



THE IMPACT OF NATURE

Springtime brings opportunities to get outside and explore! Many people can be seen riding bikes, taking walks, and going to the dog park. Spending time outside is not only fun – there are many physical and mental health benefits, too.

What are the benefits?

Research has shown that connecting with nature leads to increases in a child's psychological, social, and physical well-being. Studies have found that spending time with nature can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and anger.

Similar results have been found for children with autism! Research shows that exposure to nature also provides motor, sensory, emotional, and social benefits for children with autism. Spending time outdoors can lead to increased physical activity, which is great for a child's overall health!

Planning successful outdoor experiences

Sometimes there are barriers to getting your child outside. They may struggle to come back inside when it's time to go home or they may leave your side. Here are some things to make outside time more successful.

- ✖ **Start small.** Shorten outside trips and consider staying closer to home. Start in a place where both you and your child are comfortable! If your child likes the rain, consider putting on rain boots to jump in puddles outside of your home.
- ✖ **Let them experience nature in their own way.** This can help your child be motivated to experience nature again in the future!
- ✖ **Find walking or hiking trails and do a scavenger hunt.** This encourages your child to see, feel, and interact with nature. It can also help build your child's vocabulary.

As you plan your experiences, consider:

- ✖ **Being realistic.** You may not be able to do an all-day outing at first – that's OK. Change your expectations as your child's successful outdoor time increases.
- ✖ **Preparing for difficult times.** If your child elopes, make a plan of action so you know what to do if elopement happens. If your child's attention span is limited, pack additional outdoor friendly activities to keep nature time going!
- ✖ **Talking to your BCBA.** Your BCBA can help you come up with outdoor activities for your child that are fun, safe, and low-stress for the caregiver!

