



Learning at Home with ECO

Nature offers an escape. Research shows that spending time outside, whether it's a park or your backyard, calms your central nervous system, slows your heart rate, and boosts your immune system.

Please be mindful to follow all current official guidance when venturing outdoors: always maintain 6 feet of distance from people not in your household, and check current state guidance for travel restrictions and park closures. The Leave No Trace center also offers helpful resources for exploring responsibly.

Even our backyards or local parks offer a treasure trove of beauty and wonder to explore. Have fun with these ideas, and let us know how they go! Hashtag #exploringwitheco and share your discoveries with us on social media.

Tips for Engaging Children in Outdoor Exploration

- Model behavior to engage your children. For example: get down on your hands and knees to look closely at a flower, etc. Invite them to follow your lead!
- Voice your enthusiasm, curiosity and observations.
- Address children as 'scientists' or 'ecologists' to build their science identity.
- Encourage children to use their five senses, with the exception of taste.
- Go with the flow. Don't get attached to the exact schedule you set or activities you plan. Nature is unpredictable and some of the best teachable moments happen when you least expect them.

Activities That Can Be Used Anywhere Outdoors

- Animal Ears: ask children to cup their hands behind their ears and close their eyes in an effort to hear how animals with large ears hear. Encourage children to turn their heads/bodies around slowly, noticing how sound changes as they move. Ask children to share reflections on their experience during the activity.
- Quiet Reflection: ask children to close their eyes and breathe deeply for one minute without saying anything. After the activity, ask children to reflect on how their body feels and what they experienced when they were quiet. Ask if they feel different when they are outside, compared to how they do when they are indoors.

- Nature's Rainbow - find every color of the rainbow in nature (partners or solo). Challenge children to gather every color they can find, and they can't pick anything! Have them line up their findings on the ground and make little nature rainbows.
- Guessing Game: What Animal Am I? Kids try to guess an animal as you gradually give hints. Example: This animal is small, brown and is a rodent. This animal has a small tail and likes to hop. This animal likes to eat roots, and burrows in the ground. It's a rabbit!
- Create natural scavenger hunt lists: a pinecone, an animal home, the color red, a seed
- Use 'ambulators.' Examples: as you walk, invite children to share the following:
 - The coolest looking bug you've ever seen
 - How plants make their own food
 - What the ecological role of a mushroom is
 - Where you would build a home in this environment and why
 - How you would change the world if you had a magic wand

Synthesis Activities

- Dear Nature Letter: Have children sit outside and write a letter to 'nature' using paper and pencil. Example prompts include:
 - Dear Nature,
 - Today, I learned...
 - My favorite part was...
 - I was surprised...
 - I am grateful for...
 - I observed...
- Share: Invite children to share the coolest thing they saw, heard, felt, smelled or what surprised them the most. Discuss how learning on the outing was different than learning in the classroom. Ask them to share something they learned.
- Reflection Through Drawing: Invite kids to draw a picture that captures their experience of the outing.
- Write a poem expressing childrens' feelings/experience from the day.

We hope these ideas help you see your surroundings with fresh eyes! Be sure to connect with us online. We want to hear what wonders you encountered while exploring at home.