

Nature's Lessons for Kindergarten Readiness

The following is a list of simple outdoor nature activities you can do to help prepare your four-year old for kindergarten. Remember, each child is unique and will be ready for these activities in his or her own timing. At this age children learn through play, and all of these activities should be introduced informally and playfully – formal teaching comes later!

Concept Development

Help your child to:

- Recognize and name colors – what colors do you see in the sky, the rainbow, the flowers, the trees, the birds, etc.?
- Match leaves, rocks, sea shells, flower petals, etc. by color and shape.
- Link simple nature experiences to informal drawing, painting, singing and dancing activities.
- Understand concepts such as: in, out, under, over, off, back, etc. - jump *over* the puddle, or *into* the puddle. Find a pill bug *under* the rock. The snail is *inside* his shell, etc.

Physical Development: Large Muscles

Encourage your child to:

- Enjoy outdoor play such as running, jumping, climbing, riding a tricycle, bouncing a ball, rolling down a gentle slope, etc.

Physical Development: Small Muscles

Encourage your child to:

- Collect small nature treasures (leaves, twigs, feathers, rocks, shells, etc.) and arrange them on a tray, window sill or small table.
- Plant seeds in small pots or in the garden, using small, age-appropriate tools. Use spritz bottles or small watering cans to keep the plants moist.
- Use crayons to make leaf or tree-bark rubbings.
- Use small gardening tools or sand play materials - spoons, spritz bottles, shovels, hoses, etc.

Number Concept Development

Help and encourage your child to:

- Arrange leaves, rocks, shells, etc. in groups according to size or shape.
- Group nature items that are the same – a group of shells, a group of rocks, etc.
- Arrange nature items in size order – small to big or big to small.
- Understand concepts of big, bigger, biggest, small, smaller, smallest, etc. Point out the biggest tree. Ask “Is this tree bigger than that one, etc?”
- Count - leaves, birds, acorns, etc.
- Understand concepts of time. Watch the sun rise and set, discover when shadows are longest or shortest during the day. Talk about and experience the different seasons. Use phrases that include the words *soon*, *tomorrow*, *later*, etc.

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Language Development (Pre-reading skills)

Help your child by:

- Reading stories related to nature experiences you have had together.
- Talking together about your nature experiences, and informally introducing new vocabulary.
- Singing simple songs and nursery rhymes that relate to nature experiences.
- Asking open-ended questions. (“What do you think...?”)
- Telling stories instead of reading them. (This helps your child develop visualization skills - an essential pre-reading skill.)
- Encouraging your child to make up his/her own stories about animals, clouds, the moon, etc.
- Modeling using descriptive language as you talk with your child. (“That’s a magnificent tree with big, strong branches.” “These pink flowers have a wonderful fragrance, etc.”)
- Giving more than one instruction at a time. (“Put soil in the plant pot, then drop in the seed.”) This builds comprehension and sequencing skills.
- Listening, and valuing what your child has to say.

Pre-Reading

- Fill your child’s life with age-appropriate books related to nature. Ask your librarian for suggestions.
- If your child seems interested, introduce letter sounds with simple games like “I spy.” (“I spy something beginning with **b**.” Butterfly, bug, buds.)
- Encourage your child to create stories about animals, insects, the trees, etc.

Pre-writing

- Provide crayons, markers, colored paper, side-walk chalk, etc, and encourage your child to draw - flowers, trees, rainbows, etc. Help her to write their names, or ask her to dictate what she wants you to write about her picture. Read together what you have written.
- Let your child see you writing – lists of flowers in your garden, a poem inspired by nature, etc. Encourage other family members to do the same.

Social & Emotional Development

A child who has the opportunity to share simple nature experiences with caring adults will:

- Develop a sense of awe and wonder and respect for the Earth.
- Enjoy exploring and discovering new things, leading to a lifelong joy of learning.
- Develop curiosity, imagination and creativity.
- Develop strong powers of observation and the ability to make connections.

A child who has had the opportunity to plant seeds and nurture their growth will learn responsibility.

A child who has interacted with pets, and gently handled small creatures such as butterflies, lady bugs, worms and frogs will develop sensitivity, caring and compassion.

A child who has learned to love the natural world will grow to be an adult who will care for and protect the beautiful Earth that is our inheritance.



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