

# LEARNING TO GROW

CENTER ON THE FAMILY ♥ UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

## Outdoor Activities with Your Child

We are so lucky that we live in Hawai'i because we can spend time outdoors all year long. Take time each day to take advantage of our good weather to enjoy the company of your child outdoors. Have fun in your yard or in a park, take a walk around the neighborhood, or visit the beach. The outdoors hold exciting learning opportunities for your child.

Why do this? In addition to being fun and a great way to spend time together, research from the National Center for Physical Development and Outdoor Play has shown that children who play outdoors are happier, healthier, and stronger. They found that children who play outdoors regularly have lower stress levels, develop stronger immune systems, and become fitter and leaner. In addition, these children also tend to have a more active imagination and play more creatively.

As you spend time outdoors together, keep in mind:

- ♥ **Safety comes first.** Make sure the outdoor area that your child will be in is safe from potential hazards (e.g., water hazards, things that your child could put

in his mouth, cars, unsafe equipment, sharp objects). Monitor your child while he is outdoors and teach him how to play safely as he tries new activities and learns new skills.

- ♥ **Learning Opportunities.** Outdoor activities provide your child with many opportunities for learning. Ask questions and encourage your child to talk about what he is seeing, doing, and experiencing.
- ♥ **Learning can be fun.** As your child is having fun crawling, running, hopping, jumping and/or climbing outside, he is learning new skills and developing his large muscles and coordination.

This newsletter will focus on outdoor play activities for you to do with your child. In addition, some suggestions of age-appropriate activities and materials are provided.



### In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ Age-specific information and suggestions about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ Featured activities for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

# Infants

Children use their senses to interpret and learn everything around them. Taking your baby outdoors will expose him to a variety of sights, sounds, smells, and tactile experiences as he moves, explores, and learns about his surroundings.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommends that infants should be placed in safe settings that encourage physical activity, and that the amount of time infants spend in devices that restrict movement (e.g., playpens, bouncy chair, infant swings) be limited. Providing an open, but safe space in which your baby can reach out, turn over, crawl, and pull himself up will help him develop his large muscles.



The following are some outdoor learning activities you can do with your baby:

- ♥ Place your baby on your lap or on a clean sand area at the beach. Have him touch the sand (both wet and dry) with his feet. Talk to him about the texture of the sand and see how he responds. The sand, salty air, and the sound of the waves, will be new experiences for him. (Because of his sensitive skin, be sure to limit the amount of time a young infant spends in direct sunlight.)
- ♥ Walk around your neighborhood and point out the things that you see: flowers, leaves, grass, birds, and other animals. Talk and sing songs about the objects or pretend to be them (see *Kolea* activity below).

## Activity for Infants: *Kolea* (Golden Plover)

Materials: None

What to Do:

1. Look for the *kolea* in grassy areas around your neighborhood during the months of August through April. While you are outside, point out other animals, trees, and creatures you see.
2. Talk about what you see. Say, “Look at the bird walking in the grass. He has wings to fly high in the sky.”
3. Encourage your baby to extend his arms out like a bird as you gently lift him and “soar” him through the air while reciting this short poem:  
*One little kolea flying in the sky.  
Come in for a landing from way up high.*



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



# Toddlers

Toddlers love to move. Playing outdoors gives them the chance to practice their physical skills – helping them to gain muscle control, balance, and coordination. Each new skill they learn builds a foundation for learning and mastering more complicated physical tasks, such as jumping, kicking a ball, or tumbling.



Outdoor activities allow your child to have a greater freedom to run, shout and do ‘messy’ activities that may not be tolerated indoors. Playing outdoors also allows him to play with materials found in nature—water, sand, rocks, leaves and twigs—and learn by creating and manipulating materials easily found around him.

The following are some outdoor learning activities that you can do with your toddler:

- ♥ Make an obstacle course for your child in your yard or at a neighborhood park. Use objects such as trees to have your child run around or small objects for him to step or jump over. You can also incorporate activities such as jumping in place or throwing a ball. Remember to keep the obstacles low to the ground and, if needed, hold his hand as he moves through the obstacle course.
- ♥ Encourage playing with sand, pebbles, or water that does not have any debris. Include items such as plastic bowls, spoons, measuring cups, funnels, or small toys such as cars or animals, that will encourage your child to be creative and at the same time help him to develop his motor skills by digging and pouring.

## Activity for Toddlers: Nature Walk

### Materials:

- Paper
- Bag or box to hold collected objects
- Soap and water or hand sanitizer

### What to Do:

1. Go for a walk outside with your child and collect different types of leaves.
2. Talk about the characteristics of the leaves. Ask questions such as, “Which leaf is the longest?” and “What color is it?”
3. Once you have an assortment of leaves, put them in one pile. Together, count the number of leaves.
4. Pick up each leaf and together describe the colors, shape, and texture. Sort them by their different characteristics.
5. After playing outside, remember to wash your child’s hands as well as your own.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*



# Preschoolers

Outdoor activities are one of the best ways for preschoolers to master and fine-tune their physical skills. Preschoolers gain more coordination and become more skillful in their physical abilities such as pedaling a tricycle, throwing and catching a ball, jumping over an object, skipping, and balancing on one foot, when they are given the opportunity to practice these skills outdoors where there is plenty of room for them to move around.



Your preschooler is naturally active and curious, and is constantly seeking new knowledge and experiences. Outdoor activities can help him focus his energy and tackle skills that he may still be learning, such as swimming or doing several coordinated actions in sequence like hopping, skipping, and jumping.

The following are some outdoor learning activities that you can do with your preschooler:

- ♥ Do a “water painting,” in which your child paints on the side of a building with a brush and a bucket of water. Talk about the motions that he’s using and draw his attention to how the water evaporates.
- ♥ Use a magnifying glass and explore the great outdoors (in your backyard, park, or beach). Look at insects, plants, puddles of water, or whatever catches your child’s attention. Talk about the different features of each object and what each object looks like when you use the magnifying glass.

## Activities for Preschoolers: *How Does Your Garden Grow?*

### Materials:

Avocado seed

Toothpicks

Jar or drinking glass

Ruler

Calendar

### What to Do:

1. Start with an avocado seed.
2. Poke four or five toothpicks into the seed around its widest part to form a ring of toothpicks that will hold up the seed when it is placed in a jar or drinking glass.
3. Pour water into the jar or glass until half of the seed is submerged in water.
4. Place the jar with seed near a window and have your child check it daily to see what happens.
5. As the seed starts to sprout, show him how to measure the tallest sprout with a ruler. Write the measurement on the calendar. Each day, record how tall the sprout is.
6. Talk to your child about the changes in the size and length of the various sprouts. Ask him to describe how the plants are changing.



*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*

## How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development.

### Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen large muscles
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to interact with others
- ♥ Feel important and good about himself

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Develop early reading skills

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Understand cause-and-effect
- ♥ Develop his thinking and problem-solving skills.



## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you do this recipe with your child, show him how to safely handle the items and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Make sure to wash your hands and your child's hands before preparing any food.



### Cream Cheesy Cucumber Sandwiches

Adapted from: [http://kidshealth.org/kid/recipes/recipes/cucumber\\_sandwich.html/](http://kidshealth.org/kid/recipes/recipes/cucumber_sandwich.html/)

#### Ingredients:

- ½ cup light cream cheese, slightly softened
- ¼ of a large cucumber, thinly sliced
- 4 slices of whole-wheat bread

#### Instructions:

1. Have your child spread cream cheese with a spoon on each slice of bread. Talk about how the cream cheese feels and how to spread it all around the bread slice.
2. Have him place about 4 cucumber slices on each slice of bread. Count aloud while he is putting the cucumbers on each slice. Then, talk about the cucumbers (smell, taste, shape). Top with remaining bread slices.
3. Cut into quarters and serve immediately.



# Community Resources

## National Wildlife Federation

<http://www.nwf.org/Activity-Finder.aspx>

Activity Finder helps you quickly filter through a wide range of activity ideas to help you connect with nature. Sort the ideas by child's age, time available, cost, and other filters to find activities for you and your family.

## NAEYC for Families

<http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/music-math-more/spend-time-outdoors-your-child>

Recommended outdoor activities for you and your family to do each day.



## Suggested Books

Recommended by Read to Me International [www.readtomeintl.org](http://www.readtomeintl.org).  
For more books, visit the public library [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).



### Infants and Toddlers

#### ***Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother, Too?* by Eric Carle**

This book examines the family life of many different animals and whether they all have mothers. Like the young reader, all the animals have a mother. The bold and colorful images show the young animals playing with their mothers. Youngsters will delight in the repetitious text, which is easy to recite and perfect for an afternoon read aloud.

### Preschoolers

#### ***The Seven Chinese Sisters* by Kathy Tucker**

As a new take on the classic children's book *The Seven Chinese Brothers*, each sister has a unique talent. When a dragon kidnaps little Seventh Sister, they must combine family talents to bring Seventh sister home safely. This story shows how life in large families needs both individual effort and teamwork.

#### ***Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey**

This is a classic children's book about the Mallards, a family of ducks. At the beginning of the story, Mr. and Mrs. Mallard search long and hard for a place to raise a family. Mrs. Mallard takes the ducklings on a trip across town that involves a police officer stopping traffic until the family is safely reunited in the park. Aside from the detailed illustrations, children will also enjoy the rhyming names of the ducklings.

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