

Teaching Children to Love the Earth

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In order to teach children about the wonders of nature and the needs of our planet, they must spend time outdoors. Too many children spend most of their after-school hours in-doors watching television or playing video games.

Many adults can remember what it was like to ride a bike with the wind blowing in their face, or take a walk by a stream. Today's children live more in a virtual world, getting their information from television and computers. They're missing out on the gifts of exploring the outdoors, for reasons such as parental stress, community violence, and the influence of the mainstream media.

Think about what you can do as a family to encourage your children to love and care for the Earth.

Here are some ideas:

Take walks in nature: When you take children on a walk in your neighborhood to find colorful leaves, or to the beach to collect seashells, you'll see how they enjoy learning about the elements and beauty of nature.

Grow a garden: Even if you live in an apartment, you can grow herbs on your windowsill or tomatoes on the porch. When children care for plants they learn about natural elements such as the sun, water, and even bugs and worms. Encourage them to dig in the dirt. Plant seeds and talk about how they grow.

Make a birdfeeder: You can make one by putting a large pinecone on a string, then putting peanut butter all over it, and hanging it on a nearby tree. You can also buy one at the store. It's wonderful to hear birds sing and watch them fly.

Read about nature: Check out books from the library about local plants and animal life. There are also wonderful videos about animals in the wild. View them first to be sure they're not too scary.

Recycle and reuse: Without making young children afraid of global warming, teach them what they can do to protect the planet and how important it is to reuse and recycle. Have bins easily available for children to use, and if you can, take them to see how trash is turned into useful products. Get a cloth bag for your groceries, and ask your children to remind you to bring it with you to the store.

Turn off the lights: Your children can be the light monitors at home, and go around and shut out lights that are not being used. You can explain to them that conserving electricity is healthy for our planet.

Be a good role model: If you show enthusiasm and respect for nature, your child will learn from you.

It's up to all of us to love and respect the Earth, and if children learn when they are young, they will be better guardians of our planet.

