Children's Time Outdoors in Nature

American Nature and Health Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Time outdoors provides physical, mental and social-emotional health benefits for children, reducing stress while improving focus, mood and overall well-being. Yet, the United States lacks a consistent national framework to track children's daily outdoor experiences in nature. To fill this gap, the Children & Nature Network partnered with the Nature & Health Alliance to add caregiver-focused questions to the 2025 American Nature and Health Survey. This survey of 865 parents and caregivers of children under 18 compared current youth outdoor engagement against 2009 data.

KEY FINDINGS

A sharp decline: Children and youth spend far less time outdoors today than 15 years ago, marked by a significant drop in the percentage of youth spending four or more hours outside each week.

A peak in elementary school: Outdoor time peaks in elementary school, while infants, toddlers and teenagers spend the least time outside.

Nearby nature matters: Nearby green spaces, including backyards, local parks and schoolyards, along with nature-based programs, are essential gateways to nature for children and youth.

Climate and screen time barriers: Weather and screen time are the top barriers keeping children indoors.

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A sharp decline

Children and youth spend significantly less time outdoors in nature today than 15 years ago.

THE BIG PICTURE

This new set of numbers helps shape our understanding of children's time and experiences outdoors in nature in the United States. While some youth still get outside, most children miss out on adequate daily time outside in nature.

6 out of 10 children get less than 4 hours outside in nature a week; that's an average of less than 30 minutes a day.



6 in 10 get less than 4 hours

WHAT CHANGED SINCE 2009

In 2025, children and youth are spending less time outdoors in nature than they did in 2009. The share of kids spending very little time outdoors nearly tripled, while the share spending ample time outdoors dropped by more than a third.

Percentage changes since 2009 for ages 6-17

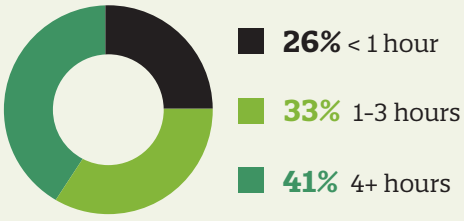


This graph depicts data from two different surveys and compares 6-17-year-old data from both, using conservative estimates.

A CLOSER LOOK AT 2025

Compared with 2009, children are spending less time in nature. In 2025, more than a quarter of kids ages 6-17 spend less than one hour a week outside in nature.

Average time outside in nature per week for ages 0-17 in 2025



Kids ages 6-17 who spend less than 1 hour a week outdoors in nature



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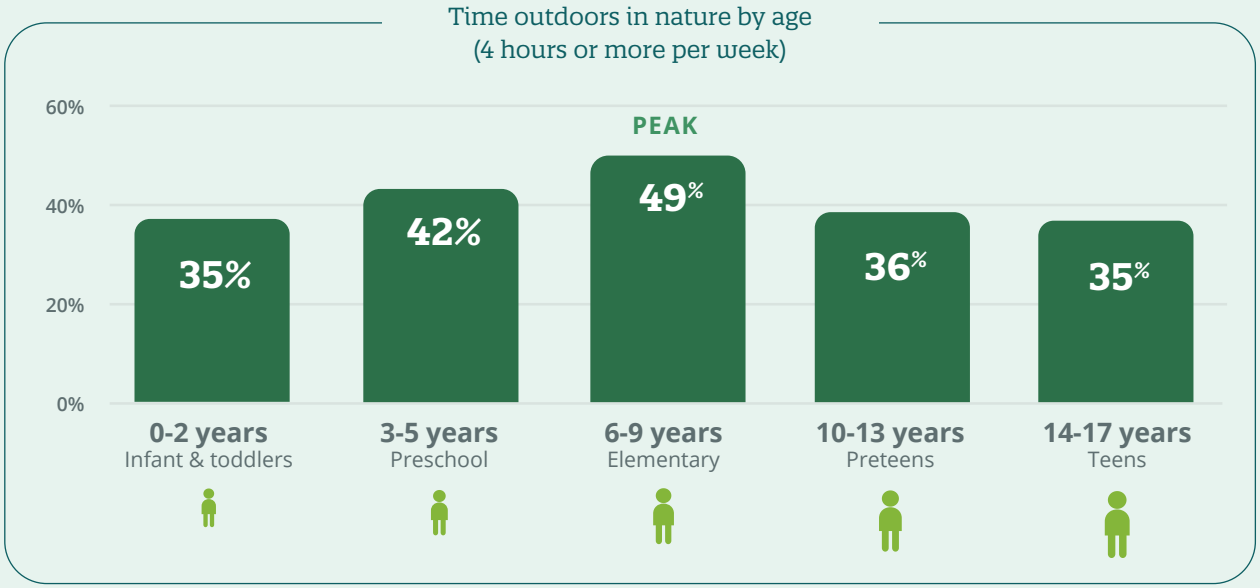
A peak in elementary school

Time outside in nature varies widely by age group, peaking in elementary school.

NATURE TIME BY AGE

Children's access to and experience of nature, as well as their developmental needs, vary widely by age.

The data show that outdoor time peaks in elementary school before dropping off. **Babies and toddlers spend surprisingly little time outdoors in nature, and time outside in nature declines again after age 10, reaching its lowest point during the teenage years.**



TEENS

20% of **14- to 17-year-olds** spend less than 30 minutes outside in nature each week, averaging **less than 5 minutes per day.**



2 in 10 teens average less than 5 minutes a day

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Nearby nature matters

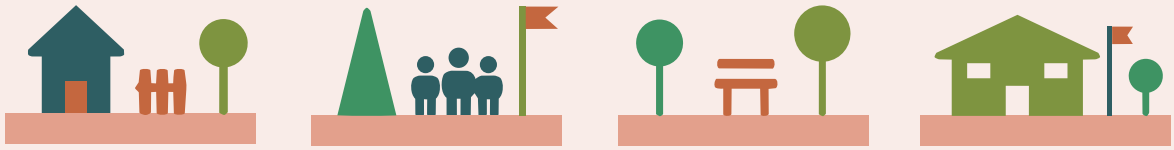
Nearby green spaces and nature-based programs are essential gateways to nature.

WHERE KIDS GET OUTSIDE

How and where kids access nature matters, highlighting the need for regular, accessible neighborhood green spaces and community programs. Family, community and peers are essential to spending time outdoors at all ages.

Informal, close-to-home locations are the primary gateways for children to connect with the outdoors. While younger kids rely heavily on backyards and playgrounds, teenagers increasingly seek out natural destinations like lakes, rivers, beaches, and trails for socializing, sports and time with pets.

Primary gateways to nature (all ages)



78%
Backyard
Primary Access

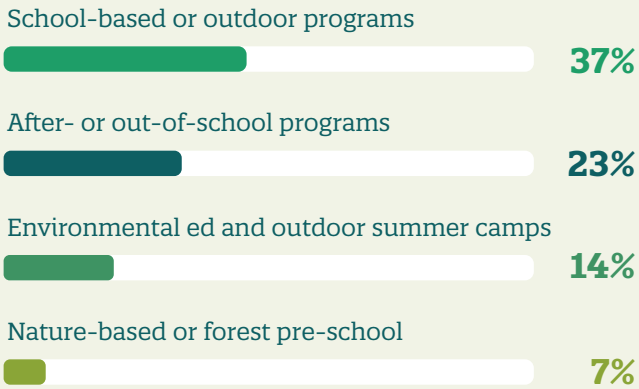
71%
Nature program
Joined one in the last year

67%
Nearby parks

46%
School grounds
Or childcare grounds

NATURE-BASED PROGRAMS

71% of children participated in at least one nature-based program in the last year, with school-based programs being the most popular.



Caregivers could choose all that apply.

PREFERRED ACTIVITIES IN NATURE

53% Free play

48% Socializing with friends/peers

44% Family activities

Caregivers could choose 3 activities, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

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Climate and screen time barriers

Weather and screen time are the top barriers keeping children indoors.

THE TOP TWO BARRIERS

What keeps kids from going outdoors in nature? Obstacles vary by age and family values, but caregivers consistently report climate and technology as the primary reasons children stay indoors. On the other hand, 5% or fewer of respondents reported logistical barriers like transportation, distance to parks and equipment costs.



52%

Weather and climate

Caregivers of children of all ages



55%

Screen time and technology

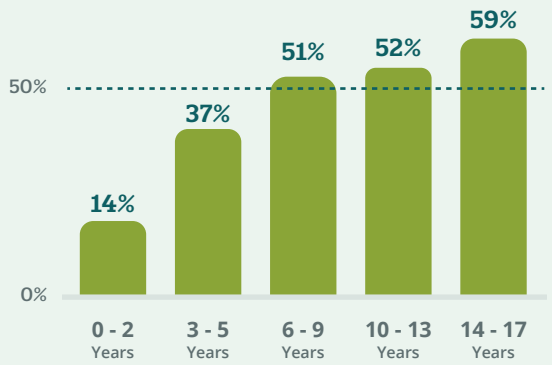
Caregivers of children ages 6 and older

DIGITAL DISTRACTION INCREASES WITH AGE

Starting at age 6, a majority of caregivers report that screens and technology become a barrier to time outdoors in nature.

Digital distractions were more likely among urban youth and youth living in high-income households.

Caregivers who say screens and technology are a barrier, by child's age



CAREGIVERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Caregiver attitudes toward time outdoors in nature play a significant role in children's experiences. Caregivers who value nature are significantly less likely to report barriers to their children spending time in nature, especially when it comes to children disliking nature or having safety concerns.

As caregiver time outdoors increased, children's time outdoors increased. **If caregivers believe it's important to spend time outdoors in nature, their children will spend more time outdoors.**

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Methods

The American Nature and Health Survey (ANHS) is a national survey of people's time outdoors across the United States. It ran online from October 6 to November 5, 2025, through the research platform Prolific. The survey included a nationally representative sample of 3,125 U.S. adults.

Investigators from the Nature & Health Alliance designed the survey. The Children & Nature Network convened an advisory group that developed an additional set of questions about children's time in nature and their experiences there.

From the larger group of adults, 865 said they were parents or caregivers of a child under 18. Each answered questions about one focus child's time and experiences outdoors in nature.

In this report, children and youth mean the same thing: ages 0-17. When we write about a specific age group, we use terms such as infants and toddlers (ages 0-2) and teenagers (ages 14-17).

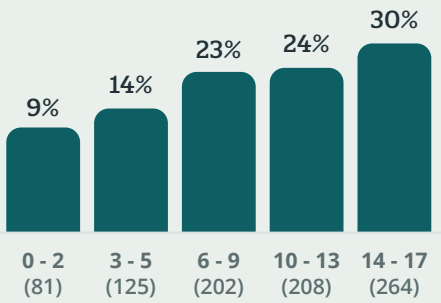
The survey counted time outdoors in green or natural spaces, such as:

- Green spaces in towns and cities (for example, parks, yards and gardens, rivers and trails)
- The countryside (for example, farmland, forests, mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, springs, trails and deserts)
- The coast (for example, beaches, lakes, dunes and shorelines), plus activities in the ocean, intercoastal waters, marshes, ponds and wetlands
- Places where children can interact with natural elements, such as animals, plants and landscape views

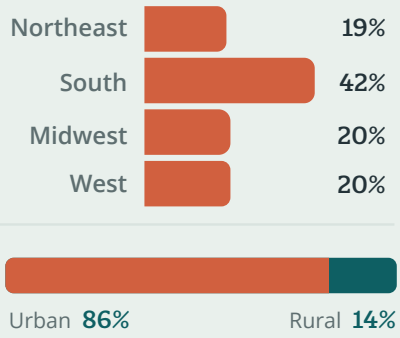
Respondents were asked not to count time their child spent outside that was not in green or natural spaces, including metal and plastic playgrounds, on artificial surfaces (such as parking lots and roads) and sports fields.

The survey team ran a series of statistical analyses to understand the relationship between exposures and outcomes, and to control for demographic influences as covariates. For the full technical report, including methodology and complete results, see the forthcoming manuscript, "Children's time in nature: a national study of outdoor activity patterns across the United States."

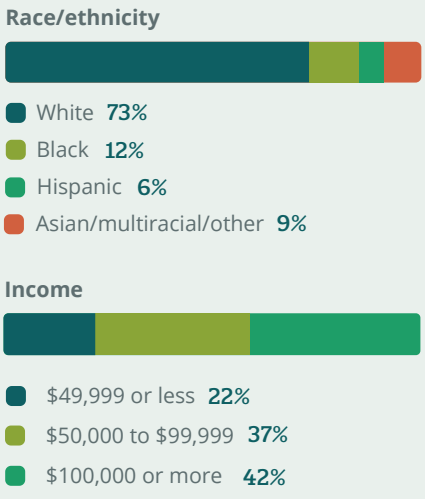
Children's age distribution



Geography



Caregiver attributes



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