

Connecting Children to Nature

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Abstract

Teaching children about the environment is vital for the future of children and society. In an increasingly urban society adults need to create opportunities to help young children connect with environment and learn about the nature. There are many positive benefits when nature learning becomes a part of the child's life. The children who have more enriching experiences in the environment are more likely to become adults who are better informed; they develop a better understanding towards the creatures i.e., they build a sense of care and responsibility towards earth.

Children grow healthier and wiser when they are connected with the natural environment throughout their childhood, may be in educational or recreational setting. This will benefit their future well-being.

A child's experience of nature can be as small as sitting under a tree or listening to the birds but even these small experiences help to improve life and learning in many new ways. Now-a-days children have limited opportunities to interact with the natural environment; they spend more time on television screens and

playing video games on computers as compared to being physically active outside. These changes have led to an epidemic of obesity in children which leads to serious health threats for them including diabetes, sleep apnea, social and psychological problems.

It's the need of the time to take action to strengthen children's connections with nature because children's academic, social, psychological and physical health is impacted positively when they make contact with nature in their life on daily basis. A child's experience with nature such as sitting

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under a tree, plucking a flower or listening to the sound of a bird helps in learning in many ways and plays a very important role in improving life. Young children learn many things when they interact with natural environment and early years of a child's life are very important. So what they learn at this age will help them to grow into adults who care about the environment.

Positive Impacts that Nature Creates

- Nature helps in development of children in every aspect such as intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual and physical.
- For developing capacities such as creativity, problem-solving and intellectual development, nature plays an important role.
- Natural experiences help in increasing children's ability to focus and play a major role in enhancing cognitive abilities.
- When children play outdoors, they get opportunity to play with others, which helps in their social and emotional development.
- When they are involved with nature they understand their responsibility towards environment and become more disciplined.

The factors which play a role in increasing the interaction of children with nature are:

- The feelings or the reactions of the parents of children to environmental problems.

- Exposure of children to the discussion of threats of environmental change.
- Peer group influence – how their friends and adults respond to environmental issues.

Teaching young children about the environment is essential for their future. In addition to this, we need to provide opportunities to help children connect with nature and learn about the environment.

Essential Steps for Educating Children About the Nature

1. Let children spend time with nature

These days children have limited opportunities to interact with the natural environment. They spend more time on television and computer screens as compared to being physically active outdoors. It's the need of the time to take action to strengthen children's connection with nature. This can be done by:

- organising picnics in a local park.
- involving children in planting a seed in a pot and watering it daily and watch it grow.
- involve nature in daily life of children as it impacts positively on their social, psychological and physical health.

2. Involve children in doing something positive for the environment

Young children learn a lot by watching adults. The small actions of the children

make a difference to the environment. Adults must involve children with simple tasks such as:

- throwing waste in bin.
- sorting of papers to put in the recycle bin.
- to dig in the garden with the help of spade.
- parents must involve children in positive things such as taking “paper bag” for shopping or catching public transport to school.

Natural experiences help in increasing young children’s ability to focus on environmental issues, which will help them to grow into adults who care about environment.

3. Listen to the concerns of children about nature

Young children are curious about the nature and during the early years they develop their thinking abilities. They might have concerns about the climatic changes and need help to deal with the events; this can lead to questioning everything in detail. Adults should listen patiently to them what they are saying and try to understand her/his point of view.

4. Understand the child’s feeling about the surroundings

Young children are unable to express their emotions directly; adults can look for the clues to their feelings through



their play, drawings, behaviour and conversations.

Adults should ask children how they feel about the nature and keep their responses appropriate to the child’s age and level of understanding.

5. Find out what children know about the nature

In order to find out whether the children have misconceptions about environment, adults must talk to children and correct their misconceptions.

Young children do not have psychological maturity to make sense of the complexity of the environmental problems and to manage the information (e.g. according to them if the planet earth is getting hotter, we all get burnt). Adults should provide them? rather overloading them with the information.

6. Adults should be aware how and what they talk to children

Adults have to be conscious about their conversations because it is

not good for children to hear about worrying environmental problems. So we should be aware, how we are reacting to news about natural problems in front of children. If our reactions are too strong, children get confused and upset so we must find ways of talking positively. We should not burden children with our concerns, rather we need to provide opportunities to children to express their feelings about climate change and other environmental problems.

7. Adults must keep check on children how they are being exposed to stories of media in relation to environmental problems

Parents need to monitor what their children are watching because exposure of media plays a significant role in contributing to their thinking. Children may ask questions about the environment related problems, as they watch or listen to media. Media sometimes presents things in a very sensational and in dramatic manner and often focus on negative portion rather than the positive side. There are many good stories about people who are saving the environment.

8. Give children hope and reassure them

Adults must reassure children that millions of people are dedicating their lives for researching ways to save the environment. We must tell pre-schoolers about the good

stories related to environment and help children to find examples of environment related problems being solved or improved and must reassure children that it is their job to look after their well-being; the children do not have to worry about that.

9. Certain Activities can be planned for children of early years to connect with nature

- Ask them to draw organisms such as bird which they see in their daily life and are related to nature
- Take children for nature walk and let them explore the sounds of nature and tell them to mimic the sounds.
- Give children time for unstructured play with peers in outdoors; this will help in promoting their observations, creativity and imagination.
- Let children experience the land, water and living things in their surroundings. This will help them to develop attachment and understanding toward the nature.
- Provide children access to outdoors everyday that will help them to develop their natural affinity with nature directly (e.g. learning about birds in the neighbourhood rather than those in a far off jungle)
- Plan activities which are related to learning about the nature every day.
- Sorting different types of leaves.
- Give them masks of different animals and ask them to mimic

horses-neigh, cow-moo, dog bow-wow etc.

- Provide them worksheets for matching the things that are provided by nature.
- Let them colour the worksheets containing the animal pictures.
- Regularly plan nature walk which would provide young children to explore and play outdoors.
- Involve children in planting a seed, let them water the seed and nurture it.

Natural experiences help children to engage with nature and they will understand their responsibility towards environment and become more disciplined. As adults we should



make a commitment to increase the children's interaction with nature as these small experiences in early age help to improve their life and learning in many ways and in future they will grow into adults who care about the environment.