



# Balanced and Barefoot: How Unrestricted Outdoor Play Makes for Strong, Confident, and Capable Children

By Angela J. Hanscom

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**Balanced and Barefoot: How Unrestricted Outdoor Play Makes for Strong, Confident, and Capable Children** By Angela J. Hanscom

**"Angela Hanscom is a powerful voice for balance."**  
—Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*

**In this important book, a pediatric occupational therapist and founder of TimberNook shows how outdoor play and unstructured freedom of movement are vital for children's cognitive development and growth, and offers tons of fun, engaging ways to help ensure that kids grow into healthy, balanced, and resilient adults.**

Today's kids have adopted sedentary lifestyles filled with television, video games, and computer screens. But more and more, studies show that children need "rough and tumble" outdoor play in order to develop their sensory, motor, and executive functions. Disturbingly, a lack of movement has been shown to lead to a number of health and cognitive difficulties, such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), emotion regulation and sensory processing issues, and aggressiveness at school recess break. So, how can you ensure your child is fully engaging their body, mind, and all of their senses?

Using the same philosophy that lies at the heart of her popular TimberNook program—that nature is the ultimate sensory experience, and that psychological and physical health improves for children when they spend time outside on a regular basis—author Angela Hanscom offers several strategies to help your child thrive, even if you live in an urban environment.

Today it is rare to find children rolling down hills, climbing trees, or spinning in circles just for fun. We've taken away merry-go-rounds, shortened the length of swings, and done away with teeter-totters to keep children safe. Children have fewer opportunities for unstructured outdoor play than ever before, and recess times at school are shrinking due to demanding educational environments.

With this book, you'll discover little things you can do anytime, anywhere to help your kids achieve the movement they need to be happy and healthy in mind, body, and spirit.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“*Balanced and Barefoot* offers new ways to see, solve, and prevent the reactive behaviors and emotions that cause kids to struggle and parents to worry. Full of practical ways to give kids the kinds of experiences that will help them thrive, this book is a must-read for parents and teachers alike.”

—**Tina Payne Bryson, PhD**, coauthor of the *New York Times* bestsellers *The Whole-Brain Child* and *No-Drama Discipline*

“Angela Hanscom explains—beautifully and convincingly—why unrestricted outdoor play is essential to children’s healthy sensory, motor, social, and intellectual development, and she shows how we can enable such play in today’s world. I recommend this book highly to all parents, educators, and pediatric health professionals, and to anyone involved in making decisions that affect children’s lives.”

—**Peter Gray**, research professor of psychology at Boston College, and author of *Free to Learn*

“In *Balanced and Barefoot*, Angela Hanscom gives adults permission to release the reigns without fear. Her expertise as an occupational therapist affirms what so many of us know intuitively: children thrive when they have access to rich, self-directed play opportunities.”

—**Erin Davis**, director of *The Land: An Adventure Play Documentary*

“Here I am, the ‘Free-Range Lady,’ and I, too, was often shocked and saddened to see my kids (and others) not know how to organize their own games outside with their friends. This is the book I needed when they were younger!”

—**Lenore Skenazy**, founder of the book, blog, and movement, *Free-Range Kids*

“I am a fan and proponent of Angela Hanscom’s nature-based philosophy. Her new book is an eye-opener as she presents from experience, observation, and scientific research not only the benefits of physical activity and free play for children, but also the mental and emotional necessity. In a culture that markets devices that restrict infant movement, endorses early education for toddlers, and over-schedules structured activities for children of all ages, Hanscom’s book is both illuminating and timely. Eloquent, logical, and reasoned, *Balanced and Barefoot* is a gift and an important read for educators, caregivers, and parents.”

—**Janet Lansbury**, author of *Elevating Child Care* and *No Bad Kids*

“Exposure to nature in early childhood provides a wide range of sensory and psychological advantages for child development. Stimulation of all senses improves physical and mental balance. Natural, free play—as proposed by Angela Hanscom—is essential for nurturing stronger and healthier bodies and minds. I recommend this important book to all parents and teachers, because we need to have the TimberNook experience everywhere.”

—**John M. Tew, Jr., MD**, professor of neurosurgery, surgery, and radiology at the University of Cincinnati, and executive director of community affairs at UC Health and UC College of Medicine

*“Balanced and Barefoot offers a refreshingly straightforward approach that counters the pressures many well-intentioned parents feel in raising children today. It’s about backing off and giving children the space to do what they naturally do—to explore and figure out the world, to make decisions, and use their imagination. Being outdoors allows children to learn about themselves, gain confidence and flexibility, learn to problem solve, and get along with others. These are all traits they need for healthy development. I recommend this book for every parent looking to raise an independent, caring, resilient and confident child.”*

—**Tovah P. Klein, PhD**, director of the Barnard College Center for Toddler Development, and author of *How Toddlers Thrive*

## About the Author

**Angela J. Hanscom** is a pediatric occupational therapist and founder of TimberNook—an award-winning developmental and nature-based program that has gained international popularity. She holds a master’s degree in occupational therapy, and an undergraduate degree in kinesiology (the study of movement) with a concentration in health fitness. Awarded a “Hometown Hero” by *Glamour* magazine for her innovative work with TimberNook, Hanscom has also been a frequent contributor to *The Washington Post*’s “Answer Sheet” column, and was featured on the NPR education blogs *Children & Nature Network* and *MindShift*. Hanscom resides in Barrington, NH.

Foreword writer **Richard Louv** is a journalist, and author of *Last Child in the Woods* and *The Nature Principle*. He is cofounder of the Children and Nature Network—an organization helping to connect people to the natural world. He’s written for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and more, and appears on programs such as NBC’s *Today* and NPR’s *Fresh Air*.

## Users Review

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#### Arnold Browning:

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**Frances McKay:**

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