

Learning through Play at Home

St Clare's Abbey, October 2020

Being in Nature -

The transition from Summer to Autumn transforms the World Around Us, and our Natural world is truly a sight to behold. It is really a wonderful gift to be able to witness the way in which our children thrive in the outdoors. Professor Jan White, leading thinker and advocate for Outdoor Learning, urges parents and schools to provide children with opportunities to interact with nature. Jan draws our attention to the fact that when in nature, children become involved in a wide range of learning experiences. For example, pretending and representing through play; a stick becomes a magic wand, leaves become bouquets of flowers and stones are fossils! Our children are avid explorers as they develop curiosity in the outdoors, keen adventurers through first-hand experiences of the living world, leading navigators making discoveries in nature with their peers as they trudge through undisturbed foliage, and artists as they explore our world in colour. In addition to all of this, our children are becoming equipped to play their part in looking after our world as they develop a deeper understanding of why we must protect living things. Learning Through Play in nature gives children the opportunity to ask questions, make believe, make discoveries, be amazed and to just **be**.

Examples of learning experiences in St Clare's Abbey in nature.





What can you do to support your child?

- **Wait and watch.** Observe how your child engages with the environment. You will quickly see what triggers high levels of concentration and engagement or what makes your child disengage/ switch off.
- **Get involved-** If you notice your child "bored" in the forest or garden, think about why this might be. Maybe they need your support to explore or feel confident in nature. Start off by foraging- gather a collection of items e.g. leaves, conkers, twigs, stones, then wait and see what happens next.
- **Be a Role Model** - think about how to look at insects and protect nature. Right now our hands are saturated with chemicals so there is no doubt that we will be harming nature by touching - can the children just look or use twigs or leaves to scoop up and examine insects?
- **Be creative-** Let your child make up names for creatures, ask questions, be curious, play imaginative games, explore and be free!

Suggested activities:

Scavenger hunt, explore colour, gather leaves, sort, mini beast hunt, gather sticks and make believe, magic wands, make concoctions with leaves, mud and water.

Notice:

1. In which outdoor activities is your child most engaged? Can you think why?
2. How does your child interact with nature? How could you help this progress?
3. Is your child able to talk out loud about what they are doing?

Feel free to email any photographs of your child interacting with nature to our school account.

Suggested reading: To read more of Jan's work follow...

- <https://www.earlychildhoodoutdoors.org/learning-and-living-in-nature/>