

Teach health & physical education using the environment

In December 2001 U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher released a report decrying the deplorable physical condition into which we Americans have slid. Today, more than ever, it's critical that we teach children to pursue and enjoy physical activity and good health.

The good news is, healthy kids and a healthy environment are closely intertwined. Efforts to help children understand and appreciate the natural environment often involve physical activities. Environmental education in areas such as water and air quality form a natural bridge to discussions of personal and public health.

At the same time, physical education and health classes can readily incorporate environmental education. In physical education, we can explore activities such as hiking, orienteering, bicycling, archery, and skiing that offer both opportunities to stay fit and incentives to be good stewards of the natural world. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion recommends that school health programs include topics such as environmental health. Along with talks about tobacco and nutrition, our children need life lessons on keeping the world around them healthy for themselves and other living things.

Here are some suggestions for blending environmental education and physical/health education:

- **Take a hike.** Whenever possible, do your environmental education outdoors, on the move. Keep those bodies as well as brains busy!
- **Plan a field trip to a state or county park or other natural area.** Your students may not be aware of the opportunities for outdoor recreation in their own community.
- **Incorporate large-motor activities into learning.** Don't just talk about predator-prey interactions; have kids be birds and bugs and act them out. Turn reviews of facts into relay games.
- **Hold an environmental field day.** Set aside one day for outdoor learning, where children move from station to station to learn about various environmental topics.
- **Include environment-related topics** such as Lyme disease and pollution issues in your health classes.
- **Visit an environmental learning center as a class.** Activities and resources such as ropes courses, predator/prey games, and climbing walls promote both physical fitness and environmental awareness.

- **Take it easy on the Internet.** It can be tempting to learn and teach about the environment through action-packed Web pages. These are valuable resources-but shouldn't substitute for hands-on experiences in the out-of-doors. Study the water cycle in the classroom--but don't forget to go outside and get wet, too!

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


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