A Shared Vision
Partners in Pediatric Blindness and Visual Impairment

Exploring the Seasons with our Senses



Let's learn outside! It's imperative that children with visual impairment use their senses to learn about the world around them. This includes learning about nature and the outdoors. In this learning experience we go outside with our child and go on a hands-on nature walk. What does the grass feel like? What does it smell like? What does it look like? What does it sound like? How does nature change depending on the season?

Duration

This activity will take 10 to 30 minutes depending on your child's mood and interest.

Materials Required

No specific materials are needed for this activity.

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Activity Steps

1. The first step involves taking a minute or two to think about things you hear, smell, see, feel, and touch in nature. Think about words you might use to describe nature to your little one: windy, sunny, cloudy, quiet, noisy, warm, chilly, fresh, stinky, smoky, etc. Does it smell like rain? Is the grass bumpy when you walk over it or ride over it in the stroller?

2. Have a clear beginning to the activity. Tell your child that you are going outside on a nature walk. Try singing a song to indicate the beginning of the activity. It can be sung to any tune you would like. To the tune of "Going on a Bear Hunt," you could try singing "Going on a Nature Walk, I Wonder What I'll Find." Here is a link to the song if you are interested: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzIcu6tbEko You can also use an object cue to indicate the beginning of the activity. An object cue could be something from nature like a stick or pinecone.

3. As you are getting ready to go outside, talk about the weather. "We are putting our coat on because it's cold outside." "Let's get our sunglasses and hat because the sun is bright." "Let's put our boots on to splash in the rain puddles or tromp in the snow."

4. Go outside and stand for a while to listen to the sounds and take some deep breaths. Think about what you hear, smell, and feel. Label it for your child. "I hear the birds chirping." "I hear Mr. Anderson's noisy lawnmower. Smell the fresh cut grass!" Reinforce the talk about weather. "Oh, the sun feels warm on my face." "It's windy. I hear the leaves rustling."

5. As you start your walk, point out things in nature that you want your child to notice. Show your child what you want them to do. For example, find something on your nature walk that you want to talk about. "Oh, there's a long stick. Let's touch it. It feels bumpy and is sharp on the end."

6. Observe your child and follow their lead. What are they moving toward, turning toward, or pointing at? What do you think they might be interested in? You might need to pick up the object for your child. Label it and talk about its attributes such as weight, size, texture, shape, etc. "You found a BIG rock. That one is HEAVY, and it feels SMOOTH on top." Encourage your child to put the rock in a container. Is it too big for the container? "This one is too big for your basket. Let's find a smaller one."

7. Continue to follow your child's lead. Are there other rocks that you can collect and compare to each other? What else can you find on the ground? Are there sticks, pinecones, grass, leaves, etc.? If your child finds sticks, pinecones, or leaves, draw their attention toward a tree. What does the bark feel like? Is it rough or smooth? Where are the leaves? Are they high up in the tree or can you reach them? Where does a pinecone come from? Does the tree have leaves or needles? Smell the trunk of the pine tree. Does it smell like vanilla or butterscotch? Smell the needles. Leaves are smooth and flat.

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Needles are long and poky. In fall, leaves might be dry, crunchy, and then turn from green to red, yellow, or orange.

8. Have a clear ending to the activity. When it's almost time to go, give your child a clue by saying something like, "It's almost time to go home. Let's pick one more thing in nature to touch and talk about and then home we go." Make up a song to sing. "We are done with our nature hunt, it's time to go home."

Tips

- Some children get overstimulated by the different sounds, smells, and temperature of the outdoors. It's okay to start with small steps. Maybe just bring a blanket outside to the backyard and spend some time sitting and listening to the sound of nature.

- If your child is ready, you can bring nature to your child while they are sitting on the blanket. Collect big, little, bumpy, and smooth rocks or pebbles. Collect long and short sticks. Collect crunchy woodchips. Collect smooth, soft, little, and big leaves. Let your child explore the objects with their hands and/or feet. What does your child like?



- You could also bring nature to your child while they are sitting or lying on a blanket indoors. They could be seated in their highchair, baby seat, or however your child is comfortable.

- Think about the time of day that would be best for the nature walk. When is your child most alert? Does your child need a more controlled environment? If so, you might want to avoid busy or noisy times in your neighborhood.

- For kids who are sensitive, consider focusing on one sense at a time. For example, spend time just listening or just touching one or two things.

- If your child doesn't like something the first time, don't force them. You might need to introduce it multiple times. The repetition will help familiarize them with the new object.

- Take your time during this activity. This will prevent scary feelings. Going slower feels safer to a child with blindness or low vision.

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Extension Activities

- Consider collecting things from nature into a container. Use a bag, bucket, baggie, or basket. Talk to your TVI about choosing a container that would work best for the activity. What kind of container makes the most sense for your journey? Consider the weight of the container. Does it need to have a handle? Is your child walking or in a stroller or wagon? If your child is riding in a wagon, the container might be their lap or the floor of the wagon.

- Retell the story of your nature walk using the objects you collected along the way. For example, “Mama and Johnny went on a walk to the park. We found little rocks, long and sharp sticks, and a bumpy pinecone. It was hot and sunny. The wind blew in our hair. Walking to the park is fun.”

- Make an experience book or bag with the things you collected. For more information on experience books go to: https://www.asharedvision.org/uploads/8/8/2/7/88271548/how_to_make_an_experience_book.pdf

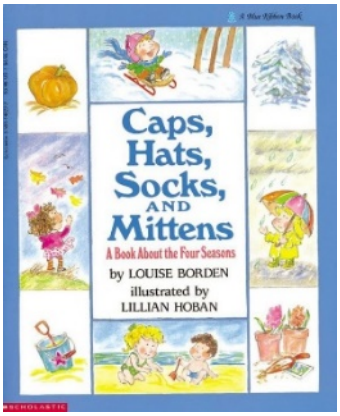
- Some children may enjoy looking through binoculars to see nature at a distance. Ask your TVI if this would be a good activity for your child.

- For children who see better at close distances, use a phone or iPad to take pictures of things at a distance and then enlarge them on your phone or iPad for your child to see. Let your child position the iPad for their best viewing.

- Take nature walks during each season. Talk about how the things in nature change each season. Children learn from hands-on, repeated experiences.

- Read books about nature and the seasons, such as:

    - Caps, Hats, Socks, and Mittens by Louise Borden
    - The Tiny Seed by Eric Carle
    - Is it Warm Enough for Ice Cream by Violet Peto
    - Ten Sparkly Snowflakes by Tiger Tales
    - The Mitten by Jan Brett, Summer by Ailie Busby
    - Touch and Feel Fall by Roger Priddy’s Bright Baby.



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