

Ideas for learning outdoors – Tips for families to get you started

Getting outdoors to take a family walk or to play in the backyard, while practising physical distancing, we can help our children learn more about nature and the world around them. Encouraging our kids to pay attention to what they normally do not notice and take-for-granted during their everyday experiences outside in purposeful ways can foster further learning. Here are some ideas to get you and your family started with this type of outdoor learning.

The following ideas can be part of conversations with your children before you go outside so that they know what to notice, to talk about as you are outside to remind them about what they should be paying attention to, and to review and reflect on once back inside. While outside, some children may benefit from recording their observations through notes, sketches, and/or digital photos. Reviewing and reflecting can include talking, writing, drawing, researching about what was noticed and how this surprised you and/or changed your thinking.

- Explore to find out what living creatures live nearby, both plant and animal. If you have magnifying glasses and/or binoculars, bring them along. What questions do we have about these creatures? How can we find out more about them? How do scientists classify living things and to which group do these living creatures belong? Is there evidence of other living creatures left behind, such as tracks or munched leaves?
- While getting your children to help with cleaning up the yard, landscaping, gardening, and/or composting, explain why you are doing what you are doing and how it impacts your family, the community, and the environment. Encourage them to ask questions and do the research themselves as appropriate.
- Work on physical literacy skills. Create an obstacle course made up of items found in your backyard, like rocks, tree stumps, spare tires, etc. and have fun practicing gross motor movements, climbing, balancing, and coordination.
- Grab some sidewalk chalk and draw and write cheerful messages to neighbours and friends, so they can see that you are thinking of them when they walk by during this challenging time of physical distancing.
- Through play, children learn and develop communication, physical, intellectual, social, and self-regulation skills, all of which are important in today's world. Encourage your children to enjoy spontaneous imaginative play in the fresh air as much as possible! Not only for their physical health, but for their mental well-being and intellectual growth too.

