

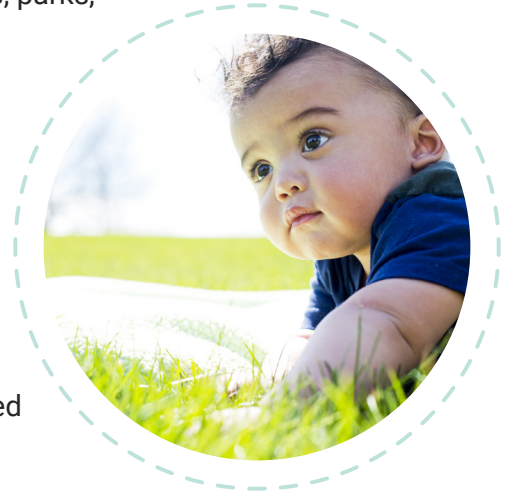
Nature Play Adult Guidance

What Is Nature Play?

Nature play is the exploration of the natural world, through regular playful moments and everyday connections in any type of outdoor environment, such as woodlands, parks, gardens, meadows or beaches. This time in nature should involve:

- unstructured play;
- time for babies and toddlers to choose and follow their own paths of curiosity;
- connecting with the land and slowing down to enjoy time in nature.

Nature play is different to outdoor play as it solely draws on interactions with the natural world, elements and natural materials that are found there. However, outdoor play can involve manufactured toys and play equipment.



Nature Play Safety

There are lots of things to consider when taking babies outdoors to support their safety and wellbeing. It is essential that babies are never left unsupervised outdoors and are watched closely at all times, especially when holding small or natural loose parts, due to their instinctive nature of bringing items to their mouths.

To ensure babies (and adults) have successful and positive experiences outdoors, it's important to take time to reflect on all aspects of health and safety in the natural environment. Babies' access to natural materials (including mud, plants, water and loose parts), handwashing, off-site permissions, weather and seasonal implications are all important considerations. This [Outdoor Health and Safety Handout](#) is a really useful document to refer to when planning and preparing for nature play.

In addition, taking babies outside in all weathers is important so that they experience the cold as well as the warmth. However, babies need to have the correct clothing so that it doesn't spoil their experience.

This [Dressing Babies for the Outdoors Handout](#) provides lots of advice on how to prepare for outdoor adventures in all seasons and weather.



What Are the Benefits of Nature Play?

Nature play can help to:

- ★ provide babies with first-hand experiences of the world around them, exposing them to the different seasons and weather, such as sunlight, wind and rain;
- ★ engage babies' senses by exposing them to different sounds, sights, colours, sensations and smells;
- ★ develop curiosity, awe and wonder and connection as babies explore and make sense of their world;
- ★ benefit babies' health and development through exposure to fresh air and natural light, improving eyesight and focus, wellbeing, movement and quality of sleep;
- ★ develop a relationship with the land, helping babies to develop connection, empathy and a sense of belonging in nature;
- ★ make babies feel more refreshed and active after accessing the outdoors.

Nature Play Activity Ideas

Time to 'Just Be': Sit quietly and calmly with babies in different weather and seasons. Watch birds fly overhead, squirrels scurry, leaves and sycamore seeds fall and swirl, minibeasts wiggle and track the clouds as they race across the sky.

Place-Specific Songs:

Develop a bank of songs that are linked to different outside spaces or songs to sing as you take journeys. As you experience nature together, sing these familiar songs to encourage babies to make connections with words and places. For example, sing 'The Grand Old Duke of York' as you go up the grassy bank or 'Humpty Dumpty' when you go past the big wall.

Sensory Walks: Take babies out in buggies, or short totters if walking, to stimulate their senses. Experience different perspectives and surfaces as you go up and down textured slopes, such as stone or bark-chip paths. For further ideas, check out this [Buggy Walks Guidance](#).

Bubble, Bubble, Pop: Play with bubbles together, sometimes blowing them down so they land on the ground for babies to hear pop, or blowing them up for babies to catch or watch float up into the cloudy sky.

Splash, Splash: Set up a shallow tray filled with water on a warm day. Babies will enjoy splashing their hands and feet and watching how the water moves. Alternatively, for babies who are cruising and walking, invite them to play and splash in a puddle - dipping their hands in, splashing with their feet and floating natural objects in the water.

Nature Sounds: Sit with babies outside, on a rug or directly onto the ground, and listen to nature sounds together. Listen for birds tweeting and leaves rustling in the breeze. Support further by using your voice to mimic the sounds you can hear, such as 'caw-caw' for birds or whistling or howling for the wind.

Nature Play Treasure Basket: Place babies on a rug or blanket outside and add a selection of natural objects in a treasure basket, such as large pine cones, shells, cherry blossom branches, large flowerheads or leaves. Babies can move towards, reach, grasp and hold items they are interested in.

Nature Peek-a-Boo: Play simple games, such as peek-a-boo using natural objects like large fallen leaves for children to hold in their hands and hide behind.

Tap, Tap, Rattle: Have fun making sounds with natural items you find. Bang acorns together for babies to listen to, tap twigs or scrape them along outdoor surfaces and blow through feathers. In addition, provide natural sensory bottles filled with leaves, seeds or alder cones for babies to rattle. You may like to create this [Sensory Bottle](#).

Grassy Toes and Mossy Feet: Try experiencing playful barefoot moments with babies. Stand or place babies on grass or moss or dip their feet into water outside. Invite them to feel the grass and moss with their fingers too, encouraging them to touch, stroke and tug the grass and play peek-a-boo as you make your hands disappear in the long grass.

Touch, Feel, Smell and Crunch: Take babies to shrubs, trees and plants to give them the opportunity to interact with objects and feel different textures, such as feeling and smelling flowers, crunching dry leaves between their fingers or tickling their hands with a feather. Use words to describe how the objects feel as you touch them, such as 'rough', 'smooth', 'soft' and 'bumpy'.



Disclaimer: This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only. As this resource refers to outdoor learning, you must ensure that an adequate risk assessment is carried out prior to using this resource. You must contact a suitably qualified professional if you are unsure. Twinkl is not responsible for the health and safety of your group or environment. Outdoor areas provide great opportunities for playing and learning, but you should always check any environmental risks before taking part in outdoor activities, and only proceed if it is safe to do so. You should ensure that children wash their hands after being outside, and are respectful of nature, taking care of animals and plants. Please be aware that children under the age of three will need to be supervised at all times due to potential hazards with handling and exploring sensory objects; for example, even the shallowest amount of water can be extremely dangerous.