



PRESENTS

EXERCISE OUTDOORS!TM

A curriculum with student activities that is ideal for middle school aged youth.

The "Exercise Outdoors!" curriculum is designed to teach youth about the health benefits of nature and to support their development of nature-based physical activity behaviors.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors

Courtney Schultz, PhD

Health & Technology Partners

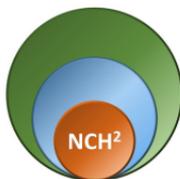
Teresa Horton, PhD

Northwestern University

John Henderson

Park Rx America

Partnering Organizations



This publication should be cited as follows:

Schultz, C.L., Horton, T., & Henderson, J. (2020). Exercise Outdoors! Middle School Curriculum and Activity Guide. Washington, DC: Park Rx America.

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM

The Exercise Outdoors![™] curriculum is designed to teach middle school (6th-8th grade) students about the health benefits of nature, and to support their development of nature-based physical activity behaviors, whether that is at a local park, around a green schoolyard, or even outside their home. These three activities are designed to get students outside and experiencing first-hand the health benefits of nature.

The Exercise Outdoors![™] activities are aligned to District of Columbia academic standards including the 2017 Physical Education Standards and the 2016 Health Education Standards.

Park Rx America (PRA) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to decrease the burden of chronic disease, increase health and happiness, and foster environmental stewardship by virtue of prescribing nature. PRA partners with schools and educators to promote healthy behaviors by connecting youth to nearby nature.

For more information and additional classroom resources visit:

www.parkrxamerica.org/studies/osse/

FUNDING FOR THIS CURRICULUM WAS PROVIDED BY THE NUTRITION EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (NEPA) GRANT AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION (OSSE). ITS CONTENTS ARE SOLELY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARK RX AMERICA AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE OFFICIAL VIEWS OF OSSE.



NATURE & HEALTH LESSON PLAN



Can Nature Make You Healthier?

TIME CONSIDERATIONS:

- One 50-minute period, or partly as homework

MATERIALS

- Drawing materials (e.g., crayons, markers, etc.); drawing paper; map of D.C. Parks.

OBJECTIVE

- Understand how nature and natural elements can positively impact health and well-being. Empower students to engage with nearby nature daily to help promote their own physical, mental, and emotional health.

BACKGROUND

Hundreds of research studies have demonstrated the benefits of both living near and spending time outdoors. Time spent in nature is associated with increased physical activity and a greater sense of well-being, which in turn decreases the risk of obesity, diabetes, depression, and other chronic conditions. Studies show forest bathing (i.e., being immersed in nature and intentionally engaging all your senses) leads to lower cortisol levels (a measure of stress), lower heart rate and blood pressure, and an increase in natural killer cells in the immune system. Spending time in nature can help people feel more rejuvenated and handle tasks, such as school homework, better.

Access to nature during the school day, even in children as young as preschoolers in Head Start programs, has been demonstrated to have numerous advantages for children. Outdoor classrooms have been shown to improve test scores, attentiveness, and creativity.

Health Education & Physical Education Standards

Health Education Health Promotion

6-8.4.1.2. Describe how exposure to environmental factors can impact health.

Physical Education Health

S5.M2.6. Identifies components of physical activity that provide opportunities for reducing stress and for social interaction.

S5.M2.7. Identifies positive mental and emotional aspects of participating in a variety of physical activities.

S5.M2.8. Analyzes the empowering consequences of being physically active.

Green schoolyards with variety in landscaping (e.g., trees, logs, shrubs, rocks, sand, and water) support a wider range of play activities and active play. Connecting to these natural elements, such as trees or garden plants, can help build resiliency, decrease negative emotions, and promote calmer, less stressed students. Spending time in nature can help improve relationship skills, social skills, and strengthen social and emotional connections with others.

Time outdoors also helps to decrease behavioral problems in students with and without attention deficit disorder. Studies indicate that psychological benefits, such as executive function, socialization, conflict resolution skills, resiliency and self-esteem, are better in those exposed to an outdoor component during the school day, such as an outdoor classroom or a green schoolyard. Children who spend more time outdoors can also benefit physically, resulting in a decreased risk of asthma and myopia (nearsightedness), lower blood pressure, and decreased body mass index (BMI) and risk of obesity through increased physical activity.

ACTIVITY: Mapping Nature Impacts on Health

Ask students the following question: "How do nature elements in parks impact your health?" Explain to students that they are going to examine a local nature spot and list how elements of that place positively impact their health.

First, ask students to select D.C. parks or nature spaces that they have experienced (i.e., a green schoolyard).

Second, prompt students to draw out the various features and elements that they enjoyed in that selected space.

Third, direct students to make connections between their own health and the influence of those features and elements. Students should begin jotting down these connections on their drawing. For instance, a student might draw a picture of the basketball courts and talk about the benefits of spending time with friends while getting some exercise.

Fourth, ask the students to share out some of the nature features that have impacted their health. Spend time discussing the importance of nature on health outcomes and work collectively to brainstorm what the ideal green schoolyard would look like at your school.

ASSESSMENT

1. Describe the importance of nature to human health. Give at least two examples of how nature impacts human health.
2. Create an ideal schoolyard that incorporates key elements of nature that promotes physical, emotional, and social health.

GOAL CREATION LESSON PLAN



Design Your Own Exercise Outdoors! Goal

TIME CONSIDERATIONS:

- One 50-minute period, or partly as homework

MATERIALS

- Either a Park Rx America (PRA) Goal Setting pad OR access to the PRA online Goal Setting and Tracking platform (parkrxamerica.org); copies of all student pages.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will (1) consider how self-selected physical activities create enjoyment, (2) describe how being confident outdoors creates enjoyment, and (3) set a short-term goal for exercising outdoors.

BACKGROUND

Did you know? Today's students are spending less time outdoors; an average of just 4–7 minutes a day is spent outside in free play, but 6 or more hours are spent in front of a screen. Increased sedentary behavior has led to skyrocketing chronic health conditions including obesity, diabetes, and mental health disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression, and suicide). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that students ages 6–17 years engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily.

However, exercising outside (whether that is gardening, riding a bike, doing yoga, forest bathing, or playing soccer) has even greater improvements on both physical and mental health. A recent study found that spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature resulted in additional wellbeing outcomes.

Health Education & Physical Education Standards

Health Education Goal Setting

6-8.4.6.15. Set a short-term goal for practicing positive health practices.

Physical Education Self- Expression & Enjoyment

S5.M4.6. Describes how moving competently in a physical activity setting creates enjoyment.

S5.M4.7. Identifies why self-selected physical activities create enjoyment.

S5.M4.8. Discusses how enjoyment could be increased in self-selected physical activities.

ACTIVITY: Creating Individual Exercise Outdoors! Goals for Students

At the end of this activity, students will have thoughtfully created their personalized Exercise Outdoors! Goal. This goal might last for a month, a quarter, or even the full school year; pick a time frame that matches your classroom goals.

Begin by asking students the following questions: "If you had to exercise outside at least once a week, what would that look like? What activity would you do? Where would you go? How long would you like to spend outside? Who would you go with?"

One way to help prepare students for success is to help them think about the potential barriers, or challenges, to successfully completing their weekly goal. What will they do if they feel unsafe outside? How will they cope with changing weather?

Many times students have a favorite outdoor place. It might not be a park, and that's okay. Find out where they like to go, even if that is a backyard, a balcony, or even a community garden! Sometimes when we say "outdoors," it brings to mind scary creatures like snakes and spiders, or unsafe parks, or places where we aren't welcomed. Take the time to talk with your students about their fears and make sure that their goal fits every aspect of who they are.

New to creating Exercise Outdoors! Goals?

For easier management of students' Exercise Outdoors! Goals, head over to www.parkrxamerica.org/ask/osse/ to create a free account and watch the one-minute video to better understand how to find a location for setting Exercise Outdoors! Goals. Additional resources for creating an account and setting Exercise Outdoors! Goals can also be found at www.parkrxamerica.org/ask/osse/.

ASSESSMENT

1. Write a short-term goal for exercising outdoors.
2. Answer the following question:
 - 6th Graders: Describe how moving competently in a physical activity setting creates enjoyment.
 - 7th Graders: Identify why self-selected physical activities create enjoyment.
 - 8th Graders: Discuss how enjoyment could be increased in self-selected physical activities.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section: _____

Score: _____

Exercise Outdoors!

Goal Creation

Where would you like to spend additional time outside? This can be a place or a space.

What activity would you enjoy doing every week outside? Think about what you already enjoy doing outside.

How many times a week would you like to spend time outdoors? Try to consider what else you do in a week. Is your goal reasonable?

Each time you go outside, how long would you like to spend engaged in your selected activity?

Is there anyone you would like to spend additional time outside with? Consider if your goal will include a friend or family member or just yourself.

What might make it hard to complete your goal weekly? How might you overcome those challenges?

GOAL TRACKING LESSON PLAN

Track your Exercise Outdoors! Goal

TIME CONSIDERATIONS:

One 50-minute period, or partly as homework

MATERIALS

Copies of all student pages; Park Rx Exercise Outdoors! Mobile App (available on all platforms: iPhone, Android, and Windows).

OBJECTIVES

Students will (1) track their performance in getting outside with their Exercise Outdoors! Goal and (2) will discuss why getting outside to exercise is an important health-promoting behavior.

BACKGROUND

Behavior change can be difficult. It is hard developing new routines, behaviors, and attitudes. Luckily, there are many research studies dedicated to understanding what leads to successful health behavior changes.

One such approach is the Transtheoretical Model of Health Behavior Change. This model states that there are six stages of change. Health-promoting behaviors often begin in the Precontemplation stage (being unaware of the problem), before moving through to the Contemplation stage (awareness of the problem and the desired behavior change) and into the Preparation (taking steps toward action).

The tracking activity will help your students manage both the Action stage (practicing the behavior) and the Maintenance stage (working to sustain the behavior change). Successful health behavior change often stems

Health Education & Physical Education Standards

Health Education Health Promotion

6-8.4.1.1. Explain the importance of practicing health-promoting behaviors.

Physical Education Engages in Physical Activity

S3.M2.6. Participates in self-selected physical activity outside of physical education class.

S3.M2.7. Participates in a physical activity 2 times a week outside of physical education class.

S3.M2.8. Participates in a physical activity 3 times a week outside of physical education class.

EXERCISE OUTDOORS! GOAL TRACKING LESSON PLAN

from two things: receiving positive reinforcement; and receiving positive encouragement and support. As a class, you might select a reward, such as a classroom party, if all students complete at least 90% of their Exercise Outdoors! Goal.

Along the way, as you are reviewing your student's goal tracking, don't forget to provide positive reinforcement by praising your students each time they successfully complete their weekly Exercise Outdoors! Goal. A kind word of encouragement never goes amiss!

ACTIVITY

Students will learn how to track their Exercise Outdoors! Goal and will examine why the development of their new healthy behavior is so important for their well-being.

Guide students with an Exercise Outdoors! Goal to the Exercise Outdoors! Goal website or via the mobile app (www.parkrxamerica.org/osse). Students can access their Exercise Outdoors! Goal through the Exercise Outdoors! Mobile App or by going online to www.parkrxamerica.org/rx and entering their unique Exercise Outdoors! Goal code to bring up their personal Exercise Outdoors! Goal Tracker page.

Explain to students that each time they successfully complete their Exercise Outdoors! Goal, they will need to record that activity either using the online app, the website, or the paper tracker.

ASSESSMENT

1. Complete the Exercise Outdoors! Goal Tracker (either app or paper) for each week.
2. Explain the importance of practicing health-promoting behaviors.
3. Discuss what you have learned about health behavior changes from tracking your Exercise Outdoors! Goal.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section: _____

Score: _____

EXERCISE OUTDOORS! GOAL TRACKING

	TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	HOW LONG? (MINUTES)	WHERE?
MONDAY			
TUESDAY			
WEDNESDAY			
THURSDAY			
FRIDAY			