A Guide to Nature Play

Playing with nature, not just in nature

Nature Play is...

Climbing a tree, exploring the bush, building a cubby or searching for shells or bugs.

It's about being outdoors and using nature to:

Move - Dig - Splash
Create - Discover - Imagine

It is unstructured play (play without rules).

It can happen...

At a park, reserve, forest, bush land area, national park, creek, river, beach or in a paddock or backyard.

It lets children...

Use their imagination, learn about nature and the world around them and play with:

Rocks - Dirt - Sand - Mud - Water - Shells
Trees - Leaves - Flowers - Bugs

It's good for children...

As it gets their bodies moving and minds active. Anytime outdoors, away from screens is great for children!

BUT it doesn't happen enough

Today's children are spending more time indoors than any other generation in human history. Too much screen time, structured play and parental concern over safety are stopping Nature Play.

Parents and carers can help make Nature Play a normal, fun part of children's lives.

Tips for Nature Play

- To encourage children to enjoy Nature Play let them direct their own play, be a positive role model and show interest in their discoveries and adventures.
- Allocate time for enjoying the outdoors and remember free time doesn't have to mean screen time. Make outdoor Nature Play a priority for your family!
- Equipment like spades for digging, containers to collect critters, binoculars to spot birds, sketch pads or cameras to record discoveries are great for Nature Play.

Rough ground

Set aside part of your backyard for children to dig, build, hide or plant. Children could come up with a name for the space and then create a sign to put in the ground or hang from a tree.

Mud station

Collect some old pots, pans, bowls and wooden spoons and allocate a space in your yard for messy play with access to dirt and water. Or make it mobile and contained by using an old wheelbarrow.

Plants and trees

Plants and trees let children grow and pick food, flowers and leaves, climb, hide behind and spot wildlife. Weeping trees form secret spaces, and tunnels can be created by planting arching shrubs in front of fences.

Construction zone

Provide "loose parts" to build cubbies and forts using: branches, sticks, wooden boards, milk crates, small tarps, cardboard, tyres, blankets, hay bales, whatever can be used safely.

Water fun

Have a hose, sprinkler or bottles of water for play with buckets, trays, milk jugs, watering cans, hollow bamboo poles or plastic pipes.

Peaceful setting

Create some quiet, sheltered spots in your yard where children can sit and plan their fun. Try a swing, hammock, fort, cubby, teepee with cushions or a trellis covered with runner beans plants.

FAMILY FOOD PATCH

www.familyfoodpatch.org.au

Some content used in this tool has been adapted from 'Nature Play Western Australia'

child health association tasmania