



## 5 Easy Ways to Encourage Language Development in the Outdoors

#1: Incorporate outdoor time into the daily routine, regardless of weather.

Resist the temptation to avoid the rain, wind or snow. A young child is excited to experience all weathers and, if dressed appropriately, learns so much about the seasons just by spending a few minutes in the open air. Free play is enjoyable, but so are garden chores such as raking leaves, planting bulbs or shoveling snow. Provide child sized tools and watch your preschooler become your best helper! Talk with your child about what you are doing, and why.

#2: Expose your child to three new words pertaining to nature each time you take a walk.

Children do not need a botany lecture while they are walking by your side. However, they do appreciate being given the proper names for items found in nature. Once a toddler knows how to identify and name a “leaf”, you can begin to introduce “sycamore”, “oak” or “beech.” Learning the names of shells at the beach is a solid introduction to the function of shells at a later stage of development.

#3: Use adjectives to describe a newly found treasure.

Examine one of nature’s gifts and talk about it together. Simple sentences such as “This pinecone is so prickly” invite children to search for words within their vocabulary to describe what they are seeing or holding. This prompts them to absorb more useful words, provided you are intuitive and supply them in your own conversation.

#4: Share the responsibility of choosing library books and compliment your child's independent choices with a selection of seasonal or topical stories that relate to current experiences.

Toddlers and preschoolers love to feel independent. Allow them to carry a small bag to the library, into which they can place books of their own selection. A bag that is filled offers a concrete explanation of "enough". Meanwhile, you can choose "your" books based on places you have visited, birds you have seen or perhaps seasonal changes. A young child likes to process information based on real experiences. If you have made a snowman recently, or planted seeds in the garden, a story based on similar events reinforces impressions and supports language development. A child who has been exposed to a wide vocabulary can be a confident communicator.

#5: Establish a designated display area for objects brought home from the outdoors e.g.. feathers, stones, shells, leaves and rotate the display regularly. Encourage conversation about what your child has found.

Children love to collect tiny objects. Reserve a space in your hallway or living room for a special shelf or table on which they can display their found treasures. Provide written labels for the objects if you wish; exposure to text is a subtle way to support word or letter recognition. There is no need to "teach" these words to your child; the fact that they are present suggests their importance. Rotate the objects regularly, to inspire your child to look for treasures on a walk or outing. Keeping the shelf or table simply stocked is more attractive to a child who is developmentally inclined to appreciate simplicity rather than clutter.