



**Lyon County - O'Brien County - Osceola County - Sioux County**

# CLIPPINGS

*A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach*

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**For Immediate Release**

## **Reconnect Children with Nature in the Spring**

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April showers bring May flowers, according to common songs, poems and nursery rhymes. However, April showers also bring fun-filled puddles, squishy mud, earthworms and a host of other rich outdoor learning experiences for children.

It is important for children to experience the outdoors during each season, but spring is an especially unique time to watch the world wake up from winter.

Research gathered by the Children and Nature Network highlights many benefits of being in the outdoors. Children who spend time outdoors are more active, less likely to be overweight, have more balance and coordination, and are less likely to need glasses. Research also supports behavioral benefits to children being outdoors, such as increased concentration, creativity, problem solving and cooperative behavior, the Children and Nature Network reported.

Spending time outdoors also has been shown over and over again to reduce cortisol levels, which is the hormone linked to stress, in both children and adults. Being outside helps us feel happier and less stressed.

The challenge for many families, though, is the belief that there just isn't time. Spring often brings new sports schedules, religious events, graduations, and for many families, fieldwork or changes in work schedules.

Managing the day to day tasks of family life brings its own type of stress, but spending even brief periods of time in nature can help calm nerves and reconnect children and parents to each other.

An important element of getting outdoors in the spring is accepting messiness. Children's natural curiosity draws them to puddles, mud, and new things to see in the spring. Embrace the messiness and plan ways to support this curiosity.

Keep old shoes or rain boots easily accessible. You can also use bread sacks as an easy shoe protector for little feet.

Use the extra daylight for a quick walk around the yard or neighborhood to look for flowers and grasses starting to grow.

Sit on the back porch and listen for birds. Children experience the world through their senses. Seeing, listening, touching and even tasting are ways to engage children in the benefits of being outdoors.

Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach offers educational opportunities for early childhood professionals to help them nurture children's sense of wonder, and transform their preschool or child care play spaces into fun, joyful areas where children can explore nature. Participants are eligible for professional development credit approved by Iowa Department of Human Services. Parents can encourage their child care providers to take advantage of this education from ISU Extension and Outreach. It's another way to provide opportunities for children to experience nature.

- 30 -

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