

Natural Experiences

"If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in." ~ Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder

I need natural experiences to:

- help me explore, compare, and describe the things around me.
- understand cause and effect.
- explore and understand my body.
- develop curiosity about the outdoors.
- learn respect for living creatures and other children, and to be gentle with them.
- discover the wonders of nature.
- explore the world through my senses: touch (textures), smell, sight (natural colors), hearing, and taste.



Two infants play at the local park on a blanket, exploring the fallen leaves.

Experiences in the Natural World

Fostering interest and affection for nature during early childhood creates positive feelings and attitudes toward nature that can last a lifetime.

My caregivers provide me with natural experiences by:

- collecting safe natural materials to explore. This can include sand, leaves, seashells, snow, seeds, and safe food items. Offer a table or dish tub where I can explore these items.
- providing safe, age-appropriate natural experiences. We can look at birds and insects or watch the weather.
- sharing the wonders of nature with me. We can play outside together, read books and tell stories, look at the sky, and handle natural objects like shells, rocks, and plants.
- watching to see what interests me.
- letting me explore natural items indoors and outdoors.
- giving me time to safely explore without interruption.

Making a mud pie might seem to some adults like just getting dirty. To a young child, it is an opportunity to feel the hardness of acorns and the grainy texture of sand and notice the different shapes of two kinds of leaves. Children compare the colors of rocks, feel the difference between ice and snow, and are amazed by the way light shines through an icicle or a raindrop." ~ Alyson Williams

- encouraging me to watch the natural world and describe what I see.
- exploring where we live together. Nature is everywhere, and everyone is part of it. It is important for me to connect with where I live and its unique sights, sounds, smells, and cycles. This gives me a foundation to explore the wider world later on.
- taking me to places where I can watch people and things in their natural settings.

After these infants repeatedly moved to the hose, the caregiver turned it on to let them explore it together. They watched the water run out of the hose, and splashed the water as it hit the ground.



Bugs Aren't Scary, Are They?

Some children may show a fear of bugs, spiders, and flying insects, especially in the early spring. Providing multiple opportunities to watch and learn about insects at a safe distance can help children become more comfortable. Try using bug catchers, or containers where the child can watch an insect and then let it go.

“A rainy or snowy day doesn’t have to mean staying indoors. Keep some inexpensive slickers or rubber boots on hand so that children can splash in puddles and play in the rain. However, never take children outside when lightning is part of the rainstorm.” ~Nancy Rosenow

To learn more about natural experiences, view the Resources and References found at the end of these materials.