

Nurture with Nature!



Reconnecting teens with nature has been shown to help them focus in school, boost a positive attitude and increase physical activity. Youth are certainly losing touch with the outdoors—a Canadian study shows that the number of children and youth who play outside at school decreases from 87% to 17% between grades 3 and 11. Seventy percent of youth spend an hour or less outdoors daily.

The effects of exposing and connecting teens to nature are widespread and valuable. Older children who spend more time outside are not only more physically active but also have healthier body weights. Physical activity in outdoor environments improves mental health even more than in other settings and this makes less irritable teenagers.

These improvements in mood and outlook can contribute to better body image and self esteem. Consistent, positive relationships also exist between students' exposure to nature, test scores and graduation rates.

How can parents help:

- Involve your teen in planning—hikes, kayaking, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, camping. A personal investment is a powerful way to help connect teens to the natural world around them.
- A garden of their own can help provide youth with structure as they compete with pressures from all areas of their lives. Control over what gets cultivated and maintenance of the fruits of their labor offers both physical and mental outlets.
- Advocate for more time outside for your teens at school, be it through extra gym classes outside or making outdoor learning a part of other class lessons.

For more information and ideas, visit the Children and Nature Network at www.childrenandnature.org.

Does your child's school have an AMA Youth Run Club?

The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) and Ever Active Schools have brought a free, award-winning program for school-aged children to Alberta schools. We can provide your school with resources and support -- from scratch or to enrich an existing run club. Learn about how to get your child's school involved at www.everactive.org/alberta-medical-association-youth-run-club.

Teen Driver Safety

Driving is a risky experience for all of us but it is most risky for teenagers in their first year of unsupervised driving. Car crashes are the leading cause of death among teens in Alberta. Not all risk is bad; risk is a necessary part of healthy teen development. It is important that teens take **Smart Risks** when driving. For more information on the smart risk approach visit: www.albertahealthservices.ca/4938.asp

Encourage your teen to **Look First**. This means being prepared to drive, every time by checking road conditions and mapping routes before they get into their car. It is also important to check tires, adjust seats and rearview mirrors before driving. Remind your teen to **Buckle up**, no matter how short the drive. It is the law. Teens can **Get Trained** by taking a driver's ed course from an unbiased expert who has years of experience teaching new drivers. Enforce with your teen that it is the law to **Drive sober**. Set a rule against drinking and driving.

Aside from encouraging your teen to take smart risks when driving, there are many things you can do to help keep your teen safe:

- 1) Set a good example behind the wheel by modeling the smart risk behaviours above. Always wear your seatbelt, never speed and be respectful of other drivers and pedestrians on the road.
- 2) In addition to driver's ed, teach your teen how to drive under your supervision in low risk conditions before moving up to more risky situations.
- 3) Stay informed about Alberta's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws and start a conversation with your teen about it.
- 4) Using the [Parent/Teen Driving Agreement](#) with your teen can help you with all of these things. This agreement will help you start and keep an open, honest dialogue with your teen about their driving behaviour. It will also help you work together to set boundaries and build trust.