KNEE HIGH NATURE:
Nature-Based Play and Learning in Early Childhood

Whether climbing on rocks and logs, building fairy houses, or pretending to be butterflies, young children learn a great deal about the world - and about themselves - when they have time to imagine, run, and simply be kids outside.

Outdoor play in nature is an important part of healthy child development. As an early childhood professional, parent, or family member, you can help meet this need by giving young children plenty of unhurried and unstructured time outdoors. Knee High Nature provides professional development workshops and discussion groups that not only help you explore nearby nature with children, but also engage you in the best practices for frequent and authentic nature-based play and learning for children.

Nature-Based Play and Learning Professional Development – for Early Childhood Educators and Child Care Professionals

To accommodate the diversity of professional development needs, Knee High Nature offers the Year of Nature Exploration Workshops and a more in-depth Professional Development Workshop Series:

- **A Year of Nature Exploration Workshops**

  In each season of the year, Four Winds’ Knee High Nature naturalist/educators will lead your group in a series of 2 ½-hour workshops relevant to the outdoor spaces just beyond your door, for a possible total of 10 contact hours.

  **Some examples of local natural ecosystems and phenomena that we might explore are:**
  - Rotting logs and leaf litter
  - Water and mud
  - Weeds and seeds
  - Under and over the snow
  - Twigs, buds and bark
  - Flowers
  - Salamanders and frogs
  - Colors of nature

  Throughout the series, we also investigate your role as adult mentor, discuss strategies to help children play together and resolve conflicts, and introduce ways to involve parents and families in authentic nature play. These workshops give you the tools you need to both meet early learning standards and spend more quality time outside in every season with the children in your care. Check our website, fwni.org, for more information.
Nature-based Play and Learning Professional Development Workshop Series

Four Winds’ Nature-Based Play and Learning Professional Development Workshop Series is designed for early childhood educators and childcare providers looking to spend more time outdoors with the children with whom they work. This series provides ongoing professional support as together we venture outside and investigate best practices in developing rich outdoor learning opportunities with resulting important social, emotional, behavioral and cognitive benefits. We facilitate these nature-based play and learning series in partnership with schools, early childhood centers, Vermont Early Childhood Networks/Starting Points Networks around the state. Each participant has the opportunity to earn up to 15 hours of PD through the series. Check our website, fwni.org, for more information.

Each meeting includes:
• Welcome and closing circles
• Extended time outdoors
• Suggested readings and resources to enhance discussions
• A focus on building peaceful learning communities with children
• Engaging nature-based play and learning activities and routines
• Reflection and support for changes in practice resulting in richer outdoor learning opportunities for students

Nurturing a Child’s Sense of Wonder: 3-part Discussion and Play Groups for Parents and Families

Four Winds’ Nurturing a Child’s Sense of Wonder family/parent discussion series introduces the whys and hows of nature-based play and learning. Using ideas and excerpts from the book Adventure, Play, Peace by Nancy Bower to prompt discussion and inspire outdoor play, the sessions will focus on nature-based play and learning strategies to nurture the social and emotional well-being of all children (and adults, too!). Four Winds offers these three-session, 1 ½-hour conversations via online conferencing and/or in-person sessions in partnership with public libraries, parent-teacher organizations, parent-child centers across Vermont. The format is flexible, depending on the group’s preferences. While the discussions are for adults, the third session invites children to join the group so we can all play together outdoors and nurture that sense of wonder!