

MB&A's

Child-Care Chatter

News and Information for Early Childhood Professionals

Go Outside and Play!

If you grew up in the years before 1980, you were probably told to "Get outside and play!" on more than one occasion. Your hours after school, on weekends and in the summer were likely filled with bike riding, skating, vacant lot baseball games, splashing in the creek behind your house, and other free-play activities. Most children today will never share your experiences.

According to the Children & Nature Network, a non-profit organization that supports reconnecting children and nature, today's children spend much less time outdoors, spend much more time with electronic technology, have little free and unstructured time, and even ride their bicycles 30 percent less than we did. The results? Research indicates that this "nature deficit" is negatively impacting

the health and wellbeing of our children. The rate of childhood obesity has doubled over the past 20 years, and children's free play and discretionary time has declined by 9 hours a week during that same period. To make matters worse, their lack of exposure to nature has made our children less sensitive to and concerned about their environment and ours.

Reconnecting children with nature and giving them an opportunity to play in an unstructured environment has numerous benefits. Research shows that they become fitter and leaner. They tend to play more creatively and to have lower stress level. They are also more likely to grow into environmentally committed adults.

Teachers, caregivers and parents give us lots of

reasons to explain why today's children spend less time in nature, including concerns about safety, the lack of readily accessible natural areas, increased residential traffic, more demands from school, and the ever-present appeal of television and computers. Most of all, however, they cite STRANGER-DANGER.

While it is always important for us to be vigilant when it comes to the safety of the children in our care, we must strive to find ways to encourage them to "Go outside and play!" and learn about their planet. That is why we have devoted this issue of *Child-Care Chatter* to the subject.

Sources: *Connecting Today's Kids with Nature*, National Wildlife Federation, 5/08 and *Children and Nature 2008*, Children and Nature Network, 1/08.



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What's New at MB&A?

We are very pleased to report that Release 6.0 of our courseware will be ready for distribution in September. You will continue to find your favorite characters—Johnny, Joey, Janie and

ES—in this release, but you will also have four new courses from which to choose. We have added the third set of Ages & Stages courses for the toddler years and a course entitled

Temper! Temper! Teaching and Caring for Angry Children.

All of the courses in this release have been updated and improved. Our technogurus have performed

their magic to make the programs load and run faster.

Call 1-877-655-7139 to pre-order your copies or drop us a note.

Never Too Young for Nature



It is never too early to start introducing a child to nature. Even the youngest infants and toddlers enjoy the experiences of touching, listening and observing the world

around them. As teachers and caregivers, we can make it possible for them to explore their world. Here are a few simple things you can do.

- **Walk through a park or wooded area.** Point out colorful flowers, leaves—especially when they are changing in the fall, squirrels and chipmunks as they scamper by, and other interesting objects. Talk about each object and allow the children to touch whatever is safe.
- **Bring nature into the classroom.** You can bring leaves, rocks, pinecones and flowers into the classroom where children can observe and touch them. Just be watchful in case they decide they also want to taste them, too.
- **Read books about nature.** While the youngest of the children may not understand all of the words, they will enjoy and relate to the pictures of animals and their surroundings. (See Tech-Notes for web sites that list books and other resources.)
- **Decorate with nature in mind.** Plants, posters and nature collections (seashells, dried flowers, leaves) are constant reminders of the natural world.
- **Play games that emphasize nature.** For example, gather an assortment of stuffed animals and let the children act like each of the animals. (The web site <http://kindernature.storycounty.com> is chocked full of games and activities.)
- **Plant a window garden in your classroom.** Depending on their age, the children can help put soil into containers, drop seeds into the soil, help water the plants, and watch them grow!

- **Start a recycling program in your center or school.** According to the National Network for Child Care (NNCC), children as young as age two to three have the cognitive ability to learn about recycling and conservation. Think about the developmental skills and knowledge you are already teaching these children—sorting, matching, sequencing, critical thinking, social responsibility. All of these skills relate to recycling and conservation.
- **Encourage parents to get involved.** As with any early childhood program, it is important for parents to participate in and reinforce your efforts to teach about nature. They can duplicate many of the activities described above.

SOURCES: "Infants and Toddlers Meet the Natural World," *Young Children*, 1/08. "Wee Recyclers Is Our Name: Recycling, Reusing Is Our Game," *National Network for Child Care's Connection Newsletter*, 2/96.

Carole's Corner

Fall will be here sooner than we think, but for the moment, everyone's thoughts turn to the warm weather and the great outdoors. At least, every child's thoughts turn to the outdoors. We adults are sometimes guilty of wanting to stay inside instead of enjoying all of the outdoor opportunities that warm weather offers. While we want to be careful to make sure children do not become overheated or dehydrated, we do want to encourage them to enjoy nature. We also want to teach them to respect it. The remaining days of summer and the early, warm days of autumn offer lots of chances to do just that.

One of the most fun and educational outdoor activities for young children is a nature scavenger hunt. Even very young children can enjoy

this activity if it is modified to accommodate their young age and skill level. Children can work alone, in groups, or in conjunction with an adult to find treasures of nature such as pine cones, rocks, different colors of flowers, and even bugs, but be sure to carry jars with holes in the lids since the bugs to breathe, too. Creative teachers and caregivers can develop lists of treasures to find that fit perfectly the age and developmental levels of the children in their care.

Another fun way to enjoy the outdoors and to teach the children to respect their environment is to have a "litter walk." Scout a safe area ahead of time and lead the children on a well-planned walk to hunt for litter. As the children

spot different types of litter, have the adults on the hike actually pick it up and place it in a bag.

After returning to the classroom or center, allow the children to watch as the adults dispose of the litter in a proper manner, and congratulate the children on helping to clean up their environment. This activity can be accompanied by any number of stories that are available now that encourage children to help keep their environment clean.

Have a safe and fun summer and fall, and take advantage of the seasons' many opportunities to teach our young children to enjoy nature.



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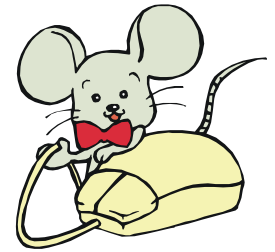
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Tech-Notes

There are so many wonderful resources that deal with encouraging children to "Get Outside and Play!" and with teaching nature, it's difficult to choose a list of favorites. But, here are the ones we found most helpful:

- **www.epa.gov/kids** This site is maintained by the Environmental Protection Agency and provides you with age-appropriate activities and links to other sites.
- **www.kid-at-art.com/htdoc/matchtmp.html** This links you to The Imagination Factory's Trash Matcher, which lists dozens of ways to recycle or reuse everything from aluminum foil to yarn.
- **www.planetpals.com** Planetpals is supported by the

Friends for Earth Group and provides



"learning helpers" for parents and teachers, activities, and fun facts pages.

- **EЕК!** (Environmental Education for Kids) is located at www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/ce/eed/cool/index.htm. This site, developed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, is full of activities and games.
- **www.homeschoolzone.com/pp/recycle.htm** This one is just for fun. Lots of holiday ideas that make recycling easy.

The Three "R's"

No, this has nothing to do with reading, writing and 'rithmetic. This is about the three basic environment "R's."

- **Reduce:** This means cutting back on the amount of waste we create each day. For example, use canvas or other fabric shopping bags instead of collecting plastic bags.
- **Reuse:** You can reduce the

amount of waste paper you generate by reusing gift bags and printing on the backs of printer paper. Check our web sources for 100s of other ideas.

- **Recycle:** Recycling means shredding, melting or processing an object in order to create new raw material. Just a few of the many, many items that

can be recycled include aluminum cans that can be made into new cans and paper and cardboard that can be recycled into other paper products.

Next time you start to toss something into your trash can, ask yourself, "Can I reduce the amount I'm using? Can I reuse this item? Can I recycle this item?" You may be surprised at the answer!

"No Child Left Inside"



In April 2006, Richard Louv, author of "Last Child in the Woods," called for a national campaign to "Leave No Child Inside" and to reconnect children and nature.

Since then, dozens of programs under a variety of names

have sprung up around the U.S., in Canada, the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Connecticut, among the first states to join the campaign, named its program to get more families into underutilized state parks "No Child Left Inside," while Texas declared, "Life is Better Outside." Regardless of the name—"Get Outdoors Georgia," "More Kids in the Woods," or "Take It Outside"—

these programs are designed to get children and their families back in touch with nature.


To find a program near you, go to www.childrenandnature.org/movement/info. Many of these state, local and regional sites have calendars of events, recommended activities and links to other helpful sites.

Source: "Children and Nature 2008," 1/08.

Scary Plastics

Recent reports about the safety of plastic containers, including baby bottles and water bottles, have sent us scrambling to clean out our cupboards and closets. While the plastics industry maintains that there is no proof that these products can be harmful, most of us have chosen to take a better-safe-than-sorry approach. Fortunately, the standard recycling codes found on most plastic products can help us make good decisions.

The products in question include those with the following symbols:

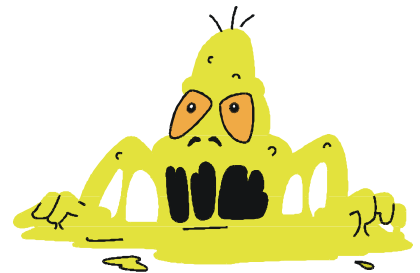
 Number 3 plastics are made of vinyl or polyvinyl chloride (PVC). They are most commonly found in cooking oil bottles and clear food packaging. The highest risk for these products occurs when they are wearing out, are put through the dishwasher or heated in a microwave. In other words, don't reuse these products for foods or liquids.



Number 6 plastics are commonly found in disposable plates and cups, meat trays, egg cartons and carry-out food containers. They are made of polystyrene, commonly called Styrofoam. Number 6 plastics can release potentially toxic products, including styrene, particularly when heated. That means you don't want to microwave your coffee if the cup is made of Styrofoam or heat food in one of these products.



Number 7 plastics are classified as "miscellaneous." That means they can be used in products ranging from baby bottles to DVDs, from three- and five-gallon water bottles to computer cases. The ones of most concern are the ones made of hard polycarbonates, which studies have shown can leach bisphenol A (BPA), a potential hormone disruptor, into liquids. Most rigid plastic baby bottles and sippy cups are made from



polycarbonate plastic. Manufacturers are beginning to respond to this potential danger by producing BPA-free plastic bottles, as well as shatter-proof glass bottles.

While many curbside recycling programs will not accept the plastics in these three categories, it's always a good idea to check before sending them to the landfill. For example, Number 3 and number 7 plastics can be recycled into plastic "lumber" for decks and flooring. Number 6 products can be recycled into insulation, egg cartons and foam packing.

Source: www.thedailygreen.com/