



Backyard and Beyond

Let's Head Outside!

Tips for Getting Outdoors with Little Ones

Whether you're visiting Discovery Woods, a park, or your own backyard, nature is all around. There's no need to be an expert or have all the answers. Exploring nature can be as simple as observing a dandelion popping up through a sidewalk crack. Being outside is important for children's development and health. Allowing them to self-select outdoor exploration and take comfortable risks, often results in rich, authentic learning experiences. It inspires curiosity about the natural world and helps build self-confidence.

You might be surprised to find natural spaces you never knew about in your own town! Check your town's website for a list of parks, walking paths, or conservation areas.



Here are some suggestions to help families become more comfortable exploring a new outdoor space.

- **Follow your child's lead.** It's okay to explore one spot! This can often feel challenging for us impatient adults, but children will be rewarded with the time and space to hunker down, and to look and listen to the world around them. They'll eventually choose to explore more as the whole family becomes more comfortable outdoors.
- **If hiking is your goal, include the whole family.** Print out a map ahead of time, or download one to your phone. Look at the map together; let your child hold the map. Identify the trail markers, also called a blaze; these are either color swatches painted on trees or labels nailed to the tree. The color or label refers to a trail on the map. Encourage your children to count the trail markers or play eye spy to hunt for the next marker.
- **Embrace the five senses.** Ask questions about what they see, hear, smell and touch. Take time to stand in one spot and close your eyes. How many things can you hear at the same time? Can you find a smooth leaf, rough bark, or soft moss?
- **Visit the same spot in different seasons.** Hiking in the same area can offer a chance to observe the changing seasons. It's a good opportunity to discuss observations the whole family sees when they are exploring.
- **Don't wait for "good" weather.** Kids naturally love being out in all sorts of weather, as long as they are properly dressed for the outdoors and allowed to explore. Enjoying what is different and special about rainy weather, or snowy weather, or hot and humid weather has learning and physical benefits for children and adults, too! Playing outdoors builds a lifelong love of all types of weather and connecting with nature.



Additional Tips: Wear supportive, comfortable shoes. Dress in layers, and use bug spray and sunscreen. Remember to bring water! Know where you are going, have a map, and research roughly how long the hike might take, if possible. You know your child best, having a snack could be the perfect motivation to keep moving.