

In March, we anxiously await spring, warmer weather, longer days, and blossoming trees. We appreciate the sight of budding greens and the sounds of chirping birds. Passover leads us to thoughts of spring cleaning, gardening, and wandering through the land. Doesn't it make you want to go outside and take a walk? Please do so! Another name for Passover is *Hag Ha-Aviv* which means "Festival of Spring", a perfect time to enjoy the outdoors.

It is a fact that children today spend significantly less time outside than their parents did. Many reasons have been posited including increased 'screen time,' stranger anxiety, and urbanization. It's not our purpose here to worry about the causes, but to convey the detrimental effects and encourage parents to make sure children play outdoors often.

The lack of time outdoors was termed "Nature Deficit Disorder" by Richard Louv in his book, [The Last Child in the Woods](#). He laments the phenomenon, which he and others predict will increase in severity in the next decades. He identifies Nature Deficit Disorder as contributing to the increase in childhood attention problems, anxiety, and depression, as well as the physical challenges involving obesity, strength, coordination, and endurance.

More recently, studies have identified lack of outdoor time as a significant factor in the astonishing number of cases of myopia and accompanying perceptual disabilities and Vitamin D deficiency causing weak bones in children. In addition, psychologists document that lack of outdoor time is related to decreased memory retention, creativity, initiative, appropriate risk-taking, social collaboration, and cognitive capacity.

Outdoor time is not just a luxury, but a requirement for optimal child development. It's a public health tragedy that is easily remedied. Take advantage of the spring weather and the Passover festival and spend time playing outdoors with your children. Time outdoors can enhance family relationships because it's a fun, carefree way to expend extra energy and enjoy each other's company.

Hag Ha-Aviv Sameach (Happy Holiday of Spring/ Passover),

Paula