



Outdoor Play - Children know they need to be outside and we know it to!

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Children's access to outdoor play has evaporated like water in sunshine. It has happened so fast, along with everything else in this speed-ridden century, that we have not coped with it.

The Great Outdoors. Restoring Children's Right to Play Outside. Mary S. Rivkin

For many generations, children have played outside as a matter of fact. As adults, if we reflect on our own childhood, we remember magical moments of building snow forts with painfully red cheeks, seeing our first deer in the woods, catching a snowflake on our tongue, enjoying the gentle rain on our face and watching the stars with wonder.

The natural world is a stage for knowledge. The senses of smell, touch, and taste, as well as the sense of motion through space, are powerful modes of learning. Imagine plucking a fresh strawberry from the garden - how sweet the smell, how delicious the taste. The delight of firsthand experience in the natural world is powerful and perhaps crucial in a child's development.

Children have a natural affinity toward nature. Dirt, water, plants and small animals attract and hold children's attention for hours, days, even a lifetime. Without continuous hands-on experience, it is impossible for children to acquire a deep intuitive understanding of the natural world that is the foundation of sustainable development.

Natural Learning, Creating Environment for rediscovering Natural Way of Teaching, Robin C. Moore

Nature calms. The oxygen-rich air is a natural stress reliever. Fresh air also supplies a boost to our brain. The majority of "beings" feel a deep connectedness to themselves and the world when viewing a sunset or a babbling brook. These moments of awe increase endorphins ("feel good" chemicals in our brain) and reduce cortisol (stress chemicals in our brain). Our spirits lift when we embrace the wonders of nature.

While children think in terms of fun, fresh air and wonder, teachers think in terms of learning:

- **Speech and language areas** - spontaneous language dramatically increases when children play outside, children use descriptive language, they 'whisper' and 'shout', they request, comment, label and learn new words.
- **Physical areas** - leaping, running, jumping, chasing, rolling, climbing, balancing, tumbling and crawling.
- **Occupational areas** - small fingers work hard to pluck a tiny ladybug off a leaf. Children might: draw shapes in the snow, make snowballs, do up zippers and buttons, pick up coloured leaves and small rocks for collections, watch a bird in flight, look through binoculars or plant tiny seeds for a garden. Sensory experiences might include: cold snow, wet rain, warm sun, cool breezes, warm earth, wet grass, musty smelling leaves, rough tree bark, fragrant flowers and soft caterpillars.
- **Social areas** - talking to friends, negotiating, turn taking, sharing, making plans and group exploring.





- **Emotional areas** - strong feelings, risk taking, creative endeavours, personal needs, the power of 'being free' and feeling connected to a larger world (children will protect the very environment that gives them such joy!)
- **Cognitive areas** - counting bugs, colours and shapes, long/short, heavy/light, problem-solving skills- "what will happen if. . .", drawing, observing and experiencing basic physics concepts like gravity.

Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives.

Thomas Berry

As I write this, the sun is shining, the breeze is light and it appears that Spring has sprung. The children are outside laughing and shouting, running and falling, kicking up grass trying to grow and looking skyward when a bird or cloud catches their eye. We are very fortunate to have teachers and staff who value the beauty and mystery of nature. Teachers can guide children to experience nature, respect nature and appreciate the many, many mysteries it has to offer.

Through the eyes of a child, remember the first fuzzy caterpillar you held in your trembling hand...

