

Ideas for Getting Outdoors This Summer

“Kidscape your backyard” or neighborhood.

Find ideas in *A Parents’ Guide to Nature Play* by Ken Finch or at www.greenheartsinc.org.

Start your own nature club. Download the Children & Nature Network’s free *Nature Clubs for Families Tool Kit* to get started at www.childrenandnature.org.

Try nature journaling. Have your child choose a spot in a natural area to visit throughout the seasons to draw or write about what is seen and heard.

Take a hike! Walks or hikes can include:

- Providing lists or pictures for children to find on a natural scavenger hunt.
- Looking for animal tracks.
- Watching and listening for birds.

Micro-hike. Place a hula hoop on the ground and explore everything within the hoop using a hand lens.

Be a scientist or detective. Have a clipboard to record questions to investigate! Start small with the plants and animals in your own backyard, neighborhood, or local park.

Try a seasonal activity. Camping, skiing, snowshoeing, ice skating, boating, fishing, and other seasonal outdoor activities can be enjoyed as a family. Equipment can often be borrowed or rented.

Visit a local, state, or national park or Audubon center. In addition to exploring the site, many offer special events, classes, and programs for families.



But, My Kid Won't Play Outside!

Is your gifted child reluctant to play outside? Try these tips!

Resist perfectionism. Gifted children can be perfectionists and may obsess over feeling inexperienced, needing the right clothes or gear, or feel frustrated with their own lack of expertise in new situations. You don't have to be an expert and neither do they. Resist these pressures and adopt an attitude of *"Let's learn this together."*



Modeling. Watch your words and reframe your outlook. Gifted children are keen observers and may be modelling and internalizing what they've heard family members say or do. Instead of reactions like, *"Ew, that bug is really gross,"* make it cool by saying, *"Wow, that bug is really interesting. I wonder what it is?"*



Grab a hand lens, a jar to collect it, and use a field guide to find out.

Connect to interests. Connect outdoor activities to their interests. A bonfire and s'mores can be a great way to introduce stargazing that could lead to fascination with the night sky. For children who delight in all things weird or gross, focus on plant or animal "super-powers" or scat identification hikes. If your child is into carpentry, try building bird or bat houses together.



Gear up or cool down. For children who claim to wilt in the heat, give them a variety of loose parts and access to water (hose, buckets, barrel, or squirt bottles). They can build their own micro water park. If sensory experiences are too overwhelming, offer gloves or tools when playing in sand, dirt, mud, or water. Use waders for children who don't like the sensation of getting wet and pack extra clothes in case they need a quick change.



Find like-minded peers or mentors. If your gifted child struggles with making social connections, try connecting



them with people they are already comfortable with, like kids in their neighborhood, older children, or adults who share an interest in nature or outdoor play. Introducing one new thing at a time frees them to engage outdoors without adding social pressure to conform.



Dress for the weather. Outdoor enthusiasts say, *"There is no bad weather, only improper clothing."* Use boots, waders, mud suits, rain gear, and snow gear to extend play across the seasons.

Create garden art. Visually and creatively gifted children can plan, draw, and plant vegetable, herb, or butterfly gardens. The reward comes when they harvest and eat what they planted or when they attract brightly-colored visitors.



Incorporate technology (if necessary). For children who are tech-savvy, incorporating some technology into their outdoor adventures may get them outside. GPS devices can be used for geocaching and orienteering. Digital cameras can be used for photography and videography. Handheld devices, such as the *Identifier*, can be taken on hikes and used to identify common bird calls and frog sounds. Apps, like *SkyView*, use augmented reality to overlay constellations, planets, and heavenly bodies over your own location in real time.



Set time limits. For children who are extremely resistant to going outdoors, setting a time limit may help.

-Dr. Leigh Ann Fish and Dr. Patti Ensel Bailie

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Reduction in ADHD-Type Symptoms

Many gifted children show high levels of intellectual, emotional, physical, sensory, or imaginal intensity called overexcitabilities. Some researchers suspect overexcitabilities play a role in the misdiagnosis of ADHD in gifted children, especially those with psychomotor (physical) overexcitability. Recent studies suggest that there is a reduction in symptoms of ADD and ADHD when children play in natural areas.⁷



Nature can provide a release for pent-up energy and tension in safe, gratifying ways. Choose outdoor sites like parks, prairies, or wooded areas where children can run, climb, and explore.

Getting Started

As a family, where do you start? Families should consider a variety of opportunities for spending time outdoors with their children, in both structured and unstructured play. First-hand, multisensory encounters with nature don't have to be wilderness experiences. Even time spent on a patch of ground, in the corner of a yard, or "on the fringes" can work. If you don't have a backyard, find a local park to explore.

One of the most important things you can do is model the desire to be outdoors, get your hands dirty, and share your enjoyment of the natural world. Prioritizing time in nature makes sense on a total development level for all children. So much so that some advocates are now calling regular time in nature as a right that should not be denied.⁸ We believe the benefits for gifted children are no exception. ☺

Resources

Acorn Naturalists

www.acornnaturalists.com

Children and Nature Network

www.childrenandnature.org

Green Hearts Inc.

www.greenheartsinc.org

Insect Lore

www.insectlore.com

University of Maine at Farmington's Nature-Based Education Resource Guide

<http://umf.maine.libguides.com/naturebasededu>

Authors' Note

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Endnotes

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 - ⁵ Lutostanski, S. (2018). Sports that work for gifted children. *Parenting for High Potential*, 7(1), 9–11, 15.
 - ⁶ Kernan, M., & Devine, D. (2010). Being confined within? Constructions of the good childhood and outdoor play in early childhood education and care settings in Ireland. *Children & Society*, 24, 371–385.
- National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF). (2011). *Fact sheet: Children's health and nature*. Retrieved from <https://www.neefusa.org/resource/childrens-health-and-nature-fact-sheet>
- ⁷ Taylor, A. F., & Kuo, F. E. (2011). Could exposure to everyday green spaces help treat ADHD? Evidence from children's play settings. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 3(3), 281–303.
 - ⁸ Kernan et al., (2010).