
A Letter to Families About Going Outdoors

Dear Families,

I take children outdoors every day, giving them an entirely different environment to explore. Outdoors they can stretch, breathe fresh air, take in the sunshine (or the rain or snow), and enjoy the freedom of open space. They can run, jump, swing, climb, and use their large and small muscles. They marvel at the creatures they find, watch trees move in the wind, and collect seeds and leaves. I want to give the children opportunities to appreciate nature and wonder about their discoveries.

Unless the weather is extreme, we go outdoors several times a day. Sometimes we go for a neighborhood walk and talk about everything we see: a construction project, squirrels, perhaps someone delivering a package. We look for things to collect outdoors, such as leaves, seeds, and dandelions. We talk about weather changes and what animals do. During our time outdoors, the children can move freely and develop their large-muscle skills. Physical exercise and fresh air are essential to your child's health and well-being.

Here are some activities to try next time you go outdoors with your child. You probably do some of them already. Perhaps others are new ideas.

Enjoy nature. Talk about the breeze touching your child's cheeks. Roll down a grassy hill together. Plant a garden in your yard, in a window box, or in a wheelbarrow that you can move as the sun moves. Take a bucket so your child can collect things such as feathers and leaves. Be sure that the items do not present a choking hazard.

Take a texture walk. Call your child's attention to natural materials and describe them. For example, you might point out *soft* sand, *rough* pinecones, and a *smooth* rock.

Invent games. Create a balancing path by laying a piece of rope on the ground to walk along. Play a game of catch. Set up a bowling game in which your child tries to knock down empty food boxes by rolling a beach ball.

Visit public playgrounds. Look for playgrounds with equipment appropriate for your child's age and skills. Playgrounds offer wonderful opportunities for children to test their developing skills and play with other children.

Encourage your school-age child to participate in outdoor activities. Try to arrange for your child to participate in sports. Take nature walks together and spend as much time as possible outdoors with your child.

Together, we can promote your child's health and well-being by providing outdoor time every day.

Sincerely,

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