

In a book titled Last Child in the Woods, child advocacy expert Richard Louv discusses problems created as children become completely disconnected from nature. The book summary states the following:

Today's kids are increasingly disconnected from the natural world even as research shows that "thoughtful exposure of youngsters to nature can... be a powerful form of therapy for attention-deficit disorder and other maladies." Instead of passing summer months hiking, swimming and telling stories around the campfire, children these days are more likely to attend computer camps or weight-loss camps: as a result, Louv says, they've come to think of nature as more of an abstraction than a reality. Indeed, a 2002 British study reported that eight-year-olds could identify Pokémon characters far more easily than they could name "otter, beetle, and oak tree." Gathering thoughts from parents, teachers, researchers, environmentalists and other concerned parties, Louv argues for a return to an awareness of and appreciation for the natural world. Not only can nature teach kids science and nurture their creativity, he says, nature needs its children: where else will its future stewards come from? Louv's book is a call to action, full of warnings—but also full of ideas for change.

Louv calls this "Nature Deficit Disorder" or "NDD". I would love to tell you how we are fighting this at Camp Champions.

On Sundays, we sit around a campfire, watch the sun go down and the stars come out. We listen to the water lapping the shore, the crickets chirp and fire crackle.

Your camper will take an overnight this term (the Letterman go tonight). They will cook a meal and sleep outside. Tonight, the moon is just past full and will create fascinating shadows for the campers.

They will take hikes, horseback rides (if your camper takes horseback), and see random animals.

As long as we are talking about NDD, I have two cute thoughts.

The first comes from a Mini "Nature" class. The instructor found the young girls a tad less than excited about the class. His solution? Have the campers walk around camp with face paint on acting like different animals that they saw or he described. He added an extra bit of fun by saying that anytime too many people looked at them, they would all freeze like scared deer. I am not sure why they choose to freeze, but that was the protocol: act like a duck, fox, road-runner or owl until time to freeze in position. Some even discussed what they thought the animals might be thinking

The second has to do with mobile phones, texting and internet. Each summer, we have campers that talk about losing their phones or computers in near-panicked tones. They fear missing all the "important" texts or gossip. What if their Facebook page grows stale? These seem initially like deep wounds, but soon fade to mild inconveniences. In fact, the campers often celebrate the separation from the gossip mill and the incessant texts. Suddenly, they find themselves using interaction with people rather than screens and they like it.

I doubt that many (if any) will eschew the technology when they return, but I do hope they will feel less dependent on them.

Meanwhile, we will be enjoying the stars.

Steve Sir