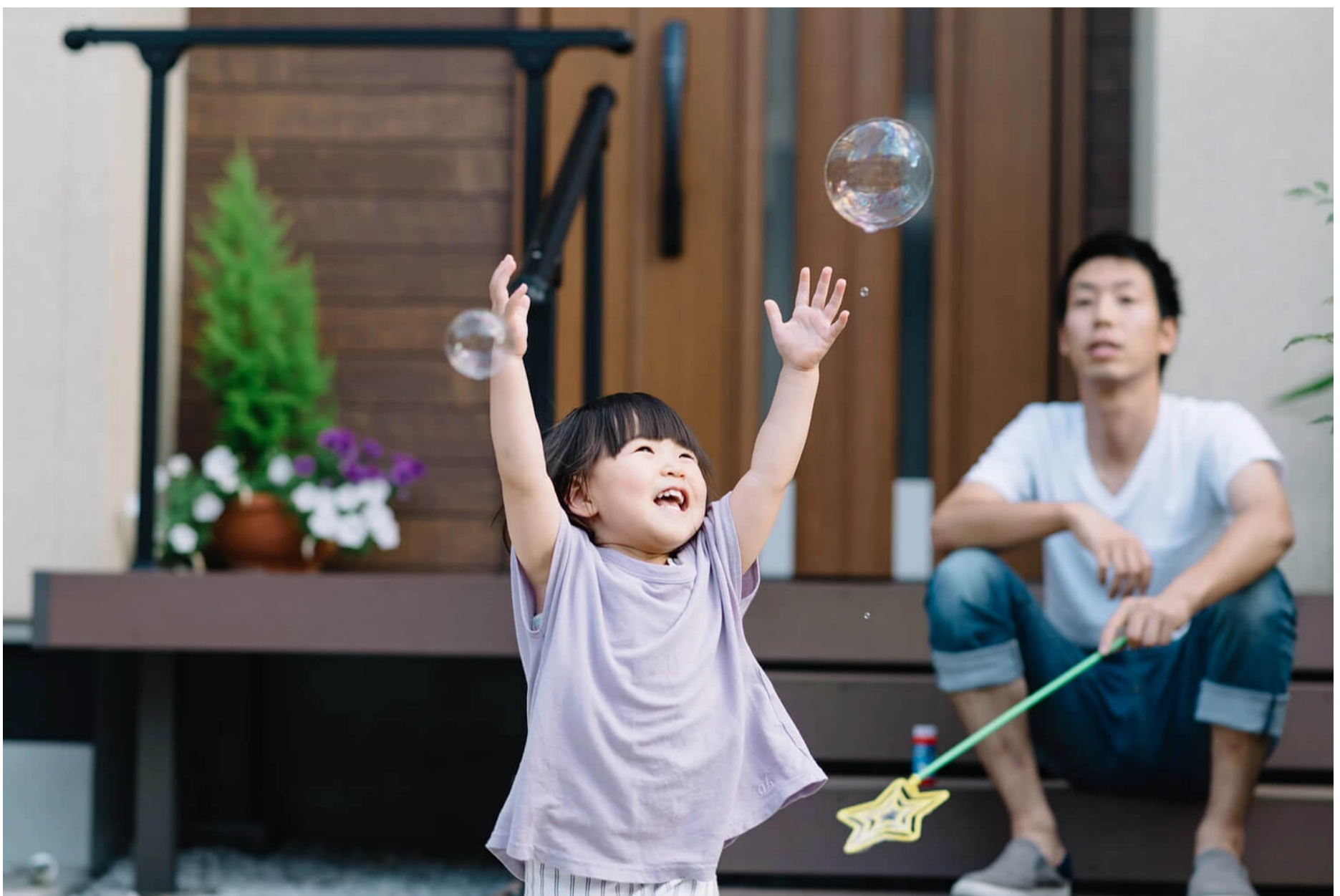


Screen-Free Steps to Deepen your Connection to Nature during Quarantine



RACHEL FRANZ, CAMPAIGN FOR A COMMERCIAL-FREE CHILDHOOD | MAY 2020



Have you tuned in to your body lately after a long day in front of the computer or after a lost hour of scrolling through your social media? For me, I notice my shoulders are tense, my brow sometimes needs pulling up after I've been squinting or frowning at image upon image on my screen, and I get grumpy. As an adult, I know that after a day like this, I need to balance it out. I make dinner without Netflix on, I lay in my hammock on a warm day, I hug a friend (or, with social distancing, I hug my cat).

We can only imagine the sensation inside a child's body after 2, 3, 7 hours on a device. For children and teens, those coping mechanisms aren't automatic. Kids benefit from an intentional strategy when breaking from screens. They deserve a chance to really tune in to their bodies and into the world around them- especially into nature.

Yet, managing screen time during social distancing as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak has become a full-time job in itself. In the past, we at [Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood](#) have hosted Screen-Free Week, the annual, international celebration that encourages children, families, schools, and communities to set aside entertainment screens for a week and instead fill their free time with all kinds of screen-free fun. **This year, in light of the virus, we bring you [Screen-Free Saturdays!](#)**

To amplify your outside time on Saturdays (or, any day), consider these six suggestions to reconnect (to nature) while you disconnect (from screens):

1. Go screen-free for a day. Screen-Free Saturdays are a chance for us to commit to those mindful, purposeful breaks from screens to support our kids (and ourselves). There are no rules around how to spend your time- except to hide away those entertainment screens in favor of rediscovering your connection to yourself, your family, your kids... and [to nature](#). Some children commit to finally doing that 100-piece puzzle. Others hike, garden, have dance parties, and relax in the grass, watching the clouds. It's *their* day- a time to really be a kid.

One of the best parts of Screen-Free Saturdays is that, once you ritualize it, it eliminates the battle between screens and outside time. For many families, this is a huge point of contention and a barrier to holding a conversation at the dinner table or ushering kids into real, meaningful play inside and out.

Challenges like [1000 Hours Outside](#) have people across the globe tracking their hours and setting intentions around getting into nature- whatever nature looks like for their family. If you'd usually spend 2 hours per day in front of the TV, can you match it and spend 2 hours outside? What about different types of weather? Can you aim to experience at least one fun/rainy/jump in puddles/get soaked kind of day?

2. Share a meal outside. Screen-use during dinner is common in households across the nation, especially those with [adolescents living under their roofs](#). Whether you're barbecuing, packing a picnic dinner, or cooking over a campfire, eating a meal outside is a fantastic way to reconnect with each other at the dinner table (or, picnic blanket). If you're inside during lockdown, set that picnic blanket up in the living room and turn off the TV. Appreciating nature can happen in so many ways.

3. Rediscover the dark. Give a kid a flashlight, and it's game on. Discovering the critters and changes in the backyard or local park at night offers a different way to connect with nature. If safety is a concern for your family after dark, "camp out" inside with a blanket and cushion tent, visit your building's rooftop, or set up on the front stoop.

Want to amp up your after dark fun? I was recently introduced to glow in the dark books, and they have increased the magic of being outside with small children. These make reading possible in so many new places.

Photo by Amy Davis, 1000 Hours Outside Facebook Post

4. Create a “yes” space outside. How often do we catch each other saying ‘no’ to our kids lately? Or, maybe we’re saying ‘yes’ to more screen distraction but ‘no’ to kid-led, open-ended play? The key to being able to provide for our kids’ needs while also working from home is to be able to say yes to independent play opportunities. And we can do that more by crafting a space that has all the safeguards in place to limit risk and maximize creativity. Maybe this is inviting the kids to play in the fenced-in backyard. Maybe this is setting boundaries around the neighborhood with walkie-talkies. Maybe this is a small space for your toddler out on the balcony. This resource from Janet Lansbury offers suggestions on [how to create a “yes” space outdoors without a yard](#).

5. Notice. How does your experience outside change how your body feels throughout the day? How are you sleeping? Eating? Breathing? Conversations like these can be had with even the littlest outdoor explorers and are critical to helping children to develop those skills to help them take care of themselves, especially if they are on screens a little bit more than usual lately.

Whatever you do with your time together, whether it’s watching the pigeons out the window, taking a walk in the neighborhood, or making a pillow tent in the living room, let it be a tool for a deeper relationship with the outdoors and a lesson in self-care and connection. We all need it, especially our kids.

The Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, which hosts Screen-Free Week and Screen-Free Saturdays, invites nature lovers everywhere to download free Screen-Free resources and join us for Screen-Free Saturdays [here](#).

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