



BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: HELPING STUDENTS CONNECT WITH NATURE

An Epidemic of Screen Time

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Americans are indoors **90 percent of the day** on average.

A 2026 survey by Consumer Reports found Americans:

- Check their phones nearly **200 times** a day
- Spend more than **4 hours daily** on their phones
- Nearly half say they feel **addicted to their devices**



Digital Media Consumption by Children

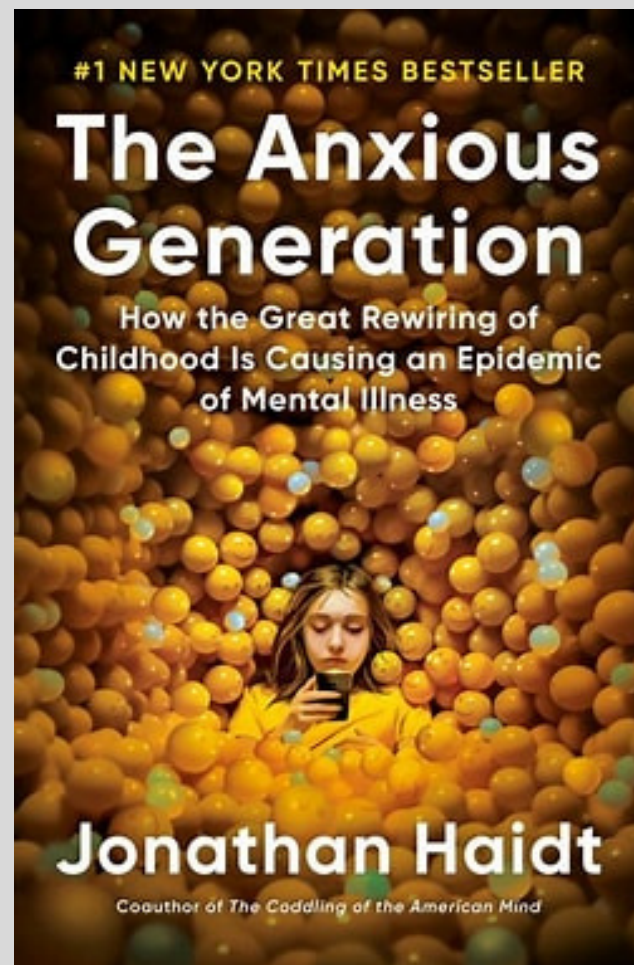
This Spring, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory warning that excessive screen time for children threatens their mental and physical health.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- infants/toddlers ages 0-2, average **1 hour** of screen time per day
- children ages 2-4 average **2 hours** of screen time per day
- ages 5-8 average **3.5 hours** daily
- ages 8-12 average **5.5 hours** per day
- ages 13-18 average **8.5 hours** of screen time daily,
in some cases exceeding the time they are in school.



The Impact of Social Media on Children



The #1 New York Times bestseller in 2024 ***The Anxious Generation*** cites studies that show social media use can be a cause of anxiety and depression, attention fragmentation, addiction, sleep deprivation and social deprivation.

The book also reports “abundant research shows that **time in natural settings benefits children’s social, cognitive and emotional development.**”

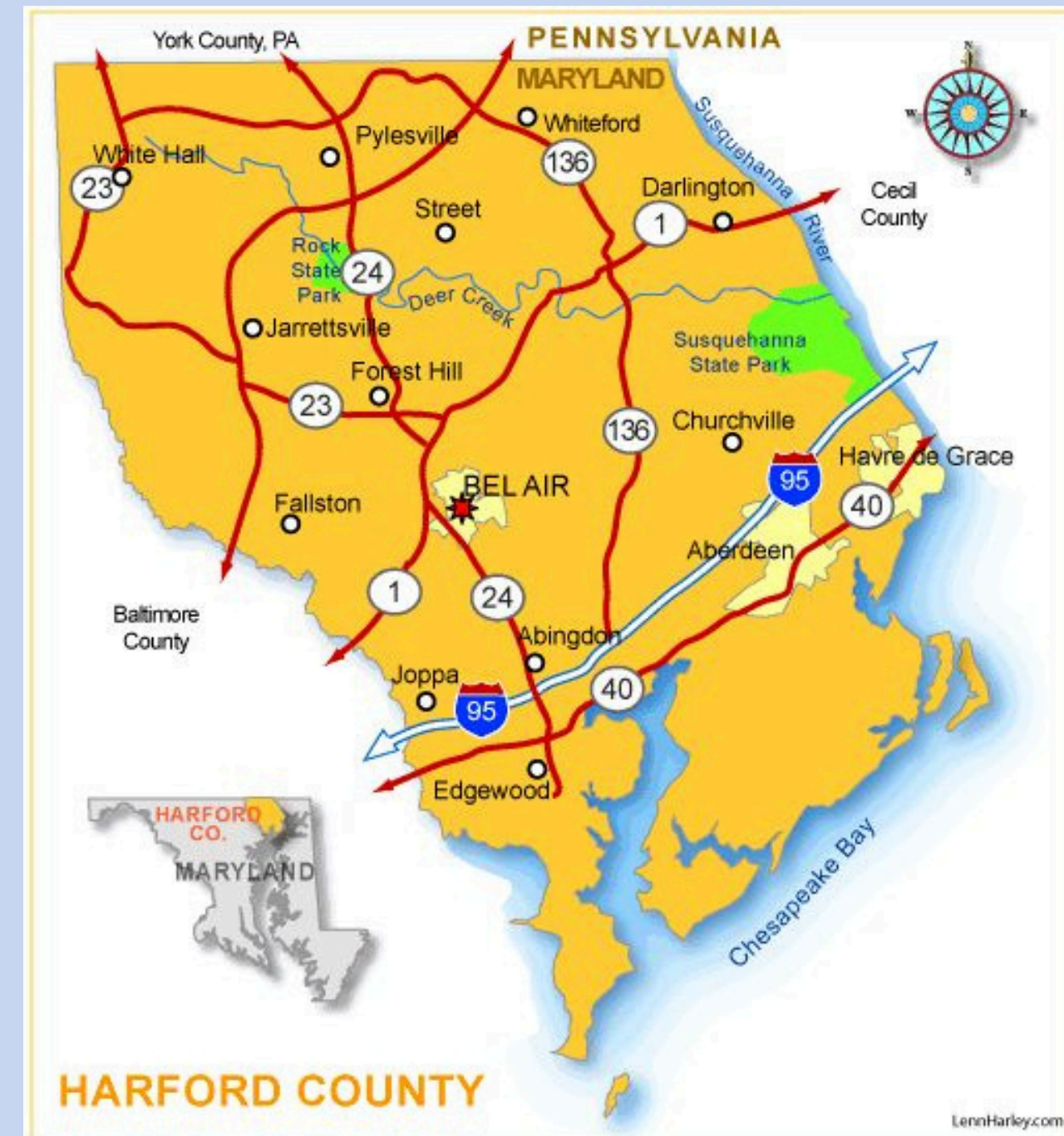
Our Goal:

**Help students slow down, connect with nature,
get a break from screens, and return to the
classroom more focused and ready to learn.**



SCHOOLS SERVED IN HARFORD COUNTY

- Bakerfield Elementary
- Edgewood Elementary
- Riverside Elementary
- Aberdeen Middle
- Edgewood Middle
- Magnolia Middle
- Aberdeen High
- Fallston High



DELIVERING NATURE WORX IN SCHOOLS

- School staff (social workers, counselors, community school specialists) serve as on-site coordinators and accompany students on sessions
- Sessions are 40 minutes and are held on school grounds during flex time (advisory period, WIN block); during health/wellness or biology class; or after school;
- Students opt-in with parental permission forms
- Nature Worx staff leads programs, surveys students and tracks and reports outcomes data
- Funding provided by a grant from the Office on Mental Health

PROVEN RESULTS IN SCHOOLS



Since Sept 2024,
more than
2,495
students served

8 Harford County
Schools

90%
reported
improvement in
mood

78% of students reported they learned how time in nature can support them

INTENTIONAL TIME IN NATURE HELPS US:



- Restore attention & focus
- Regulate stress
- Improve mood
- Reconnect—with ourselves, each other, and the natural world around us



KEY CONCEPTS OF NATURE CONNECTION



MINDFUL AWARENESS

**Students can have a hard time slowing down
and focusing their attention.**



Being in nature gives them a simple way to practice noticing and engaging their senses. These moments of mindful awareness can help restore attention, so students can return to the classroom better focused and prepared to learn.

CONNECTION

**Nature can be a bridge - to ourselves,
to one another,
and to the world around us.**

**When students spend time noticing and exploring
the natural world, they have opportunities to build
curiosity, belonging, and a sense of connection.**

INVITATIONS TO EXPERIENCE NATURE



Sensory: Feel and smell the tree's bark; notice the patterns of its leaves

Exploratory: How old do you think it is? Do you see any signs of life around it?

Contemplative: How are you similar to a tree?

Creative: What stories could this tree tell you about its life?

WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING

Question: What did you like best about Nature Worx? Answers:

- Being able to take a break from school work and being calm outside
- I liked that we got to go outside to learn about everything and each other.
- Having time with people outside and being away from craziness inside
- I loved how we put the leaves to the sun and got to see all the veins.
- When we went silent and listened to nature
- I liked the peace of this program



WHAT SCHOOLS ARE SAYING

“Nature Worx is a tremendous value to our school. The highlight of my day is watching students walk out the door and return in a completely different state of mind, calmer, more focused, and ready to finish the day on a positive note.” - Lauren Farmer, LCSW-C, Social Worker, Magnolia Middle School



“The Nature Worx program encourages students to develop resilience, build positive relationships, and improve their overall well-being in a calming, nature-based environment” -Cheryl Franz, M.Ed, LMSW, Community School Specialist, Edgewood Middle School

WHAT SCHOOLS ARE SAYING

“I love it when our kids transform during the Nature Worx session. My favorite is when they spy wildlife and are excited to tell everyone. And I love to see their exploratory curiosity as we walk through the woods.” -Sarah Seidl, Counseling Secretary, Magnolia Middle School



“One of my 8th grade students said they love how they can relax mid-day away from the pressure of school and just take in nature.” -Connie Kostaras, 8th Grade Guidance Counselor, Magnolia Middle School



“Nature Worx guides are engaging and offer a good balance of mindfulness activities and outdoor exploration.” -Lisa Patchell, LCSW-C, Community School Social Worker, Aberdeen Middle School



WHERE MINDFULNESS MEETS THE OUTDOORS

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