

# PARENT INSPIRATION

## Needed! Learning in Nature

Nature is a phenomenal resource for helping your child's cognitive and spiritual development, and mental and physical health. Over 100 years ago Ellen White wrote often about the broad effects of time in nature on the mind, body, character, and spiritual development. "The constant contact with the mystery of life and the loveliness of nature, as well as the tenderness called forth in ministering to these beautiful objects of God's creation, tends to quicken the mind and refine and elevate the character."<sup>1</sup> Today scientific studies are documenting these very effects.

### OUTSIDE IN GREEN SPACE

It is no surprise that studies show that children who spend time outdoors have healthier weights and physical health<sup>2</sup> because they tend to be more active. However more benefits can be gained if children have access to play areas that are green - meaning they have grass and trees. Being in green space increases children's ability to focus.<sup>3</sup> In fact, time in these green play settings can reduce ADD symptoms.<sup>4</sup> Simply walking in a park can help concentration.<sup>5</sup>

It is also important to get out into nature (a field or woods, around a pond, along a river, in a nature park) during the week. Sabbath afternoons can be a great time to seek out a natural location to explore as a family. Time in peaceful natural settings helps reduce stress in both children and adults and even provides a buffer against stressful events.<sup>6</sup> Spending time in nature also enhances emotional development<sup>7</sup> and studies have found that playing in natural environments enhances creativity and creative play.<sup>8</sup>

Many teachers and schools are starting to create schoolyard habitats to help add green space and natural objects for creative play to their school grounds. This enables teachers to be able to go outside for hands-on lessons. When teachers take learning outside (e.g. learning about plants outside with real plants instead of just in the classroom), it improves student motivation for that topic<sup>9</sup> which helps kids actually learn and retain information.

### NATURAL SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS

Most importantly, time in nature is critically important for spiritual development. Ellen White writes, "While the Bible should hold the first place in the education of children and youth, the book of nature is next in importance. . . In the natural world, God has placed in the hands of the children of men the key to unlock the treasure house of His word. The unseen is illustrated by the seen; divine wisdom, eternal truth, infinite grace, are understood by the things that God has made."<sup>10</sup> The lessons available take time to discern. Nature study helps children learn to be quiet and really use their senses to see creatures and find interesting natural objects. Learning about this object, they can then think about what biblical concepts, stories or topics can be illustrated by what they have observed.<sup>11</sup> Even very young preschoolers can enjoy nature study and will discover wonderful spiritual lessons in the things they see and find, once they have had some practice. Check out [naturenuggets.blogspot.com](http://nature nuggets.blogspot.com) for ideas to get started.

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1. *Child Guidance* by Ellen White, p 56

8. *The Natural Environment as a Playground for Children: Landscape Description and Analysis of a Natural Landscape* by I Fjortoft and J Sageie (2000). *Landscape and Urban Planning*, Vol 48(1/2), pp 83-89

10. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* by Ellen White, pp 185,188

11. *Testimonies* by Ellen White, Volume 2, pp 583, 584

All other references are from the *Children's Nature Network: Health Benefits*, [tinyurl.com/3su7wud](http://tinyurl.com/3su7wud) and *Education Benefits*, [tinyurl.com/4yc5ov2](http://tinyurl.com/4yc5ov2)



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## TO CONSIDER

As we observe the things of the natural world, we shall be enabled, under the guiding of the Holy Spirit, more fully to understand the lessons of God's Word. . . Children should be encouraged to search out in nature the objects that illustrate Bible teachings, and to trace in the Bible the similitudes drawn from nature. They should search out, both in nature and in Holy Writ, every object representing Christ, and those also that He employed in illustrating truth. Thus may they learn to see Him in tree and vine, in lily and rose, in sun and star. They may learn to hear His voice in the song of birds, in the sighing of the trees, in the rolling thunder, and in the music of the sea. And every object in nature will repeat to them His precious lessons. *Child Guidance* by Ellen White, p 45, 46

## IN NATURE

There are so many wonderful ways to help kids learn lessons that God has for us in nature. Here are some resources to get you started:

- *Nature Canada*, [www.naturecanada.ca](http://www.naturecanada.ca)
- *Wetland Link International*, [www.wwt.org.uk/wli/regional-partners](http://www.wwt.org.uk/wli/regional-partners)
- *USA National Wildlife Foundation* [www.nwf.org/en/Get-Outside.aspx](http://www.nwf.org/en/Get-Outside.aspx)
- *United Kingdom Nature Detectives*, [www.naturedetectives.org.uk](http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk)
- *USA National Park Service*, [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)
- *Eco India*, [www.ecoindia.com/education](http://www.ecoindia.com/education)
- *Nature Club Blog*, [neednature.blogspot.com](http://neednature.blogspot.com)
- *Online Field Guides*, [enature.com](http://enature.com)

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Journal of Adventist Education Vol 71(3) provides the research and biblical base, and practical tips for nature learning for all ages. [circle.adventist.org/files/jae/JAE\\_v71%233.pdf](http://circle.adventist.org/files/jae/JAE_v71%233.pdf)
- These books can be read online at [egwwritings.org](http://egwwritings.org) or purchased through [AdventistBookCenter.com](http://AdventistBookCenter.com)
  - *The Desire of Ages* by Ellen White, pp 516, 517
  - *Child Guidance* by Ellen White, Chapter 7: Practical Lesson's From Nature's Book
  - *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* by Ellen White, Section 2 (Lessons from Nature) and Section 5 (Teaching from Nature)
  - *Education* by Ellen White, Chapters 10-12 (Nature Teaching)

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