

Getting Kids To Love And Respect The Great Outdoors

(NAPSA)—Connecting with nature offers many rewards for children. Spending time outside gives kids a chance to exercise in the open air, engage all their senses of perception and enjoy the simple pleasure of being outdoors.

Introducing kids to nature can be easy and fun for the whole family. Here are a few tips:

Start in your own backyard: Children's first introduction to nature can start at home. Even small children can dig a hole, hunt for bugs, plant sunflower seeds and watch them grow, or help fill a bird feeder and watch the flocks come to feed. Parents can plant flowers that attract butterflies and hummingbirds, then ask kids to notice when insect or bird visitors arrive.

Take a nature walk: Start your preschoolers with a trip to a park or nature reserve and take note of the flowers, insects and animals you see. If you can't identify them, take a picture and try to research them online when you get home. Some nature reserves offer guided walks, which are great for older kids. Next, try short hikes. Be sure your child has a pair of sturdy shoes. Wearing two pairs of socks—a thin nylon liner close to the foot and a thicker, heavier pair on the outside—may help prevent blisters. Hikes are a lot of fun but your child could become bored if there isn't anything going on for a long time. You can engage them by playing games such as "I Spy" and challenge them to contests collecting leaves, stones or twigs to help them relate to the nature around them.

Bring nature to the craft table: Collect items found on nature explorations to create crafts that will bring the outside in. For example, dried flowers and



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leaves can be used to make place mats or picture frames. Rocks can be decorated and transformed into paperweights.

Take the kids camping: When introducing camping, try to keep the first trip short—about two nights—and keep travel time to the site as short as possible. Before you go, you may want to show kids a DVD about camping so they know what to expect. For example, "Mickey Mouse Clubhouse: Mickey's Great Outdoors" features five episodes from the "Mickey Mouse Clubhouse" TV show that showcase how to enjoy outdoor activities such as camping, fishing and exploring nature.

The camping episode shows that when camping, the first thing to be done is to set up the campsite, put up the tent and organize the fire. Only then do Mickey and friends go fishing. The other adventures introduce binoculars,

using maps and finding landmarks. Each episode incorporates the value of using tools to help solve problems.

Teach children to respect nature and leave a small footprint: It's fun to catch fish, but check size requirements and throw back fish that are too small. Collect fireflies in a jar but release them at the end of the adventure. Help children remember to clean up after themselves outside and not litter.

Subscribe to a nature magazine: Nature magazines can teach kids about different aspects of nature and help keep them interested during the colder months when it's not as easy to spend time outside.

Look up: Teach children about the planets and the constellations. Take a lawn chair outside some nights and look up at the stars or plan a picnic at dusk and watch the sun go down. The changing sky offers a fascinating show.

Take a child to the seashore at low tide: Point out a few tide pools, give your kids a bucket and let them go. Then have fun discussing everything they bring back.

Plan a visit to a children's zoo or petting zoo: Children love the opportunity to see animals in their natural habitat and may even have a chance to pet or feed them. It's another wonderful way to spend time outdoors together.

Visit natural history museums: These museums offer information about ecological systems and various animals. They often have special exhibits and play areas specifically for young children. Teaching your children to love the natural world around them can be one of the best gifts you can give them.