



Parents'

Nature Awareness

Guide to Outdoor Activities

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The purpose of the guide is to raise awareness concerning the benefits of family outdoor activities and provide efficient tools for organising such activities.

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Exploring the Curriculum
Through Nature Programs

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Introduction

It's a cloudy November day. The morning sun is trying to bring a bit of warmth after the night storm. There are some puddles along the path, raindrops are shining on the plants, and the rocks are covered with green, wet moss.

With our wellies and raincoats on, we are ready to explore the forest. Our only worry is how long the puddles will last, so we can splash in them.

The branches of an old oak tree are creating weird shapes on the ground which is covered in a yellow and brown carpet of leaves. If we are silent enough, we can hear the creatures moving on the dry leaves making crunching autumn sounds. A jay takes off from the nearest branch while the song of a blue tit is ringing in our ears.

"This tree is different from the other time, no leaves on it anymore."

"What about this one? It still has some, and they are very yellow."

"Wait, this one has funny shaped leaves and are

all there. And it's all green!"

... discovering how the forest changes along with the seasons is part of our explorers' game.

"Hey, if I am under the tree and the wind blows, it feels like it's raining."

"Do raindrops taste like anything? I should open my mouth and find out!"

Our senses are much more alert out here.

"Shall we climb on this rock?"

... wearing wellies feels very different while climbing...

"It's slippery but I will manage, I have to be very careful! "

"Come, I found a treasure! A spider web full of sunny raindrops!"

"Can I take a picture of it?"

Taking care not to disturb the forest creatures even if they are too small to be aware of them, is one of our responsibilities.

"Where did we leave our brushes?"

... some sticks have been turned into brushes and the mud mixed with leaves becomes the paint. The forest ground is now our canvas.

"What did you draw?"

"A time-machine, but it's broken. I will fix it!"

Now, the sticks become tools for the engineers to travel through time. Then, other sticks become shelters, a forest elf, and a raft for a forest fairy to go visit her friends.

"Maybe it's time for a break."

"Oh, yes, my stomach is rumbling... let's have a snack!"

We are well prepared: we have some fruits, nuts and our bottle of water, but the ground is still wet from the rain.

"It's wet here, let's go and find a dry spot... there, under the tree, it's much better. How come this place is so dry?"

"The rain couldn't pass because the trees are like

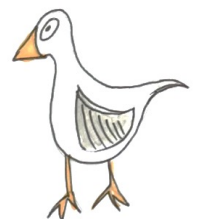
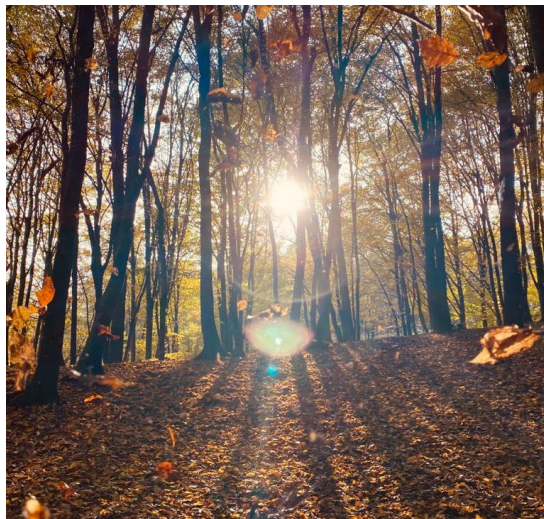
an umbrella.."

Under the tree, munching our food, we are warm and comfortable with our layers of clothing yet a little tired from all the morning adventures.

"Shall we go back in a while?"

"Ok, but can we come back tomorrow?... Can we come back here every day?"

With a bag full of treasures, a mind full of new experiences, bodies tired but very much alive, our hearts full of joy and freshness, we thank the forest and promise to come back...



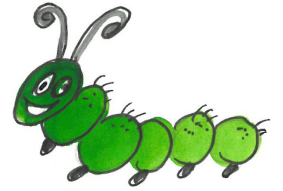
Get ready

Why is nature good for my family?

Where to go?

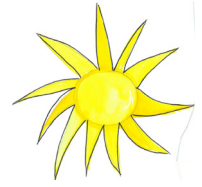
The more, the merrier!

What to wear and what to carry?



Why is nature good for my family?

“Our body, mind, and senses are designed to connect with nature.”
(Scott D. Samson)



Problems of the modern world:

1. 25% of the children are overweight ¹
2. Children spend less than an hour outside, and hours screening every day^{2,3}
3. The percentage of children requiring some sort of mental health care raised to 9.9% in Europe⁴



Benefits of outdoor learning:

All these problems have a simple solution: regular doses of vitamin G (Green)!

“Evidence suggests that, like a vitamin, contact with nature and green environments is needed in frequent, regular doses.”
(Frances Míng Kuo)



“We can now assume that just as children need good nutrition and adequate sleep, they may very well need contact with nature.”
(Scott D. Samson)

Lucky us this “prescription” is not hard to follow! It’s amazing how easily we can rewire to nature and this is due to the fact that we are part of it and we feel an ancestral, inborn call to connect to it.

Once you regularly play and learn outside, it is clear that children feel a deep joy and awe in the natural setting. But what other reasons are there to go outside as a family? There is a growing body of research that shows that nature is good for our physical and mental health, as individuals, families and communities.

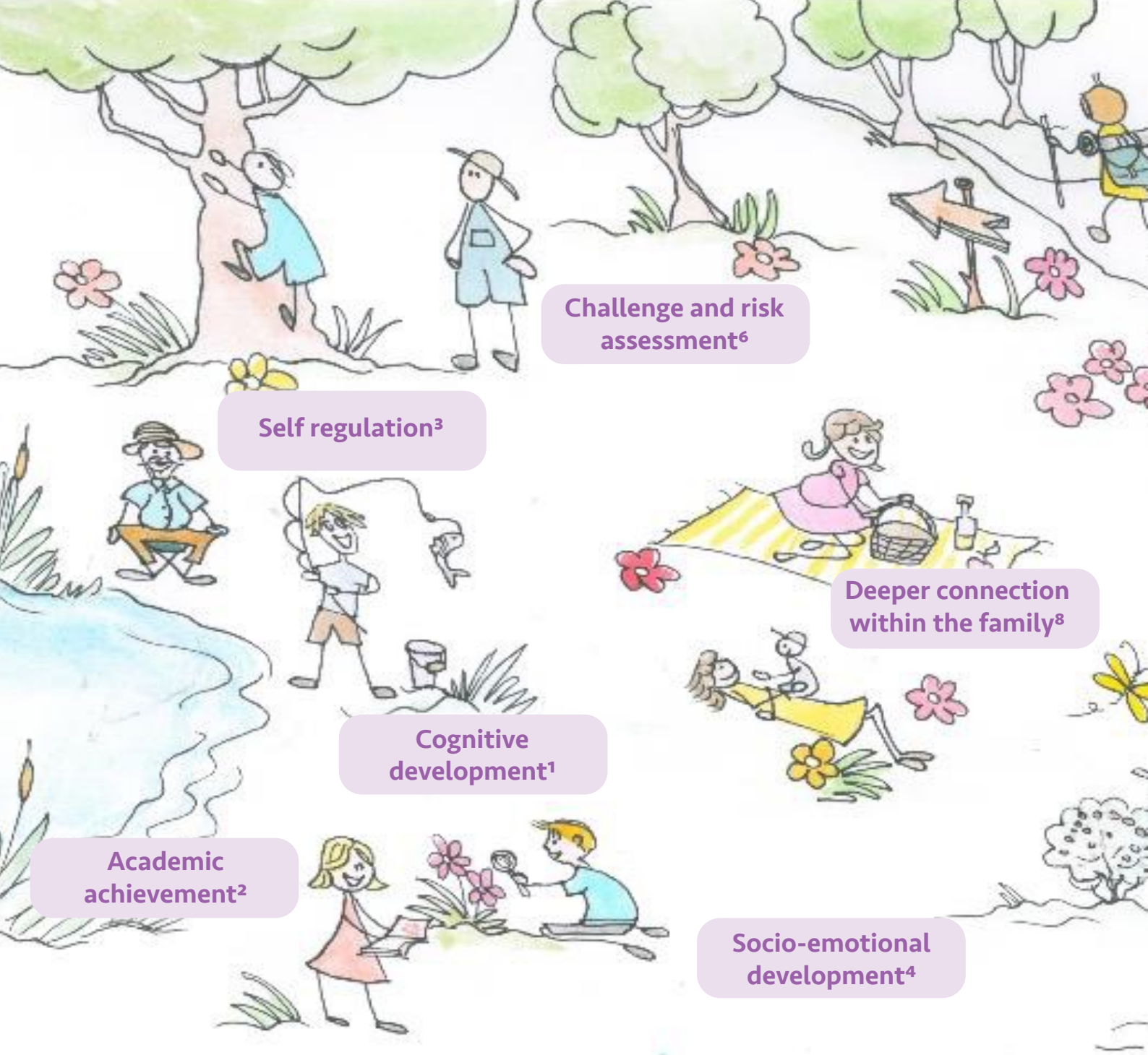
1 World Health Organization, “Tenfold increase in childhood and adolescent obesity in four decades, new study by Imperial College London and WHO” (31,5 million people aged 5-19 were measured) “The number of obese 5 to 19 year olds rose more than tenfold globally, from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016. An additional 213 million were overweight in 2016 but fell below the threshold for obesity.”

2 On-line questionnaire conducted by Happy Kids Kindergarten, 2017

3 Richard Louv “The Last Child in the Woods”, “In the U.S. the average child spends as few as 30 minutes of unstructured outdoor play each day, but more than seven hours each day in front of an electronic screen” (National Wildlife Federation, 2014)

4 From “The School Children Mental Health in Europe (SCMHE) 2015” project results that collected and monitored children’s (6-11) mental health in the EU countries

5 Richard Louv, op. cit. quotes Paul (4th grader).



Challenge and risk
assessment⁶

Self regulation³

Deeper connection
within the family⁸

Cognitive
development¹

Academic
achievement²

Socio-emotional
development⁴

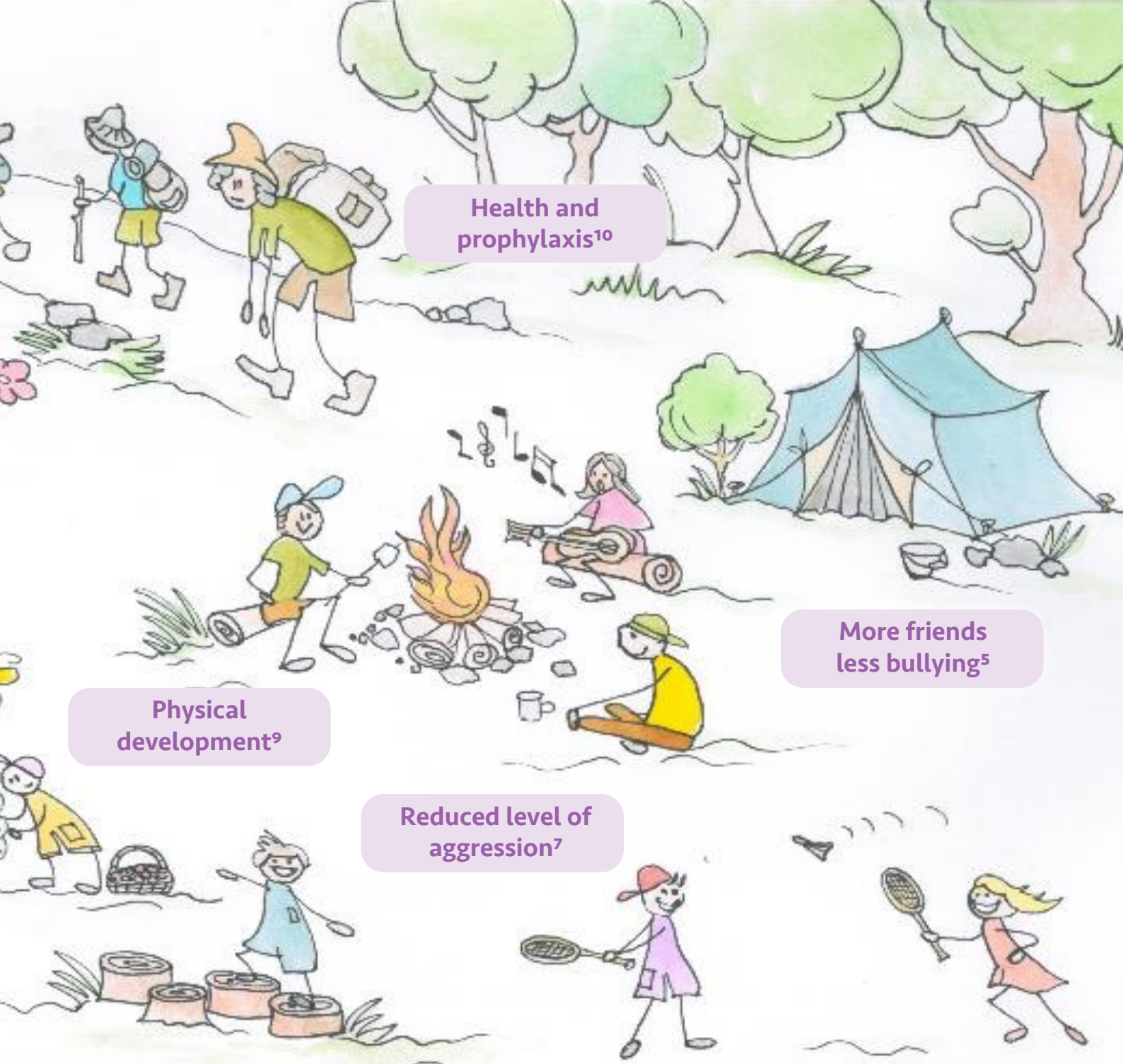
1. **Payam Dadvand et. co.**, "The Association Between Lifelong Greenspace Exposure and 3-Dimensional Brain Magnetic Resonance Imaging in Barcelona Schoolchildren" (2018): "We identified several brain regions that had larger volumes in urban children with higher lifelong exposure to residential surrounding greenness. Brain regions whose volumes were increased in association with better cognitive test scores partly overlapped with some of the regions associated with greenness".

2. **Ming Kuo, Michael Barnes and Catherine Jordan**, "Do Experiences with Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship" (2018): "In academic contexts, nature-based instruction outperforms traditional instruction. The evidence here is particularly strong, including experimental evidence; evidence across a wide range of samples and instructional approaches; outcomes such as standardized test scores and graduation rates".

3. **Patty Born Selly**, "Teaching Stem Outdoor Activities for Young Children" (2017): "During nature play, children have many opportunities to practice self-regulation. Children learn that if they manage their actions, they get a desirable result, an immediate benefit such as more time with an animal or an up-close look at a beautiful flower".

4. **Louise Chawla**, "Learning to Love the Natural World Enough to Protect It" (2006): "Studies have shown that students who learn outdoors develop: a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity, decision-making and problem-solving skills, and empathy towards others, motor skills, self-discipline and initiative".

5. **Richard Louv**, "Last Child in the Woods" (2005, 2008): "Children who spend more time playing outdoor have more friends [...] the deepest friendships evolve out of shared experience, particularly



Health and
prophylaxis¹⁰

More friends
less bullying⁵

Physical
development⁹

Reduced level of
aggression⁷

in environments in which all the senses are enlivened”.

6. **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs UK**, “Wellbeing and the Natural Environment: a Brief Overview of the Evidence” (2007) “Nature helps young people to manage risk and encourages them to welcome challenge”.

7. **Scott D. Sampson**, “How to Raise a Wild Child - The Art and Science of Falling in Love with Nature” (2016): “Compared with residents whose building was surrounded by barren ground, those living in a building with a view of stands of trees enjoyed substantially lower levels of aggression, violence and reported crime, along with increased effectiveness managing life issues”.

8. **Shelley Hutchinson**, “Five Benefits of Nature to Parents and Kids” (2014): “Spending time in nature can be beneficial to your family’s mental, emotional and physical wellbeing”.

9. **Scott D. Sampson**, op. cit. “Compared to kids confined indoors, children who regularly play in nature show heightened motor control – including balance, coordination, and agility”.

10. **Scott D. Sampson**, op. cit.: “Shinrin-yoku (Forest Bathing – walk in the forest for at least 15 minutes) practitioners experienced a drop of 16% or more in the stress hormone cortisol. In the forest, blood pressure tends to drop as well, while the immune system gets a major boost, increasing expression of white blood cells and anticancer proteins. At least a portion of these effects appears to be due to chemicals emitted by the plants”.



Reduced stress¹⁵

Creativity and sensory awareness¹¹

Vitamin D²⁰

Enhanced communication¹³

11. **Patty Born Selly**, op. cit.: "Open-end toys foster creativity, collaboration and sensory awareness. They offer countless opportunities for cognitive growth. Children who use open-ended toys intuitively know that these objects have multiple uses. In this way, open-ended play objects encourage divergent thinking and creativity".

12. **Rachel and Stephen Kaplan**, "The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective" (1980): "Attention restoration theory: people can concentrate better after spending time in nature, or even looking at scenes of nature".

13. **Learning Through Landscapes**, "Taking it Outdoors: Communication, Language and Literacy" (2009): "The outdoor environment can be a highly motivational place for the development of communication skills".

14. **American Academy of Ophthalmology**, quoted by **North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education** op. cit.: "More time spent outdoors is related to reduced rates of near-sightedness, also known as myopia, in children and adolescents".

15. **Scott D. Sampson**, op. cit., "Simply being in the presence of natural landscapes tends to reduce stress and promote relaxation. Such experiences lower mental fatigue and boost mental clarity while enhancing both work performance and healing".

16. **Cheryl Charles**, "Research Articles and Summaries of Outdoor Education Research" (2010) "Outdoor experiences help students increase their understanding of their natural and human communities which leads to a sense of place".



Sense of balance
and well-being¹⁸

Sense of place and
community¹⁶

Soothed ADHD
symptoms²¹

Lasting love and
care for the
environment¹⁷

Focus and
concentration¹²

Positive effects on
the nervous system¹⁹

Good eye-sight¹⁴

17. **Scott D. Sampson**, op. cit.: "Individuals who spend abundant time playing outdoors as children are more likely to grow up with a strong attachment to place and environmental ethic".

18. **New Economics Foundation**, "National accounts of well-being: bringing real wealth onto the balance sheet" (2009) "Key indicators of well-being (wellbeing is a key indicator of societal progress): connect with others, be active, take notice of what is around you, keep learning and give to others. Outdoor activity is a superb way of enhancing wellbeing in this way".

19. **Florence Williams** "The Nature Fix, Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative" (2017): "Psychologist Roger Ulrich, in another experiment, he stressed out 120 students by showing them movies of bloody accidents in a woodworking shop. He knew they were distressed because he measured their sympathetic nervous activity – the sweat gland on their skin, their heart rates and their blood pressure. Afterwards, some students were assigned to watch a ten-minute video of nature scenes and some to watch videos of urban scenes, from a pedestrian mall to cars on the road. The results were dramatic: within five minutes, the brains-on-nature returned to baseline. The brains-on-built environment recovered only partway – as indicated by those nervous system measures- even more than ten minutes later".

20. **Joy A. Weydert**, "Vitamin D in Children's Health" published on Semanticscholar.org (2014): "Beyond the skeletal effects it pro-offers, there is more evidence now supporting the beneficial effects vitamin D has on immune health, mental health, and overall life expectancy".

21. **Cheryl Charles**, "Children & Nature Network Research and Studies" (2007) "Contact with the natural world can significantly reduce symptoms of attention deficit disorder in children as young as five".

Where to go?

You have the determination, the children are willing to go outdoors, but where? Start exploring a space close to your home like your garden, a park or a vacant lot. Choose places where human intervention is minimal; there, you will find a variety of plants and small creatures. Then, expand to a nearby forest, orchard, beach or meadow. River sides, lakes and ponds also offer a large variety of exploration possibilities. These are some of the natural environments our schools use in our outdoor programs:



If the weather is too bad to stay outside, you can still learn about nature in the natural science museums, local farms, agricultural or animal exhibitions.

It's not necessary to think of new places to visit every time you want to head with your family outside. Repeated visits to the same place have many benefits: first, you could be more aware of safety issues, then the children would feel more comfortable in a setting that they already know. Many times, kids continue a game that they started at their last visit to such an extent that they can imagine even a whole saga. In addition, they can see and feel the rhythm of nature through the seasons. When experience is gained, you can head out for longer hikes with your family or larger groups of people.

The following family pictures can also give you ideas of places to go and things to do:



Where to go?



The more, the merrier

“What if parents, grandparents, and kids around the country were to band together to create nature clubs for families? What if this new form of social/nature networking were to spread as quickly as book clubs ... did in recent decades? We would be well on our way to true cultural change.”

(Richard Louv)

Richard Louv (the writer that reignited nature movement in schools and communities all over the world) and Child and Nature Network (CNN) encourage the set up of nature club for families.

“These are groups of people with an interest in connecting children with nature. Each Nature Club for Families is unique. Some meet weekly at the same urban park—playing, building friendships, and singing [...] Some take [...] families on lengthy walks for focused nature study... Some take the form of boisterous family trail hikes that combine kid-driven play with spontaneous nature observation.”¹

Whatever the form, these Nature Clubs share common goals:

- Families spend regular time in nature,
- They form a small community that organises its own common activities,
- They are driven by the love and enthusiasm for nature.



A few key benefits highlighted by CNN are:

- “Nature Clubs for Families can be created in any neighbourhood – whether inner city, suburban, or rural – and in any economic setting.
- Nature Clubs for Families can be joined or created by any family – single parents, extended families, friends who feel like families.
- The Nature Clubs for Families approach can break down key barriers, including fear of strangers, since there is safety in numbers.
- There is the motivation factor—it’s much more likely you and your family are going to show up at a park on Saturday morning if you know there’s another family waiting for you.
- Shared knowledge: many parents want to give their kids the gifts of nature, but they don’t feel they know enough about nature to do so.
- And importantly, there is no need to wait for funding. Families can do this themselves and do it now.”²



1 “Nature Club for Families a Tool Kit: Do It Yourself, Do It Now“, Child and Nature Network
2 Idem

FAQ

Do I have to know a lot about nature to start such a club? More important than knowledge are the passion and love for nature. All information is a click away.

How much time should a meeting last? This depends on your goals. Such a gathering can last between several hours and several days. However, you could begin with a shorter amount of time allocated to get people the chance to know each other, and know the place. In time, the children will ask for more time to spend together.

Do I have to follow a strict schedule? Have some activities planned, but there should also be enough time for group and individual exploration. In order to be inspired, to feel awe and let creativity loose, we need time.

Should all the parents know the place we visit? Not necessarily, but at least the leader should be very familiar with the place, surroundings and access to roads.

Do we need rules for the group? Definitely! Some basic rules (about three-four) to ensure good communication, safety and a reasonable, sustainable use of the place are indispensable.

How about technology? Technology can be used in a constructive way: to identify plants and animals with apps, to document findings, etc. However, technology should be a tool and not the focus of our attention.



Step by step guidance of how to plan a club, check lists, templates for invitations and flyers, web-site tips, useful resources and links are available in Nature Club for Families, Tool Kit, Children and Nature Network (www.childrenandnature.org).

What to wear and what to carry?

“There is not such a thing as bad weather, there is only bad clothing.” (Saying)

What to wear

Breathable, light clothes for summer time:



Additional summer clothing: sunhat, sunglasses.

Layer clothes for winter time:



Additional winter clothing: scarf, gloves, fleece and neck gaiter.

What to take

1. **Attention getters:** whistle/bird call
2. **Essentials:**
 - First-aid kit, health card, some money
 - Food (sandwich, fruit, dried fruits/seeds)
 - Still water
 - Mobile phone (extra battery for longer hikes)
 - Rubbish bags (can also be used as raincoats)
 - Tissues, wet wipes, toilet paper
 - Penknife/outdoor knife
 - Sunscreen, insect repellent.
3. **Useful stuff:**
 - Flint or matches
 - Scissors, paintbrush, torch
 - String/rope, hammock
 - Photo/video camera.
4. **Focusing, observation and working tools:**
 - Binoculars, compass, magnifying glass
 - Small bag and jar for collecting cool stuff
 - Micro-container with magnifying glass
 - Tools for children: saw, outdoor knife, spade
 - Small water net, fishing rod kit.

Leader parent's backpack



What to wear and what to carry?

First aid kit

- Adhesive bandages, butterfly bandages
- Gauze pads and gauze roll
- Medical tape
- Sterile rinse solutions
- Antiseptic creams and ointments
- Anti-inflammatory ointments
- Eye-drops
- Tweezers, scissors, safety pins
- Tick removal tweezers or syringe
- Hydrocortisone cream
- Antihistamine for allergic reactions
- Hand sanitizer



Go!

About risks and place awareness

What is great nature play?



About risks and place awareness

It's a basic instinct to protect our children from harm and pain. However, many parents of today's generation are "umbrella parents", trying to secure children from any kind of discomfort and avoiding any potentially threatening situation. This has driven children away from nature. Why? Because lately, wilderness has been associated with danger.



Why do we fear nature?

An important influence is that of the media and society that "unconsciously associate nature with doom – while disassociating the outdoors from joy and solitude."¹ Dramatically presented animal attacks, kidnapping, ticks that "spread" the Lyme disease, severe accidents, all scare people out of the woods. And this happens while "research shows that the great majority of injuries kids sustain during risky outdoor play are minor and require little or no medical treatment."² From the experience of two Erasmus partners we can tell that only one severe but not major injury occurred in 7 years of practice, with 30 to 70 kids being outside on a daily basis.

On the other hand, parents and children focus on immediate entertainment and the habit of hiking for days and wondering in the woods for peace and solitude is fading.

Well-meaning schools, communities and families prefer safety for fear of any accidents and litigation: better stay safe in an over-controlled environment than venture outside!



Why taking risks is good for us?

If children never experience challenges that they overcome themselves, how can they perceive dangers or evaluate risks? How will they learn about their own strengths and limitations and how will they take care of themselves?

We all know that children are naturally curious and they want to explore the world around. If we



"Risk and challenge offer a powerful medium for personal growth and development by building self-esteem and self-confidence, and in group situations, they foster the development of trust, leadership and judgement."
(Jane Williams-Siegfriedsen)



don't let them try to succeed or fail, they will be more curious about the forbidden and never understand our concern for their safety. The children who today are able to step out of their comfort zone and learn from their mistakes, will better deal both physically and mentally with their life experiences in the future.



¹ "The Last Child in the Wood", Richard Louv op.cit.

² www.verywellfamily.com/why-risk-taking-is-healthy-for-kids-4118491, Why Kids Need to Take Risks in Life?

About risks and place awareness

Climbing trees

Why do it?

- Supports children's ability to problem solve and make decisions as they assess distances and angles, judge the strength of limbs, work out where to put their hands and feet and navigate uneven surfaces.

What could go wrong?

- Scratches, bruises, sprained limbs, broken bones.

How to do it right?

- Have 3 support points (like two hands and one leg or two legs and one hand), do it when it's sunny, pick trees other than fruit trees.



Sticks and lose parts

Why do it?

- They are portable: children can move, sort, stack, build and manipulate them however they wish;
- Provide opportunity for imaginative play, problem solving, teamwork and muscle development.

What could go wrong?

- Scratches, bruises, eye injury, swallowing.

How to do it right?

- Adult supervision required, fencing with sticks is a bad idea, sticks no longer than the kid's arm for children under 5, throw sticks only at Mr. Nobody.



Bare feet

Why do it?

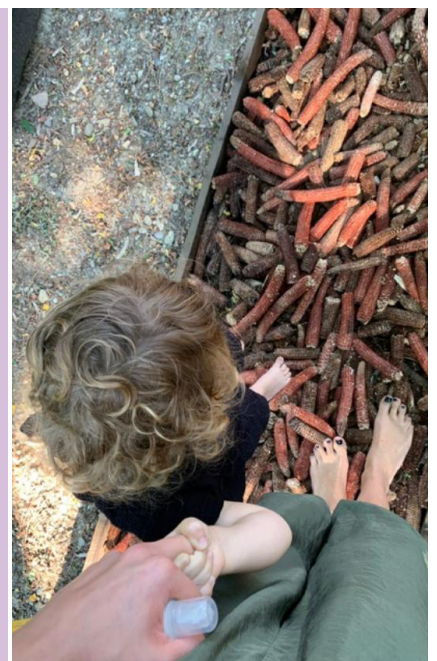
- Offers sensory stimulation by walking on different surfaces with uneven or varying textures (mud, pebbles, grass, rocks, sand, dry earth);
- Enhances children's ability to sense what their feet are doing without even looking at them (proprioception);
- Builds strength in children's foot arches, preventing flat feet.

What could go wrong?

- Cuts, scratches, bruises, loss of balance.

How to do it right?

- Check the area for broken glass or sharp objects.



Fire

Why do it?

- Provides opportunity to embed real life experience in learning. Teaches about flammability, basic fire-safety, effect of fire on objects and food.

What could go wrong?

- Singed hair and clothes, burns, smoke inhalation, start a forest fire.

How to do it right?

- Build a safe fire place, pay attention to items that hang and loose hair, only walk around the fire, do the fire-position when approaching the fire-pit (one foot and one knee down), constant adult supervision.



Real tools

Why do it?

- They provide an authentic experience for children for tinkering, gardening, constructing, whittling, cutting, and understanding how things work.

What could go wrong?

- Bruises, cuts, piercing.

How to do it right?

- Adult should role-model the use and rules, then supervise individual or small group handling of similar kinds of tools; adapt the tools to the age and abilities of the children.



Sports like paragliding, biking, diving, rock climbing, rafting, snowboarding, etc.

Why do it?

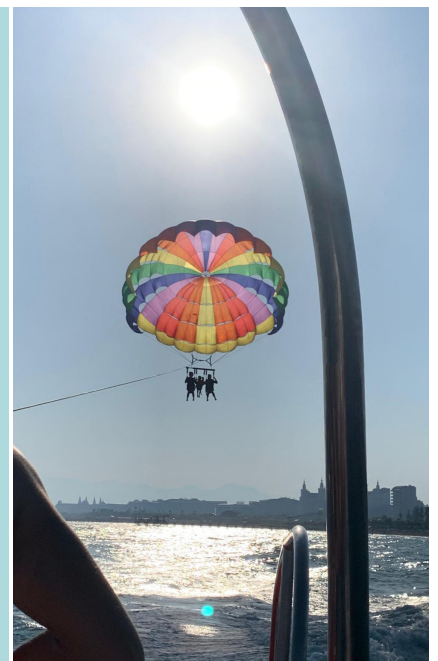
- Enhances children's overall coordination and balance;
- Develops self confidence;
- Children face their fears together with the whole family and this creates family bonding.

What could go wrong?

- Sprained limbs, broken bones.

How to do it right?

- Always rely on professional help.
- Wear proper equipment.



About risks and place awareness



Tips to minimize risks

1. Before heading out, make sure that everyone is dressed properly and has what they need (food, water, sunscreen, etc.). The leading parent will carry a special backpack (See chapter: What to Wear and What to Carry?).
2. It's a good idea to know the place beforehand and the way there, especially if you want to lead a larger group. Thus, you can prepare the group of what to expect for the next section.
3. While hiking, walk in a line and appoint an adult to lead and another to end the line in order to make sure no one is left behind. They can blow whistles to signal "STOP".
4. When you settle in a place, set some "boundaries" with the children to keep them in visible sight: "You can play from this tall tree to the tree

next to the stream".

5. Explore the area together with the other adults and think of the potentially dangerous elements. Next, it's action time: if you see places which are risky (sharp rocks, ravines) keep them outside of the established boundaries. If there are any dangerous elements (glass, irritant plants, and syringes) remove them or, if they cannot be removed, find a better location, or put that area outside the established limits.
6. When at your outdoor place, figure out where you can find shelter if the weather changes suddenly to worse. Even a tarp cover shelter is better than nothing. Also, make a plan to leave quickly, and under safe conditions!

*"Cold weather outdoor play boosts immune system."
(Pennsylvania Department of Health)*



Bad weather, what to do?

Playing outside on a rainy or snowy day stimulates children cognitively and physically because weather changes the surroundings and challenges our senses in new ways. Cold weather strengthens the immune system, contrary to the popular belief that children get sick because it is cold outside.

However, going out depends on each situation, and you should check the weather forecast before departure. From our experience, wet and cold at the same time, make not a good mix for children's mood.



Place awareness

Children love foraging wild food but some of the plants on the location may be poisonous or rare, protected plants. Eat only known plants! Phone apps can help you identify the edible ones if you are in doubt. The children always want to pick the mushrooms they find, so better carry a small guide on local fungi and make an agreement with the kids that it is adults who should handle the mush-

rooms. Whenever you want to build or create nice things, use sticks and leaves that already lie on the ground instead of living plants. Avoid over-harvesting or uprooting any plant, and flowers will bloom and thrive many years to come. Some of the animals could also be poisonous or rare. Kids should learn that plants and animals are beautiful where they are: in nature, undisturbed.



What is great nature play?

We will see why child-led play works for our children, we will get inspired with some types of play and read about favourite activities for different age groups.

Why is child-led play good?

Let's think: when do we feel better? When a boss is telling us what to do, or when we, driven by curiosity and passion, look for solutions to solve the problem? It's quite the same with our kids. When they get to choose and lead the play,

- children are more interested and involved;
- they are more inclined to observe, think and draw conclusions and committed to finding solutions to their questions and problems;
- children spend more time playing;
- they are more eager to accept adults or other children in their play and keener to embrace the opinions of other people;
- they are more communicative, especially school-aged children who find it more comfortable to spend their free time with their gadgets and open to making rules and complying with these rules;
- they are ready to accept their own mistakes and use them in a constructive way;
- they often play over and over again in the same way or create a saga;
- children are happy.

In order to create their own play, the children need **time, a safe space and an observant adult** who can give a helping hand, play along and listen. It is also important to play **with** nature, not just in nature: playing badminton is playing outside but it is not nature play. Start from the elements that surround you and engage your imagination: the combinations and play possibilities are endless!

At first, children might be reluctant to going outdoors. Just get started and they will love it, especially if they have some friends around to play.

Frequency is another issue: in order to fully enjoy the benefits of nature play, children should be outside on a daily basis. This is one of the most difficult aspects to restore nowadays, since we need a green area in your close proximity and enough time to play. Not easy, but here is the example of an Australian family who decided to go outdoors three hours a day for a year; this is what the father declared at the end of the year¹:



“Taking the kids outside was like some kind of parenting magic. It made everything easier. We had happier kids who were more fun to be around. Outside, they played more creatively and they rarely argued. As the year progressed, we found that we were calmer, less stressed and more grounded.”
(Nick Alexander)

1 <https://www.natureplayqld.org.au/what-happened-when-one-family-decided-to-go-outdoors-three-hours-a-day-for-a-year>

What is great nature play?



Symbolic Play

A stick can be a person, a stone can be a pie. Symbolic play, when kids use objects, ideas, actions to stand for other objects, ideas or actions, lays a solid groundwork for abstract and symbolic thinking. This play is particularly useful in role-plays or to represent Math problems in a visual way.



Creative Play

Children visualize what they want, understand how to do it and create something new. Loose elements are the main material and the possibilities of combinations are endless. Kids "create" a doll with a small, leafy pine branch and a cone tied to it, or they make a monster trap using string; a hut can be a military fort, a rich palace or the home of an elf.



Exploratory Play

Children use their senses to learn about the looks, properties and functions of the things around them. They want to know where the roots go under the ground, how the ants work on their ant hill, how things move on an inclined terrain or how frog eggs feel. It's science put into practice and children understand how things move, function, grow and behave.



Pretend Play

It can take the form of socio-dramatic play (like re-enacting real situations such as family situations), dramatic play (children pretend to be animals) or fantasy play (children pretend to be wizards, witches, flying ponies or any other creatures belonging to the realm of fantasy and fairy-tale).

Types of play



Mastery Play

It's when children change through their play elements in their natural environment - they build a dam to change the course of a stream, make under-ground tunnels or they dig a mine to remove rocks from the ground. In this type of play, they often use tools and work together to achieve their goals.



Recapitulative Play

Children re-enact moments from the history of mankind legends and myths (they make spears or light the fire like in the prehistoric times, they use swords and make stone castles like in the medieval period, or practice the bartering system with natural elements they find around).



Communication Play

Word-games, drama, miming, making up rhyming for known songs are some types of games that develop vocabulary, word-sense, speaking skills and imagination. Children refine their speech sounds while talking and listening to others, use language for social development and learn from their peers.



Risky and Rough Play

Involves elements of risk to develop the children's sense of risk assessment and self-confidence. Balancing on a suspended beam, climbing up a ravine, climbing are such examples. Rough play is often played between adults and children and involves tumbling or chasing within safety limits.

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Examples of nature play

Infants and toddlers

Children aged one-two, should explore a limited, even enclosed area with a rather flat, clean surface. Play along with your baby, showing a lot of enthusiasm and marvelling at the wonderful things around. Use a lot of "Look!", "Feel!", "Oh-s!" and "Wow-s!" to connect them to the environment. Toddlers like counting things, pointing to colours and shapes. In sensory play, young age children prefer smooth things, so choose moss, leaves, closed cones or shells for playing. Don't forget that they use their mouths for exploration, so avoid very small things, and always be by their side. They also love digging and making shapes in the sand. If you find a stream or a pond, you are a winner: toddlers can collect pebbles, play with water, or "cook" using water plants for a long time! Butterfly "chasing" and wind "catching" are also some of their favourite activities.



Pre-school children

Three to five years old children, go beyond parallel play, discovering how nice playing together is. Through social, cooperative play, they develop basic lifelong habits and language. They still need the close supervision of adults but the older they are, the more creative they get with the things around. Try to let them lead the outdoor play and choose the activities, and you will be amazed how many things they can learn by just being kids. When they ask a question, don't just give them the answer killing thus their curiosity. Instead, ask: "What do you think?" - and a whole world will open to imagination and story-telling. Scientific truth is not even as important as playing with your child and having a special moment together! If you are enthusiastic about what you see around, you engage in side-by-side exploration and tell your own stories, you will create family memories for a life-time.



What is great nature play?

Pre-schoolers are more sensorial and touch rocks, mud, clay, tree barks with pleasure. They love finding small hideouts and building small worlds for fairies and elves. Moving is their way of learning, and they love running, log-walking, rock and tree climbing and playing hide-and-seek. They already use tools like magnifying glasses and small containers to analyse creatures like insects, spiders or frogs. Pre-schoolers interact with the world around: they carry, fill, splash, pile, load, and take apart. Therefore, loose parts (twigs, leaves, pebbles, flowers, etc.), are an inexhaustible resource for moving around, creating patterns and inventing new “stuff”.



School-age children

Children aged 6-11 will already challenge you physically as they get stronger and stronger. They love risk taking and finding out their own limits. Even if your heart starts racing, take a deep breath and let them explore ravines and climb trees high. Children have a sense of self-awareness and, usually, they don't put themselves in real danger. But they love to freak us out, so pretend you are ok with it and... smile. Children at this age take charge of their own experience and create opportunities for experimentation and problem-solving. They engage in social, team-building activities and enjoy playing sports like football or group activities like cooking together at the open fire. Hiking is very appealing to them if you call it “adventure” and you combine it with amusing activities like track reading, animal-spotting and foraging. They can use tools like outdoor knives, hammers, spades, saws and drills for building fortresses or mining. They also build shelters, tents, bird-blinds, swings and adventure trails with pleasure. They just need rope, tarp, scissors and the nature around. If they are bigger, they can already use apps and books for plant and animal identification and write their impressions in a Nature-journal. Star-gazing and night campouts? Just try!



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Teenagers

We all know this is a difficult age, and you might as well find a professional third party to organize an adventure camp with long hikes, sleeping under the clear sky, canoeing or rafting, rock-climbing and bonding games. Teenagers are focused on their social image and forge life-long friendships, so nature can be a place to express their physical abilities and personality. They also participate really seriously into community projects like saving rare plants and animals, park landscaping or tree planting. You can initiate something like - iLike Outdoors - combining the use of gadgets and nature: making short movies, a tree-house time-lapse film or photo albums.



Endings

When you get back home

Reflecting and celebrating the experience



When you get back home

Inspecting for ticks

If you live in a temperate climate, after a day in long, thick grass, it is advisable to check yourselves for ticks. No need for worries: a tick must first attach to you and feed on your blood for several hours before a Lyme infection occurs, so the sooner you remove it from your body, the better.

- Search for ticks in hard to reach areas where the skin is thinner like the neck, scalp, armpit, tummy and groin area. Tick bites look like small red pea-sized spots, usually raised or swollen.
- Wash and dry your clothing. You can treat your clothing with insect repellent before going outdoors and use heat to kill any ticks that may have made their way home on your clothes.
- Shower within two hours of returning home. Standing in hot, running water can help wash away any ticks that were on your body but not yet attached.
- Inspect your pets for ticks. Examine your dog or cat for ticks as soon as they come inside. Any ticks that are not removed can potentially infect your pet, and any ticks on your pet's body can also transfer onto you.

Outdoor clothes care

- **Always Read the Care Label** Some garments might need to be dry-cleaned only; others might have to be washed with cold water.
- **Consider the Fabric Used** In general Outdoor clothes are made out of synthetic fabrics such as polyester and nylon because they are durable and wick away sweat. However, there is a growing tendency to use merino wool for base layers and wool needs to be washed in cold water on a medium cycle with normal detergent.
- **Do You Really Need to Put them in the Dryer?** In the case of outdoor clothing, the dryer can actually cause shrinkage and damage. By skipping the dryer, you'll be extending the life of your gear. Not to mention that you'll also be saving money on your electricity bill!
- **Should They be Hand Washed Instead?** The majority of outdoor clothes can also be hand-washed. Much gentler than using the machine, it will also ensure that they last longer.



Reflecting and celebrating the experience

It's not just about living the adventure... In order to make the most of it, let's think about our family time in the great outdoors and celebrate the experience! Talking about what we saw, what happened, what we liked the most, what went right and what we could do in a different way, learnt lessons and our feelings, will add a new dimension to the deeds. Here are some ways to do it:

- Use photos, short films and collected items to bring memories alive;
- Store the interesting "stuff" found in a Treasure Box, observe and talk about them from time to time;
- Keep a Nature Journal where the kids (and you) draw and write their impressions;
- Make a research project about an insect or a flower that you found;
- Play detective and investigate the children's questions in books and on the internet;
- Make the "Story of the day";
- Seek how the encounters and events in nature can relate to other things in your child's life: "Did you see how the little bug tried and tried till it got to the top of the log? You can also try and try to ride the bike till you can do it by yourself."

Once we talked about an outdoor experience, we can plan the next one. What activities would you like to do again? What new things would you like to try to do? Then, it's time you put your new plan into practice in the real world!

When celebrating an outdoor experience, be a parent, a naturalist and a cheerleader at the same time. The parent gives love, the naturalist knowledge and respect for nature and the cheerleader the passion for family nature activities.



*"It was a unique experience,
we enjoyed it to the fullest!"
(María and José, parents of Miguel)*



**Live, reflect and celebrate your family time in nature to
create life-long memories and bonding!**