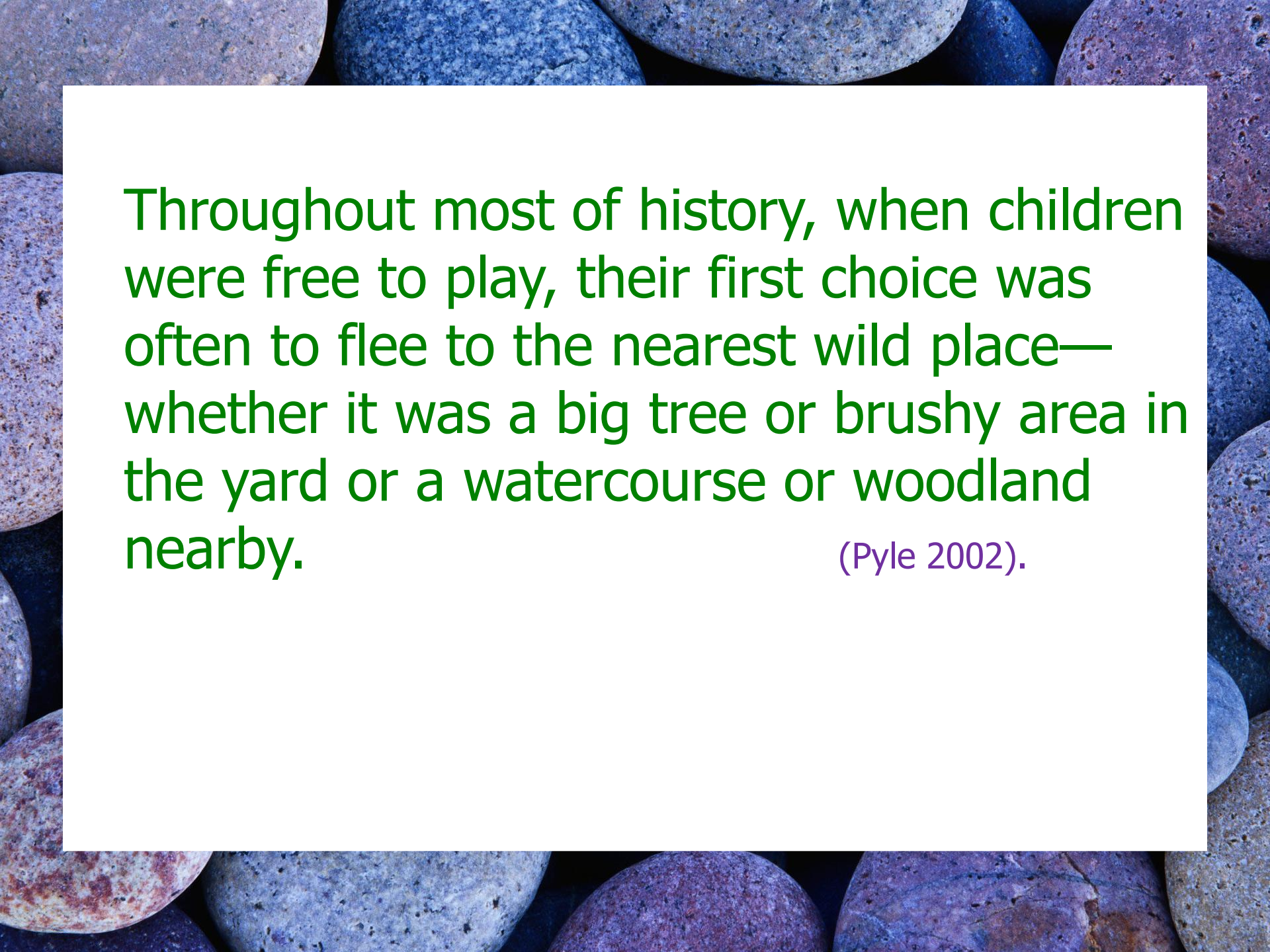




Let the Children Play – OUTSIDE! # 4

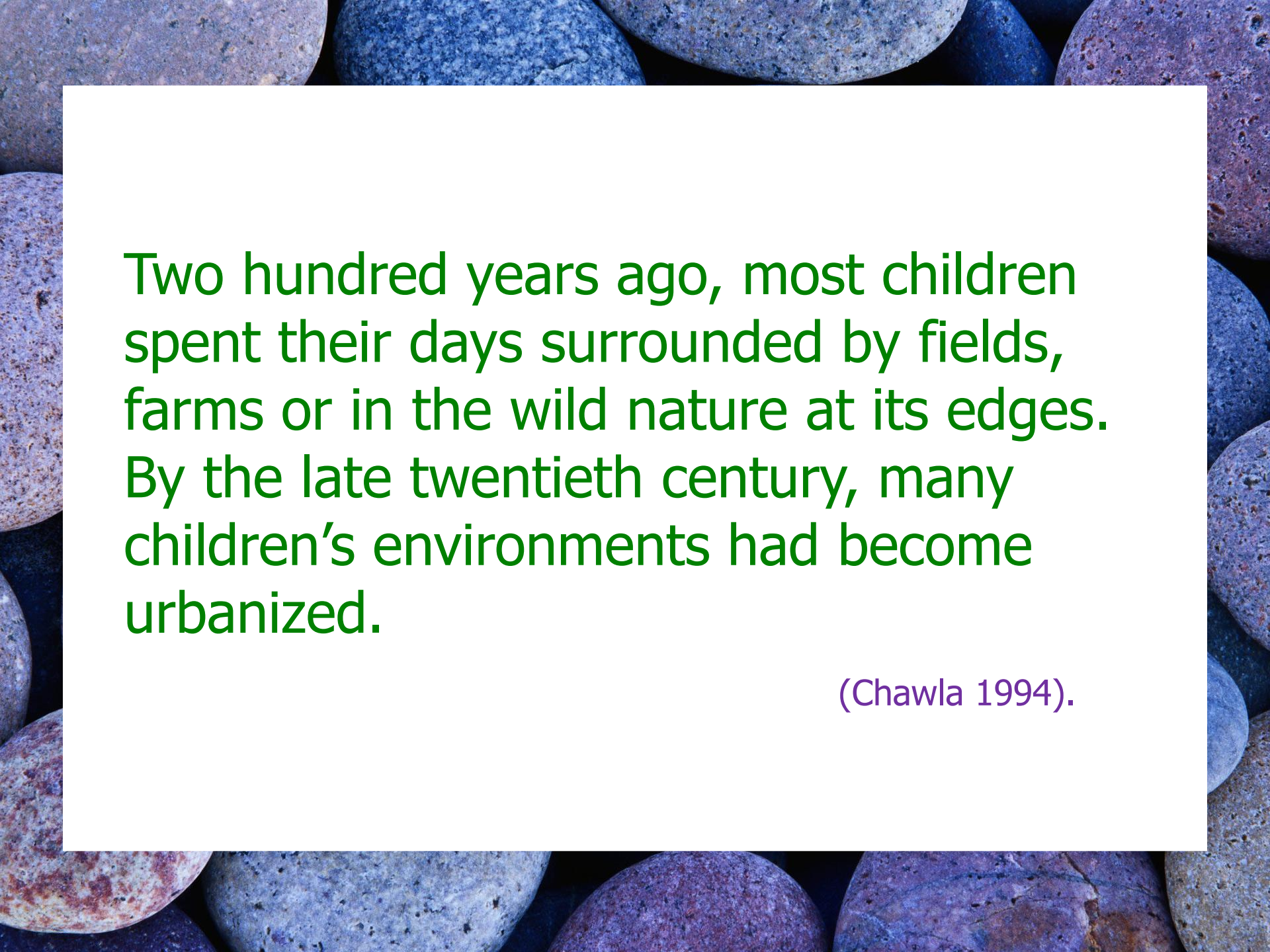
Let the Children Play Regional Forum

Gayle Karen Robertson



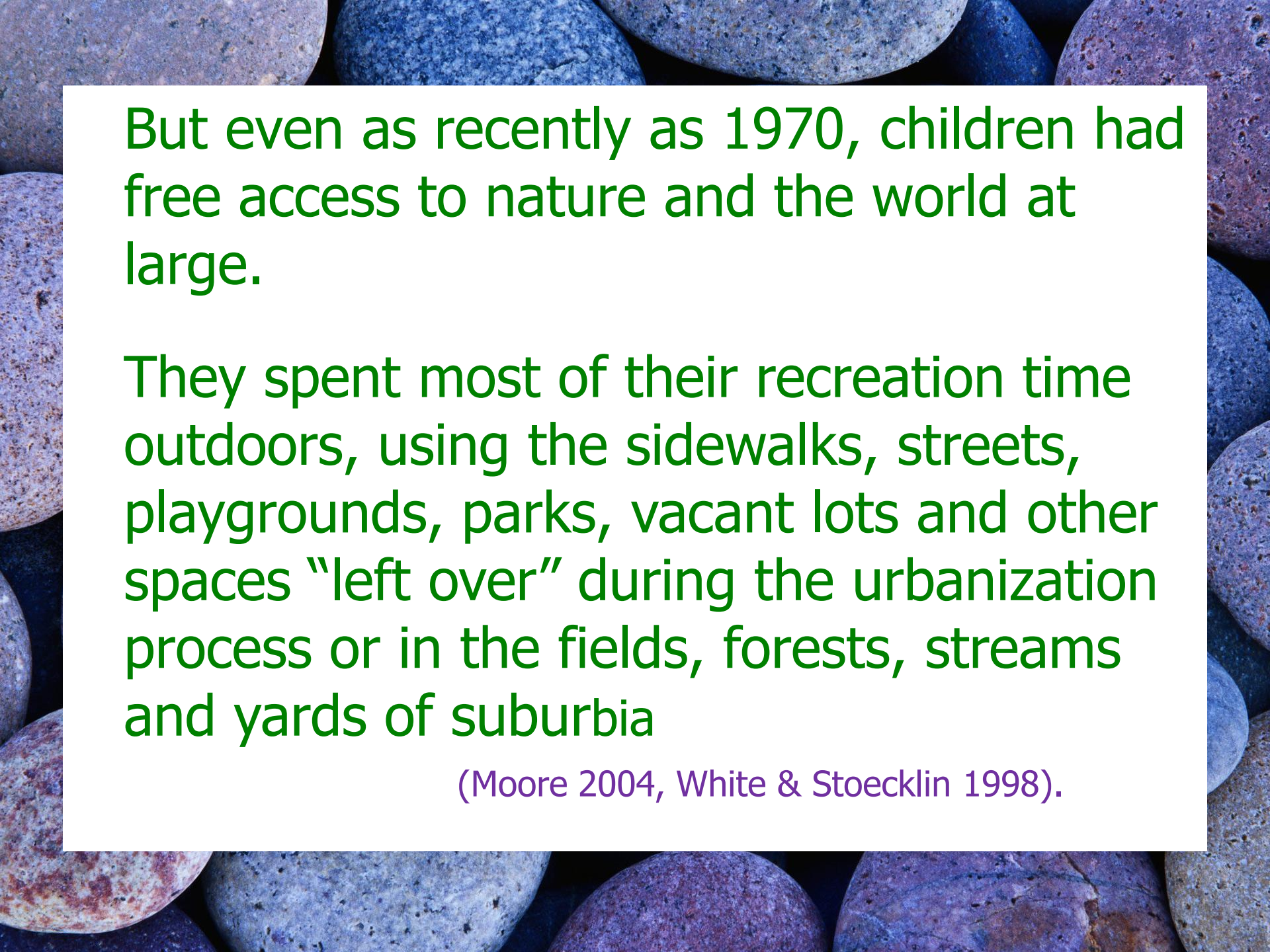
Throughout most of history, when children were free to play, their first choice was often to flee to the nearest wild place—whether it was a big tree or brushy area in the yard or a watercourse or woodland nearby.

(Pyle 2002).



Two hundred years ago, most children spent their days surrounded by fields, farms or in the wild nature at its edges. By the late twentieth century, many children's environments had become urbanized.

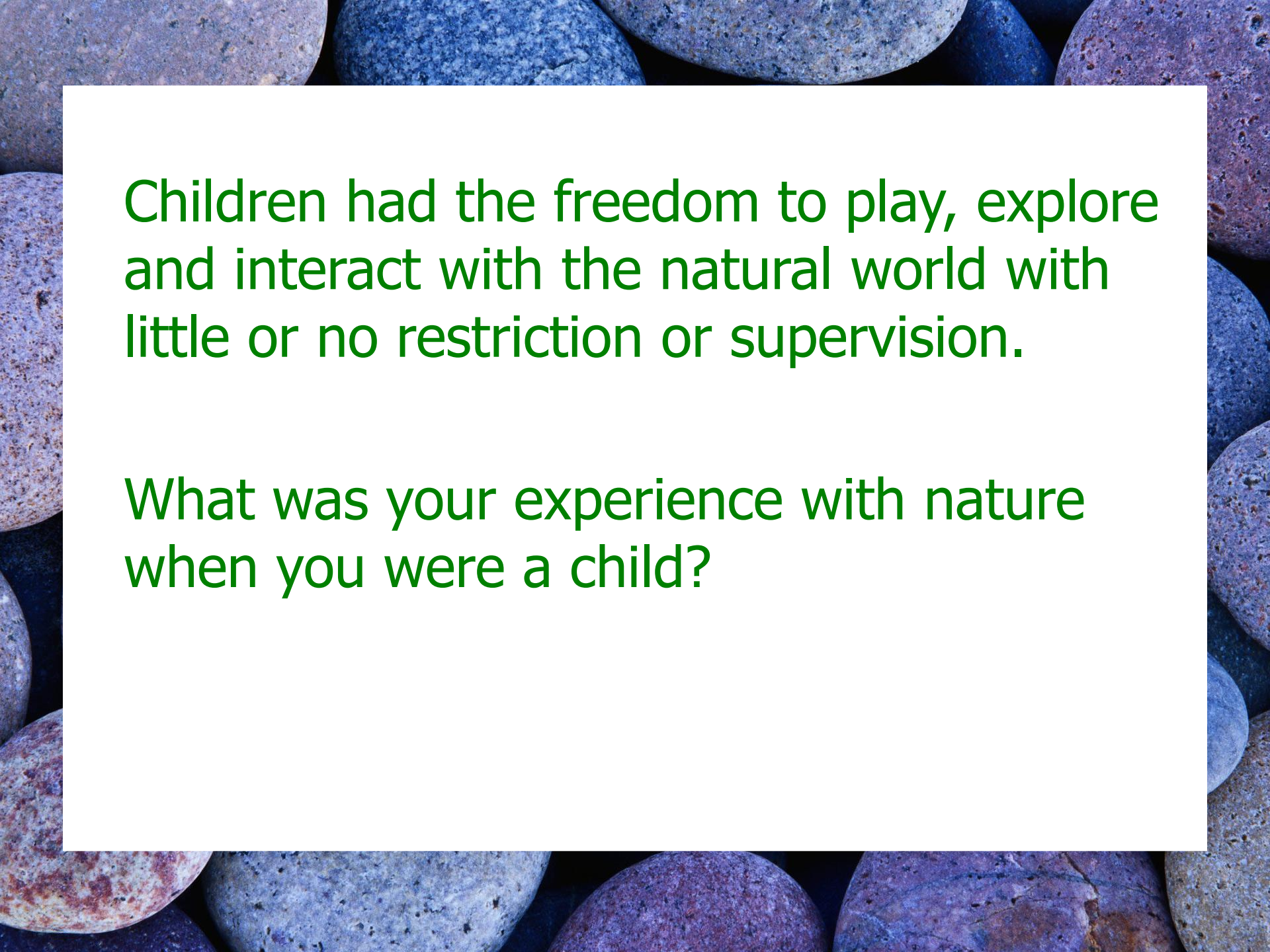
(Chawla 1994).



But even as recently as 1970, children had free access to nature and the world at large.

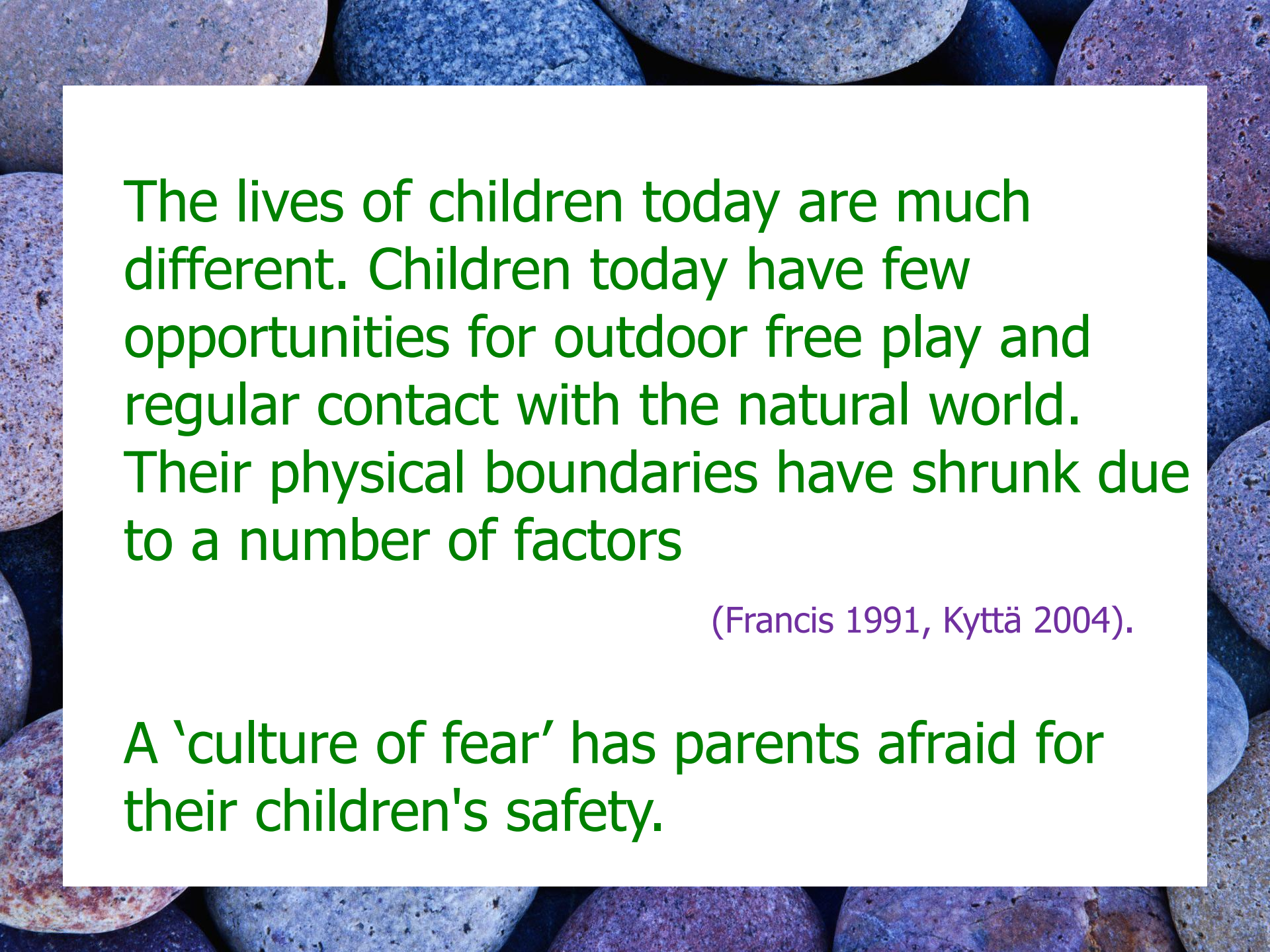
They spent most of their recreation time outdoors, using the sidewalks, streets, playgrounds, parks, vacant lots and other spaces “left over” during the urbanization process or in the fields, forests, streams and yards of suburbia

(Moore 2004, White & Stoecklin 1998).



Children had the freedom to play, explore and interact with the natural world with little or no restriction or supervision.

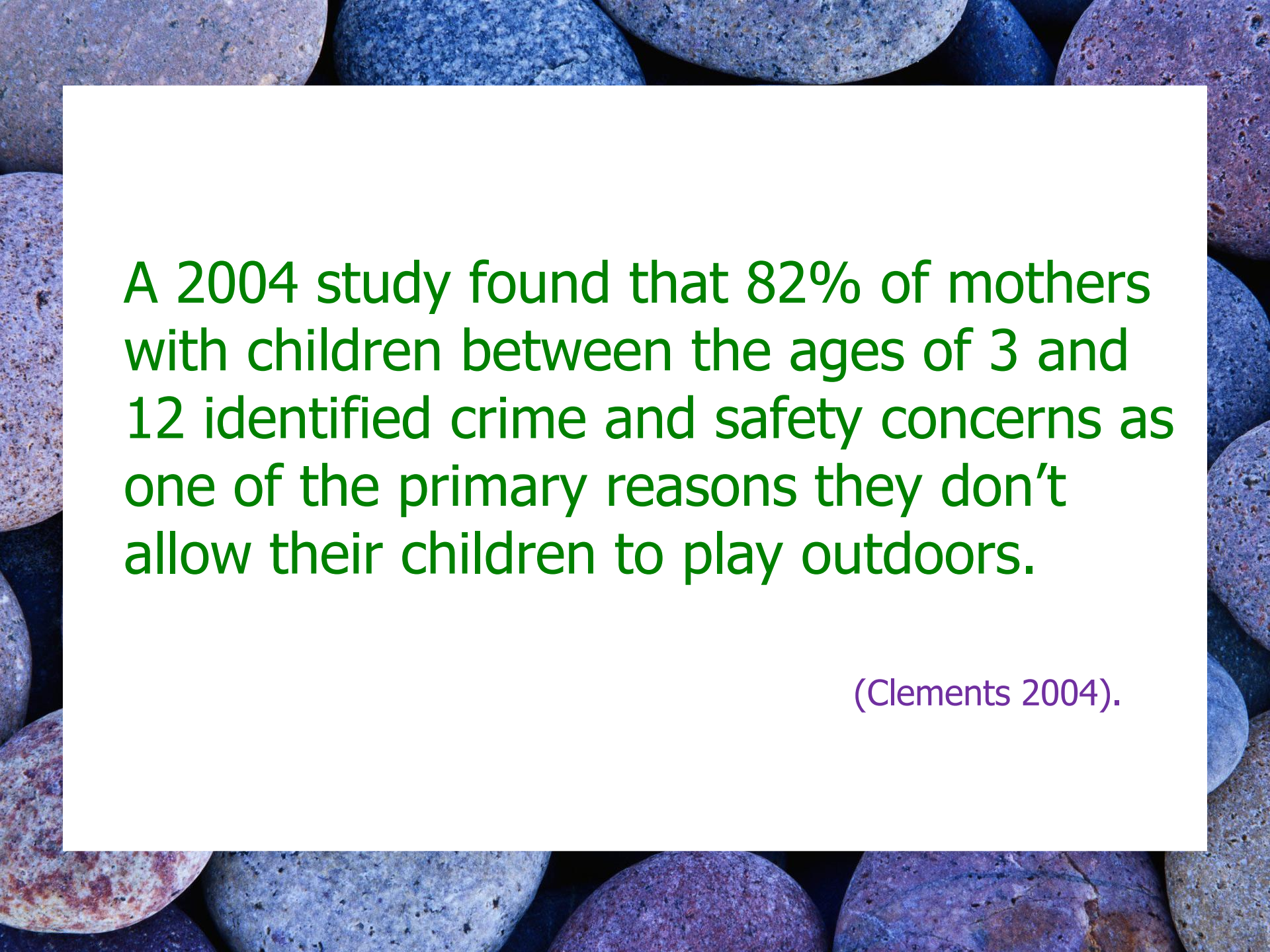
What was your experience with nature when you were a child?



The lives of children today are much different. Children today have few opportunities for outdoor free play and regular contact with the natural world. Their physical boundaries have shrunk due to a number of factors

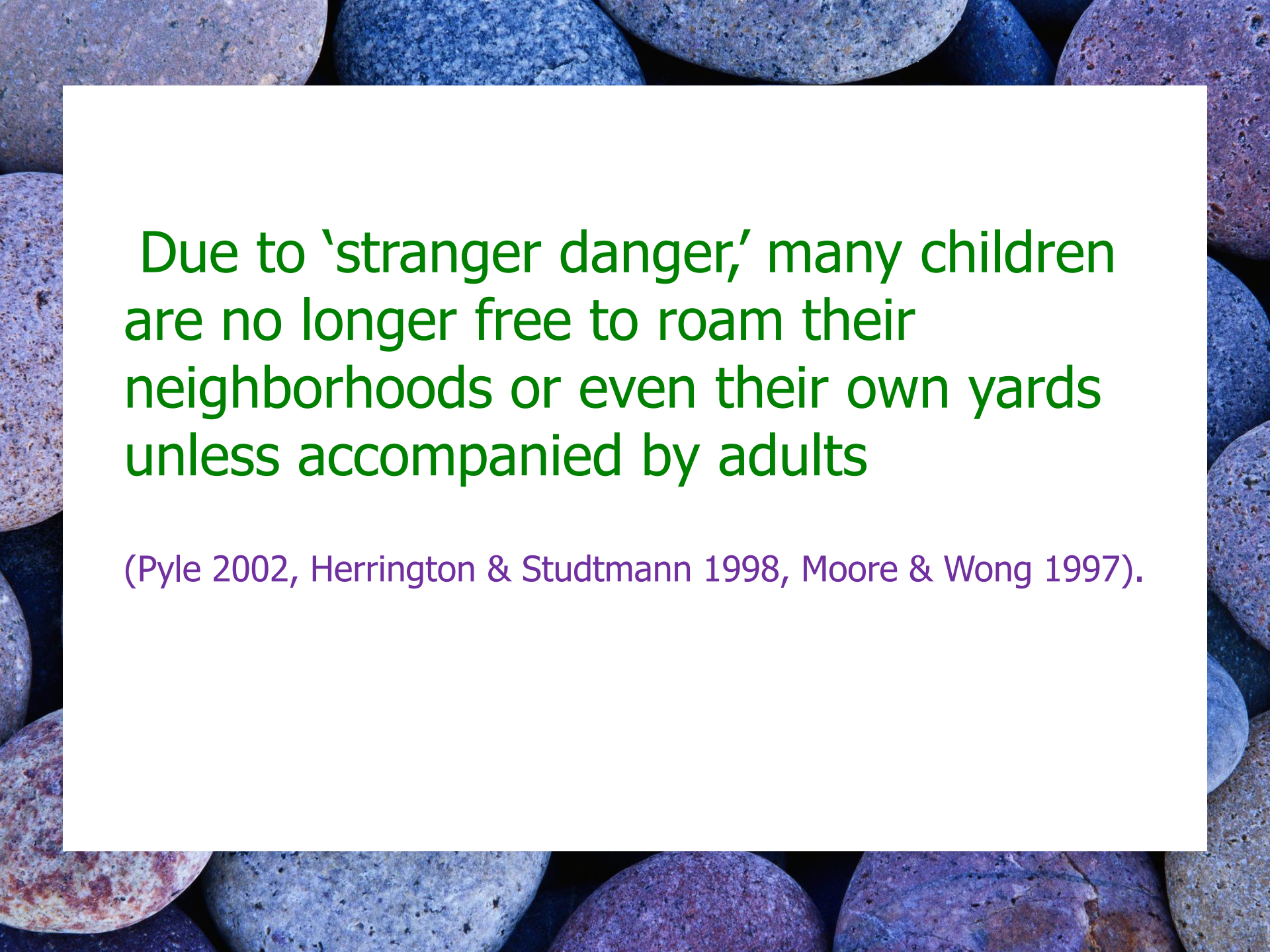
(Francis 1991, Kyttä 2004).

A 'culture of fear' has parents afraid for their children's safety.



A 2004 study found that 82% of mothers with children between the ages of 3 and 12 identified crime and safety concerns as one of the primary reasons they don't allow their children to play outdoors.

(Clements 2004).



Due to 'stranger danger,' many children are no longer free to roam their neighborhoods or even their own yards unless accompanied by adults

(Pyle 2002, Herrington & Studtmann 1998, Moore & Wong 1997).

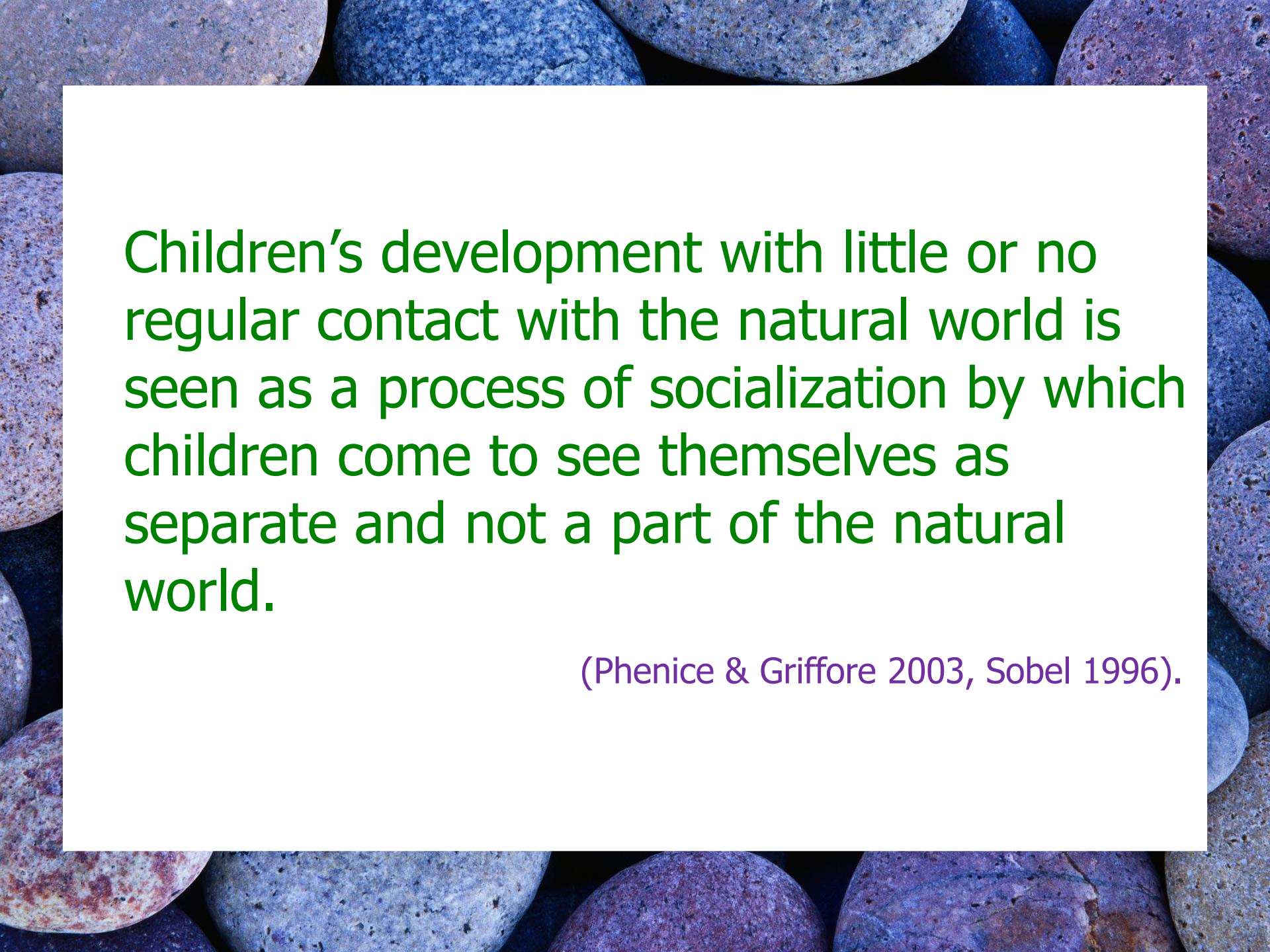


The culture of childhood that played outside is gone and children's everyday life has shifted to the indoors.

(Hart 1999, Moore 2004).

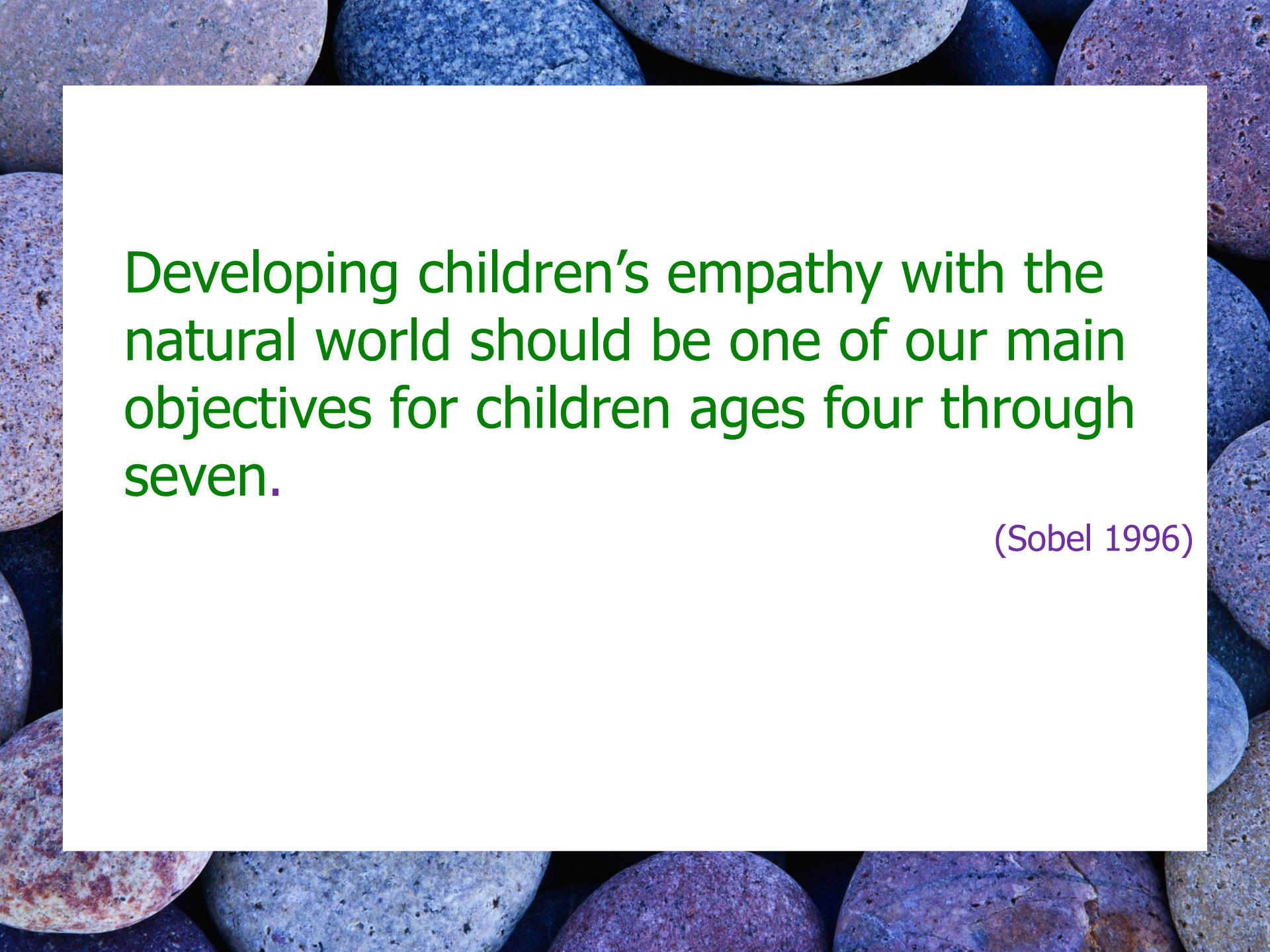
As a result, children's opportunity for direct and spontaneous contact with nature is a vanishing experience of childhood.

(Chawla 1994, Kellert 2002, Kuo 2003, Malone 2004, Pyle 2002, Rivkin 1990, Wilson 1996).



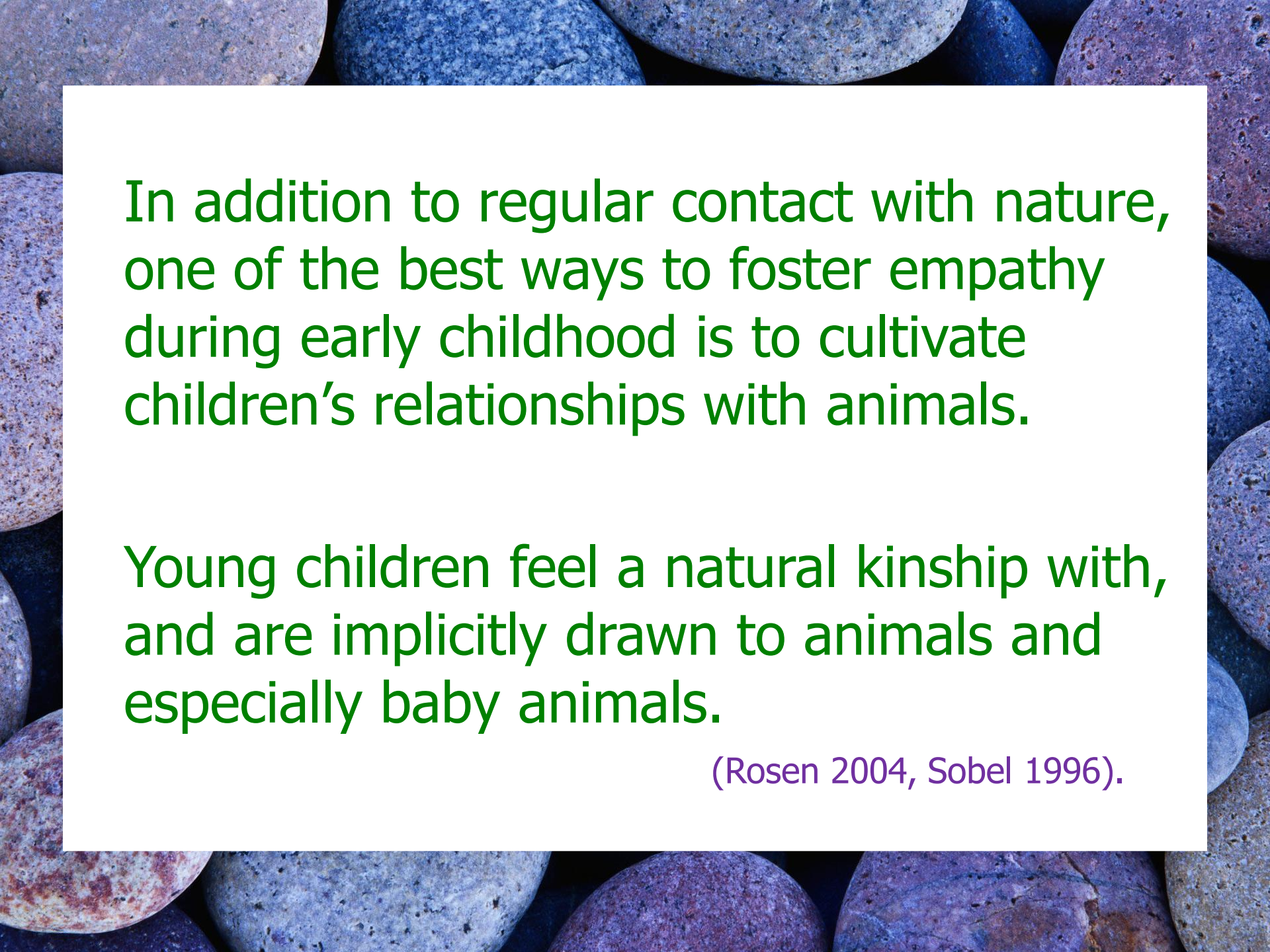
Children's development with little or no regular contact with the natural world is seen as a process of socialization by which children come to see themselves as separate and not a part of the natural world.

(Phenice & Griffore 2003, Sobel 1996).



Developing children's empathy with the natural world should be one of our main objectives for children ages four through seven.


(Sobel 1996)



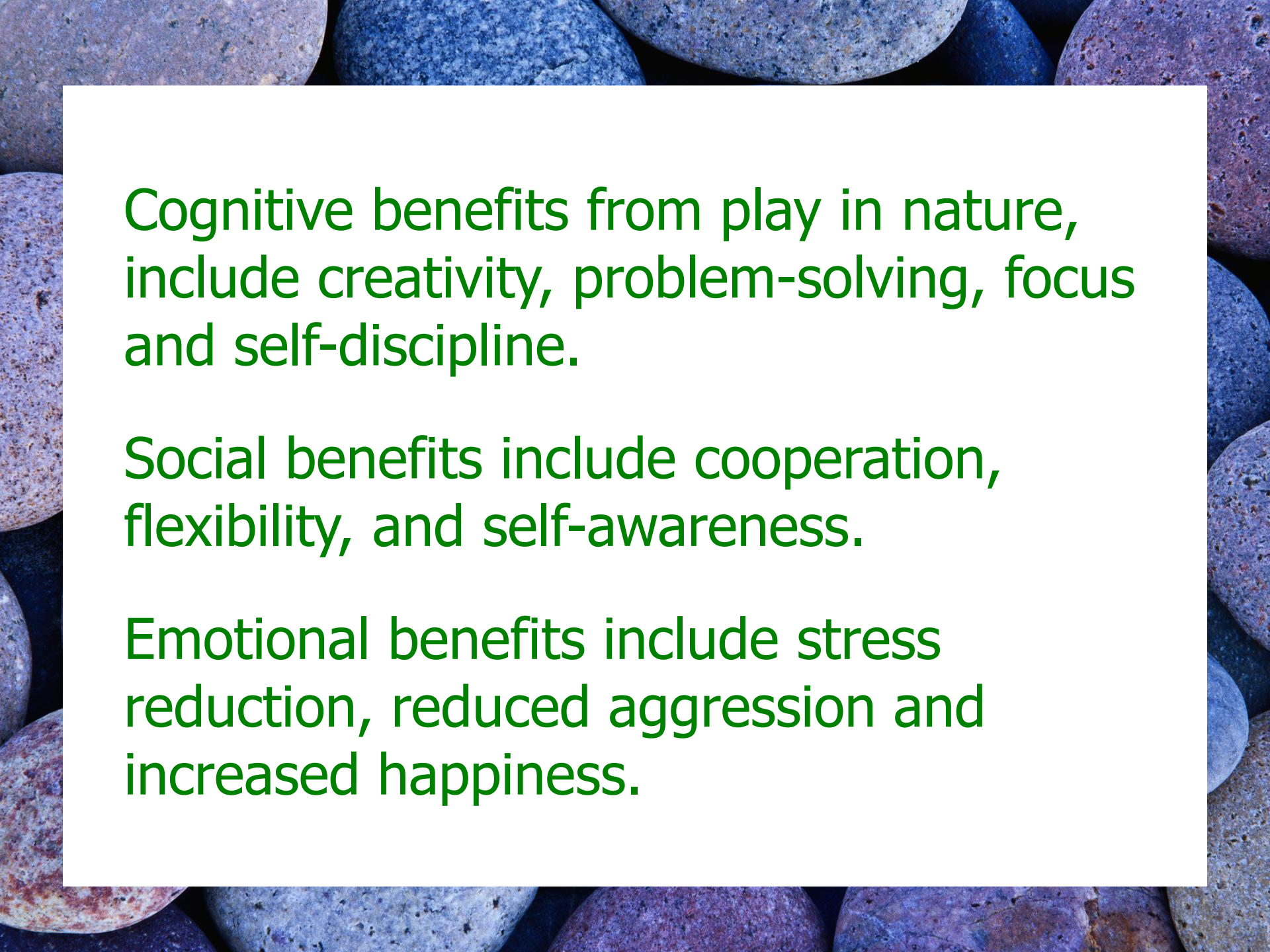
In addition to regular contact with nature, one of the best ways to foster empathy during early childhood is to cultivate children's relationships with animals.

Young children feel a natural kinship with, and are implicitly drawn to animals and especially baby animals.

(Rosen 2004, Sobel 1996).



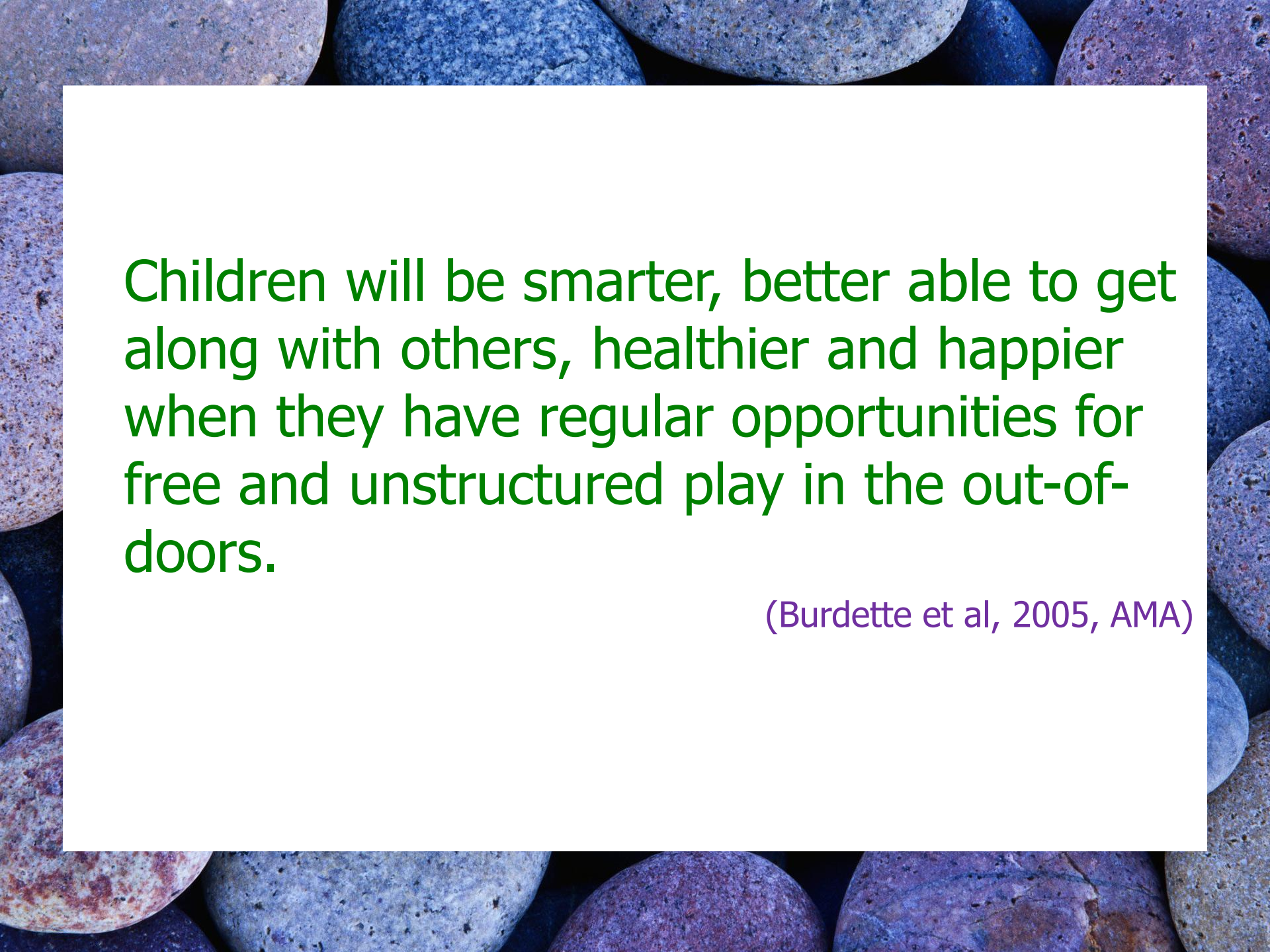
Unstructured free play in the out-of-doors brings a host of benefits to children — from being smarter to more cooperative to being healthier overall.



Cognitive benefits from play in nature, include creativity, problem-solving, focus and self-discipline.

Social benefits include cooperation, flexibility, and self-awareness.

Emotional benefits include stress reduction, reduced aggression and increased happiness.



Children will be smarter, better able to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors.

(Burdette et al, 2005, AMA)

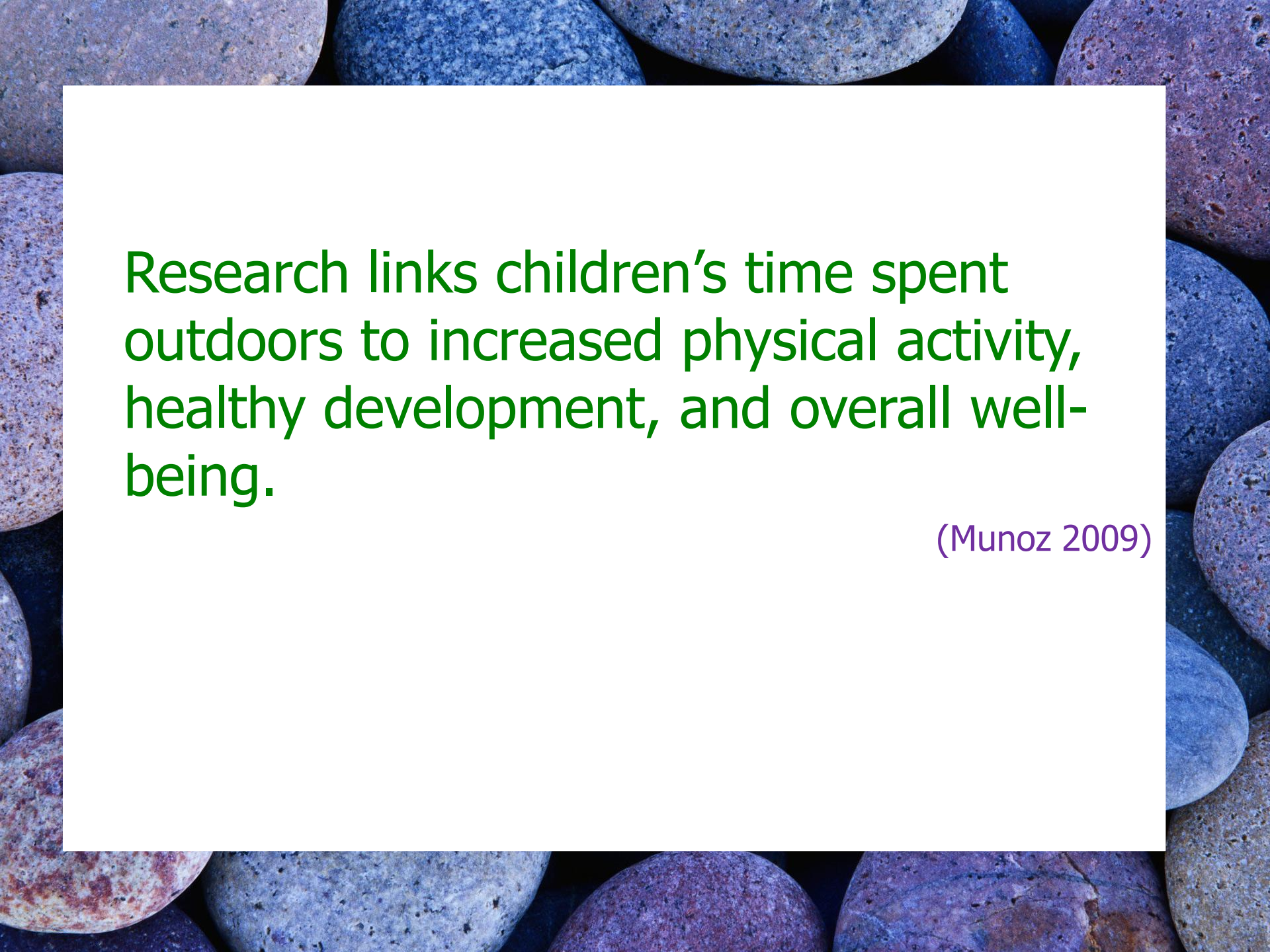


Children with attention deficits
concentrate better after a walk in the
park.

(Faber & Kuo, 2008)

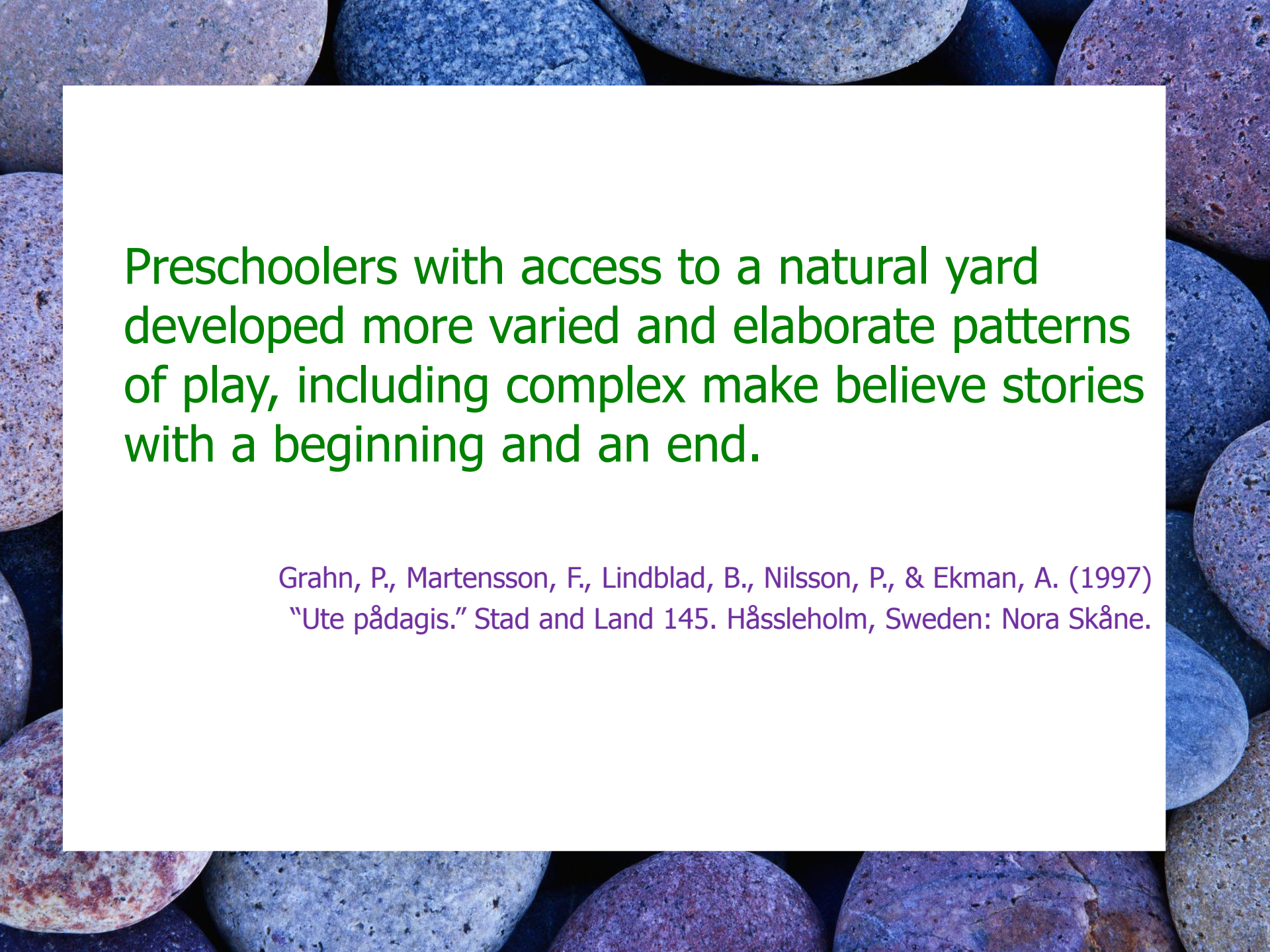
Even a view of nature — green plants and
vistas —helps reduce stress among highly
stressed children. Further, the more
plants, green views and access to natural
play areas, the more positive the results.

(Wells & Evans, 2003)



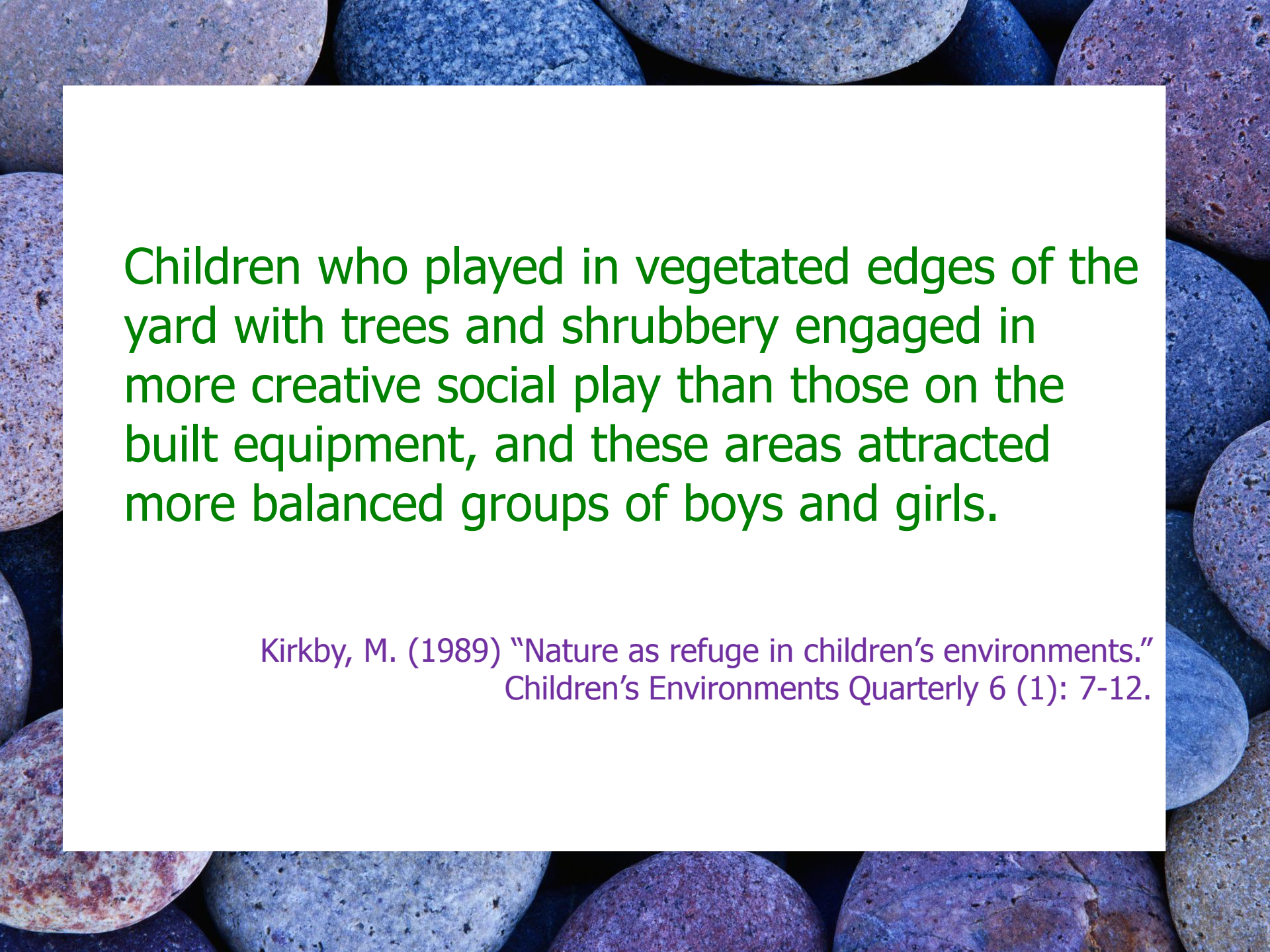
Research links children's time spent outdoors to increased physical activity, healthy development, and overall well-being.

(Munoz 2009)



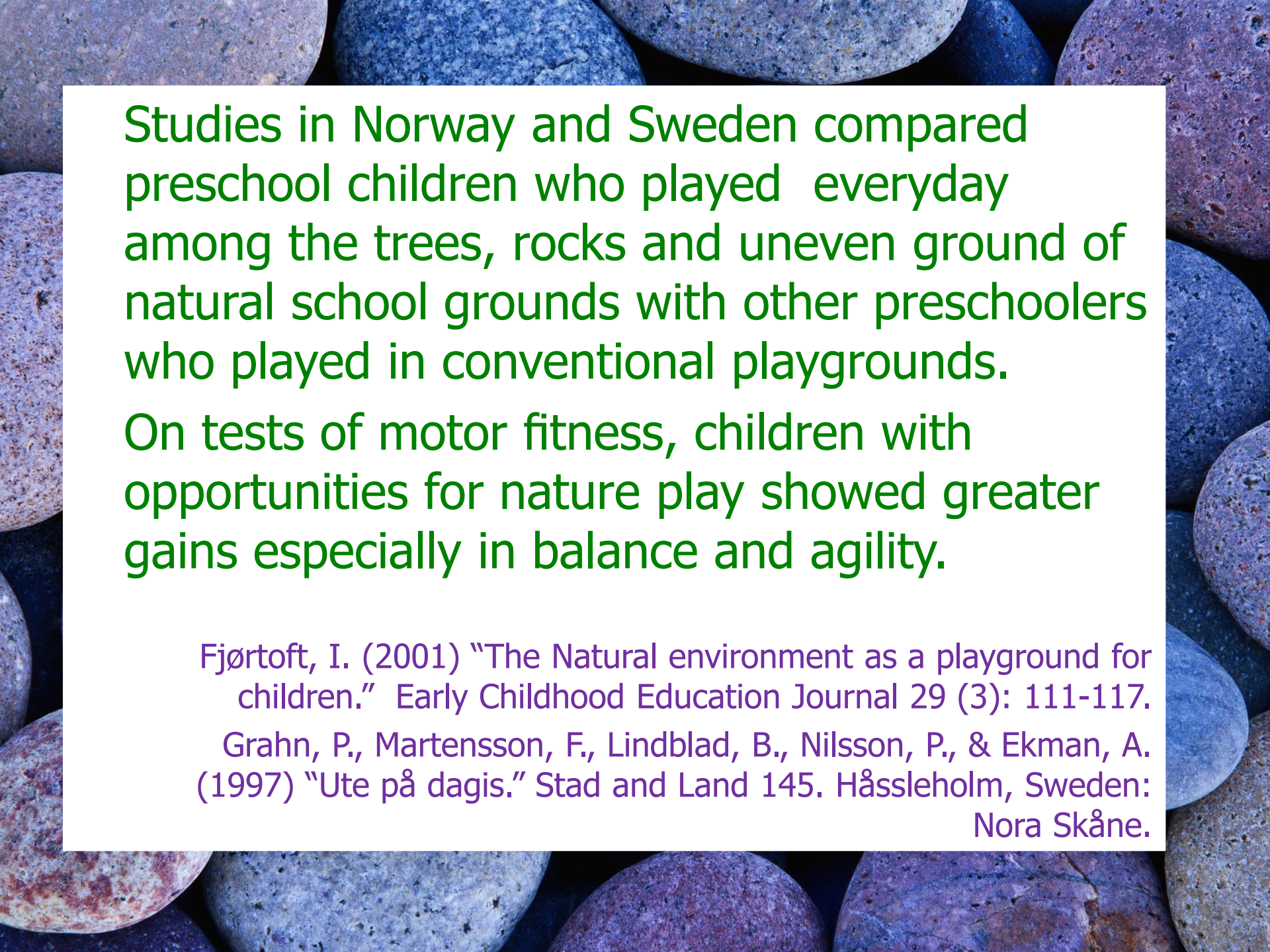
Preschoolers with access to a natural yard developed more varied and elaborate patterns of play, including complex make believe stories with a beginning and an end.

Grahn, P., Martensson, F., Lindblad, B., Nilsson, P., & Ekman, A. (1997) "Ute pådagis." *Stad and Land* 145. Håssleholm, Sweden: Nora Skåne.



Children who played in vegetated edges of the yard with trees and shrubbery engaged in more creative social play than those on the built equipment, and these areas attracted more balanced groups of boys and girls.

Kirkby, M. (1989) "Nature as refuge in children's environments."
Children's Environments Quarterly 6 (1): 7-12.



Studies in Norway and Sweden compared preschool children who played everyday among the trees, rocks and uneven ground of natural school grounds with other preschoolers who played in conventional playgrounds.

On tests of motor fitness, children with opportunities for nature play showed greater gains especially in balance and agility.

Fjørtoft, I. (2001) "The Natural environment as a playground for children." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 29 (3): 111-117.

Grahn, P., Martensson, F., Lindblad, B., Nilsson, P., & Ekman, A. (1997) "Ute på dagis." *Stad and Land* 145. Håssleholm, Sweden: Nora Skåne.



Children's stress levels fall within minutes of seeing green spaces.

Play protects children's emotional development whereas loss of free time and a hurried lifestyle can contribute to anxiety and depression.

Nature makes you nicer, enhancing social interactions, value for community and close relationships.

Kuo, Frances E., & Andrea Faber Taylor, *American Journal of Public Health* 94.9. 2004.

Ginsburg, MD, Kenneth R, 119.1 (2007). *American Academy of Pediatrics*, Jan. 2007.

Weinstein, N., Przybylski, A. K., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). "Can nature make us more caring?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35, 1315-1329.

Children who play regularly in natural environments show more advanced motor fitness, including coordination, balance and agility, and they are sick less often.

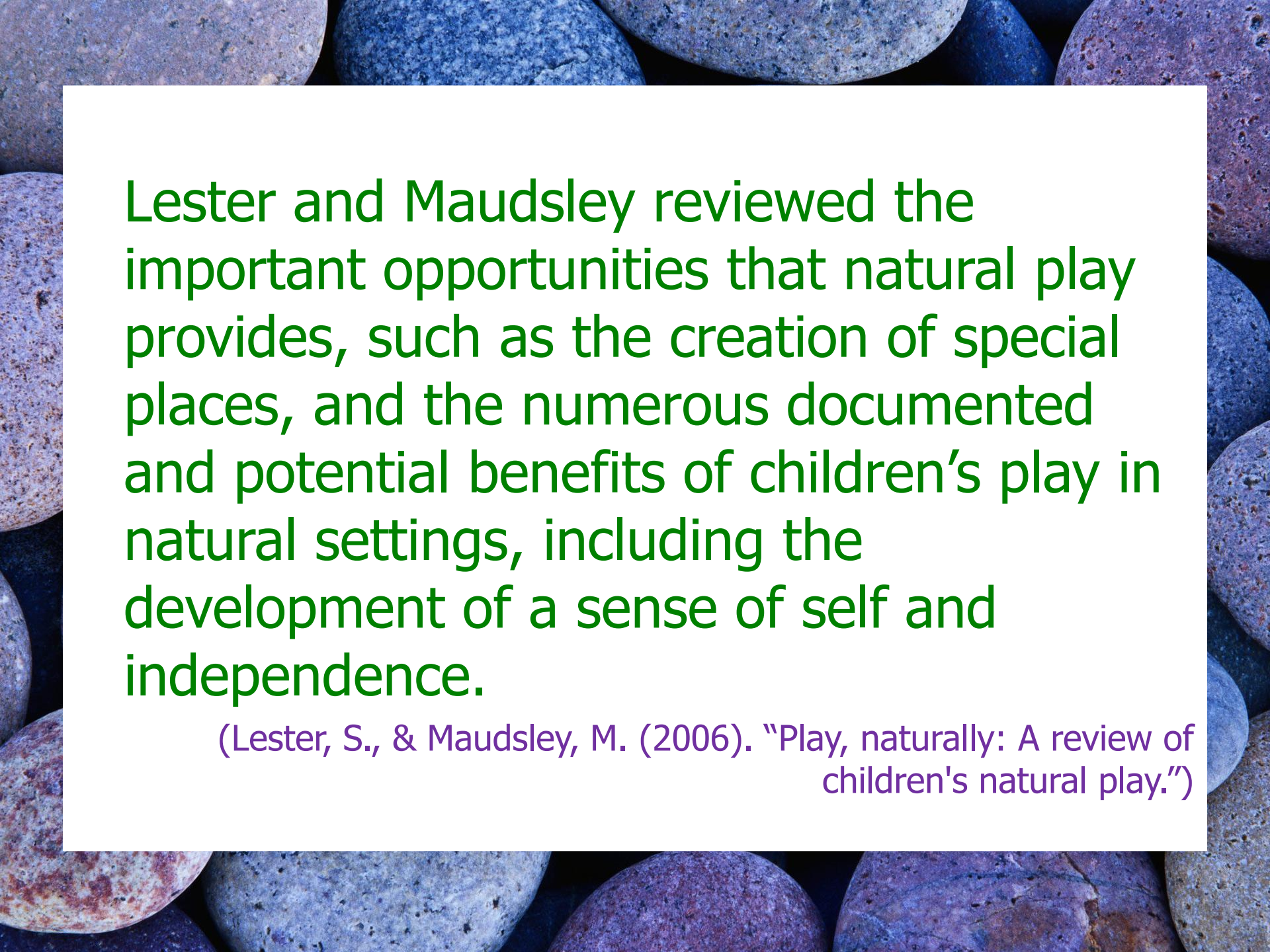


(Grahn, et al. 1997, Fjortoft 2001).

Nature buffers the impact of life stress on children and helps them deal with adversity. The greater the amount of nature exposure, the greater the benefits

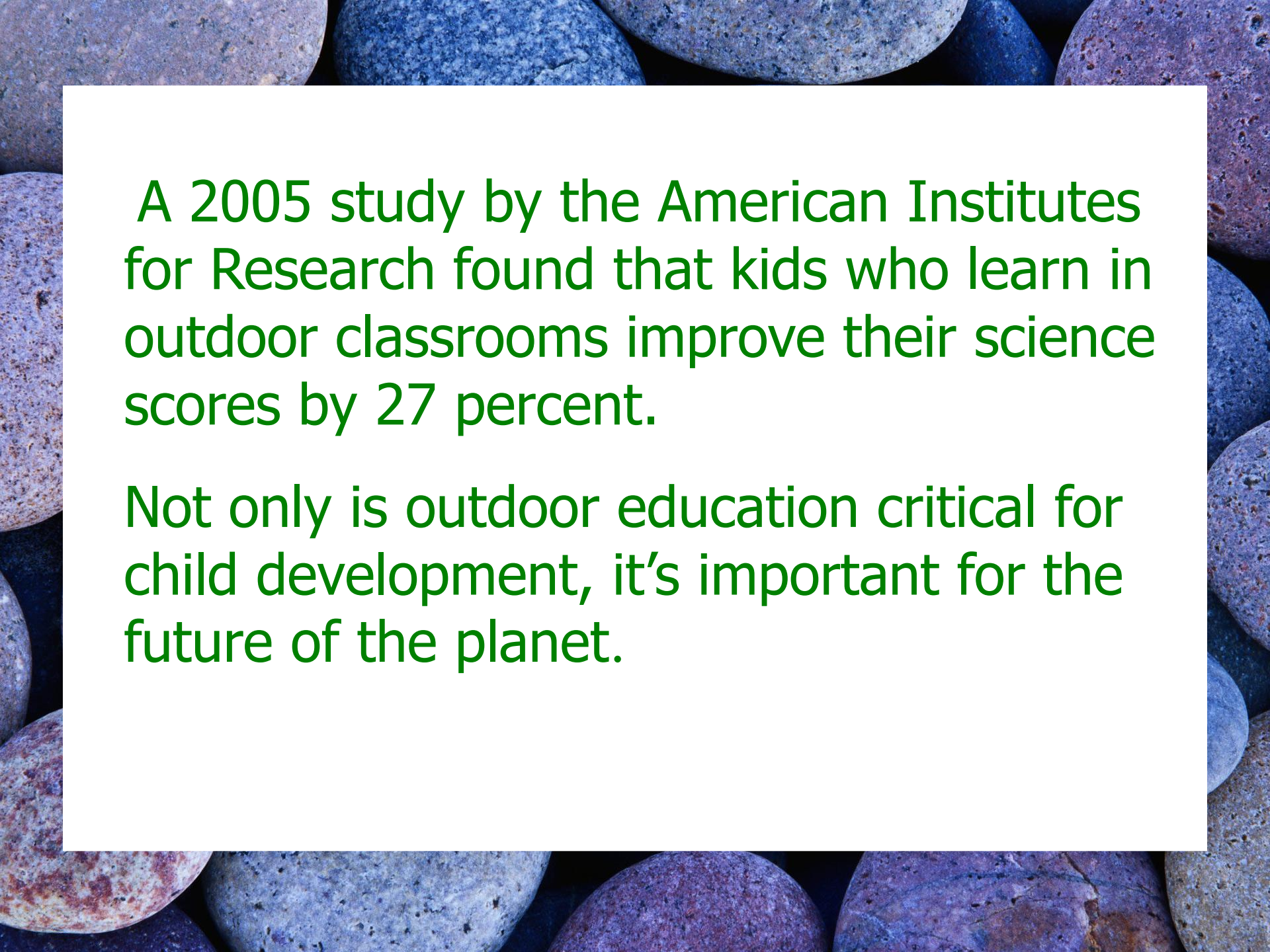
(Wells 2003).





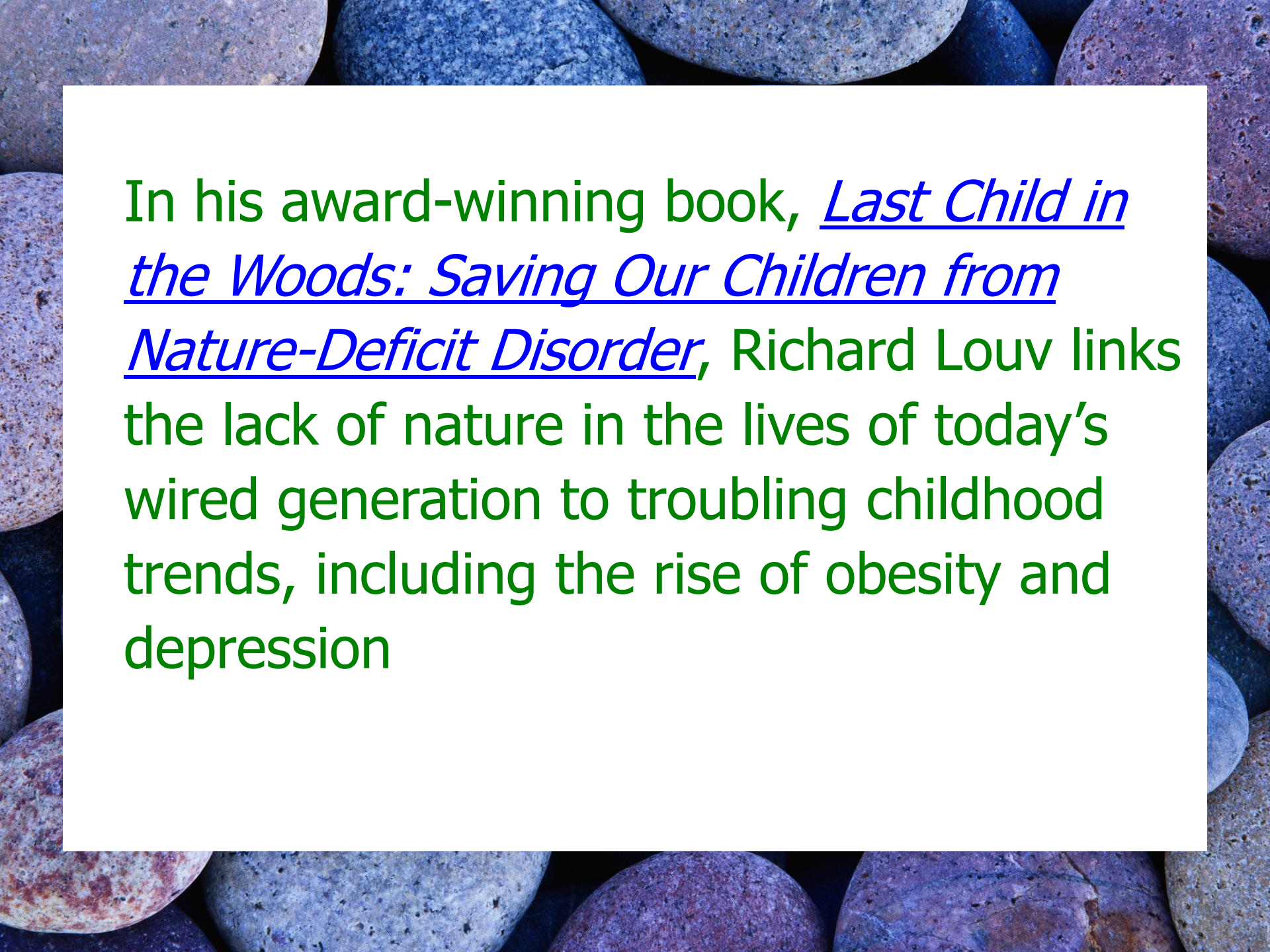
Lester and Maudsley reviewed the important opportunities that natural play provides, such as the creation of special places, and the numerous documented and potential benefits of children's play in natural settings, including the development of a sense of self and independence.

(Lester, S., & Maudsley, M. (2006). "Play, naturally: A review of children's natural play.")



A 2005 study by the American Institutes for Research found that kids who learn in outdoor classrooms improve their science scores by 27 percent.


Not only is outdoor education critical for child development, it's important for the future of the planet.



In his award-winning book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv links the lack of nature in the lives of today's wired generation to troubling childhood trends, including the rise of obesity and depression



What can we do?



In several parts of the world, notably Germany, Scotland, Norway, Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia, Forest Kindergartens have been established.

These forest kindergartens for children 3 to 6 are held almost exclusively outdoors in all kinds of weather.



Even if we are not ready to move completely outdoors we can ensure that all children have some time outdoors every day.

Outside play environments for young children should include:

- Water

- Plentiful vegetation - trees, bushes, flowers and long grasses that children can explore and interact with

- Animals, creatures in ponds, butterflies, bugs

Outside play environments for young children should include:

- Sand, and best if it can be mixed with water
- Diversity of colour, textures and materials
- Natural places to sit in, on, under, lean against, climb and provide shelter and shade.

Outside play environments for young children should include:

- Different levels and nooks and crannies, places that offer socialization, privacy and views.
- Structures, equipment and materials that can be changed, actually, or in their imaginations, including plentiful loose parts.

(White & Stoecklin 1998):



Try a few of these ideas.

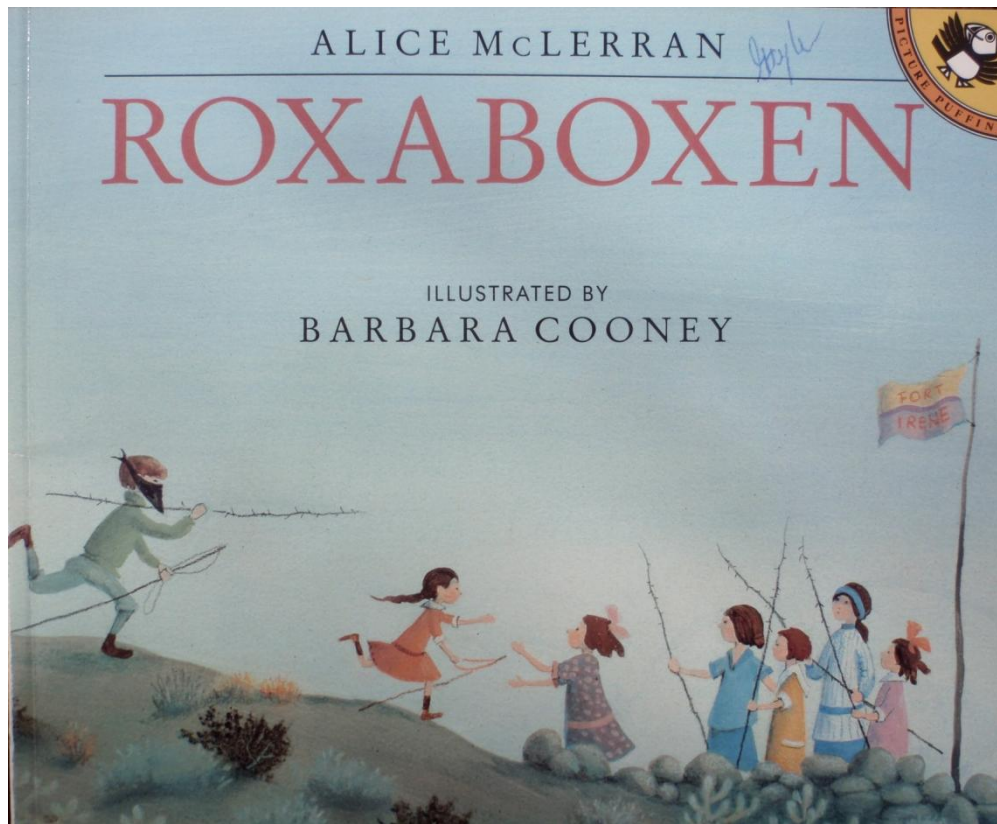
- Maintain a bird bath or a bird feeder.
- Encourage kids to camp in the backyard.
- Build a backyard weather station.
- Make a “green hour” a new family tradition, giving children time for unstructured play in the natural world.




Try a few of these ideas.

- Invent a nature game on a hike in the country.
- Build a tree house with your kids.
- Plant a garden
- Raise butterflies

Before and after going outside and even while being outside read books about nature.





“Let the Children Play # 4” is the fourth
in a series of 4 PPT presentations by
Gayle Karen Robertson at the **Manitoba
Regional Forums, Spring 2012**

**Healthy Child Manitoba
Manitoba Education – Early Childhood
Development Unit**

**Family Services and Labour – Early
Learning and Child Care**

Manitoba Parent Child Coalitions

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