

Outdoor Learning is an important part of daily life at Connor Downs Academy. It allows our children to interact with the natural world. Being at home doesn't mean staying indoors, if you feel well. As social distancing measures continue, our connections to nature are more important than ever. There are many opportunities for children to learn in the outdoor environment. Why not explore Spring as it unfolds? While you're exercising, notice the changes as the days grow longer. Which birds are singing? Are more bees looking for nectar from within those bright flowers?

Nature has so many benefits for children. It supports all aspects of their health and development. For example, it improves health and fitness, develops emotional wellbeing and independence, and improves concentration. Children learn important skills, such as: problem solving, communication, and the ability to assess and manage risk.

It is also important to get at least 15 minutes of cardiovascular exercise a day, preferably in the fresh air. So, whether this is in your garden or as part of your outdoor daily exercise routine, there are always opportunities keep physically and mentally fit.

Here are some ideas for learning outside

Get creative and use a variety of items to construct a challenging obstacle course.

Build a den

Building a den is a great way for children to get creative outside. It improves their problem-solving and develops independence. Best of all, it's a very easy activity to enjoy with resources you already have at home. For example: sticks, cardboard boxes, chairs, old blankets, sheets or towels, washing line or string and newspapers. If they build a sturdy den, it will come in useful as a fun space for other outdoor activities.

Reading and writing outside

Reading is a very important life skill. So, this is a good time to take your books outside. Perhaps get cosy in your den and enjoy reading in the fresh air. There has been no better time to make the most of the outdoor reading opportunity and get lost in a good book. Why not set your child a creative writing challenge? Be an author for the day. Children could take their pencils and notebooks outside with them to write a short story or a poem. It's all about getting their thoughts and ideas on paper and enjoying language. Perhaps share their stories electronically with friends and family to keep connected.

Read a book. For example, 'Superworm' or 'The Gruffalo' by Julia Donaldson, 'The Tiny Seed' or 'The Hungry Caterpillar' by Eric Carle. Record any activities inspired by the story (maybe a mind map). Now try and sort the ideas in to areas of learning mathematics, literacy and science.

Explore a special place, when it is safe to do so. Stand still. Look up and straight ahead. Use your 5 senses to describe and say:

What you can see?

What you can smell?

What can you hear?

What can you touch?

What can you taste?

Design and Construction

Why not design a mini garden? Use sticks, twigs, pebbles and stones. You can use bottle tops for mini ponds within your design and string for swings and hammocks. You can build towers out of sticks, rocks or pebbles. Who can build the tallest tower or the tower that stands up the longest? This is a good concentration and coordination activity too.

Story Stones

Collect a variety of stones. Paint them with different pictures. For example: trees, fire, mini-beasts, leaves, rainbow, flowers or a butterfly. Then varnish. These can be used in different ways.

- Pick stones out of a hat and invent a story to include the pictures on the stones. Children paint their own pictures on their stones to illustrate their story.
- Paint letter on to the stones to help spell and sound out words.

The stones can also be painted with numbers and maths symbols.

Outdoor Art

Leaf and mud sculptures just need nature items from the outdoors and water. Give your child some ideas to keep them busy enjoying their creative art time. Ask them to look out around them and paint what they see. Give them a theme to follow, such as: favourite stories, special people or superheroes.

You can use twigs for pencils, mix different types of soil to create dark colours and carefully select leaves and flowers for colour. Make a nature booklet, book mark or even a seed packet.

You could set up a 'Weather Watch' outside. A thermometer is not essential. You will need: a measuring jug, bucket or bowl for collecting water, a ruler or tape measure, a piece of paper and a pencil to make a chart for recording observations. Ask your child to go outside every day, observe the weather and think about how it feels, (warm, cold, breezy, fresh). Write it down on your chart. Check and record the temperature if you have a thermometer. Write down a detailed description of your observations. Notice the small changes and include them in your description. Do this for a few weeks and it will be interesting to reflect back on how the weather has changed. Has there been any rainfall? Leave your measuring jug or bowl outside all the time. As it fills, measure the daily total. Activities like this support your child's scientific and mathematical learning as they count, measure, observe, make predictions and test theories.

Sowing and Growing

You could explore growing your own food. A relatively simple activity is to sow seeds from tomatoes that you have purchased. This is a great way to teach about sustainable food. Simply remove some seeds from a tomato. Soak for around 12 hours in tepid water. Dry with kitchen paper and then sow these within a few days in a small plant pot. If possible, use good quality potting compost. Why not reuse a milk or juice carton by cutting to size? Be sure to pierce some drainage holes in the base. Add some gravel before the compost and then sow your seeds, two in a pot, 5 cm apart at around 1cm depth. Place the pots on a warm window sill. Keep the soil moist daily but don't over water. It is best to use a spray bottle for this or place on a saucer filled with water. If more than one seedling grows, once it reaches 5cm tall, transplant to a new pot. It is also best to gradually introduce the plant to more sunshine each day. Once the plant reaches around 8cm tall, move it to a larger pot. There are many different types of tomatoes. However, many grow best in warmer locations. This could be an opportunity to carry out an experiment to find out where your tomato plants grow best.

The Eden project have lots of information about plants and gardening on their website.

<https://www.edenproject.com/learn/for-everyone/plant-profiles>

Remember, gardening can be therapy for the mind and body. I hope you enjoy engaging with some of the activities above. I would love to see any pictures that you can send into school.

Stay safe and see you soon.

Mr Costello

It is essential that your children are supervised by a responsible adult when participating in these activities.