

## The Parent's Page: The Benefits of Summer Recreation

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Now more than ever is a great time for families to embrace the outdoors. With the impact of COVID-19 closing schools, restaurants, movie theatres, and so on, it is important to continue the focus on what is available for families to spend time together while remaining healthy and active. Summer recreation and spending time outside is a great way to end the spring and start the summer off right.

Some of the major benefits of time spent outdoors include improved physical health, great benefits to mental health, and even new friendships! Although many of our decisions are uncertain, the start of summer camps and the opening of parks begin in the summertime. Whether or not children and families will be able to utilize these awesome resources in the Catskills this summer, it is still good to know the many benefits of summer recreation and time spent outside.

Firstly, the physical benefit of getting up early in the morning to go to a park, or to arrive at a summer camp program can create a healthy habit first thing in the morning. Starting the morning with physical activity can help families and children learn healthy lifestyle habits. Summer camps offer the ability to learn a ton of new games that keep children active from the start of the day to the end. Parents who engage in outdoor activities also set a good example to their children by giving them the ability to engage physically outside to keep active. Maintaining a healthy weight, heart health, and stress management are just a few benefits of outside physical activity that children and families can gain by utilizing summer recreation options and spaces.

However, physical activity is not the only benefit to summer recreation programs. Mental health is extremely important and often overlooked in children. A structured and stimulating summer activity can help children achieve a healthy mental health status by being able to step out of his/her/their comfort zone and learn new

activities and skills. This allows children to develop a stronger sense of "self" and create a new sense of self-esteem. Families can also help their children achieve healthy mental health by utilizing the outdoors. Scavenger hunts, bird watching, nature arts & crafts, and so on are examples of how families can use the outdoors to keep busy in the summer while simultaneously building healthy mental health.

Lastly, one of the most important things we can give to children is the ability to make long, lasting friendships. The friendships that are made at summer rec programs give children the opportunity to meet children from different areas who share the same interests as them. Children can relate to one another by sharing the camp experience while also embracing differences in background and lifestyles. This can also help children learn the importance of respect. Learning about cultural differences can give children a new viewpoint in life that may not be available to them otherwise.

Furthermore, if summer camp is not an option for families, parents can still encourage new friendships in the summer. Some children may not have the opportunity to attend a specialized program in the summer depending on a variety of circumstances and/or recent social disturbances but that does not mean they don't have the opportunity to chat with someone new. Supervised summer pen pal programs are a great way for children to meet others and socialize without face-to-face contact. This gives children something to look forward to and a chance to learn something new!

Whether it is a specialized summer program or just organized family time outdoors, children can benefit greatly from summer recreation. We, as adults, must give children the opportunity and space to learn and grow and the warm weather and recreational opportunities in the summer are the perfect way to get started.