



Time in Nature - Ideas for Families with Young Children

Play outside in the rain together. Try to catch raindrops on your tongues. Ask your child what the raindrops taste like. Let the raindrops fall on the exposed skin of your hands or arms. Can you and your child see each droplet? What do they feel like — cool, wet, fresh?

Take a walk in the evening or at dawn or dusk. Ask your child what feels different about being outside at this time of day?

Splash in a puddle together and explore what you can find. Throw small stones in the puddle and watch the ripples. Alternatively, use a water table or bring a big bowl of water outside. What can each of you see reflected in the water? Can your child hold the water in their hands? Talk together about the way water moves.

Play in the dirt/sand/mud with your child. Make mud pies together. Encourage your child to squish the soil between their hands or draw in it with their fingers. Ask them what it feels like. Build mounds of dirt and pour water over them. Can you observe where the soil goes?

Make tracks in the mud. See if you can find other animal tracks. Which animals do you think made them? Take turns telling stories about the tracks you make or find.

Bring some fresh cut apple branches or forsythia inside and place them in a jar of water. Watch them bloom over a few days to a week, making sure to keep the water fresh. Take guesses about when you each think the flowers will open. With your child, try drawing the branches every day to observe the way they change. *Colored pencils or watercolors work well.

Lie on a tarp or blanket together and look up at the sky (being careful not to look at the sun). What shapes can you find in the clouds? Do you see any birds flying? Imagine what it would be like to be a cloud blown by the wind or a bird flying. Encourage your child to close their eyes and feel the sun and breeze on their face.

Build fairy houses with twigs, pine cones, leaves, grasses, and other found natural materials. Leave them somewhere special for little creatures to find.

Place seed or a bird bath out for birds to eat and bathe. You and your child can watch them from a window or from outside, if you sit quietly nearby. Notice and keep a list of the birds that you see in your yard or near your house.

Collect leaves and flowers. Arrange them into different shapes or patterns on the ground (or a table inside if it's too windy). You can press them in a book, where they will flatten and dry for your child to save.

On a sunny day, experiment with the shadows your bodies cast on the ground. Ask your child to dance, wiggle, and make different shapes with their body! You can trace their shadows with chalk on pavement or just watch them change.

Encourage your child to run outside in a safe, open space. Can they hear the wind in their ears? How fast can they run? Ask them what happens when they put their arms out like a bird.

Bring an old sheet outside on a breezy day and make a sail by helping each other hold the corners together, letting the wind fill the fabric. Talk about what it feels like to hold onto it.

Collect small stones and look closely at them. Ask your child why they picked the stones they did. How do the stones feel in their hands? Can they describe the stones (i.e. shiny, smooth, or rough?) Try building something together with your stones, like a tower or a tiny house.

Sit by a stream together and listen to the sound of rushing water. Throw small leaves and sticks in the water and watch them float downstream. Help your child dip their hands or feet into the water. Ask them what it feels like. Can they feel the pull of the current?

Visit a nearby pond. What animals might live in or near a pond? Talk together about which animals you can see or hear, and what pond life might be like for each of them.

Gather "loose parts:" sticks, stones, rocks, pine cones, etc. and then add things from around the house like balls, pieces of rope, spoons or scoops, containers. Now together create a game to play with these materials.

Pick a special spot that you visit each day or several times a week. Notice any changes that you see. Take a minute and close your eyes to listen to what sounds you hear.

Plant seeds in a pot of soil on a sunny windowsill or in a patch of loosened dirt outside with plenty of sunshine. Help your child give the seeds a little water every day and watch them sprout! *Sunflower, bean or pea seeds work well because they are easy to see and often emerge quickly from the soil.

Go outside and pretend to be baby animals with your child. What kind will you be? What would you both be doing?

Put together a back pack that you take each time you go outside to explore that includes: paper, crayons, pencils, magnifiers, string, small scissors, small gathering jars, small trowel, a flashlight. What else might you all want to have with you when you head outdoors?