



Nature Explore Talking Points



WHAT IS NATURE EXPLORE?

Nature Explore is a national nonprofit program of Dimensions Educational Research Foundation, which works collaboratively with a network of organizations throughout the nation. Our goal is to help nature become an integral, joyful part of children's daily learning. Nature Explore provides research-based workshops, design consultations and resources created to support programs as they continue to connect children and families to the wonders of nature.

WHAT IS A NATURE EXPLORE CLASSROOM?

A Nature Explore Classroom is a dynamic, nature-based outdoor space developed by research-based, field-tested design principles focusing on youth education and whole child development. Nature Explore Classrooms allow children to explore and develop a connection to the natural world through engaging in open-ended play while enhancing the physical environment and adding natural beauty to the space.



THE NEED

Research shows that children need authentic connections with the natural world as a regular part of healthy growth and development. There is a growing concern that today's children are not getting adequate access to nature. Many lead overly-scheduled lives with decreased time spent outdoors exploring nature and increased time spent indoors (or on playgrounds devoid of rich sensory experiences). This disconnection contributes to increased childhood obesity, reliance on behavior-regulating medications and a dislike or even fear of the unknown natural world.

WHAT MAKES NATURE EXPLORE EFFECTIVE?

Outdoor classroom design principles and resources are grounded in over a decade of research and field-testing by the Dimensions Foundation to help ensure developmentally appropriate benefits for children. Dimensions Foundation's research approach has been primarily qualitative action research but several studies include mixed methodologies as well. A unique characteristic of this research approach is the use of teachers as collaborators and co-researchers. Dimensions' Education Programs teachers and independent researchers at other sites have been collecting data since 1998. Over the years, expanded research has included mixed-methods and outside researchers on larger studies.





HOW DO NATURE EXPLORE CLASSROOMS SUPPORT CHILDREN'S SKILL DEVELOPMENT?

One of the most significant findings of research shows that when children engaged in authentic play in Nature Explore Classrooms, they were developing skills in a variety of domains simultaneously. This is referred to as whole-child learning. Direct observation of children's work over time provides evidence that children are developing these foundational learning skills as they explore Nature Explore Classrooms with interested, caring adults:

***Math / Visual-spatial / Music & Movement / Art / Literacy
Science / Close Observation / Social-Emotional***

For more information regarding Nature Explore's research as well as a list of key skills that children gain in nature, visit natureexplore.org and click on "Research & Collaborations".



WHY ARE EDUCATOR WORKSHOPS IMPORTANT?

Workshops provide educators and families with field-tested, age-appropriate methods for reconnecting children with nature on a daily basis. Nature Explore offers eleven engaging, hands-on workshops that provide comprehensive information on ways to support children's learning outdoors.

WHY IS FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IMPORTANT?

Families are a key part of what makes the comprehensive Nature Explore program so effective. When families enjoy nature with their children on a regular basis, children grow and flourish.

The Nature Explore Families' Club has been created as a resource for organizations to help connect families with the outdoors, using developmentally appropriate activities for exploring the natural world together.



WHAT IS NATURE EXPLORE CERTIFICATION?

Nature Explore Classroom Certification is a national initiative that recognizes schools and other organizations that have made a commitment to providing outdoor classrooms and comprehensive programming to help children use the natural world as an integral part of learning. Certification is open to any organization able to meet the following yearly requirements:

- Well-designed outdoor space based on Nature Explore Guiding Principles
- Staff development
- Family involvement