



Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

JULY/AUGUST 2016

Family Fun from Mother Nature!

This edition of *Wonder* is focused on the Nature Action Collaborative for Children Universal Principle:

We believe it is important for families to enjoy regular experiences in the natural world with their children.

“Parents are like shuttles on a loom. They join the threads of the past with threads of the future and leave their own bright patterns as they go.” — Fred Rogers

Surrounded by incessant messaging in the media and the stresses of today’s world, parents and families make decisions every day that ‘weave’ the future for children. They wade through overwhelming advice as they seek support and guidance to help them in their decision-making. Sometimes, messaging that

emphasizes the natural world as a place where children can be whole as they live, learn, and play can’t be heard over the din. Mother Nature needs an agent to give voice to her value over the roar of commercial consumerism. Consider how you can advocate for nature and families to strengthen the ‘bright threads of today’ that will create real, positive change in the lives of families. To inspire your thinking and get you started with some hands-on ideas, listed are a few resources you can use in your own work with children and families.

Children and Nature Network: Natural Families

The Natural Families Network engages thousands of parents and families from across the country and around the world in frequent, active time together in the natural world. The Network organizes Family Nature Clubs, which help to break down barriers to getting out in nature, by bringing together multi-generational families from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Family Nature Clubs also foster quality time together with family and friends, while helping people get time in nature back on the family calendar. They provide regular opportunities to engage in fun outdoor family activities. These experiences give families a sense of place, allow for free play in nature, and familiarize them with opportunities for outdoor recreation in their neighborhoods. Family Nature Clubs can be very grassroots and organic, and perhaps could be started by families in your program. Additionally, through large-scale partnerships with organizations that also seek to serve families in nature, C&NN is expanding participation in Family Nature Clubs worldwide.



The mission of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children is to re-connect children with the natural world by making developmentally appropriate nature education a sustaining and enriching part of the daily lives of the world’s children.

www.WorldForumFoundation.org/nature

Future Issues of *Wonder*

We invite you to email your ideas, stories, and photos that relate to children’s connections with nature to:

Tara Hild: tarah@natureexplore.org

A Toolkit for Families (from the Environmental Action Kit)

As part of the creation of the Environmental Action Kit (see website below), a gap became evident in the availability of materials that could help young children address environmental issues in a universal way. A number of agencies confirmed a great need for developmentally appropriate, hands-on activities that could be used in homes and early education programs worldwide. The “Toolkit for Educators” and “Toolkit for Families” were created in an attempt to meet these needs. The goal of these materials is to help all children understand that certain environmental topics are universal — for example, caring for plants or conserving water. Activities were developed so that any educator or family could use them without having to buy expensive equipment or supplies.

The Toolkit is organized into stewardship themes based on recommendations from global environmental and educational groups. Each theme provides children opportunities for hands-on enjoyment and caretaking. Educators and families can use the suggested activities as a beginning and add their own adaptations and ideas.



You can access the “Environmental Action Kit: Toolkit for Families” through the World Forum Foundation Connection Center: www.worldforumfoundation.org

Here are a few excerpts:

Plants: Care for a Special Tree

Observation Ideas — Help children become great observers of their tree throughout the year.



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Encourage children to:

- sketch the tree monthly to watch for growth and changes. (Children may want to take photographs of it as another way to document changes throughout the year.)
- watch the tree closely to note if it has provided food or habitat for any animals or insects.
- write a story about the tree and its life. (Ask children: Do you know how old your special tree is? How can you find out?)
- think about other interesting ways to record observations.



Air: Air in Motion

Let's Build a Mobile Outdoors to Help Us See the Wind's Power

- First, can you collect some natural items that you can hang? The items can't be too heavy.
- Now attach them with string to build a mobile.
- Where will you hang them? On a tree branch? Somewhere else near your home?
- Now watch your mobile. Does the wind's power move your objects?

Water: Fun Facts About Rainwater

- The Moringa tree, which grows in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and Central and South America has seeds that can be used to filter water. The process involves grinding the seeds into a paste, mixing it with untreated water, waiting for the impurities to settle to the bottom, and siphoning the pure water off the top. This removes about 90% of the bacteria!
- An elephant can smell water up to three miles away.
- A dog's nose is so sensitive that it can smell the difference between a plain tub of water and a tub of water with a teaspoon of salt in it.



Soil: Let's Dig In

Find Some Safe Soil — Is there a place outdoors that has safe soil where children can dig in the ground? Or, do you have raised planter beds filled with soil that will work?

- First, let's explore some soil. What do you notice? Use all your senses.
- Next, look closely. What do you find in the soil? Insects? Pieces of sticks?
- What happens when you sift the soil?
- What happens if you add water to soil? Did you make mud? How does it feel?



Energy: Enjoy the Sun's Light

Talk About It — Here are a number of concepts you can talk about with children:

- Sunlight provides energy for all living things.
- Plants use the sunlight to help them make sugars from the air they breathe through their leaves, and from water. The plant uses this sugar to grow.
- This process is called photosynthesis and is the most important process on the planet.
- People eat all sorts of things plants grow, such as leaves, seeds, fruit, roots, nuts, and flowers.

Have an Outdoor Picnic

Enjoy an outdoor picnic eating freshly harvested fruits and vegetables. Feed your body, mind, and soul at the same time... we were all born to participate in the cycle of life! As you eat together, you can talk with children about the wonderful process of photosynthesis. (Don't worry if they don't grasp the entire concept. It's enough to simply celebrate how the sun's light helps plants make food for us!)

Animals and Insects: Beneficial Bugs Adventure

- Choose one type of insect to observe closely and learn more by recording your discoveries.
- Recording what you are learning will help you remember. This is what scientists call taking 'field notes.'
- Did you find insects on plants? Many bugs get their food from plants, but did you know they might also be helping plants grow at the same time? It's called pollination. Can you record field notes about pollinators?
- Everyone in your family can compare your field notes.

Human Health: Appreciate the Wonders of Nature

Talk About It — Help children think about the importance of taking good care of the natural world so everyone will always be able to appreciate its beauty. Talk about things people sometimes do that can make the natural world less beautiful. (Examples: littering, damaging trees, walking on flowers.) Ask children to think about something you can create in your home to show people the beauty and wonder and importance of nature.

Ideas: There are many ways you and your children may decide to display the wonders of nature where you live.

- Display nature items on a shelf at home.
- Display artwork that celebrates the wonders of nature. If children choose, they may write messages (or dictate messages for adults to write) about the importance of keeping nature beautiful.
- Display favorite books or photographs that show the beauty and diversity of the natural world.



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