

**A Practitioner's Guide
to
OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING**

Connection to nature

**Guest Blogger : Jo Fitzpatrick,
Learning Outdoors Development Officer-
Thrive Outdoors**

In this week's guest blog we hear from our very own Jo Fitzpatrick- Learning Outdoors Development Officer here at Thrive Outdoors. Jo has extensive experience in outdoor education with the subject of her final masters thesis being on 'Connection to Nature'. In this blog Jo shares some handy tips and activities you can do to help foster a connection to nature in the children you work with! Stay tuned on Thursday as we share the rest of Jo's blog for our #ThursdayThinkPiece.

Why connecting with nature is important....

Modern lives are led increasingly indoors, either at home or school and with our reliance on devices, this means that often we/our children don't get to spend much time outdoors. This disconnection has been referred to as 'Nature Deficit Disorder' by Richard Louv, who has written about this in his books 'Last Child in the Woods' and 'Vitamin N'.

Outdoors, in nature, is where the passion for learning, creativity, and the inquisitive nature of children can be cultivated. Children can learn by doing and problem solve in an organic way, and it enables them to form and consolidate a connection to nature.



“If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused - a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love - then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response.” Rachel Carson¹

As children have an innate curiosity with the natural world, all they need is a willing adult to facilitate these experiences.... The quote below perfectly encapsulates this:

“Children who spend all their time in the open air may still observe nothing of its beauties. The boy sees the significance but if he does not find the same awareness in adults the seed of knowledge just beginning to germinate is crushed”² Fredrich Froebel

Try these tips and activities out!

So what are some things you can do to help foster a Connection to Nature in the children you work with?

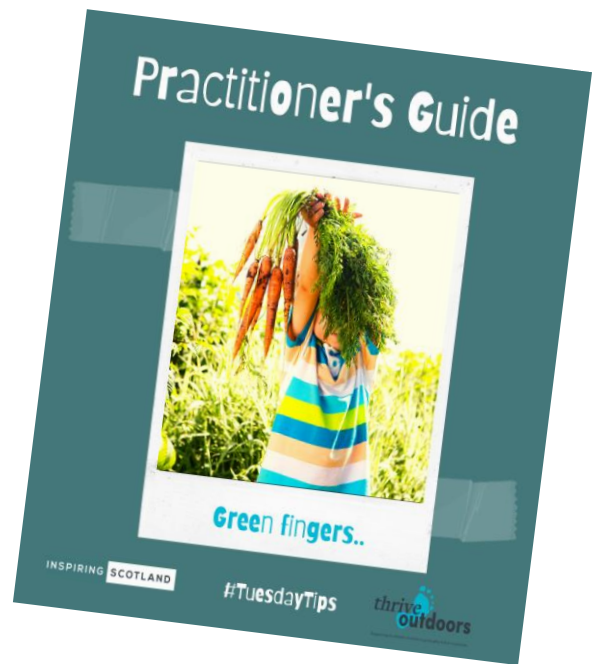
1. **Go Outside!** Spend time outside every day, playing, learning, exploring, just breathing and listening to nature. As adults we can recognise how time outside helps improve our mood and energy – make this a regular experience/habit for your children.
2. **Embrace the weather!** Go outside in all weathers, get the wellies, raingear and warm layers on and have fun! Remember there is no such thing as ‘bad weather’ but if children are told its too wet/cold to go outside then that is what they will grow up to believe. And just think of all the wonderful opportunities they will miss – jumping in puddles, the beauty of rainbows, making mud pies, sliding, balancing on slippery / wet things, even making a snow fort.



¹ Rachel Carson (1956) Help your child to wonder. Woman's home companion

² Froebel in Tovey (2007) Playing Outdoors. Spaces and Places, Risk and Challenge

- Grow!** Introduce gardening into your practice - small or large scale depending on your options. Even planting seeds or bulbs, looking after them and watching them blossom can encourage a caring attitude, and open up a world of enquiry. If you have space then plant fruits and vegetables and at the end of your hard work you get to eat them 😊 What better way to introduce young people to different foods than to grow them?! We are so removed from food production that many children don't understand where fruits or vegetables come from. Help them make that connection and have pride in their achievements of successfully nurturing a plant from seed to fork!

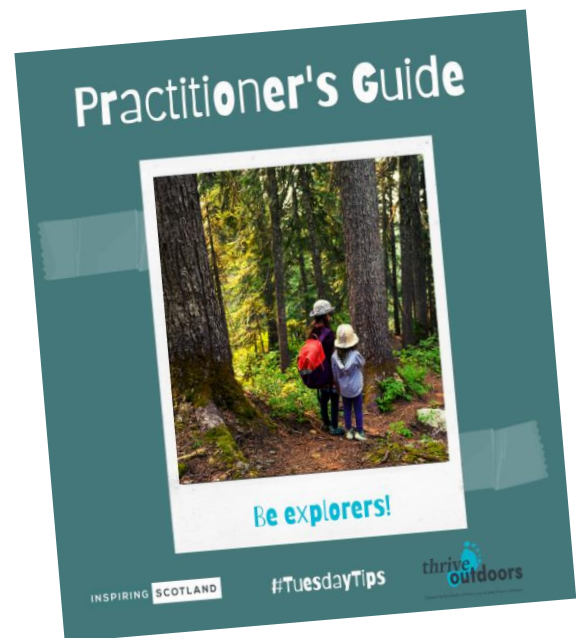


- Search!** Scavenger hunts are a great way to explore your surroundings and search for things you've never noticed before. Engage all your senses during your time outside and make use of available resources if you are not sure where to start!

- Get creative!** Explore your imaginative side – use natural materials to make land art mandala, draw what you see, make a nature map, sing songs or read stories and poems about the nature you encounter.

- Cultivate!** Invite nature into your area by making a bird feeder or a bug hotel, grow wildflowers for bees and butterflies. It opens up so many opportunities for learning about the importance of bees and other insects and our interconnectedness and reliance on our natural world.

- Be explorers!** Get some binoculars and magnifying glasses so the children can feel like true explorers. You can use some of the many ID sheets to identify your discoveries or get creative and make up some descriptive name until you know what they are!



Enjoy this blog? Do you have top tips that you would like to share?

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Instagram @thrive_outdoors

or by email to amy@inspiringscotland.org.uk

Useful Links

Our handy hints and tips on #outdoorplay

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/thrive/>

Links

- Woodland Trust Tree ID Sheet:
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/03/tree-id-kids/>
- RSPB Nature activities <https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-teachers/schools-wild-challenge/activities/>
- Scottish Wildlife trust activities <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/things-to-do/learn/>
- Sustainable Development Goals resources
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/student-resources/>
- Thrive Outdoors downloadable activities
https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/thrive/?thrive_type=activities-games

Further Reading

Rachel Carson (1956) Help your child to wonder. Woman's home companion.

<http://training.fws.gov/history/Documents/carsonwonder.pdf>

Froebelian Approach to outdoor Play:

<https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Outdoor-Play-Pamphlet.pdf>