

Being Outside with Children

Positive interactions with the natural world are an important part of healthy child development and a key aspect of the Four Winds Nature Program.

There's so much to see and learn outside, no matter where you are. Nature can be a source of wonder, joy and inspiration for children - here are some suggestions to help you and the children with whom you are working safely explore the nearby natural world.

Before you take children outside, consider the following suggestions for creating successful exploration time:

- ✓ Begin with simple experiences, in an environment that is familiar.
- ✓ Revisit the same place often.
- ✓ "Facilitate" rather than "Teach" by noticing what the children are discovering and experiencing. Small groups with an adult are ideal for this.
- ✓ Model caring and respect for the environment.
- ✓ Encourage kids to observe nature in place and only collect natural items if appropriate.
- ✓ Have a plan for a "circle up" to get the group together after your explorations to share discoveries or talk about something important.
- ✓ Include a ceremony for releasing any living creature that is captured back into the natural environment where it was found.
- ✓ Have fun! Your joy and enthusiasm are contagious!

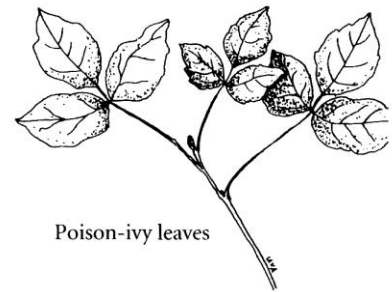
Tips for Exploring Nature with Children

Ahead of time:

- All schools have different rules and protocols for time outside; be sure you've reviewed your school's handbook. Ultimately, classroom teachers are responsible for their students and familiar with school emergency protocols and so should stay with the group inside and out.
- Pre-scout the area before you visit with children. Be alert to possible dangers - steep cliffs, fast streams, broken glass or barbed wire, wasp nests, poison ivy, etc. AND take note of interesting discoveries for the children to make when you are here later!
- Let children know how much you are looking forward to going outside with them this year and ask them for their ideas about safe outdoor behavior. This can be a rich discussion with students - be sure all agree on the final distilled "Be Safe" list.
- Explain about and practice "freezing" when the safety whistle blows so children know what it means. And you might choose some special call and response (a barred owl call? A wolf howl?) as a signal for the group to circle up.
- It's best to have at least two adults when out in the woods or fields with a group of kids. Be sure another adult knows where you're going and when you all will return.
- Communicate with families about upcoming Four Winds days so parents can help make sure children are appropriately dressed for being outside, and perhaps getting dirty or wet. Parents may want to consider sunscreen and/or bug spray for their child.

Every time:

- Have clear plans for your outdoor experience: observations to record, drawings to display, information and notes to compile, an investigation or a role play game, a discussion to review questions that emerged during the lesson, etc.
- Prepare a backpack with plenty of water, snacks (if needed), and even a small first-aid kit. Some schools have walkie-talkies to take outside with groups. Bring one cell phone out with the group, for emergencies only.
- Give directions inside about what you all will be doing outside. (And you'll give those directions again outside!)
- Briefly review your group's "Be Safe" list. And remind students of your expectations for everyone while outside - to be thinking and acting like scientists.
- Make sure children take a pre-trip bathroom break.
- Get an accurate child count before you go and make sure all the kids know today's "magic number" - and then count kids often (have the kids count, too), plus each time you move to a different area and before going inside. Assign buddies, if appropriate.
- Do you have a special meeting place where you circle up outside? Make sure kids know it!
- Clearly point out to all children the boundaries for today's exploration. And any safety concerns you found on your earlier scoping-the-site visit.
- Be present - focus on the children, count heads often, listen to their stories, share in their discoveries.
- Have fun!



Other things to consider:

- In the winter, everyone should have a hat that covers the ears, mittens or gloves and some warm, waterproof boots. Many schools keep kids inside if the windchill is 10°F or lower.
- Good hygiene now includes regularly checking for ticks. Some schools send young kids home after an outdoor lesson wearing a sticker on their shirt that says, "We got to learn and explore outside today! Be sure to check me for ticks."
- Think about all the children in the class as you plan your lessons, inside and outside - be inclusive of all abilities. Ask the classroom teacher for help in meeting the needs of all the students.
- The more often you take a group outside, the better they are at it. And the more you all will enjoy this time together!

