



Helping Hands Christian Learning Center

"Let Us Make a Difference in Your Child's Life"

The Great Outdoors

In some parts of the country we find ourselves smack in the middle of the drudgery of winter. With a decrease in temperature and an increase in hours spent inside, it is sometimes difficult to find ways to maintain contact with the outside world. However, most experts agree that giving children regular contact with all that nature can provide is an essential part of growing up (even when it is cold).

For many adults, memories of childhood include blissful periods spent in the great outdoors, building a snow fort, chasing fireflies, or playing kickball until the street lights came on. Due to a variety of factors, children today spend significantly less time outside than their parents and especially their grandparents. As a society, we are paying many costs as children migrate their play to inside spaces.

Besides a dramatic increase in childhood obesity, some experts contend that there may be a connection between the loss of contact with nature and a number of societal maladies. Increases in behavioral disorders and in the number of children on behavior-modifying drugs to children's lack of respect for the earth, and our role in caring for it, have been attributed (in part) to children's lack of time outside.

Regular contact with nature has shown to have many positive effects on children's intellectual, as well as physical development. Having unstructured play time outside also develops a sense of creativity and adventure. For many children, being able to connect with nature helps provide a sense of calm and of being part of a larger community. These feelings can lead to lower levels of stress (especially in children) and fewer behavior challenges. Spending free time outside also appears to be connected to an increase in children's critical thinking and in their ability to handle and resolve problems.

At *Helping Hands*, we are committed to spending a portion of every day in the great outdoors (as weather permits). We also look for ways to bring the natural world into the classroom so that children have more opportunity to interact with natural items. Children learn by exploring through their senses, and nothing stimulates the senses like items from the natural world.

Look for ways that you as a family can reconnect with nature. Even in winter, a short nature scavenger hunt can provide a brief respite from being cooped up inside. Start an herb garden inside or plant the seeds of the fruits and veggies you eat and watch what happens. Take a minute and explore the ground that is around your home, dig in it, investigate how it changes from one season to another. Gently move your baby's hand to touch a tree. Talk about how it feels. All of these mini-adventures serve to increase children's connection with the great world that surrounds us.



There is no substitute for nature. Organized sports are fun and support children's physical development. The Nature Channel provides children with information about animals and other aspects of the world. However, if we want children to benefit from all that the natural world has to offer, there is no alternative to rolling up your pant legs and squishing your toes in the mud.