

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Sharing the Joy of Nature

“Oh that we were Maying Down the stream of the soft spring breeze
like children with violets playing in the shade of whispering trees.”
~ Charles Kingsley

“**I** WISH MY REDWOOD TREE would become a human,” a little girl remarked earnestly. “I stand by the tree every day and make that wish.” As she talked, the loving tone in her voice revealed how intimate her relationship with “her” tree has become. It is helpful to remember how we viewed nature when we were children.

Do you remember talking to a tree or a flower? Creating a hideout in a secluded place? Feeling astonished by a ladybug scampering over your hand? When asked how they made it through difficult times when they were children, adults often cite their relationship with nature, remembering its offering soothing support. Spring is the time for us to become an enthusiastic audience for the earth’s parade of exuberant new life.

Science advises us that being in nature boosts our immune system and helps us slow down, relax, and even concentrate more effectively. On the other hand, people who haven’t had much outdoor experience often feel anxious in open space. A boy playing in a tiny glen next to a street once told me, “It’s scary being this far out in nature.”

Last weekend at our Saturday workshop focusing on developmental issues, many parents spoke of the freedom they felt as children to explore the natural world around them. They wish their children could play outside, losing track of time.

At school, students on the big playground feel the exhilaration of running, playing ball games, or looking for bugs in the long grass with their friends. Children in preschool relish the time they spend on walks in various terrains on our school grounds looking for birds’ nests and collecting spring flowers. These experiences provide many of the same feelings of outdoor expansion that previous generations enjoyed in the neighborhoods and fields surrounding their homes.

Many adults recover the luminous sense of nature they once felt by connecting with their children outside. After school, many parents relax and spend time in our Children’s Garden while their children explore the tranquility of the running brook or the exhilaration of venturing into the wild woods. (Children need careful supervision in this area.) The garden has its own atmosphere, and people seem intoxicated now by the scents of spring.

Ask your children if they spent time working in the garden (preschool or Seven Circles) and what they discovered. Better yet, become a volunteer gardener with your child on Sunday mornings. Remembering to see nature as we once did as children allows us to fully experience spring with them.

This excerpt from “The Summer Day” by poet Mary Oliver expresses the joy of being swept away by nature:

I don't know exactly what prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.

May 16, 2012

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