

Outdoor Play: Promoting Curiosity and Exploration

PROMOTING

CURIOSITY is extremely important for infants and toddlers, especially when playing outdoors.

It is **CURIOSITY** that motivates children to learn.

Because infants and toddlers are naturally curious, they learn about their world by **EXPLORING**.

In order to be able to explore, infants and toddlers need to have strong relationships with caregivers as well as safe spaces to explore.

Infants and toddlers learn in relationship to what is in their world:

- what is in their environment
- what they do every day
- the people with whom they interact
- the experiences they have

EXPLORING through **PLAY** is the way that infants and toddlers learn about their world.

Being outdoors promotes curiosity and exploration which leads to ACTIVE learning (experiential learning). Experiential learning is when children **ACTIVELY** participate in the learning process.

For infants and toddlers to be successful and actively participate in the learning process, we need to:

1. Allow children to explore the things that interest them.
2. Provide lots and lots of uninterrupted time to play outdoors.
3. Support learning by providing various items of interest.
4. Ask open-ended questions to promote curiosity and exploration.

Open-ended Questions

Asking open-ended questions gives children opportunities to use an expanded vocabulary, creates curiosity, and motivates children to continue exploring to learn more. Responses to open-ended questions give adults an opportunity to understand what the child is thinking and feeling. The responses that children give to open-ended questions are sometimes wonderfully creative and can surprise us.

Asking open-ended questions helps to broaden children's thinking processes, develop their speech and language skills, and to build confidence in their ability to express themselves using words. After asking an open-ended question, ALWAYS allow time for the child to think (ponder your question) and respond. Young children often need EXTRA time to decide what to say and how to say it.

Open-ended Questions:

- **Convey messages such as:**
 - *I value what you think*
 - *I am interested in hearing your ideas*
 - *I am curious to know more about what you are exploring*
- **Have many possible answers**
- **Do not have a right or wrong answer**
- **Encourage thinking and problem-solving**
- **Help children build on previous knowledge**
- **Encourage children to use their imagination**

Open-ended questions could start with:

- **What do you suppose ...**
- **How did that happen ...**
- **Tell me about ...**
- **How can we ...**
- **What made you decide to ...**
- **What would happen if ...**
- **What could you do to ...**
- **What else could you do with ...**
- **I wonder how you made ...**
- **What did you notice when ...**

Examples of Open-ended Questions:

To promote exploration and observation: What do you see, hear, or feel? What did you notice?

To stretch thinking about cause and effect: What do you think will happen if you drop this stone in the water?

To apply knowledge to solve a problem: What can you do to keep the paint from dripping on the sidewalk?

To put thoughts and feelings into words: Why do you think the little boy in the story is sad/joyful/lonely?

To make predictions: What do you think will happen if you keep adding sand to the bucket?

To evaluate: What made you decide to pick that shovel to use?

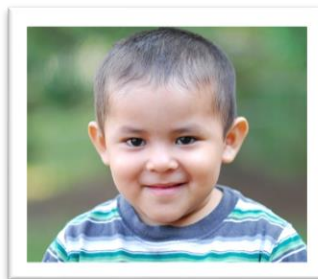
To use own ideas: What new ways can we move our arms or legs while we dance outside?

To think about the world: Where do you think those clouds are going? How do the clouds move?

To make connections with past experiences: How did you know to put the big wooden blocks on the bottom?

Resources Related to Outdoor Learning for Infants and Toddlers

- [The Benefits of Adopting The Curiosity Approach in Early Years](#), Article by Stephanie Bennett and Lyndsey Heller, November 2020, The Curiosity Approach™ www.kinderly.co.uk
- [The Curiosity Approach™](#) – Promoting Awe and Wonder in Early Childhood www.thecuriosityapproach.com
- [Nature Net](#) – Connecting children, families, and educators to nature through hands-on, outdoor learning and exploration. www.naturenet.org
- [Nature Explore](#) – Transforming children’s lives through research-based outdoor classroom design services, educator, workshops, and natural products. www.natureexplore.org
- [Rocking and Rolling. Fresh Air, Fun, and Exploration: Why Outdoor Play Is Essential for Healthy Development.](#) Young Children, May 2019, Vol 74, No. 2. National Association for the Education of Young Children www.naeyc.org
- [Supporting Outdoor Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers](#) – Information about age-appropriate equipment, materials, supplies, and physical space for outdoor learning environments. Head Start | Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/article/supporting-outdoor-play-exploration-infants-toddlers>



Child Development Resources

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