

## Nature-based Learning and Development for Teachers

[Music plays]

Narrator: In your role as an early childhood educator, you make choices almost every day about learning experiences that affect educational outcomes for children. This video presents information about some of those choices. It shows you how to use the natural world as a learning tool to improve outcomes for the young ones in your room. You will see how to create and maximize opportunities for children to interact with nature. Intentional planning for nature-based learning can make a big difference for children. Research suggests that spending time outside and interacting with outdoor elements can enhance a young child's health and readiness for school.

[Teacher and children clapping]

Narrator: Let's look at how some teachers use nature in their daily routines to enhance children's development in different areas. We'll start with physical development and health.

Gardening offers learning opportunities on nutrition and can encourage healthy eating habits. Research shows that children who participate in gardening activities are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables. Natural environments can provide unique and interesting ways to develop motor skills, both fine and gross. Consider what it takes to run up a slope, balance on a log, or pick up a seed. Time spent outdoors and in natural settings can increase levels of physical activity, and this helps to decrease obesity in young children.

Next, we'll look at how outdoor play spaces are rich environments for social and emotional development. When children are outdoors, they often engage in a greater variety of interactions and form new friendships. Also, research findings show that engaging with natural elements may help children be less impulsive and get better with directing their attention to a task.

Girl: They're roots.

Teacher, this is a root!

Narrator: Young children are fascinated and curious about the natural world. Nature-based learning can support children's approaches to learning in many ways. Growing plants and watching seasonal changes helps develop persistence and attentiveness. Nature leads children to seek new information. It inspires art projects. Or it can even be a medium for creative expression.

Girl: The sun will melt it.

Narrator: Nature-based learning is full of opportunities to practice expressive and receptive language skills. Conversations about nature can contain new vocabulary words for children to easily learn. The concrete definitions or examples are right there in front of them.

Boy: Whoa.

Girl: Whoa.

Narrator: Fiction and nonfiction books about the natural world help children develop appreciation and knowledge of books, as well as practice alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness.

Teacher and children: Let's count it. Met-a-mor-pho-sis.

Narrator: When weather permits, events, including literacy night, can occur outdoors.

Teacher: So, we need to match Henry up to see if he's taller or shorter. Are you ready to count?

Narrator: Of course, we can't forget about math -- counting, patterns, geometry, and spatial sense -- and the scientific method. Hands-on activities with nature encourage children to explore, compare and contrast different elements, and learn new information about plants, animals, weather, and other parts of nature.

Teacher: Oriel, you're right, it does feel like a pumpkin.

Teacher: What's in here?

Narrator: You can engage children in social studies when you place local artifacts, art, or plants indigenous to the area in the outdoor play space.

Girl: I found a berry right there!

Narrator: Discuss how they relate to history, culture, and the environment. Take children on field trips to local parks, gardens, and farms. They can discover nature in their own community.

Teacher: Who has a memory about what we did at the farm? Leah.

Girl: A tomato!

Teacher: Wow!

Girl: Look at it.

Narrator: Now, let's review what we've covered about nature-based learning. Research provides a strong case for incorporating nature into learning activities. Giving children ways to experience, move, and interact with the outdoors not only improves health and well-being, it also leads to better academic outcomes. Nature can be used to address the five core domains of the school readiness framework: physical development and health, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language and literacy, and cognition and general knowledge. Nature supports learning in all the domains. And it's fun for children. Whether it is exploring in the woods, making new friends, or learning more words, nature can be the source of better outcomes for children.

For helpful resources and more information, please visit the nature-based learning and development page on your screen.

Teacher and children (singing): We're going to have a great day. We're going to have a great big smile.

Narrator: Get started today. The children are waiting to play, explore, and learn outside.

[Music plays]