

Mary McCourt  
Let's Move! Missoula Coordinator  
**406-258-3895**  
mmccourt@co.missoula.mt.us  
Missoula City-County Health Department  
301 W. Alder Missoula, MT 59802



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Fast Facts:

- Let's Move Missoula and Missoula Best Beginnings Council are sponsoring Unplug and Play Outside Week April 21 through April 28--a week-long series of screen-free activities for children.
- Families are invited to the free Unplug and Play Outside festival on Sunday, April 21, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at McCormick Park.
- Learn more at [www.unplugmissoula.org](http://www.unplugmissoula.org).

### Missoula agencies encourage families to unplug and play

Let's Move! Missoula and Missoula Best Beginnings Council are encouraging kids to "Unplug and Play Outside!" April 21-28. Unplug and Play Week challenges to families to limit recreational screens for the week of April 21-28 and reap the many benefits. The program encourages kids to get outside, spend more time at unstructured play, re-connect with friends and neighbors, and take advantage of Missoula's endless opportunities for screen-free fun and relaxation. "Unplug and Play!" is part of a global campaign to educate families about the detrimental effects of too much screen time from television, computers, gaming systems, portable music players and cell phones.

Families are invited to the Unplug and Play Outside! kick-off event on Sunday, April 21, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., at McCormick Park. Missoula Parks and Recreation and their partners are hosting over 20 fun outdoor activities for kids. Kids can shoot some hoops with Lady Griz basketball stars, or try their hands at fencing, pickleball, jump rope, Frisbee golf, a climbing wall and much more. The event is free and healthy snacks will be served.

Several local organizations are hosting free or low-cost events during "Unplug and Play Outside!" week. Kids and their parents can enjoy a \$1 swim at Currents Aquatics Center, jump and tumble at gymnastics; listen to a favorite story at Missoula Public Library and more. The full schedule is available at [www.unplugmissoula.org](http://www.unplugmissoula.org).

Let's Move Missoula is sponsoring Unplug and Play Outside week to help promote healthy lifestyles for Missoula youth. The group points to the large and growing body of evidence which illustrates the need for kids to spend less time in front of screens and more time in play activities, especially unstructured play that includes nature.

"We know that excessive screen time is partially responsible for the childhood obesity epidemic. Kids who are using their recreational time to sit in front of a screen are not expending the amount of energy that will help them maintain a healthy weight. In addition, and equally important, are the many benefits of unstructured play that kids are missing out on," says City-County Health Department Let's Move! Missoula Coordinator Mary McCourt.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institutes of Health:

- Every day, children ages eight to 18 spend more than six hours watching TV, playing video games or using the computer for recreational purposes.
- The more time youth spend in front of the screen, the more likely they are to be overweight.
- Overweight is highest among children watching four or more hours a day.
- Research has shown that children who reduced their screen time showed decreases in body mass index (BMI), which measures body fat related to height.

Worldwide celebrations of Screen-Free Week are supported by leading health and education organizations including the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, National Education Association, and President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

Research supports reduced screen time for kids. "Study after study demonstrates kids who spend less time in front of screens weigh less, eat healthier food, sleep better, do better in school, read more, and are less prone to risky behaviors. Doing more while watching less is the smart choice," explains Rebecca Morley, Eat Smart Coordinator for Missoula City County Health Department.

The National Institutes of Health offers these tips for parents:

- Agree to limit screen time to no more than 2 hours a day.
- Don't put a TV in your child's bedroom.
- Take a family walk after dinner instead of turning on the TV.
- Turn off the TV and play outdoors.

For more information on Unplug and Play! week in Missoula, visit [www.unplugmissoula.org](http://www.unplugmissoula.org), stop by Currents Aquatics Center, or phone the City-County Health Department at 258-3895 or 258-3827.

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***Media Note - Attachments:***

- Unplug And Play Outside Program Guide
- Missoula Forum For Children and Youth Unplug and Play "Why Unplug and Play Is Important"
- Best Beginnings Council Program Overview



The Missoula Best Beginnings Council (BBC) was formed to serve as a comprehensive voice for early childhood in our community. Members of BBC provide expertise in Home Visiting and Early Childhood Education and School Readiness. Through collaboration, Best Beginnings is committed to improving the health and developmental outcomes for all of our young children. Together the agencies, organizations, and individuals of Best Beginnings explore current early childhood systems in Missoula County, foster relationships between agencies and community members, and analyze strengths and challenges to improving support for children and their families. In the summer of 2012, Best Beginnings completed a comprehensive Missoula Early Childhood Needs Assessment which provides direction for the council as it moves forward to reduce duplication and address gaps in early childhood services. Through its many resources the Missoula community consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to providing an environment that supports our youngest children. Best Beginnings is honored to be an active member of the team!

**Funding for Unplug & Play is made possible by Missoula Best Beginnings Council through a grant from the Department of Public Health and Human Services.**





## Why Unplugging and Playing is So Important

Many of us know intuitively that it is important for kids to get away from the screen and into their environment. However, many of us are not sure why this is true. Here are a few researchers' opinions about why this is true.

- ◆ Kids that are physically active tend to be more successful in academics, be more positive, and have more confidence than their counterparts who are sedentary (Ratey, 2008).
- ◆ Engagement in extracurricular activities is associated with better grades, less discipline, better attendance, and improved social skills (Lawhorn, 2008).
- ◆ Children that regularly experience imaginative play in their natural environment are less likely to suffer from obesity, depression, and attention disorders (Louv, 2008).
- ◆ Kids that engage in more screen time have increased difficulty with attachment to both peers and parents alike (Richards, et al., 2010). That is to say that the relationship and connection between the child and parent is negatively associated by increased screen time use.

One thing that you may notice from the research above is that none of it mentions competitive sports. Sports are one of many ways to address these points, but there are many more activities that vary greatly in regards to cost, intensity, complexity, and necessary skill.

The take home message is that your child does not have to go on epic adventures in dangerous places in order to get the benefits of being outside and active. It can be as simple or as complex as you choose to make it. Additionally, your child does not have to be a great athlete in order to enjoy being outside and active, take some time exploring their likes and dislikes and encouraging them to engage in activities that they love as well as those that stretch their minds and bodies. If they love soccer in the park, great! Have them do that as well as explore some new activities like geocaching or frrolf.

Thank you for reading.

Billy Reamer

The Missoula Forum For Children and Youth  
Coordinator

