Let’s Experience the Natural World

The natural world is a fully equipped environment through which you can support and stimulate children’s learning and development. Within the natural environment you are offering children access to resources and materials which are only available outdoors e.g. clouds and wind, mini-beasts and different habitats, puddles and rain. A good proportion of the natural world is also free to access.

Why do children need to explore and experience the natural world?

Experiences in the natural world support children’s development through encouraging children
• To use all their senses
  o to look at the environment and notice what is happening (e.g. air blowing across skin and hair)
  o the pleasure of lying on the grass and watching the clouds fly overhead
  o listening is a vital skill that needs to be supported from the earliest age. The natural environment offers sounds which form a natural part of the environment e.g. birds and sounds which are part of the environment but not natural to it e.g. fire engine
  o to touch and feel objects and natural materials and find out what these materials can do (e.g. leaves are free, endless in shape, size and texture, a continually changing resource)
  o to enjoy being out of doors and experiencing nature ‘hands-on’
  o to understand changes to materials (e.g. when water and soil are mixed together it turns into mud, when the temperature drops water turns into ice)
Experiences in the natural world can encourage children’s independence through
- children selecting their own materials and resources
- encouraging the development of preferences (likes and dislikes)
- making their own collections
- learning how to use materials and tools safely and carefully
- recognising and naming animals, mini beasts and birds
- recognising and naming flowers, trees (e.g. from the shape of their leaves)

Experiences in the natural world can encourage children’s communication skills and language development
- descriptive language (e.g. slippery, knobbly, uneven, bumpy) through experiencing different slopes, slides and surfaces
- imaginative language (the external environment offers many opportunities for open-ended play)
- the weather is a major topic of conversation for adults – extend this to include discussions with children
- birds, trees and flowers are everywhere – children will recognise differences between them and begin to name

The natural world provides children with a predominately endless amount of resources to explore and experience within a ‘real’ environment.
The natural world can encourage children’s personal, social and emotional skills through
- collaboration in play with other children
- co-operation between children
- opportunities for conversation and dialogue with children and adults
- learning how to take care of the environment

Water plays a large part in our lives. From the smallest puddle upwards children of all ages are
drawn to water
- they love playing with water and in water.
- holding out their hands and faces to feel the rain
- looking at raindrops on windows and clothes
- they develop an understanding that water takes on many forms, including snow and ice
- they begin to understand patterns can be made by water
- they learn about properties of different materials e.g. twigs float on water but stones sink
- they learn about evaporation
- they learn about the vital place water plays in life-cycles and its importance to humans
  and animals

Children can be fascinated by light and shadows. Take advantage of the sun when it is out to
explore shadows
- can children catch their own shadows?
- can children catch another persons shadow?
- can you change the shape of a shadow?
- do spiders have shadows?

Our sense of smell is one of our most powerful senses. It can remind us of people, places and
experiences from a long time ago. The natural world provides many resources to encourage
children’s sense of smell
- flowers
- farmyards
- herbs
- rain