



Nature Play Day

Resource Packet



Nature Play Day Packet Contents

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Dear Community Member:

We are excited you are interested in Nature Play Days. Playful Pedagogy, part of the North Carolina Zoo's Education Division has been facilitating nature play for over five years. In 2011, we decided to share nature play through satellite programs called Nature Play Days. We enjoyed ourselves greatly, but the time has come to return to the zoo. We are hopeful that community members like yourself will take advantage of some of the resources in this packet to host your own local Nature Play experience. Community programs are most successful when they are driven from inside the community. We would like to take just a moment to share some thoughts about the kind of play Playful Pedagogy supports and why it is so important to us.

Children, who have a natural affinity for nature, are losing their connection with it. They no longer possess a sense of place which has consequences for the future of our environment. By connecting children with nature through play, we have a greater chance of affecting change in future adult consumers. Play is an ideal vehicle for establishing a relationship with nature. Initially, play provides a distraction to less desirable variables such as heat, cold and creepy crawlies. Once children have overcome those variables, their comfort in the natural world opens doors to an awareness of and interest in the natural world. This interest leads to questions and observations that provide a foundation for learning in and beyond the play environment.

While play is hard to define, Playful Pedagogy supports play that is freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed. The focus is on the child. Alternatively, many play opportunities for children are directed by an adult or managed with an adult agenda. Free play allows the child to explore and manipulate their environment in their own way, for their own reasons. Playful Pedagogy offers workshops to adults interested in understanding Playwork in order to better support children in play environments. However, training is not required to facilitate a Nature Play Day.

We invite you and other members from your community to take on hosting a Nature Play Day in your area. Please use any of the resources in this packet to host a fun-filled day focused on children having fun and playing outdoors.

Sincerely,

Linda Kinney
Playful Pedagogy



Nature Play Day Step by Step Guide

The following guide is designed to help plan and coordinate a Nature Play day in your local community.

Step I: Determine Feasibility of Local Play Day

Meet with community members who might be interested (neighborhood organizations, community centers, etc)
Propose Nature Play Day (see “Support for Play” document)

Step II: Determine Location

Consider all types of weather (enough shade for hot days, good drainage for rainy or post-rainy weather, etc)
Consider logistics like access to bathrooms, unloading and loading materials, access to water for cleaning, etc

Step III: Establish Date

Consider other regional activities that may impact attendance at the Play Day

Step IV: Determine Activities

Brainstorm long list along with elements necessary for each activity (see “Activity Table” and “Suggested Nature Play Activities”)
Prioritize activities, establish minimum number of volunteers
Determine if funds are needed; if so, create budget; find sponsors

Step V: Recruit Volunteers

Use friends, family members, outdoor enthusiasts, community groups, etc
Keep in mind that not all volunteers will show up, but too many volunteers could take away from the free play by dominating the space with activity-oriented, adult led agendas

Step VI: Promote Activity

Establish uniform promotional materials such as:

- 1-3 pictures to represent event
- Short paragraph describing event (1-3 sentences)
- Logistics: Who, What, When, and Where
- Ensure all materials distributed are the same
- Flier



Step VI Continued

Distribute materials in as many locations possible such as:

- Local businesses

- Facebook

- Email list serves

- Community calendars (parenting calendars, event calendars, EE calendar)

Begin distribution four weeks before event

Redistribute promotional materials 4-7 days prior to event

Step VII: 'The Day Before' Checklist

Review logistics table, pack car(s) with all loose parts and materials for the day

Touch base with all volunteers to have the most accurate count of helpers

Touch base with host site ensuring no changes/ issues with site

Update internet sites like facebook and twitter about event

Step VIII: NATURE PLAY DAY!

Have Fun!

Step IX: Nature Play Day Follow Up

Debrief: Consider the following:

- Memorable moments

- Areas that were a hit

- Areas that needed more

- Community response

Planning for future: To play or not to play!

Thank you notes and/ or certificates of participation

- Volunteers

- Host site

- Other community members involved

Follow up internet sites with comments and pictures from event

Nature Play Day Suggested Activities

Fort Building

A space for construction of forts and dens. Provide natural materials such as sticks, vines, branches, and leaves as well as tarps, nets, rope, pruning shears, saws, hammers and nails, etc.

Dirt/ Sand Digging

A place to physically move earth. Provide shovels, hand trowels, garden forks, buckets, trucks, toy bugs, toy animals, stumps, etc.

Mud Pies

A combination of dirt play and water play, this area could be associated with either of the two areas or separated out on its own. Provide dirt and water, grass, leaves, flowers, pots, pans, utensils, etc.

Water Play

A space for water access, large or small body of water. Activities will vary due to the size of water body, but consider these activities: boat building (small and large), pond dipping for macro-invertebrates, net fishing, rock skipping, etc. Provide bamboo, river cane, newspaper, nets, magnifying lenses, ropes/ string, buckets, watering cans, etc.

Rock Building

If possible, this is a fun way to challenge children physically and mentally. By providing a lot of rocks in varying sizes, children can build towers, walls, bridges and more. A good place to look for this site is around drainage areas.

Nature Art

A space for reflection and expression. Take advantage of concrete pads, walls or use canvas tarps as the surface. Or arrange leaves on the ground following Andy Goldsworthy's lead. Provide earth pigments for painting, paints, paint brushes, flowers, leaves, grasses, glue, paper, sidewalk chalk, small stones, glass beads, cement and molds for stepping stones, etc.

Loose Part Free Play

This activity area can be scattered across other areas or set out on a lawn or other open space. Loose parts are anything that can be moved, so the sky is the limit. Suggestions include: hula hoops, jump ropes, bubbles, puppets, fabric, miscellaneous toys, magnifying lenses, bug boxes, Tupperware containers, cardboard boxes, ribbons, etc.



[Nature Play Day Location] Activity Centers*

Brief description of site.

Activity Center	General function	Materials/ Loose Parts	Site Description	Notes
Ex. Fire pit	Burning, poking, reflective space	Sticks, marshmallows, pencil and paper	Cement pad, sheltered	Constant supervision required

*Activity Centers are concepts to serve as helpful tools for organization and do not intend to restrict the play within the area. Please encourage all activities throughout the entire space.

Nature Play Day Logistics Chart

This chart is used to layout the plan for the Nature Play Day event.

Date/ Day	Task	Person Responsible	Notes
Ex. Week of August 22 nd	Site prep	Terry and team	Fence rail gathering, spray poison ivy
	Loose part collection	Jess	See attached list of activity area for details



Volunteer Hours

The following chart is for tracking those who provide assistance in your Nature Play Day event during any part of the process. This includes planning, implementing and following up on the event.

Name	Task(s) Performed	Hours	Notes



Nature Play Days Playworker Expectations

Playworker Staff

List individuals expected to participate in the facilitation event

Support Staff

List individuals available for site-specific assistance

Expectations

Play is ambiguous by nature, so defining Playwork is perplexing and challenging. Playwork aims to support the child at play, allowing the child to direct their own experience. The following expectations are guidelines and sharing and discussion will help maintain flexibility within the space and the play process itself. That said we ask you to be:

Friendly

Open

Non-judgmental

Playful

Flexible

Reflective

Unobtrusive

Supportive

Non-directive

And above all else, we hope that you will be true to yourself.

Suggestions of “what to do” as a Playworker

Help children get oriented to the site and play possibilities

Play (build a fort, float a boat, climb a tree, blow bubbles)

Determine if loose parts can be moved around to different locations to support play

Help parents to “step back” and let children lead the process, work out problems on their own and maybe even take a few risks

Consolidated Loose Parts List

Nature provides all sorts of play affordances. Rooting around in the leaves, climbing trees, and damming streams are lots of fun and don't require additional materials. Loose parts are not required for play, but increase the affordances of a natural space, diversifying the range of play types. Loose parts also provide a springboard in to play when the "wildness" of nature is overwhelming. The following list is a grouping of items Playful Pedagogy takes along on Nature Play Days to help bridge the gap between backyards and the backwoods.

- Trucks
- Plastic animals
- Kiddie pools
- Shovels
- Garden trowels
- Garden forks
- Containers
- Pots/ pans
- Hoses
- Watering cans
- Dip nets
- Bug boxes
- Colanders
- Rope/ string
- Plant cuttings
- Sticks and/or bamboo
- Canvas tarps
- Tarps
- Fabric
- Hula hoops
- Jump ropes
- Bubbles
- Fabric
- Sidewalk chalk
- Cardboard boxes
- Newspaper
- Paint brushes
- Puppets
- Clay



Additional Resources

Play Days have been around a while. Many countries host play days and have numerous resources. Using play to connect children with nature is also well underway. To help shape your Nature Play Day event, browse the links below to get ideas, learn about other events, and get inspired.

www.playday.org.uk/

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/our-work/playday.aspx>

www.wildzones.net

www.naturalearning.org

<http://udel.edu/~roberta/play/>

<http://web.eenorthcarolina.org/core/event/calendar.aspx>