

40 Neighborhood Outdoor Adventures - Ways to Get Youth and Adults into Nature and Nature into Lives

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Note to Parents, Teachers and Mentors:

All activities that follow can be quite safe and fun. Each needs to be thought about in relation to your area and the age or experience level of your youth. For example, if there are poisonous animals or plants, then special precautions need to be made to anticipate problems. You must scope out the area first. Ask the locals and experts about safety considerations. Tell kids how to behave if there are special risks. Be observant and helpful, but do not take the initiative and wander away from the youth. Allow for unstructured fun and learning. However, to compete with other structures such as school, sports, music lessons, etc. help kids to include nature activities regularly in their lives.

Use age appropriate activities creating: Awareness, Discovery, & Responsibility

Young children need controlled activities, supervision, guidance, assistance, rules, and help with understanding. Adolescents want interactions with peers, less parental influences and greater adventure. Each person is different and needs vary by age and experiences in life. Have plans, but let youth explore, sense their place and decide their fate as can be allowed. Watch and be ready, but don't hover. Make learning fun. Each encounter should create awareness, discover new knowledge and skills and develop attitudes through responsible behavior.

20 Activities start with Awareness (A), Discovery (D), leading to Responsibility (R)

Younger youth might understand these phrases best: **(A)** What's that? **(D)** Find Out. **(R)** What I should do!

1. **(AD)**Go into the yard, open space, nearby Community Park, etc. to have fun. Run around. Get your feet wet. Look under rocks. Climb a tree. Build a fort.
2. **(AD)**Put on blindfolds then sit and listen for 5 minutes, longer or shorter times might be needed based on the persons involved and their experience in the environment. Discuss what you heard with other youth and parents when time is up.
3. **(AD)**Go for a slow walk with blindfolds on and with a partner leading the activity. Touch interesting parts of the environment such as the bark of trees, texture of plants, places that are warm and others

that are cool, insects, soft grass or “sticky” shrubs. Develop senses of smell, touch, curiosity, and wonder.

4. **(AD)** Draw maps of your yard, open space, nearby community parks, etc. Use big sheets of paper for young kids and move up to GPS locations and better maps later. Show hills and valleys, water and dry spots, rocky areas etc. Identify where grasses, shrubs and trees grow separately and in association. Determine if someone planted the vegetation or if it is native. Perhaps Google Earth can provide a base map. What is natural? What is human caused? Track changes.
5. **(ADR)** Look for little parts of the environment. Toss a coat hanger and carefully see and count the plants, insects, spiders, soil, rocks, etc. where it lands. Roll over small rocks to see if worms or insects live beneath. Tell what you see. Add the small details to your maps by drawing pictures. Make and care for a worm or ant farm at home.
6. **(ADR)** Find a hillside that was eroded or dig small holes in the soil to learn about soil differences. Are they sandy, made up of larger particles? Are they clay which gets sticky and holds together when you add a little water? Or are they a mixture called loam? Are soils dark indicating they have decayed plant materials inside and are quite good for growing gardens or crops? Perhaps they are light colored and filled with rocks, making them more difficult to use for planting. Put everything back in its place.
7. **(ADR)** So far, no rocks, soils, plant, or animal names had to be learned. Now begin putting names on what you see. Get good field guides and learn how to identify major features of plants and animals first, and then begin to see the smaller specifics that separate one animal or plant from others. Learn difference between sparrows and finches first, and then spot the various species of each. Some animals might be detected best by their tracks. Plants mature and make flowers at different times of year. Record when you see animals and flowers. Compare notes to see if plants mature at same times each year and are animals seen at similar times of day and year? Tell about your favorite plants, animals and experiences in nature.
8. **(ADR)** Learn about nature through LandHelp, www.LandHelp.info, and elsewhere on the Internet. Look under sections about animals, forests, pests, landscape and gardening, next child in the woods, small acreage management, weather, sustainability, teaching packages, and other sites of interest. You will get more ideas for fun activities and improve knowledge for action. Bring one activity to parents or Community Conservation Club.
9. **(AD)** Animals are not always present throughout the year. They might migrate short or long distances, some animals will hide in holes, under rocks or in the mud during winter. Learn the times of year that they are in the area and look forward to seeing them arrive again the next year. Bird calls might be your only link.
10. **(R)** Plant vegetables, flowers or native shrubs and trees in appropriate places. Care for them properly and enjoy their growth and development.
11. **(AD)** Once you become aware of plants, animals, soils, rocks, and geographical features of the environment, then you can begin to learn how and why they got there. For example were the rocks and soils made from volcanoes, ocean deposits, uplifts of mountains, etc. Did plants escape from gardens? Which animals are new? Ask for help.
12. **(AD)** Once you know more about the environment then begin understanding the interrelationships. What animal eats plants or other animals? How are plants created from soil, water, sunlight and little seeds? Some plants and animals are very particular about their requirements. Others use a wide range of food and environmental resources. Help to provide what animals need by management. Invite managers to assist.
13. **(AD)** Conduct a painting class. Kids need to see specifics of color, form and texture to paint. Help them to be observant. Help them to question! Help them to answer!
14. **(R)** Keep journals with notes and reflections about nature and what is seen, learned and unknown. These can be personal or shared with others. Fill in the blanks.

15. **(ADR)**Get split rail fence materials or other similar structural items and get the kids building their own fences, forts, and play areas. These are not permanent structures, just temporary places to create and develop skills of cooperation and having fun. You could pre-build the uprights to hold fences, etc. and the kids would merely move them around to create a maze or a rocket ship to Mars. Perhaps these can be used in a neighbor's yard, common open spaces, etc. Be sure to get permission from the owners and managers. This could be a great home owner's association project for the area youth. Encourage kids to wear gloves, pants and good shoes, and you can supervise, but do so at a distance. They need to learn about using proper equipment, but little nicks and scratches will heal.
16. **(ADR)**Take field trips and hikes to new places and apply what was learned previously to the new settings. You don't need to go far. Nature is everywhere. Use maps. Be safe.
17. **(ADR)**Determine your "environmental footprint." See the sustainability section in www.LandHelp.info and work to use less energy, water or unnecessary chemicals around the home. Ride a bicycle or walk. Recycle, reuse and make do.
18. **(R)**Practice having good "personal footprints." Eat proper foods. Get plenty of exercise. Outdoor activities can easily combine with kids' health practices.
19. **(R)**Form a neighborhood club that helps to organize activities where you live. A little organization will help to get more done, to share the load and to help the kids. Tell people what you are doing. Your club can be an example for others.
20. **(ADR)**Join traditional clubs in the area such as 4-H. Contact the local office of Extension through the county government telephone listing. They operate 4-H. If you have the kids, they can help with programs, information, and leadership.

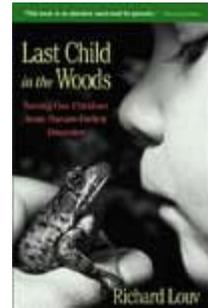
20 More Ideas for Older Youth

21. **(ADR)**Let youth explore. Cell phones can now contain Global Positioning Systems so parents can know where youth are at all times. Youth are only a phone call away.
22. **(ADR)**Volunteer with state and federal natural resources management agencies or other volunteer programs. Get hands-on experiences.
23. **(ADR)**Ride bicycles in the neighborhood and on city and regional trails. Enjoy the beauty of open spaces. Look for and record interesting aspects of nature.
24. **(ADR)**Create a nature treasure/scavenger hunt when hiking or biking to give a few objectives to youth that promote seeing and exploring. Use maps. GPSs or compasses can be used for geocaching. Youth can create new explorations.
25. **(ADR)**Join a bike club. Develop bike riding stamina at a local health club cycling class.
26. **(ADR)**Enter riding contests or enjoy the freedom and new places that riding reveals.
27. **(ADR)**Go camping. Learn outdoor skills such as cooking and survival techniques.
28. **(ADR)**Go canoeing and boating. Learn how to safely operate oars and motors.
29. **(ADR)**Learn to fish. Take fishing seminars at local sporting goods shops.
30. **(ADR)**Make your own flies, lures, and fishing rods.
31. **(ADR)**Climb rocks. Visit local climbing walls to learn the basics. Take a ropes course. Hook up with others with similar interests. Discuss working together.
32. **(ADR)**Take a hunter education course from the local state wildlife agency.
33. **(ADR)**Go hunting. Be an ethical participant with nature not merely an observer.
34. **(ADR)**Attend meetings and field trips of local birding groups such as Audubon Society.
35. **(ADR)**Join Girls and Boys clubs, Scouts, or 4-H. They often have conservation, camping, and a variety of outdoor skills programs for youth. Have them join your group.
36. **(R)**Start a Community Conservation Club in your own neighborhood and connect with other activities around the area.

37. **(ADR)**Identify local issues that need attention and develop leadership skills, along with other leaders in the area, to make changes. Make a difference.
38. **(ADR)**Build your knowledge and gain inspiration by reading. Read about nature and peoples' reactions to nature and impacts on nature.
39. **(ADR)**Read to younger youth and to seniors who might have dwindling eyesight or who might merely enjoy the presence and help from younger persons.
40. **(R)**Get others involved with nature through your leadership.

Enable "The Next Child in the Woods"

Author Richard Louv wrote a book called **Last Child in the Woods** that has spread a disturbing message across North America. He suggests that this is the last generation to have contact with nature unless we do something. By association, we can also infer that youth are also unaware about where their food, shelter and water come from. Youth and adults lose contact with the life and death realities of nature and therefore the impacts they have on their surroundings. There is a movement to reconnect children and adults to nature that has arisen quickly, spontaneously, and across social, political, and economic dividing lines. To learn more about the movement and how you can get involved, look into www.LandHelp.info under the Section on the left side entitled: "Next Child in the Woods." If youth do the activities suggested in this prospectus, then they are part of the movement created to ensure "**The Next Child in the Woods.**"



Reasons for concern about youth and adults with nature arise from their busy, over-stretched and over-stressed lives. Alternate uses of time and urban living have hindered outdoor activities. Even good intentions have unintended consequences.

Urbanizing populations live in communities with covenants to protect real estate values and public safety, but they also might serve to limit the free play of building forts, climbing trees and getting knee deep in the local pond. No wonder children are driven indoors to the lure of electronic entertainment: cell phones, computers, iPods, video games, and TV.

Fortunately, we can connect children and adults back to nature. The latest research demonstrates that hands-on experiences with nature provide benefits to people even if it is simply in the weed lot at the end of the street. Researchers cite diminished levels of ADHD, fewer incidents of anxiety and depression, improved self-esteem, enhanced brain development, higher levels of curiosity and creativity, and a sense of connectedness to the community and the environment. Society needs to get back into the wonders and realities of nature. To help youth and adults become good participants and stewards with nature, I'll keep you informed with LandHelp and the blog:

[http://del-helplanduselandhelp.blogspot.com/;](http://del-helplanduselandhelp.blogspot.com/)

Get into nature! Get nature into you! Take a friend!

The activities that follow provide structure to the 40 ideas and links to new activities and worksheets.

15 days of activities to involve youth and adults in nature

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Below are themes for 15 days of activities. The “Activity Reference #s” correspond to descriptions provided on the “40 Neighborhood Outdoor Adventures - Ways to Get Youth and Adults into Nature and Nature Into Lives.” The letters represent hyperlinks to supplemental worksheets and websites.

Day	Themes and activities	Activity References #s (letters next to numbers are hyperlinks to websites) Additional references in italics	Development levels: Awareness (A) Discovery (D) Responsibility (R)
	40 Neighborhood Outdoor Adventures - Ways to Get Youth and Adults into Nature and Nature into Lives <i>Additional activities in Italics</i>		
1	Explore, learn and be responsible Run wild, get your feet wet, climb a tree, build forts Blindfold discovery Take a walk Plant and care <i>Tell stories about what you discovered</i> <i>Visit a plant nursery</i>	1. a , b 2. 3. c , d , e 10. f , g , h , i	AD AD AD R R AD
2	Artful watching Learn to paint Learn to look carefully	13. j , k l , m , n , o , p , q , r	AD
3	Know where you are and record where you have been Make maps and keep journals <i>Make Pictures showing special places on your map and in your journal</i>	4. s , t 14.	ADR R
4	Look for the small Find little parts Make and care for an ant farm or worm box	5. u v , w , x	AD R
5	Rocks and soil are earth’s foundation Take a hike learn about soil <i>Pick up and dispose of litter properly</i>	6. y , z , aa bb , cc	ADR R
6	Enjoy nature at home Learn about and name nature at home Use field guides and Internet Keep records Talk about your favorite plants, animals and sightings	7. 8. 9. dd , ee , ff , gg	ADR AD AD

7	<p>Explore new places and a new you</p> <p>Visit some place new Ride bikes Be safe Take a ropes course or climb rocks or walls Discuss working with others Join a bike club; cycle at health clubs Enter riding contests <i>Learn to use simple maps of city, parks, trails, etc.</i></p>	<p>16. 23. 31. 25. 26.</p>	<p>ADR ADR ADR DR ADR</p>
8	<p>Be an explorer with the right tools</p> <p>Conduct a treasure/scavenger hunt Use maps, compass and GPS</p>	<p>24. hh, ii, jj, kk ll, mm, nn, oo</p>	<p>ADR</p>
9	<p>Explore on your own</p> <p>Let youth explore. Supervise as needed. Discuss what was seen</p>	<p>21. pp, qq, rr, ss, tt</p>	<p>ADR</p>
10	<p>Have experts show how the world works and what you can do to help</p> <p>Invite an expert to speak about how the environment is formed, how it works and what you can do</p>	<p>11. 12.</p>	<p>AD AD</p>
11	<p>Help your neighbors build a creative play area</p> <p>Create and build a play area in your neighborhood. Get permission. Take care. Be safe</p>	<p>15.</p>	<p>ADR</p>
12	<p>What is your ecological footprint?</p> <p>Determine your ecological footprint Practice having a good “personal footprint” with proper eating, exercise and sustainable practices</p>	<p>17. uu, vv 18. ww</p>	<p>ADR ADR</p>
13	<p>Organize a Community Conservation Club</p> <p>Form a neighborhood club for youth activities Start and official Community Conservation Club that is good for adults too</p>	<p>19. xx, i 36.</p>	<p>R R</p>
14	<p>Join with the larger community of activities</p> <p>Explore outdoor activities in area to have fun and to join in with existing opportunities Volunteer to help Go camping Go canoeing and boating Learn to fish Make your flies, lures, and rods Take hunter education Go hunting Go birding Join youth other groups and clubs and have them join you Identify local issues and help solve problems</p>	<p>20. a, b, yy 22. 27. 28. 29. 30. 32. 33. 34. zz, aaa 35. bbb 37.</p>	<p>DR ADR ADR ADR ADR ADR ADR ADR ADR ADR ADR</p>
15	<p>Life-long learning and responsible actions</p> <p>Build your lasting learning by reading more Read to younger youth Lead others into nature</p>	<p>38. 39. 40.</p>	<p>ADR ADR R</p>

URL Addresses Noted Previously (a through bbb)

- a: http://www.tpwmagazine.com/archive/2008/mar/ed_1
- b: www.njsacc.org/pdfs/activities-color.pdf
- c: [www.heritagewoodsonline.co.uk/Environmental games and activities booklet.pdf](http://www.heritagewoodsonline.co.uk/Environmental%20games%20and%20activities%20booklet.pdf)
- d: <http://www.naturely.com/sense.htm>
- e: <http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/SoloWalk.html>
- f: <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/Activities/MoreActivities/Garden>
- g: <http://www.ca.uky.edu/entomology/entfacts/ef006.asp>
- h: www.growing-minds.org/plans/ConstructABeanStalk%5B1%5D.pdf
- i: [www.ni-environment.gov.uk/print/018 adopt a tree new.pdf](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/print/018_adopt_a_tree_new.pdf)
- j: <http://www.howstuffworks.com/easy-outdoor-crafts-for-kids1.htm>
- k: <http://www.playdateyakima.com/2008/07/01/10-outdoor-art-activities/>
- l: www.arlingtonecho.net/pdf_files/wordwalkgr3.PDF
- m: <http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/SecretSmells.html>
- n: <http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/SensualAwarenessInventory.html>
- o: <http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/NaturalOrchestra.html>
- p: <http://www.kidsgardening.com/growingideas/projects/nov04/pg1.html>
- q: [http://kids-educational-activities.suite101.com/article.cfm/a language arts lesson to bring outdoors](http://kids-educational-activities.suite101.com/article.cfm/a_language_arts_lesson_to_bring_outdoors)
- r: www.cpaws-southernalberta.org/education/pics/pond-study-lesson-plan.pdf
- s: www.arlingtonecho.net/pdf_files/map_mkr4.PDF
- t: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/resources/activities/journal.phtml>
- u: http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/images/huntforminibeasts_tcm4-117847.doc
- v: <http://iitc.tamu.edu/lessons/lesson55.html>
- w: <http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/print/edu003.pdf>

x: <http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/print/edu004.pdf>

y: http://ontarioecoschools.org/newsletter/March_2009/downloads/Interpretive%20Hike%20from%20Cel ebEcoSchools08.pdf

z: <http://www.brainpopjr.com/science/land/soil/grownups.weml#teachers>

aa: <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3747082>

bb: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/wm/publications/recycle/publie043.pdf>

cc: http://www.arlingtonecho.net/pdf_files/littergr1.pdf

dd: http://www.naturely.com/interview_a_tree.htm

ee: <http://www.sciencespot.net/Media/ncsquares.pdf>

ff: <http://www.thewildones.org/Curric/animalObs.html>

gg: www.sciencespot.net/Media/ncatoz.pdf

hh: http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/kids/explore/nature_treasure_hunt.phtml

ii: <http://www.greenhour.org/images/activities/PDF/Nature-Scav-Hunt.pdf>

jj: http://www.naturely.com/scavenger_hunt.htm

kk: http://www.audubon.org/educate/educators/six_and_up.html

ll: www.arlingtonecho.net/pdf_files/dnt_lst5.PDF

mm: http://www.us.orienteeing.org/Forms/orienteering_lesson_plan.pdf

nn: www.jcschools.org/DEPARTMENTS/SecondaryEducation/coordinated_school_health_files/Where_are_y ou_handout.pdf

oo: www.arlingtonecho.net/pdf_files/mapkeycpgr1.PDF

pp: http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_lf_k0700_1441.pdf

qq: <http://www.inquiry.net/outdoor/winter/activities/games/nature.htm>

rr: http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/images/huntforminibeasts_tcm4-117847.doc

ss: http://www.greenhour.org/images/activities/PDF/wildlife_hike_checklist.pdf

tt: www.projectwild.org/documents/WildlifeisEverywhere_000.pdf

uu: <http://www.state.ct.us/ott/PolicyAndEducation/YDYW2008/WorkshopHandouts/The%20ABC%E2%80%>

[99s%20Of%20Measuring%20and%20Reducing%20Your%20Carbon%20and%20Ecological%20Footprints/
Ecological%20Footprint%20Lesson.pdf](#)

[vv: http://pub.em.ed-prod.access-eis.com/pub/assets/pdfs/eco-footprint_lesson_plan_grades_3_4.pdf](http://pub.em.ed-prod.access-eis.com/pub/assets/pdfs/eco-footprint_lesson_plan_grades_3_4.pdf)

[ww: http://www.davidsuzuki.org/kids](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/kids)

[xx: http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarten/Child/com/commun.htm](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarten/Child/com/commun.htm)

[yy: http://youthdevelopment.suite101.com/article.cfm/top_10_outside_activities_for_kids](http://youthdevelopment.suite101.com/article.cfm/top_10_outside_activities_for_kids)

[zz: http://www.audubon.org/educate/educators/six_and_up.html](http://www.audubon.org/educate/educators/six_and_up.html)

[aaa: www.ni-environment.gov.uk/print/014_bird_watching_new.pdf](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/print/014_bird_watching_new.pdf)

[bbb: http://www.nrdc.org/greensquad/intro/intro_1.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/greensquad/intro/intro_1.asp)

