

Benefits of Nature Play

Research shows the list of benefits of unstructured outdoor nature play is long because such experiences develop the whole child physically and mentally. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia places an emphasis on children engaging actively in play-based learning from birth to five years old to enrich their life, and values families as “children’s first and most influential educators”. The Framework, produced by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments, says that play builds opportunities of “belonging, being and becoming” as vital foundations for children’s development. It supports the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which includes Article 31, recognising “that every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts”.

Children of all ages and abilities can experience unstructured nature play. Some main benefits of nature play for children are:

Builds resilience – to fall down and get back up again, to experiment and learn from mistakes develops problem solving and creativity by being persistent to try things a different way.

Risk taking and reasonable risk assessment – children can reflect on their actions and feelings related to nature experiences and gain confidence to make their own decisions from self-directed and self-controlled play.

Calming – our natural attraction and trust of nature can calm behaviours, focus attention and increase ability to concentrate and learn.

Develops the use of senses – exploring the textures, sounds, tastes, colours and smells in any weather develops learning skills, expands sensory use and strengthens muscles for gross and fine motor skills.

Develops respect and care of other living things – good adult role models show appropriate ways to care for the natural environment.

To be observant and focus their attention – how to observe, investigate, imagine and question develops critical thinking.

Develops language and communication skills – to participate in conversations and observations about ideas or experiences develops speaking, listening and social communication skills.

Increases academic achievement- teaches children a love of exploring and discovering, to use imagination through symbolic play. For example, to act out animal moves, dry collage and drawing in the sand; to reflect on experiences and develop language and social skills through discussion with other children and adults.

Develops self-control - to interact with their world and be in control of their own actions in various situations develops self-regulating behaviours and learn cause and effect.

Cost effective and accessible – nature play can be at school, the park, the beach, in the city, the country, community or your own backyard, and can be free or inexpensive.

Discover and understand feelings – develops confidence for children to express their feelings from using their imagination and role play to investigate their natural environment.

Learn knowledge, skills and social skills from other children and adults – nature play builds a sense of community by sharing skills, knowledge and fun experiences.

<https://www.natureplaywa.org.au/early-years-for-parents>

