

SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Taking infants and toddlers outside is an important part of their day. When weather permits, outdoor time allows very young children to learn in a different environment. Nature provides an endless array of learning opportunities. The outdoors presents smells, sounds, and sights that are ever changing and rich. Aside from the educational components, sunshine and open spaces appeal to the emotions and provide freedom for exploration. Comment on the feel of wind blowing and the heat of sun on their arms. Help infants and toddlers touch natural growing items like tree bark and leaves and smell flowers and leaves. It is a different experience when they see growing, living things.



INFANT & TODDLER ACTIVITIES

Support Physical Play Outdoors

- Make walks interactive by stopping and letting infants and toddlers touch and feel leaves, sticks, and tree bark. Bring a paper bag. Have the children bend down or reach up to get leaf specimens, sticks, and rocks to put into the bag.
 - Place a large blanket on the grass, and let infants enjoy tummy time. Roll a ball to an infant who can sit up. Aim the ball at their feet some of the time and encourage them to kick.
 - Pull an infant who can sit up in a wagon, and teach the infant to hold on to the sides.
 - Visit parks and playgrounds that offer baby swings and low climbing equipment. Place infants on the slide and hold them as they slowly descend. Low slides are as much fun for toddlers to go up as to come down. Climbing and sliding are enjoyed over and over.
 - As the child becomes ambulatory, provide riding toys that use her feet to make the toy move. Older toddlers can learn to pedal a tricycle.
 - Provide low climbing equipment that young toddlers can crawl over and under.
 - Use steps to provide a new dimension to exercising young muscles. Help children go up and down stairs, first crawling and then walking. They will be fascinated with this new venture, and it helps improve balance.
 - Play music and invite toddlers to dance in a safe, grassy area.
 - Play in sandboxes to encourage fingers and hands to develop dexterity as young toddlers put the sand in cups and pails. Teach that sand cannot go into their mouths or be thrown.
 - Add water to soil or sand to change the play. Toddlers like to dig in mud. It is messy, but it helps develop large and small arm and hand muscles and hand-eye coordination.
 - Add a variety of push toys, such as toy lawn mowers. Take pull toys outside.
 - Let toddlers help water and dig in a garden. Pulling up carrots or picking beans is fun and easy for very young children. Watch for ants and ladybugs on plants. Point out leaves that have been eaten by insects. Butterfly plants, which are easy to grow, are breeding grounds for hungry caterpillars. Teach young children to watch but not touch.
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