

EXTRA EXTRA!

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Play is good for the planet too, say experts

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Children born today, who could be looking at a 3C rise in temperature in their lifetime, will need as many restorative and resilient natural environments as possible to recover from the stresses of an increasingly dangerous world.

Children who spend more time in nature are less likely to have mental health problems in later life. Being in natural environments is associated with positive outcomes, from more creative play and social and cognitive development to enhanced immune function and better psychological health. We recover from stress more completely and quickly in a natural environment than in a built environment.

But playing in nature is also linked with later pro-environmental behaviours. We can only love what we know, and we can only protect what we love. If a child can't recognise a swift, how will they know if it doesn't make it back one year?

There are aspects, too, that are harder to measure. Beauty, for instance, delight, make-believe, freedom. Outside, even in the most urban areas, there is magic in the cracks of



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a pavement and wonder on a walk around the block.

A child can be nurtured by a particular tree in a park, or a dandelion on a street corner, or the snails on urban road verges that have been left to grow wild. Crucially, giving children the chance to know they are part of a vast and complex matrix of life and that we only breathe and eat because of plants and insects and the sun and rain, roots young minds to the land and encourages a care ethic with other beings.

No one knows how the climate crisis will end. But we do know this: children need the life-giving, stress-relieving, kin-making, awe-inducing, wonder-sparking experiences of the natural world. Letting our youngest citizens love the world and know the world, run through long grass until their heart beats like a drum, climb a tree and become a bird or a squirrel, paddle in rivers looking for minnows, spend time in areas free from harmful air and noise pollution, knowing that they are part of the Earth, is the very least we can do for them today.

TRUE OR FALSE?

Not all news is based on truth. Do you think this story is based on true or false news?

Sometimes playing in the garden results in the discovery of new species.



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