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**Supporting CommUnity**

**Have Fun  
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*moving from common sense to common practice*

## **Let's Go to the Park!**

By Lori A. Hoffner

Let me ask you something.

When was the last time you laughed until your stomach actually started to hurt?

The kind of laugh that makes you double over, gasp for air, and say, "Please stop, I can't take it anymore"?

If it's hard to remember, you're not alone. Especially during the busiest time of year—when calendars fill up with work, activities, and obligations—it's easy to feel overwhelmed. The days blend together, stress builds, and even joy can feel out of reach.

But here's what your mind and body are trying to tell you: you need relief, not just rest. And sometimes, that relief starts with something as simple as laughter or a deep breath under an open sky.

This is where parks come in.

Parks are more than green spaces. They are powerful community resources that support mental wellness, physical health, and emotional connection.



Research shows that just spending time in a park—walking, playing, sitting, or laughing—can significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. The natural environment helps lower cortisol (the stress hormone), while increasing serotonin, which boosts mood and promotes emotional balance. Simply put, being outdoors in a park can help you feel better—mentally and physically.

When we're constantly moving through life on autopilot—scrolling, scheduling, and stressing—parks offer us the chance to pause. They give us space to breathe deeply, move intentionally, and even reconnect with joy. Physical activity in parks doesn't just support heart health or fitness goals—it helps regulate mood, improve sleep, and reduce mental fatigue.

According to the Mayo Clinic, laughter can relieve physical tension and stress for up to 45 minutes. And when paired with movement and social connection, the mental health benefits multiply. Parks are the perfect setting for that combination. They allow families to play together, friends to gather without pressure, and strangers to become neighbors.

In fact, community parks help reduce feelings of isolation by providing inclusive spaces where people can connect across generations and backgrounds. These shared experiences contribute to a stronger sense of belonging, which is crucial for emotional well-being.

Beyond mental health, parks also protect us from environmental harm. They reduce air and water pollution, cool down overheated neighborhoods, and preserve space from inappropriate development. And because they're usually located away from busy streets, they provide safer areas for children to play and for adults to walk, jog, or relax without the constant noise and stress of urban life.

This time of year, when stress can run high and energy can run low, remember that the park is more than just a place to pass the time. It's a place to reclaim time.

To laugh.

To move.

To connect.

To heal.

Parks create lifelong memories, support mental wellness, and remind us that joy isn't a distraction from the real world—it's a necessary part of it.

So take a walk. Watch the sunset. Kick off your shoes. Let the park remind you how good it feels to just be.

*Lori A. Hoffner, Organizational Development Speaker & Trainer helps people and organizations create open, positive, and inclusive environments through her speaking, training, and consulting. Since 1997, Lori has had the pleasure of working with audiences across the country to help them learn, grow, and develop positive practices for their organizations. If you want to learn how Lori can support your team, please [contact us](#).*