



How Can Being in Nature Help my Child?

Explore The Wonders of Nature With Your Child

by Mark Stead, Head of Learning at WWT

Getting children outdoors, exploring nature is great for them as well as being good for the environment. Connecting with nature has been shown to...

- Improve children's physical health.
- Make children feel happier and less anxious.
- Increase children's confidence and self-esteem.
- Improve children's emotional regulation.
- Help develop creativity, problem-solving skills and intellectual development.
- Help children develop social and communication skills.

So we know it's great for your children, but how do you go about it? Here are our 7 top tips for how to make the most of being in nature...

Moments not minutes

Many parents feel like they simply don't have time to explore nature with their children now we all lead such busy lives. But the great news is that you don't have to spend long in nature for it to be of benefit. In fact, it's not about how long you spend there, it's what you do whilst you're there that's important.



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A sense of freedom

The most important thing is to allow your child the freedom to explore what's around them. Encourage them to use all of their senses. Children are more likely to experience the benefits if they have hands-on experiences with nature. Encourage them to look carefully, to touch, feel and smell natural objects. Get them to be quiet and listen to the sounds of nature. With nature connection, it shouldn't be a case of look and don't touch. In fact, quite the opposite. It's more a case of look and do touch... and smell, and listen!

Everyday nature

The other great news is that you don't have to go far. Some of the best nature connection moments are right on your doorstep, no matter where you live. A child looking closely at a plant (dare I say a 'weed') growing through a gap in the pavement can be just as powerful as visiting a National Park. In fact, it's more important that children connect with the nature on their doorstep. This means they can develop a long-term relationship with these places and the animals and plants that live there. Why not see how many signs of nature you can find within view of your front door?

Feelings not facts

Many parents worry that they don't know the name of all the plants and animals. Don't worry, this isn't important. Explore and discover things with your child – if they ask something you can't answer, find out together. It's more about creating emotional connections than having lots of knowledge.



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No equipment required

People also worry that they need all of the latest equipment, such as telescopes and expensive cameras. This couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, you don't need any specialist equipment at all. Some of the best nature connection experiences are things like walking barefoot across grass, rolling down a slope or simply looking at the shapes in the clouds!

There's no such thing as bad weather...

...only bad clothing. Or so they say. In fact, you don't really need any special clothing either. A pair of wellies and a good set of waterproofs is great, but the most important thing is that your child wears clothes that you don't mind getting muddy. That's all part of the fun!

Get stuck in and give it a go

Remember that nature is great for you too. It's a great opportunity to strengthen family bonds through sharing experiences with your children. So don't forget your wellies as well – Get stuck in with your children! The most important thing is to give it a go and explore together – you never know what wonders you might find.

Some ideas to get you started

We've developed a whole host of simple nature activities to get you started. Visit

<https://generationwild.wwt.org.uk/activities> to find out more.



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About the author

Mark Stead is Head of Learning at WWT, the charity for wetlands and wildlife. He oversees a learning programme across their ten UK wetland sites. Mark has a particular passion for connecting children with nature. He has run Forest School sessions for children from a council estate where he lives and has completed an MSc in Education for Sustainability. Having been a primary school teacher for over ten years, he understands some of the barriers to connecting children with nature and is keen to help people overcome these. He enjoys exploring nature with his seven year old son, Danny, who is quickly developing his dad's passion for all things nature.



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