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HOW TO GET KIDS OFFLINE, OUTDOORS, AND CONNECTING WITH NATURE

*200+ Creative Activities to Encourage
Self-Esteem, Mindfulness, and Wellbeing*



GENERAL OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

SCAVENGER HUNTS

Scavenger hunts are an activity where children try to find items on a list. If a group of children are having a scavenger hunt, they might try to see who can find the items first, or look collaboratively as a group. Create a list of items for your child to find outdoors. If you are heading to a park, the beach, a playground, and so on then create a list based on objects likely to be found in that area.

Items that might go on a scavenger hunt list:

- Something round.
- A twig in the shape of a Y.
- Something that starts with the letter _____.
- A bottle cap.
- An acorn.
- A leaf.
- Two different colored pebbles.
- Something green.
- Something scratchy.
- Something that made you smile.

NATURE JOURNALS AND SKETCHBOOKS

Create or buy your child a sketchbook that is filled with blank pages. Bring it with you in the car, on walks, on trips, to the park, and so

on, and encourage your child to stop and observe different places. Allow them to take a few moments to draw or write about what they see. When my son was three we started a nature journal and sketchbook for him. We kept a bag with his sketchbook and some pencils in it and took it everywhere for a few summers. Once he got used to the process, he started to ask to stop at places to sketch. At times he wanted to sketch a bridge or a pond. Sometimes he would ask to make a special trip somewhere just so he could sketch there, such as a monastery or a lighthouse. By age four he added an extra sketchbook to his bag, which he called the “guest sketchbook.” If we were visiting with family or friends he would ask them to sketch with him in the guest sketchbook.

Years later I came across these books and was amazed at how such a simple tradition made an impact on him. His drawings are simple and mostly unrecognizable at his young age but I love to look at the pictures and remember him sitting by a riverbank, or next to a clump of flowers, or even sharing a porch swing with a loved one while they both sketched. The process helped him to slow down and just observe with his senses and capture the moment without technology but with creative expression.

Here are other ways to use a nature journal or sketchbook:

- Use words, sketches, doodles, or other art form to document what lives and grows in your neighborhood. What kind of trees/animals/flowers/birds?
- Visit a spot each week and document what is happening there or what changes occurred in the past week. Are there any new plants growing there? Are leaves changing size or color? Are things healthy and thriving, or in ill-health or dying? Are there any new signs of visitors here, such as animal prints in the mud or droppings left behind?
- Draw or illustrate a visual checklist of animals, plants, or other life forms that are in your area and that you would like to see. When you find them, check them off or put a sticker next to them. You can even do a little research to find out if there are rare or endangered species in your area and add them to your checklist for a challenge.



Figure 6.1 Find a place outdoors to draw or write about your natural surroundings

PLEIN AIR ART

Plein Air Art is an art form that translates as “art in the open air.” When you see artists on the side of a river, on the beach, or in the park painting at their easels—that’s an example of Plein Air Art.