
Nature Activities For Children. Do These With Friends, Families and Small Groups

Nature activities can be done outside or inside (if necessary) to increase the awareness of what God has created for us to appreciate, use, and be wise stewards. These activities may simply increase the awareness of the out-of-doors or they may present in-depth teaching of a specific topic. The activities should arouse curiosity for nature in the participants. A greater understanding of our environment and how all of God's creation is intertwined is another benefit of nature programs.

God has created so many wonders for us and nature programs are a way to begin to understand those wonders. The best way to learn about nature is through direct participation.

A vast majority of the children live in an urban setting; an environment that does not naturally lend itself to exploring the out-of-doors. By doing nature programs, you are arousing their interest in exploring nature by exposing them to new ways of looking at their surroundings. What a wonderful gift to give both God and the child.

These activities are written to be done with a group of children in a camp setting. They translate well to a birthday party, or can be adapted for a parent to do with one child. They can be done in a back yard, or in a public park.

Planning Nature Activities:

The first step is to familiarize yourself with your outdoor surroundings. Once you know the environment you are working with, then you can plan a program that involves one child or a group of children and makes the best use of your surroundings. Things to keep in mind when planning your nature activities:

- children's interests
- age of the children
- physical or mental limitations of any children
- number of children
- what children are wearing
- time frame
- activities that encourage children to use all of their senses and see new things in nature
- if in a public park be sure to clean the area of trash where you will be doing the activity.

Once you have selected nature activities that fit the above criteria, then you need to try it yourself. Trying it before you actually do it with children gives the opportunity to make sure everyone leading the activity knows their roles. Make sure that you plan to leave the area just as you found it. A good activity allows the children to "take nothing but pictures, and leave nothing but footprints."

It is also important that you plan a rainy day activity. There are many activities that can be done indoors, or with brief periods of time outside. Also plan at least two extra

activities just In case you have extra time, or if one of the activities just is not working.

Leading a group in nature activities:

These are a few points to remember when leading nature activities:

- Be enthusiastic! Participate. If you want a camper to *hug a tree*, you need to do it first. If you are not enthusiastic about the learning opportunity the children will not be either.
- When giving directions;
 - Get the attention of the group.
 - Speak clear and with a strong, confident voice.
 - Make directions simple, brief, but adequate.
 - Ask for questions.
 - Be prepared and confident.
- Encourage the children to wonder and ask questions. It is important that you show interest in the questions and discoveries.
- Be the means to show children how to use all of their senses while exploring the world around us. While doing an activity, get them to use their other senses.
- Keep your terms age appropriate. If you get too technical for younger children, or keep it too simple for older children, they will lose interest quickly. Often it is interesting to explain things in a different way; compare tree shapes to vases, teepees, lollipops, droopy, and etc.
- Know poison ivy or other dangers and point it out to the children.
- Watch for the children who are not involved. You can either direct them to an activity or else it may be necessary to split the group into smaller groups to encourage participation. A shy child is much more likely to become involved in a smaller group, as well as a smaller group gives each person more activity.

Remember:

We can help them become more aware of nature, be more enthusiastic about nature, and more appreciative of nature. This is a time for them to become keenly aware of their surroundings and look at nature in a new way.

Examples of Nature Activities:

Trust Walk

One of the activities is to learn to trust in each other and in God as we walk along, even though there may rocks and holes in our path. This is also a way to learn to pay more attention to our other senses besides sight.

This is a trust walk. Explain to the children that we want to make sure this is a safe activity, so we need to help each other along the trail, just as God helps us along our path in life. Here are instructions:

- Have everyone in the group split into pairs.
- Give each pair a blindfold.
- Explain that one person will have the blindfold on and the other person will lead the blindfolded person. Trust is placed in the person who is leading so the blindfolded

person won't fall or walk into anything. The person who is leading guides the other child to touch, smell, and hear different things in nature.

- It's best if the leader in the group demonstrates walking safely while leading another person with a blindfold on.
- After everything is explained, one person in each pair puts on the blindfold and all pairs proceed to explore nature.
- Each person gets a chance to lead his or her partner.
- After all children have had a chance to lead each other, the group may want to sit in a circle and talk about what they found.

Micro-Trails

Before doing this activity, read [I See An Elephant Trunk. What Do You See?](#) to a child or group of children. This is an excellent way for them to learn to look for little things in nature and use their imagination.

Micro Trails are just that; very small trails. Micro trails are less than fifty feet in length and focus on the little things in life. It is a trail meant for crawling and peering. It may be done individually or in small groups:

- The first step is to collect ten, six- to twelve-inch sticks (which you may want to do ahead of time to save the group time and depending upon availability of sticks in the area). Then each stick should be tagged with a colored ribbon or yam, with a different color for each group. Each group receives a length of 50 feet or less of cord and, if possible, a small magnifying glass to help them focus in on the smaller things in nature.
- It may be very helpful if the children can go through a Micro Nature Trail that is already set up. It should be a maximum of 50 feet long with the sticks marking the special interest "stops" such as a tiny fungus, a snail shell, a spider web, a pine cone, some lichen growing—anything that can be looked at from ground level and is of interest. A magnifying lens can be left at the marker to look deeper. The rope connects the spots of interest.
- Give each group an allotted amount of time to do their trails after going through the example. After each trail has been developed, let the children crawl along each other's trails. Have the other children explain what they see along the trail to the *trail builder*.

Nature Hike

A good follow-up activity to the Micro-Trail activity is a nature hike, because the children will be tuned in to thinking about how to look for interesting things in nature along the hike:

- The nature hike can take the aspect of "identification" where the children are able to ask "what's that?" and a knowledgeable nature activity leader can explain. Or they can learn how to use books or a cell phone App with keys to identifying different insects, plants, animals, rocks, etc.
- The nature hike can take the *non-identification* aspect, where the children are encouraged to use their sense of touch.
- Here are a few ideas. *Smooth-bumpy*. Children are sent out to find one smooth object and one bumpy object and then they all get together to discuss their finds and why they like these objects. Or each person can take the whole group to see each

object in its natural place. Come up with other ideas for them to find such as *soft-hard*.

Source:

These activities were originally used in University of Minnesota Extension 4-H Camping Programs in the 1970s. This lasting legacy shows how nature activities are timeless when shared with children in a safe manner. When a child can explore in nature it's just as impactful for every generation. The activities were then adapted in the 1990s for the camp curriculum God's Day Camp—Your Teens Leading Your Kids by Debra and Burton Laine.

Disclaimer:

Persons doing these activities are responsible for making sure they follow safe procedures to keep children safe at all times. The activities are conducted at your own risk. The authors and organizations that have used these activities in the past bear no responsibility and cannot be held liable for any injuries that occur as a result of doing these activities.