

What's In It For Me?

What Teachers/Caregivers can expect to gain from “taking on” the OUTDOORS . . .

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It's good for you, too!

A rose is a rose
is a rose . . . (but
so much more!).
Did you know
that floral scents
contribute to
cognitive
functioning –
making teachers
as well as
children smarter,
more alert and
ready to learn?



The April 2007 issue of the NC Child Care Health and Safety Bulletin is filled with information about how the outdoors is healthy for children and important for their growth and development (www.healthychildcarenc.org). Well guess what? It's healthy for adults too! When you think about your typical day in your early care and education setting, how much time are YOU spending in the fresh air, in full spectrum sunlight, in an environment that has lots of “green” – plants, trees? The health benefits of being outdoors continues throughout life. There is even evidence that exposure to green spaces is healing. Research tells us that in hospital settings, patients that have window views onto green space (plants, trees.) heal faster than those who don't. We are just beginning to understand the health value of the outdoors for all of us.

Pleasure and relief from stress:

Many teachers who develop rich outdoor environments report that they can't wait to get to school to see what is happening outside. They say that being outside makes them feel calm, happy and peaceful. And the pleasure is guilt-free. Research shows that when adults share this interest and pleasure with children, it contributes to children's learning and well being.

Sense of freedom:

When you open the door for the children to go outside, babies will kick with joy, toddlers attempt to run, and older children “charge” across the play yard with delight and enthusiasm, expressing their joy in the freedom found outside the classroom. Have you ever noticed that you feel the same way?

Many teachers have had little chance themselves to explore nature outside. You may therefore think you don't know enough about nature. But you don't have to have all the answers. Children will notice and ask about the most incredible things (as you know) It is fun, freeing and appropriate for teachers to respond to questions by saying, “Let's find out together! This is how we learn...”.

Need exercise?
No time to go to
the gym? Try
playing “follow the
leader” with a
child. Let them
lead you and see
how much exercise
you get!

This is a chance for you to enjoy the details in nature, notice the shape of a leaf, the color of a flower, the sound of the wind. By talking about what you see, hear, and feel, you are modeling language and showing children that you care about the environment.

Think of it as free educational materials: acorns for counting, leaves for sorting and counting, shadows to notice, branches to build with, shrubs to hide in, flowers to smell, birds to observe...

The environment as teacher:

Many teachers say a well-equipped outdoor environment is like having another teacher. Why is that? . . . Because children are naturally curious and attracted to things in their environment. They want to explore hills, trees, plants, butterflies, worms, grass, sand, water... sunshine and shadow. A rich outdoor environment suggests things to do.' Try chasing your shadow!' 'Climb up the hill.' You will find that children talk more and ask more questions in the outdoor environment. All of this is great for their development and exciting for you as well!



Photo by Wendy Banning

***So . . . have fun . . . play outside . . . knowing you are doing the right thing for children
...and for yourself!***

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