”**

What do sidewalk chalk, jumping rope, and playing catch or frisbee all have in common? They are ways to keep our children occupied, happy, and active. And more importantly they are all things that we do *outside*. Fortunately, as we face COVID-19, we can take advantage of the improving weather to go outside with our kids and play in the fresh air.

As we all know, many of our children are plugged into their devices as though it is a [full-time job](#). Perhaps COVID-19 can wake up our children to the thrill of hopping down the [side walk](#) and avoiding the cracks (or it will break our mother’s back), or searching for 4-leaf clovers to wish on and daydream about.

Your children would love to play with you and they would love to learn the games you played outside when you were a kid. Teach your children all the things you can do with a red [rubber ball](#): handball? Bouncing ball games like, “A my name is Alice...” Outside play offers families a new way to connect. While we need to go outside too, to maintain our sanity, we will also learn from some of the things we do with for our children. And in the most enjoyable way, our children will be steeped in [science and ecology](#) as they take the time to examine their world. Grass and trees are not necessary to study nature; every urban area has its own weather, [wildlife](#), and birds.

Think about the things your children can do:

- Children can enter a [zone](#) when you give them a magnifying glass and a plastic container and ask them how many different bugs they can find. And then you can look them up together on the web and find their names and what they eat.
- Find the birds that live in your area and print out their pictures. Like a scavenger hunt, kids get points for finding the birds and checking them off their list. And who is that singing? Find a website that offers birdsong too.
- Colorful sidewalk chalk can be used cooperatively or alone to create cities and vistas and forests of fairies. A renewable resource that washes away at the next rain, take pictures of their creations with your smart phones and then ask them to write the story of their masterpiece!
- Ask your kids what they want to do and make up games together. We all played Follow the Leader? and Do What I Do? What do your kids want to play? Are there any outdoor games they learned at school?
- Remember “Red Light Green Light?” You likely played this as a child and it built your [executive function](#) or impulse control. Just like Simon Says, you needed to learned when to move and when to wait. The same is true for “Mother May I?” - another game that kids love and we played it for hours.

- Urban parents may remember Skelly which involved bottle caps and drawing a little court into a block in the sidewalk. Yes, bottle caps and chalk. Talk about learning to make something from nothing. Increase your children's resourcefulness and [creativity](#). What games can they make up with bottle caps and chalk on the sidewalk or driveway?
- Some parents may remember great games of Hide-and-Seek and Capture the Flag that lasted all day. Our parents had to beg us to come in to eat as we stayed out until dark. Running around fights [obesity and hypertension](#), now at epidemic proportions.
- Rain rain go away? Not at all. Get those boots and raincoats out and together notice how the world changes with a shiny wet veneer...

Whatever you do outside, it will be great for you and for your kids. Let's use this time as an opportunity to rediscover the pleasure of fresh air.

As Richard [Louv](#), the nature writer argued, "Now more than ever we need nature as a balancing agent." A balancing agent for languishing in front of the television, or playing the same video games repeatedly, or hearing children complain that they are bored.

Why be bored when we can go play outside?

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