

Engaging Toddlers in Nature Play

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Your child is watching your every move and picking up cues based on how you interact with nature. If your aim is to instill respect and love for all things wild, try these simple activities with children **ages three months to two years old**:

- Let baby crinkle dry leaves on the ground. Crunch the leaves with baby as he enjoys the sound.
- Visit shrubs and trees to allow baby to touch and grab at the green leaves. Smell the leaves with baby.
- Invite baby to grab and feel soil with hands and toes.
- Quietly watch birds fly overhead and squirrels pitter patter.
- Listen to bird sounds and mimic them for baby: "teacher-teacher-teacher", "peter-peter-peter", or "caw caw"!
- Visit nearby flowers. Gently touch and smell the flowers. Say color names to baby and describe how the petals or leaves feel.
- Pick up twigs and seeds for baby to manipulate. Try tossing helicopter seeds to watch them spin.
- Blow bubbles in the wind. Listen to the sounds of the bubbles pop on blades of grass.
- Make sounds with what you find outside. Try tapping acorns, walnuts, or twigs together and invite baby to join in.
- Touch tree bark and describe how it feels to baby (rough, smooth, bumpy, scratchy).

- Pick up a worm, cricket, or ant and show baby how it moves in your hand. If baby is welcoming, let the tiny animal crawl in baby's hand.
- Stand your barefoot baby on soft grass or moss. Encourage baby to touch the grass or moss with fingers, too.
- Play in a puddle. Stir up water with twigs, dip fingers or toes in, or float leaves in the water.

Your curious child will develop positive feelings about nature through happy, sensory associations of nature play with you. As you explore together, you are making more than memories; you are nurturing baby's lifelong love of nature!

Common Sense Notes about Nature Play

Always supervise your child! Never leave her unattended outdoors and watch closely whenever she is holding small objects. Never allow her to taste any leaves, and do not allow her to play in soil or grass where pesticides or other chemicals may have been applied.

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