

U.S. kids need playtime intervention

By Katie Arnold, *Outside*

So far this summer has been one of the wettest and coolest on record across much of North America. In Ontario, where my family and I spent a month at our island cottage, the thermometer topped 80 only a couple of times. Many days started out damp and chilly, but I'd bundle our two daughters in sweats and fleece and boat across the channel to Juniper Island for the usual morning drill: swimming, canoeing, and tennis lessons, a kind of retro DIY day camp that's been a tradition on Stony Lake for more than 50 years.

By 4pm most days, the wind would have scrubbed the sky clear of clouds, and my daughters would fling themselves off the front dock or we'd go paddle boarding or motor across the lake to visit friends. But when the wind was blowing hard out of the north or west, sending whitecaps barreling down on our point and making it too blustery to be on the water, Pippa, 6, and Maisy, 4, took a more laid-back, old-fashioned approach to summer: They played.

A generation ago this wouldn't have been worth noting. Playing was what kids did, naturally. But with the onset of schedules and screen time, free-play among children has been steadily decreasing since the mid-1950s. According to two studies out of the University of Michigan, as reported by Peter Gray in the *American Journal of Play*, children's play time fell by 25 percent from 1981 to 1997; outdoor play has plunged by 50 percent, with kids today spending a mere 4-7 minutes per day goofing off outdoors.

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