



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

News Release



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New Passport Program is a “Dose of Nature” to Make Healthier Kids-

Nonsense you say! A “Dose of Nature” makes healthier kids?

Well it's true! The evidence has been building for years and it is time to show parents a program that puts kids on a path that connects them with the natural world and counteracts a growing series of childhood health problems.

California State Parks and Sonoma County Regional Parks have joined forces to launch the Outdoor Parks Passport. The program is designed to give parents and their children strong incentives for visiting parks, because doing so on a regular basis does contribute to healthier kids.

Using the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights, signed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sonoma County Regional Parks and California State Parks have created a program that encourages children to make 10 discoveries in the parks of California. The Outdoor Parks Passport highlights ten fun activities found in parks that will improve the physical and mental well-being of America's children, while they are having loads of fun, getting lots of exercise, and learning about the natural world around them. That's kind of like taking your medicine, and loving it.



The two park agencies are unveiling the Outdoor Passport Program for the first time in concert with a park celebration held annually in Sonoma County parks called *The Parks Celebration*, held in April at many of the 45 Regional Parks. The program will run from April 1 through October 31.

Studies from all across the country are showing that the next generation of children in America is suffering from increased health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, attention deficit disorder, childhood stress and more. These same studies conclude that for the first time ever, kids growing up today are expected to live shorter lives than their parents.

For energy efficient recreation –
California State Parks on the Internet: <<http://www.parks.ca.gov>>



How does this Outdoor Parks Passport work? The Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights lists ten things that children can do to lead healthier lives and make a connection to the natural world. For instance, one of the ten is very simple: Splash in the Water. There are lots of parks where kids can do a little swimming and splashing around, looking for fish and experiencing streambeds and tide pools. Another of the ten is: Follow a Trail. What better way to explore nature with parents and friends and work off that special lunch you had while sitting on a rock beside a flowing stream?

Here's another health connection. In making those ten discoveries, children are experiencing natural areas of greenery and forests, plants and animals, creeks, waterways and marine life and they are finding pathways to exciting and stimulating adventures. Why is this good? The studies show that experiences in the outback, getting out of the fast paced, constant buzz of city life and into the peace and solitude of park settings, reduces stress and attention deficit disorders. In addition, the experience creates a physical exertion that combats obesity and it creates an excitement that encourages children to know more about the wonders of the natural world around them.

If you want to join the group on the trail or at the campsite, the Outdoor Passport can be found on the Sonoma Regional Parks Website and/or the California State Parks' website. Here they are:

www.kids.parks.ca.gov -- Click on Outdoor Parks Passport

www.sonoma-county.org/parks/ -- Click on Outdoor Parks Passport

From either of the websites, a child or parent can download 12 pages. The first page is the introductory page giving instructions to both parents and children. On the following pages, one will find the ten Rights and a listing of suggested parks for planning an outing.

Next, each child can do something really cool. They can personalize each of the pages with a reflection of their own personal experiences and adventures, adding such things as a photograph, story, drawing, a rubbing, artwork or other creative invention that portrays that particular experience. It's a way kids can rave about their experiences in the outback of Sonoma County and show off just a bit. Kids are also given a special email address on the Passport so they can write to us about their adventures.

When a child completes all ten of the discoveries, they can download the certificate of completion. We think kids will be wide-eyed and excited about filling in their fun stories about the critters, crawlers, tide pool residents, birds, hiking trails and outback experiences.

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