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AUSSIE KIDS DON'T CLIMB TREES ANYMORE

Experts urge children to get outdoors as new research uncovers a massive decline in outdoor play across the generations

Most Aussie kids don't climb trees anymore, according to new research from Planet Ark. Once a symbol of an idyllic childhood, this nature-loving pastime is so significantly on the decline that only 19% of Australian children enjoy a clamber in their local tree.

Our children's love affair with the great outdoors is waning so rapidly that 10% of kids today play outside just once a week and only 35% of children play outside everyday compared to 72% of kids a generation ago. Experts are urging Australian parents to help get our kids back outdoors to ensure the social, emotional and physical development of current and future generations.

The findings and report released today are part of an independent study commissioned by Planet Ark and sponsored by Toyota, titled *Climbing Trees – Getting Aussie Kids Back Outdoors*, to raise awareness of National Tree Day on Sunday 31 July, Australia's biggest tree planting and nature based event.

The landscape of childhood has changed so significantly in just one generation that 73% of Aussie parents agreed that they played outside more often than indoors compared to only 13% of their children.

The choice of outdoor activities between generations has also changed with activities like jump rope, hopscotch and street games down from 66% to 29%, exploring nature down from 65% to 28%, and only 19% of children climbing trees today compared to 64% of children a generation ago. Furthermore, 73% of people stated that they played on their street as kids but only 24% of their children do the same.

The barriers to outside play include crime and safety concerns with 87% of respondents saying they were worried about letting kids play games on the street like they once used to and one in four parents saying they simply don't have enough time to play outdoors with their kids anymore.

However, the research indicated that Australians overwhelmingly agreed on the benefits of outdoor play for the positive development of our next generation of kids, with 92% saying it allowed children to use their imaginations, 93% agreeing that it helped develop physical and motor skills, and 90% saying it provided a positive outlet for reducing stress.

Professor Anita Bundy, an internationally renowned academic in the area of children's occupational therapy and assessment from The University of Sydney is leading the charge to address the decrease in children's play outdoors.

Professor Bundy's current research in this area focuses on the benefits for children of providing opportunities for unstructured play in schools to increase children's activity levels and playfulness. She hopes the work will revolutionise school playgrounds, leading to the introduction of more natural play spaces and unstructured equipment that stimulate more creative outdoor play.

"Our current research stems from the worry that children's emotional wellbeing, creativity and social skills are impaired by the decrease in outdoor play. While parents understandably prioritise safety, what they seem to forget is that playing outdoors—especially with friends-- contributes to experiences and skills that promote safety", said Professor Bundy.

Planet Ark's Rebecca Gilling says "Making outdoor activity a habit for kids can be easy, if you know how. Some ideas to try include climbing a tree, playing street cricket, riding a bike, going for a bushwalk, walking the dog or even camping in the backyard!

"Planet Ark is calling on Australian parents, grandparents and teachers to make this year's National Tree Day the beginning of the push to get Aussie kids back outdoors to make – EVERY DAY Tree Day!"

For more information and to find your nearest Tree Day site, please visit treeday.planetark.org or call the National Tree Day Hotline on 1300 55 8000.

National Tree Day is organised by **Planet Ark** in partnership with **Toyota** and its dealer Network, which provide on-the-ground support at local and community tree-planting sites Australia wide.

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Climbing Trees – Getting Aussie Kids Back Outdoors, is an independent study commissioned by Planet Ark (and sponsored by Toyota Australia) in March 2011. It was conducted by Pollinate, a specialist communications research company, to investigate childhood interaction with nature and how this interaction is changing.

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