



Time Outdoors is Well Spent

By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director

In southern Arizona, summer time means something different than it does in other parts of the country. First of all, it usually starts much earlier than New York, for example. Temperatures, typically, begin climbing in triple digits in April and don't drop down again until some time in October (during the day, anyway). It's why Chandler residents, among others, laugh at the back-to-school commercials featuring sweaters, turtlenecks and layers. And then there is the fact that back to school, for us, isn't the Tuesday after Labor Day but sometime in the middle to end of July. But, I digress...

This upcoming three-day weekend marks the beginning of the 100 days of summer, that time period between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Our temps have hit in the low 100s and it is time for the pool and other water activities. We slaver on the sunscreen, don our shades and splash in! But in addition to being refreshing and a break from the incessant AC (Thank G-d for AC!!), these outdoor experiences have restorative powers.

According to the Child & Nature Network, childrenandnature.org, "Time in nature can be a powerful antidote to the negative impacts of trauma and stress in children's lives. When ... service providers incorporate nature into their therapeutic work, children and families

experience a wide range of benefits, including improved mental and physical health, stronger relationships, better communication, reduced stress, and healing from trauma,” states the Child and Nature Network.

Nature’s Benefits

As I watch children outside, both at the JCC and in my home, it is amazing to see how such open-ended time encourages exploration and creativity. Children take the opportunity to use the skills that they have developed in a classroom setting and use them in real world situations. This is the ultimate in validation for a teacher and a parent. You want to see your child use what they know to navigate the world around them!

Nature: It Does a Body Good

Remember those commercials: Milk, it does a body good? We often become very focused on food providing a great deal of our health benefits and of course it does. However, we can’t discount our mental health. According to Dr. Cathy Jordan, Consulting Research Director for the C&NN, “Although nature might be good for all children, it’s especially good for those who might be at risk for poorer health, mental health, social or educational outcomes. The implication is that ... access to nature could, for example, help close educational achievement gaps or reduce health disparities.”

Next Steps

Get outside! Spend time in nature when you can. Of course, protect yourself from the harmful rays of the sun whenever possible with sunscreen and sunglasses. I was never an early

riser, preferring to sleep in whenever I could. But now, that 5:00 a.m. wake-up is such a benefit. Get out and walk or run if that is your thing. Take advantage of the cooler weather if you can. I promise you that you will reap the rewards not only for yourself but your child too. And make this three-day weekend one of rejuvenation for your mind and your soul!

Shabbat Shalom!