

8 Simple Nature Play Activities

1. Mud Fun (on or after a rainy day, or make your own)

Go out to a local park or backyard and let kids get messy with mud, the way they want to. You can bring cake tins or muffin trays to make mud pies, anything that can get dirty. If there is no mud, make some with water. Make sure kids bring an extra pair of clothes and if it rains: raincoat and gumboots.

2. Cloud Monsters (on a day with nice clouds)

Find a nice patch of grass, beach or river bank with a good view of the sky. Invite children to look up at the sky while sitting or lying down. Share what you see. Are there any monsters? Animals? A boat? Anything is possible. You may see different things in the same cloud, and this is exciting! Is there perhaps a story in the clouds? Are they changing? Where are they moving? (and, if you like: why are they moving?) Cloud monsters is a child-led activity to co-create a fun or beautiful story together.

3. Nature Picnic

(outside or inside)

Get out to your local park, beach, natural area and bring a rug and food to share. As an adult, have a look around first for any animals or hazards to be aware of. Then let the kids play freely in the park/ designated area/ your range of vision, exploring, looking for sticks, building cubbies, climbing rocks. Of course there have to be adults present, but allow kids to roam freely and get the confidence to come find you when they need you. Then all sit together and share the food and talk about the adventures and discoveries.



4. Bug Hunt

Make an A4 paper with a table on it. Kids can bring magnifying glasses or binoculars if they have them. Go on a bug hunt and try to find bugs. Look under fallen branches, rocks, on and around tree trunks. Observe the bugs. What do they do? Are they by themselves or move/work in groups? How does what they do work together with the plants and animals around them? Kids write down/ draw what they observe on their paper and share with the group when they come back from their exploration.

5. Nature Treasure Hunt

Explore your local park, beach or natural area where you want to do the treasure hunt first and note down some defining features e.g.: tallest tree with leaves underneath, round pond with ducks, big rock with lots of ants, 3 little rock pools with crabs etc. Make a list for the kids to follow with instructions on what to do at each station e.g. 1. Look for the tallest tree and find the most special leaf underneath. 2. Search for the big rock. When there follow the train of ants, where does it lead to? 3. Find the pond. How many ducks can you count? Etc. When they come back you can either make an art work with the leaves etc they found, share stories of what you saw or draw about what you have seen. Options are endless.

6. Nature Art

Go out to a local nature area and let kids collect little wonders of nature (anything they find on the ground, encourage them not to pick or tear off living plants and trees or bring living creatures). If there is no option to go out together, you can bring in twigs, leaves, pebbles etc. yourself beforehand. Talk about the various things they/ you have encountered, what they feel/look like, what is their function, how they fall etc. Encourage kids to create a piece of art/ story with them, either by themselves or one all together.

7. Backyard Camp Out

Pitch a tent in your backyard and have a sleepover with a couple of friends. Eat outside around your camp. Look at the stars at night. What sounds can you hear? Maybe you can even make a camp fire if it's not too dry and there is an adult present.

8. Explorer's map

Find a place where children can explore freely, either alone or with their parent or carer (depending on age and terrain). Invite children to explore the area and draw a map so that they can always find their way. Invite the children to sit down and discuss the map of the area they have explored. Are there any key locations or things included in their map, and why? If the child has finished the map, go on a walk together and let the children share and explain what they see around them.

Any of these activities can be accompanied by reading a book about the subject you are focusing on, and drawing, painting or storytelling of the experience you have shared, during the activity or afterwards.

KINN supports a leave no trace approach. Always respect the site and respect nature. Leave a site as you found it as we share it with other creatures. When playing in puddles, do this on paths/tracks etc so we minimise damage to sites. To learn more about KINN, visit kidsinnaturenetwork.org.au.

Nature Play Week 2019 runs from April 17-28. Please register your Nature Play Week activity via our website: natureplayweek.org.au and be part of this empowering movement.

The Nature Play Week 2019 Launch Event will take place on Wednesday April 17 from 9.30 -10.00 am (formal proceedings) and until 1.00 pm nature play activities at the The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden of the Melbourne Royal Botanical Gardens. For more information, please visit natureplayweek.org.au or follow us on Facebook.