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## Author extols the virtues of kids playing outdoors

BY FRED MANN  
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Many adults still have a sense of wonder about nature inspired by a special place outdoors they used to hang out when they were children.

Kids today are missing out on that feeling, to the detriment of their physical, mental and emotional health, Richard Louv, an author and journalist from San Diego, said Monday in a talk at Century II.

"Nature is in us, it's who we are," Louv said.

But these days, nature to kids has become something separate, something "out there," he said.

Louv, author of "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder," spoke as part of the two-day Kansas Health Summit sponsored by the Kansas Health Foundation and a host of state and local health, environment and recreation organizations.

He recalled the woods near his home in Raytown, Mo., where he grew up.

"I owned those woods. Those woods are in my heart still," he said.

Kids have lost that sense of ownership of nature in the past 30 years, he said. They have been disconnected from the outdoors for many reasons, not all of them having to do with video games.

Urban design that limits contact with nature, a fear among parents of kids interacting with strangers, and school policies that restrict play are among the factors to blame, Louv said.

"It's gotten to the point where it's not certain... that our culture will remember a time that it was considered not only normal but expected for kids to go out in play in the fields or the woods -- that kind of independent play, that kind of hands-dirty, feet-wet play," Louv said.

Studies show kids score higher on tests and are more creative and healthier with even a little contact with nature, he said.

Research also suggests that problems such as childhood obesity, attention deficit disorder and depression could be alleviated to some extent by such contact.

A frenetic schedule of sports events isn't the answer, he said.

The kind of independent play where you ran home, threw your books on the couch and raced outside to play is what's missing, Louv said.

There are signs of hope, he said. Cities and states are initiating campaigns to get kids outdoors. Congress has passed legislation with the same goal.

More and more parents are becoming aware of the issue and making sure their kids have contact with nature.

"Adults who take children outside into nature receive all the same benefits," Louv said.

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