

# Children and Nature

## Developmental Stages: Birth to 6+ years

**Birth - 9 months: Bonding with parents/primary caregivers.**



At this stage your baby depends on you to introduce her to her brand-new world. Make sure her world includes flowers, trees, gentle winds, sunshine, moon and stars - and plenty of love!



**9 months - 3+4 years: A time of exploration,**

From the time your child becomes mobile he is on a journey of discovery, exploring the world around him. To do this he will use all his senses - sight, touch, taste, smell, hearing.



Your job: Join in! Create a safe environment where the child is free to explore, indoors and outside, then, as far as possible, follow his lead. Join in with the same sense of child-like joy in discovery, and your child will develop a sense of awe and wonder that will stay with him all his life.



At this age it is the *experience* of the natural world that is important. Answer questions simply and avoid the temptation to teach. There's time for that later!

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This stage of discovery is an all-important time for young children. By the time they reach their fourth birthday they will have already formed a world view. They may view the world as a generally loving and supportive place, where exploration is encouraged, mistakes are a normal part of life, and the adults in their lives are loving and caring. Or they may see the world as a place to be distrusted and approached with great caution.

*"Children learn best through their everyday experiences with the people they love and trust, and when the learning is fun. And the best places for those experiences are outdoors, in the natural world."*

Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, 1994

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### 3+ years - 6+: Play, imagination, creativity, growing independence

Somewhere between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> birthday the young child moves from simple exploration to imagining and pretending, free-flow play, and greater independence.

#### Play

Piaget described play as the young child's work. It is characterized by rules the child creates for himself. It has no goals outside the activity itself, and does not require adult direction. It is important to allow time for such free play, as this is how the child gets to know and understand his world and how he can respond to it - physically, emotionally, and socially.



#### Imagination and Creativity.



Your child is now ready to give free reign to his imagination. He can imagine being a butterfly, a tiger, a bird. He can imagine flying to the stars, or catching the moon in his hands. He may have an invisible (to you) friend who shares his adventures, while nature provides a stage for his imagination to soar. "Let's pretend" is a favorite game when friends get together. This is an important stage of development and should be encouraged, for fantasy play helps develop a child's sense of empathy, wonder and creativity.

*"Children live an imaginary life, and creating a place where they can have fun in a very free way can motivate them and expand their horizons."* Robin C. Moore and Herb H. Wong

#### Growing Independence

As your child gains knowledge and experience of the world, so she is driven to express her growing independence. "I can do it myself" is a frequent refrain and, as far as possible, should be honored.



She is also looking to adults for more information about the world around her. She is no longer content to just smell the flowers. She wants to know their names, and why there are so many different colors! Answer her questions directly and simply, but encourage her to make her own discoveries by asking questions such as "Why do you think that happened?" or "What if . . . ?"



With her newfound knowledge the child, at about five years old, is ready for more - she wants to be like her older siblings, cousins or friends - to read, to learn about the larger world, to be just like them! Look out world. Here she comes!

**Note: All developmental guidelines are just that – simply guidelines. Each child is unique and will move through each stage in his or her own way and at his or her own pace.**