

A child's interests are

Windows Of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

Experiencing the outdoors is a powerful learning activity for many young children



Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

Right outside your door!

- Let your child explore puddles after a rain or, for extra fun, during a gentle rain in warm weather! She'll be fascinated by the tiny splashes and ring-shaped ripples that raindrops make on the surface of a puddle. Show her how to make larger splashes and ripples by tossing small rocks and other natural materials into a puddle. Which ones make the loudest and highest splashes? Can she see her reflection in the water? Don't forget to have fun together stomping and hopping through puddles feet first—in rubber boots or barefoot, according to the weather!



■ Help your child plant in a small part of your yard. Together choose plants that grow quickly and produce showy flowers and fruits. Your small gardener will marvel at what he accomplishes. Some ideas: giant sunflowers, pea vines with strings or netting to climb toward the sun, summer squash, zucchini, melons, or pumpkins.

■ Let your yard be a place to observe and learn about seasonal changes. Plant a fruit tree, such as an apple or cherry, and mark the seasons by observing and talking about the ways it changes through the year. Take photos and use them to let your child tell or listen to a story about her special tree. Or, let your child experience some of these other activities during each season:

Spring: Explore around your yard to see who can be first to spot new shoots popping through the soil; make special treats for wild birds; tend bird feeders and bird baths.

Summer: Play in a lawn sprinkler or a shallow wading pool; grow and taste summer fruits and vegetables.

Fall: Gather and press autumn leaves flat between the pages of a heavy book; make leaf collages; jump in a pile of just-raked leaves.

Winter: Collect twigs and pinecones for a fire in a fireplace or wood-burning stove to enjoy together; break icicles off porch railings and branches with mitten hands; touch, taste, and sing about falling snow!

Places to learn and activities to enjoy AWAY FROM HOME

Anywhere outdoors

- Sit together beneath a tree. Listen to and talk about the many sounds you hear. Try to imitate some of them, such as bird calls, crickets and other insects, rushing water, and leafy branches moving in the wind. Encourage your child when he tries to copy sounds of the outdoors.



- Encourage your young child's interest in picking up and holding bits of the natural environment that catch her attention outdoors. Let her hold and examine rocks, leaves, feathers, nuts, pine cones, twigs, and other items as you tell her what they are and talk about how they look and feel. Take care to steer her away from anything toxic or sharp, or anything that might be a danger if placed in her mouth.
- Take home some of the things your child finds on nature walks, and display them in his room on a special shelf or bulletin board. Praise him for his interesting "finds," and let him show the display to visiting friends and family members.
- Plan frequent opportunities to enjoy outdoor places together, such as parks, hiking trails, nature preserves, beaches or lake shores, and wildlife centers. Take along a snack or picnic meal to eat in the open air together. Your child might like to help prepare or carry the food for your outing.
- Invite another parent and child, a relative, or friend along when you explore a new outdoor place with your child. It's fun for your child to share her excitement about the outdoors with other people. She'll love the chance to gain knowledge from what she sees and experiences with others.

Duck pond

- Take along a change of clothes so your little one can delight in getting close to (or even in!) the water, with your close supervision.
- Talk about the kinds of food ducks enjoy and bring some along so your child can toss food to the ducks. A couple of good choices are cracked corn and bits of stale bread crust.
- Imitate the ducks' quacks and movements. Have fun with your child engaging in silly duck behavior.
- Take a look around with your child to see if you can find a duck's nesting place, a fallen duck feather, or even an egg!
- Marvel at a mama duck taking her little ones for a walk or a swim.
- Make up funny stories to tell about the duck families you see.



Taking a walk in the neighborhood

- Open umbrellas and take your young child for a walk as rain or snow falls. Sing songs and recite nursery rhymes about the weather as you walk along. Let your little one feel raindrops and snow flakes on his nose and fingers. Talk about sensations like "cold," "wet," etc.
- Before heading out for a walk, look out the window together and ask, "What should we wear?" Let your child find coats, hats, boots, etc., and praise her for getting herself ready to go outside!

