

Pointers For Parents

Why Parents Should Let Their Children Get Dirty

(NAPSA)—With high-tech gadgets and video games monopolizing children's days, it may be time to reintroduce your children to the world's first toy: dirt. Today's over-programmed children need outlets for creative expression, physical activity and stress relief.

Obesity has become the number one preventable cause of death and Americans spend more than 90 percent of their lives inside.

Ninety-three percent of moms know their children's motor skills improve when they play outdoors, yet 40 percent of school districts have eliminated recess.

"At an early age I was encouraged to play outside, have fun and not be afraid to get dirty," explained baseball great Cal Ripken, Jr., who supports the newly launched America Needs Dirt initiative. "I believe that spirit of freedom and adventure helped me push myself to achieve more. I was not afraid to dive into home plate—literally and figuratively—in my adult life."

Encouraging even the youngest children to play, but more importantly, giving them the freedom to get really dirty, serves as an extra challenge for them to fully embrace the experience—and they carry that gusto to other facets of their life such as work and relationships.

"A stain-free life is a life half-lived," says Ripken. "Athletes come home from games dirty. It is the grass stains from going for a fly ball and the dirt from running around the bases that are proof—like a badge of honor—that you got out there, had fun and accomplished something."



Cal Ripken, Jr., embraces dirt and encourages children of all ages to do the same.

Here are some tips from Ripken on how to help children develop active behaviors:

- Present choices. Let children choose or create their favorite outdoor activity. Not everyone is a star athlete, but they can all benefit from a friendly game of tag or setting up an obstacle course outside. Choices make playtime more palatable.

- Provide freedom. Allow "wild and free" activity in supervised places such as playgrounds and fields. Children can burn more calories and relieve more stress with this liberty.

- Create family fun. Let your children help you in the garden or take the whole family to the park on a weekend afternoon. Children love to get messy and by showing them dirt is good, they are free to fully embrace life's natural wonders and experiences, now and in the future.

For more information on the importance of playing hard and getting dirty—and for additional tips from Cal Ripken, Jr.—visit www.AmericaNeedsDirt.com.