Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights

**It’s time for kids to take a break from the TV and the computer and go back outside!**

Find inspiration in the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights and take your children or students outside to slim stones, count butterflies or catch-and-release fish. Encourage the kids to look, listen, touch, and smell. Let them take the lead—with their natural curiosity, children will quickly find something to explore.

**Outdoor activities have been shown to benefit children’s social, emotional, and physical development—**which is integral to their adulthood. This is important to ensure that the time in nature are also more likely to be strong feelings of well-being.

Outdoor activities are shown to benefit children’s social, emotional, and physical development. Young people who grow up spending time in nature are also more likely to be strong advocates for the environment when they reach adulthood. This is important to ensure that the land, water, and wildlife legacy we have worked to conserve continues to benefit future generations.

**Discover wilderness**

- Prairies, dunes, forests, urban, and coastallands

**Take A Trip Somewhere Totally New**

- There are thousands of places to explore: play in parks and prairies, go swimming in a beautiful lake, pick a pumpkin, and many other things. Most people—including city dwellers—lose less than a half hour from a beautiful natural area, and many are much closer. However it’s most fun, comfortable, and safe for you—including with a teacher or a group—keep an ear out for opportunities and make a list of all the places you might go. Then check them off!

**Travel Back In Time**

- In the middle of winter, when the thought of going outdoors is too chilling, visit your library, nature center, or natural history museum and investigate what our region looked like 10,000 years ago. Hint: you would be viewing the Chicago area from the top of an ice sheet twice as tall as the John Hancock building!

**Find out more**

- Visit your local nature center, or natural history museum and look for opportunities to gently put the bugs back where you found them.

- Are they looking for food? Do different bugs do different things? When you’re done, make sure to gently put the bugs back where you found them.

- **Catch and release fish, frogs, and insects**

- Make a bug playground

- Tape together clean, cast-off materials, such as plastic food containers, to build a jungle gym you imagine would be fun for insects.

- **Take A Walk**

- Pick a short amount of time—even 5 or 10 minutes— and go for a family walk. You can observe things, think deep thoughts, talk, or just breathe the fresh air. You’ll find some part of nature wherever you go, including your own neighborhood. It may seem way too simple, but plain old walking has inspired many a great naturalist.

- **Follow a trail**

- Take your children or students outside to slim stones, count butterflies or catch-and-release fish. Encourage the kids to look, listen, touch, and smell. Let them take the lead—with their natural curiosity, children will quickly find something to explore.

- **Camp under the stars**

- Go camping

- Some spectacular natural areas nearby allow visitors to camp. Visitors usually have to call ahead to make a campground reservation. Call your local forest preserve district, park district, or state park for information about camping locations and what you’ll need.

- **Camp With Fifty Friends**

- In many towns and cities, park districts offer special camping programs. Some may even let you camp in parks where you wouldn’t otherwise be allowed to. Very often these busy over-nights include fun games and guided encoun-

- **Check Out The Moon**

- Every night before bed, take a look at the sky. Every day in the city, where stars will be dimmer, you can almost always see the moon, and usually a few stars or planets. On a monthly calendar (you can use an old one or even draw a grid yourself), draw the moon as it appears each night. Do you notice any changes? Write down your other observations about the sky.

- **Climb a tree**

- You may not know it, but you have one of the best toys ever created in your own neighbor-

- **Build With Sticks**

- Spend a few minutes collecting all the sticks you can find in the woods or on the ground and watch what they do. Do they climb? Are they looking for food? Do different bugs do different things? When you’re done, make sure to gently put the bugs back where you found them.

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- Make A Bug Playground

- Tape together clean, cast-off materials, such as plastic food containers, to build a jungle gym you imagine would be fun for insects.

- **Be A Leaf Master**

- Try to find as many different leaves as possible in your garden or neighborhood. To do this, you can find leaves on flowers shrubs, vines, and trees. Kids want to count up a few ways up into a tree, parents should spot them. Afterwards, try to identify the leaves you have collected together. You don’t have to know the scientific terms—try grouping them into fun categories like “round,” “pointy,” and “smooth.”

- **Wrap around your boots. Where the ground is covered with snow, take turns with friends being “animal” and “tracker.” It’s just like hide-and-seek, but you’ll get practice noticing different animal tracks.

- **Hide-And-Snow-Seek**

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Celebrate nature and historic places

Interview Friends And Family
Find out what your friends, parents, grandparents, and neighbors know about plants and animals in your area or another. How do they value nature? What plants do they know? What games did they play outside while growing up? Did they have a garden? If you want to, you can record all of the interviews in your own journal. You can even add pictures or drawings.

Go Fish
Many parents and grandparents have fond memories of going fishing. Embark on a family fishing expedition. Borrow a fishing pole and tackle from friends who love to fish or from your local park or forest preserve district. Sooner or later, you'll have your own favorite fishing spot and be able to tell the difference between bluegill, sunfish, and bass. Those who catch a line usually need to buy a permit. Ask your park, forest preserve, or state department of natural resources office about local fishing regulations.

Plant a flower

Plant Your Dinner
All you need to grow food is earth, water, sun, and a plant! At your local garden or hardware store, buy a clay pot ($3); a bag of organic soil (especially if you want to grow vegetables for eating, $9); and a starter plant ($4). (You can also start with seeds, but that takes more work.) For just a little dough, you can grow a basil, tomato, bean or other food-producing plant for the rest of the season. If you want to, decorate the pot. You can also garden outdoors, of course, but make sure to have your soil tested first—many city soils can contain harmful pollutants such as lead.

Scatter Seed At Home
Buy a “native wildflower” seed mix packet ($4). (about 84) and scatter the seed on bare soil in the sun in your yard or a pot (not a wild flower preserve). If you want to, decorate the pot. You can even keep your plants company with sculptures from art class!

Play in the mud or a stream

Be A Watchful Walker
The next time you visit a gentle stream or pond, try taking off your shoes and socks and dipping your foot in. What do you feel? Are there plants? Is the bottom made of gravel, mud, or what? Do frogs go hopping away? A parent should closely supervise, and kids can hold a parent's hand for balance. In some places, it's often a really good idea to keep your shoes or sandals on, because there can be sharp objects on the bottom.

Dip A Net
Bring a bucket and a fine-meshed dip net to your local pond. Fill the bucket with some pond water. Next, stick the net in the water. Get it down in the mud and muck and then quickly pull it up and out of the water. Turn the net over into the bucket and see what drops out. You might find water bugs, crayfish, minnows, or tadpoles. When you're done looking at them, you can hold a parent's hand for balance. In some places, it's often a really good idea to keep your shoes or sandals on, because there can be sharp objects on the bottom.

Dip A Net

Board a boat
After you can swim, another great way to experience the water is by boat. Never done it before? Don’t know where to find a boat or an appropriate water body? Many park and forest preserve districts have programs. They'll set you up with a canoe, paddles, life preservers, and pointers to get you going the right direction—and back!

Make Shade A Art
Trace shadows at different times of the day to make interesting patterns and cool artwork.

You can draw in dirt with a stick, place seashells around it using bricks, rocks, sticks, or timbers. If you're really ambitious, you can even keep your plants company with sculptures from art class!

Make a map of your block in every season.

Make a Neighborhood Map

Explore nature in neighborhoods and cities

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20 Ideas for FUN and EASY Activities for Kids and Parents

Learn to swim

Take swimming lessons
You can sign up for inexpensive swimming lessons at your local pool. Once you do, you'll feel a lot more safe and comfortable playing around near ponds, lakes, and streams. Before lessons start, you can help your child feel comfortable in the water by playing together in a shallow wading pool or splashing in the tub.