



Hamilton

Seventh-day Adventist® School

*Educating For Eternity*



# NATURE PLAY AND DISCOVERY PROGRAMME

## Nature Play and Discovery Programme

“The things of nature are the Lord’s silent ministers, given to us to teach us spiritual truths. They speak to us of the love of God and declare the wisdom of the great Master Artist”. Ellen G. White  
*Adventist Home*

“While the Bible should hold the first place in the education of children and youth, the book of nature is next in importance...In the natural world, God has placed in the hands of the children of men the key to unlock the treasure house of His world. The unseen is illustrated by the seen; divine wisdom, eternal truth, infinite grace, are understood by the things that God has made.” *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and students by Ellen White, pp185,188*

“Time in Nature is not leisure time; it’s an essential investment in our children’s health (and also, by the way, our own).” Richard Louv. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

### Introduction

Nature play is more than playing *in* nature; it is children playing *with* nature.

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that play and discovery in natural settings has huge benefits for the wellbeing of a developing child. From motor skills to social skills, problem solving and cognitive development to physical development, from resilience to risk assessment and management, researchers are discovering just how important nature play is.

As part of our learning programme, Hamilton Seventh-day Adventist School is committed to providing regular opportunities for students to engage with nature.

Nature Play and Discovery supports the goals for Adventist Education in three key ways:

1. To provide holistic education that enhances wellbeing;
2. To develop spirituality and a redeeming relationship with God in the lives of students; and
3. To encourage lives of service and personal responsibility.

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/398e/efa27d322fb0ec7a925e1ae8926fdec6a1de.pdf>

<http://circle.adventist.org/download/PI-LearnNature.pdf>

Nature Programme experiences at our school include:

1. Unstructured outdoor play which is child initiated and child directed
2. Semi-structured play using provocations, equipment or loose parts to inspire creativity and challenge problem solving
3. Guided discovery with intentional links to NZ curriculum content and recorded learning
4. Purposeful projects creating and maintaining semi-permanent nature spaces, play environments, outdoor learning spaces and gardens

## Purpose and Outcomes

We aim to:

- Promote the holistic wellbeing of students
- Connect children with the Creator in order to grow spiritually
- Provide opportunities for the physical, mental, social and emotional challenges, and subsequent learning, associated with outdoor play and exploration
- Promote social engagement and learning opportunities with parents, experts, school community and neighbourhood
- Teach students to value our natural and native environments
- Develop a sense of belonging and stewardship through connection to the local environment
- Build resilience and confidence through exploration
- Increase creativity, imagination and innovation

## Research Base - Benefits

Researched evidence supporting the value of a Nature programme for:

### *Physical health*

- When children have regular time in the outdoors, including forests, parks, and playgrounds, they have opportunities to release stress, play vigorously, and directly explore nature, which in turn provides physical and psychological benefits (Frost, 2010; Jacobi-Vessels, 2013; Louv, 2005).
- For children, green spaces are an important environmental influence on physical activity and emotional wellbeing. (Ward, Duncan, Jarden, Stewart, 2016)
- Outdoor natural environments may provide some of the best all-round health benefits by increasing physical activity levels with lower levels of perceived exertion, altering physiological functioning including stress reduction, restoring mental fatigue, and improving mood and self-esteem and perceived health. (Gladwell, Brown, Wood, Sandercock, Barton 2013)
- There is a great advantage of germs for your child's developing immune system. Microbial exposure and increased microbial burden is beneficial for wellness. (Gilbert, J. Knight, R. 2017)



### *Mental health*

- Green plants and vistas reduce stress among highly stressed children. Locations with a greater number of plants, greener views, and access to natural play areas show more significant results (Wells and Evans, 2003).
- Spending time in nature improves wellbeing. It's not just something that's nice to do, it's good for your mental and physical health. (2015, Mental Health Foundation NZ)
- Nature Supports multiple development domains. Nature is important to children's development in every major way—intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically (Kellert, 2005).

- Maggie Barry (Conservation Minister, 2015) says, “The links with improved physical and mental health are proven and well established. People feel less stressed, more relaxed and refreshed when they venture into the outdoors, whether they are exercising or helping to contribute to a worthwhile conservation project.” (Article 2, 2015)
- Evidence suggests that not only are people dependent on the natural environment for material needs such as food and water, but also that the natural environment is equally essential for fulfilling psychological, spiritual and emotional needs (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown & St Leger, 2006). Therefore, it seems crucial that mental health promotion should acknowledge the importance of ensuring access to natural environments and protecting these areas for our wellbeing (Article 2, 2015.)

#### *Social Emotional development*

- Play, particularly free, unstructured and outdoors is essential for healthy brain and socio-emotional development and in the early years of life is far more important than direct instruction (Frost, 1998; Szalavitz and Perry, 2010).
- Improves social relations. Children will be smarter, better able to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the outdoors (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005).
- Having regular contact with natural outdoor environments plays a pivotal role in promoting children’s health and wellbeing. (Armitage, 2009; Jacobi-Vessels, 2013; Kernan & Devine, 2010; Louv, 2005; Robinson & Wadsworth, 2010)

#### *Creativity, problem solving, decision-making, negotiation*

- Play actually changes the structure of the developing brain in important ways, strengthening the connections of the neurons (nerve cells) in the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain considered to be the executive control centre responsible for solving problems and making plans and regulating emotions. (Pellis, Pellis and Himmler 2014)
- Nature supports creativity and problem solving. Studies of children in schoolyards found that children engage in more creative forms of play in the green areas. They also play more cooperatively in the natural environment (Bell and Dymont, 2006). Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem solving and intellectual development (Kellert, 2005)

#### *Cultural responsiveness, Environmental responsibility, Service*

- Creating a play experience outside on a regular basis will not only educate our children about where their curiosity may take them, it also feeds a deeper connection to our natural environment. Instilling these connections in this new generation is of most importance to our kaitiakitanga and environmental sustainability (Ministry of Education, 2017).
- Wilson (2012) outlines how the early childhood years are fundamental in developing “environmental attitudes and a commitment to caring for the Earth” (p. 87). The natural world can give children instant responses to their curiosity through all their senses as they touch, taste, smell, see and hear what is going on around them. Such connections tend to foster an ethic of care for the natural environment and the life systems within it (Phenice and Griffore, 2003). Positive experiences in nature can support children to develop the understanding that humans are interconnected with the earth and its life supporting systems, and that all humans have a responsibility to ensure its survival for future generations (Chawla, 2007).
- Time in nature is not leisure time; it’s an essential investment in our children’s health. Today, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment, but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading (Louv, 2005).
- Research has shown that empathy with, and love of, nature grows out of children’s regular contact with the natural world. Hands-on, informal, self-initiated exploration and discovery in local, familiar environments are often described as the best ways to engage and inspire children and cultivate a sense of wonder. These frequent, unstructured experiences in nature

are the most common influence on the development of lifelong conservation values. (DOC, 2011)

#### *Improved academic performance*

- Greenspace can have a significant positive effect on improved concentration duration, behaviour in the classroom, and educational and social development for school-aged children. (Beere & Kingham 2017)

#### *Readying the brain to learn*

- Access to play improves classroom behaviour and academic performance (Pellegrini and Smith, 1998) and enhances children's readiness to learn, their learning behaviours and their ability to problem solve (Ginsburg, 2007).

#### *Risk Management skills*

- Nature provides children with age appropriate risky play opportunities which allows them to understand their own limitations, develop their problem-solving skills, and it teaches them to overcome fears and anxieties. Risky play in the outdoor environment is important for children's developmental growth. (Jensen, A. 2016)
- The opportunity for risk taking improves children's competencies in risk management and risk perception. In addition, social skills may be enhanced through opportunities for collaboration with older peers, as children collectively decide and learn how to manage risk. (Bundy et al., 2009)
- Risky play helps children to learn to manage their own safety and move around comfortably (Knight, 2009).

If you have any more questions about our Nature Play and Discovery Learning Programme, please make time to come and talk to us about it. You are also welcome to come and observe and participate in a Nature Play session.

Come out and play.