



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Outdoor Activities for Young Children

According to *Caring for Our Children*, infants (birth to 12 months) should be taken outside two to three times per day, for as long as they can tolerate it. For toddlers and preschoolers, they should be allowed 60 to 90 total minutes of outdoor play every day.

There is strong evidence that young children experience significant benefits from spending time outdoors. For example:

- ♥ **Overall fitness level and defense of childhood obesity** – Regularly spending time outdoors increases opportunities for children to crawl, walk, climb, and run, which improve large motor skills.
- ♥ **Enhanced opportunities to problem solve** – Children learn cause and effect while making connections through exploration of natural objects and materials.
- ♥ **Improved communication skills and social interaction** – There are increased opportunities for children to play with others through turn taking and sharing.
- ♥ **Increased creativity and imagination** – Being outdoors provides countless opportunities for discovery and creativity as children explore the materials in their natural environment.
- ♥ **Connection to nature** – As children learn about nature, they begin to develop a connection with, and appreciation for, the natural world.

Despite these benefits, there is a common concern—and one that often limits outdoor play—safety. Here are some general guidelines to keep in mind:

- ♥ Many injuries and accidents can be prevented with careful supervision.



- ♥ Do a daily check of outdoor equipment for possible hazards.
- ♥ Teach children how to be safe and act responsibly when outdoors.

This newsletter will discuss age-appropriate outdoor materials and activities as well as safety precautions for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

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,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Infants are little scientists. They actively investigate the world using all their senses and seem to have no fear when it comes to exploring with their hands, mouths, or entire bodies. Spending time outdoors is a rich and important part of the daily routine for infants.

Here are some age-appropriate outdoor activities for infants:

- ♥ Take baby to areas with a variety of sensory experiences; places where she can see, touch, and smell- such as, flowering plants, chirping birds, or sprinkling water.
- ♥ Encourage her to feel the rough bark of a tree, soft grass, and textures of large stones.
- ♥ Set baby down on her stomach so that she can be on grassy areas and feel leaves and dirt. Point out trees, ducks, airplanes, while saying the words for each object several times.

Infants do not yet understand what is safe or not safe or how to protect themselves. They need responsible adults to minimize outdoor health and safety risks and eliminate the most dangerous hazards so that they can explore and play safely. The most important things to keep in mind

when taking infants outdoors are: appropriate supervision (make sure that you can see and hear them) and ensure that all equipment is appropriate for their age.



Activity for Infants: *Discovering Natural Object Surprises*

What You Need:

- Variety of natural objects (smooth rock, stick, leaf, sea shell)
- Wash cloth

What to Do:

1. Bring out objects one at a time and cover it with a cloth.
2. Say to baby, "What's under the cloth? Where did it go?"
3. Unveil the object and watch her delight in discovering the item underneath.
4. Say the name of the item to baby and repeat it a few times as you describe it. For example, "Look it's a rock! Feel how smooth the rock is."
5. Repeat the process with the other objects.



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

Toddlers

When toddlers are playing outdoors, they are hard at work learning important physical skills, and gaining muscle control, balance, and coordination. Each new skill lets them progress to the next one, building on a foundation that leads to more complicated physical tasks, such as jumping rope, kicking a ball on the run, or turning a cartwheel.

You can encourage physical development by introducing these outdoor activities to a toddler:

- ♥ Give her some soaking wet sponges. Let her wash her tricycle, or play dishes, or make sponge shapes on the sidewalk. Show her how she can squeeze water out of the sponge.
- ♥ During a neighborhood walk, give the child a small basket or paper bag and encourage her to pick up leaves or other “treasures.” After your walk, have her take out the items she collected and talk about what she found.

- ♥ Make your own bubble solution and have the children run and chase bubbles.

As you take toddlers outdoors, think of safety preparedness by having the following items handy in case of an injury or emergency: a phone, emergency contacts, and a first aid kit, which includes any medications that children may need, as well as sunscreen, bug repellent and other protective substances.



Activity for Toddlers: *Homemade Bubbles*

Adapted from *Home Science Tools*

What You Need:

- 6 cups water
- 1 cup liquid dish soap
- Clean container with lid
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup light corn syrup
- Bubble wands, including clean items found at home
(e.g., pipe cleaner, round cookie cutter, plastic funnel, new unused fly swatter)

What to Do:

1. Pour all the water into the container.
2. Pour the liquid dish soap into the water, slowly stirring it until the soap is mixed in.
3. Add the corn syrup to the mixture.
4. The solution can be used right away, however for best results, let the solution sit overnight with the container covered.
5. When ready to use, dip the bubble wand into the solution and have the child slowly blow a bubble through it until the bubble comes loose from the wand.

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



Preschoolers

Being outdoors allows preschoolers opportunities for more active movement and games that help them to practice following directions and interacting with others. You can use outdoor activities as a way to encourage preschoolers to build their safety awareness by having them understanding the rules. For example, “It’s OK to



run outside because there’s plenty of space” or “We take turns on the slide so that no one gets hurt.”

You can encourage outdoor movement through activities such as rolling large balls; playing catch and riding wheeled toys; and, dancing, singing or moving to music. Unstructured time allows them to learn important skills, use their imaginations, and offers time to wind down. Gardening or simple science activities can encourage their enjoyment of the outdoors while using all their senses.

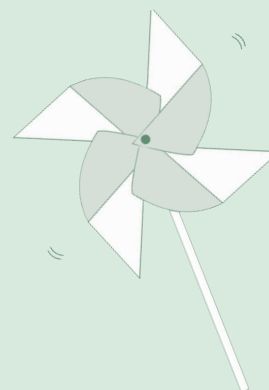
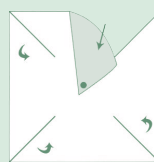
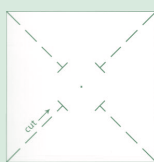
Here are some activities that preschoolers can do outdoors:

- ♥ Create an outdoor scavenger hunt where she can collect items from nature. Talk about the items she should find and give her reminders while outdoors about where the items may be.
- ♥ Give the child a pair of binoculars and paper with pencils or crayons. Have her sit outside and observe what she sees. She can then tally the number of animals she sees, do a rubbing of a leaf, or count the different types of birds.

Activity for Preschoolers: *Pinwheels*

What You Need:

6-inch square piece of paper
Disposable wooden chopstick
Pushpin or tack
Jumbo crayons or washable markers
Scissors



What to Do:

1. Have your child decorate the paper with crayons or markers.
2. Fold the paper in half diagonally to form a triangle, then in half again to form a smaller triangle.
3. Unfold the paper and cut two-thirds of the way to the center of the square along each crease line.
4. Bring every other point of the cut paper to the center of the square and overlap them. Push a pin through the four points of the center of the square and poke the pin into one end of the chopstick.
5. Have your child hold the chopstick and move her arm back and forth or go outside on a windy day. Ask questions such as, “What makes it turn?”

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

How This Helps

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

Physical Development

- ♥ Learn through her senses
- ♥ Use and strengthen large muscles

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to cooperate with others
- ♥ Feel important and good about herself

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build vocabulary skills
- ♥ Increase her observation, listening and understanding skills, and attention span

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her creativity and imagination
- ♥ Understand cause and effect



Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Monster Mash

Adapted from Keiki Can Cook <https://www.healthyhawaii.com/eat-healthy/>

Ingredients:

- 3 cups water
- 1 cup dry pinto beans, rinsed and soaked overnight
- Onion powder
- Garlic powder
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, shredded

Directions:

1. In a medium saucepan, bring 3 cups water and soaked beans to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered till tender, about 1 hour.
2. Drain beans, saving ½ cup of cooking liquid
3. Together with your child, mash beans with cooking liquid until smooth.
4. Mix in seasonings to taste.
5. Sprinkle with cheese and serve warm.



Resources

On the Move: The Power of Movement

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/316-on-the-move-the-power-of-movement-in-your-child-s-first-three-years>

Download this resource to discover how movement is a key factor in young children's overall development.

Be Active Kids Guide to Early Childhood Physical Activity

<http://www.beactivekids.org/assets/pdf/MovementGuideOnline.pdf>

This online activity guide contains activities that are intended to help get children (ages birth to five) more active and to learn skills while having fun.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

***Barnyard Dance* by Sandra Boynton**

This high energy book encourages keiki to stomp their feet and clap their hands...getting ready for a barnyard dance.

***Wiggle* by Doreen Cronin and Scott Menchin**

This book encourages young readers to get up, follow along with the story, and get their wiggles out.

Preschoolers

***Silly Sally* by Audrey Wood**

Follow Silly Sally while she walks to town and meets many friends doing silly active movements such as, walking backwards and upside down.

***My First Book of Nature: How Living Things Grow* by Dwight Kuhn**

Encourage your child's recognition to natural objects. This book provides an introduction to growth, explaining how it occurs in everyday things.



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowhawaii.org or visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii