

KIDS CONNECTION

Summer 2026



Early Educator Quarterly Newsletter

As we move forward into the summer season, we are excited to share a collection of resources, ideas, and community connections created with early childhood educators and families in mind. This season of growth reminds us of the important role you play in helping young children learn, explore, and thrive.

Summer is an ideal time to incorporate nature-based learning into early childhood environments. Meaningful connections with the natural world support children's curiosity, development, and well-being. The resources in this issue are designed to foster growth, exploration, and lifelong learning for children.

Thank you for being a part of our early education community!

Sneak Peek

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Countdown to Kindergarten**

Training Calendar

2026

JUNE

- Child Development Fundamentals: Infants: June 22

2026

AUGUST

- ITS-SIDS: August 11

2026

JULY

- ITS-SIDS: July 7
- Finding Our Calm: July 15th
- Child Development Fundamentals: Toddlers: July 20
- The Intentional Teacher : July 22nd



Summer Snack



Frozen Yogurt Bark

Prep: 10 mins Freeze: 4 hrs
Servings: 10



Ingredients

- 2 cups Greek yogurt, vanilla or strawberry
- 1/2 cup blueberries
- 1/2 cup strawberries

Instructions

1. Spread yogurt onto a parchment lined baking sheet in an even layer.
2. Top with blueberries and strawberries. ***cut into age appropriate sizes***
3. Freeze 4 hours or until frozen through. Break into pieces and enjoy!

Variations

- Fruit: Kiwi, pineapple, bananas, mango, raspberries, and peaches.
- Toppings: Granola, coconut flakes, mini chocolate chips, white chocolate chips, chia seeds, and sprinkles.



Events in the High Country

- King Street Market: Tuesdays, 3:30-6:30pm
- Music in the Valle: Fridays, 6:00pm
- Music on the Lawn: Fridays, 5:30pm
- First Friday Art Crawl: 1st Friday of the month
- Farmer's Market: Saturdays, 8:00am-12:00pm
- Yoga in the Gardens: Sundays in June, 10:00am
- Day out with Thomas: Select dates in June
- Todd Summer Concerts: Select dates, 6:00-8:00pm
- Roots in the Garden: Select dates, 5:30pm
- Boonerang Arts Festival: 6/19-6/21
- Baby Goat Yoga: Fridays, 6/27-8/7, 5:00pm
- Fairy Day: 7/11, 1:00-5:00pm
- Back 2 School Fest: 8/8



Bringing Nature into the Classroom



Nature Based Learning

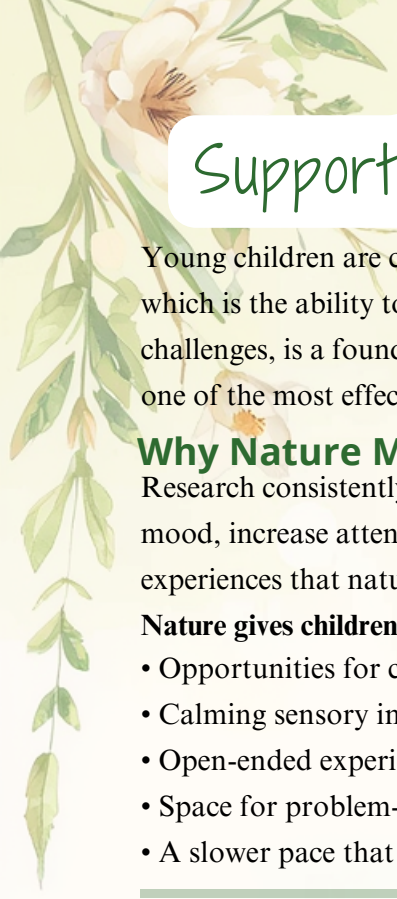
Research shows that nature-based learning supports cognitive development, creativity, problem-solving, and emotional well-being. When children engage with the natural world, they develop critical thinking skills through observation and exploration. Studies indicate that regular outdoor play reduces stress hormones and increases focus and attention span in young learners.

The changing seasons offer endless opportunities for discovery—from watching seeds sprout to observing butterflies emerge. Nature invites children to ask questions, make predictions, and learn through hands-on experience in ways that indoor environments simply cannot replicate. Every puddle, flower, and crawling insect becomes a teacher when we embrace nature as our partner in early education.



- *Classroom Garden:* Children plant seeds, water plants, and observe growth cycles firsthand, building responsibility and patience.
- *Nature Journals:* Drawing and documenting outdoor discoveries encourages observation skills and early literacy.
- *Outdoor Story Time:* Reading in the fresh air under trees connects literature with the natural world and creates calming learning moments.
- *Natural Art Materials:* Leaves, sticks, and flowers become paintbrushes and collage materials for creative expression.
- *Weather Watching:* Daily weather observations build scientific thinking and vocabulary development.
- *Bug Hunts:* Searching for insects sparks curiosity and teaches gentle respect for living creatures.
- *Nature Table:* Seasonal collections of leaves, pinecones, flowers, and natural treasures for children to explore with magnifying glasses. Add water, containers, and utensils to create a **sensory soup** experience!





The Power of Nature in Supporting Self-Regulation in Young Children

Young children are constantly learning how to recognize, express, and manage their emotions. Self-regulation, which is the ability to calm the body, manage feelings, focus attention, and respond appropriately to challenges, is a foundational skill that supports learning, relationships, and overall well-being. Nature can be one of the most effective and accessible tools early educators use to support this development.

Why Nature Matters

Research consistently shows that time spent outdoors and in natural environments helps reduce stress, improve mood, increase attention span, and support emotional regulation in young children. Nature offers sensory experiences that naturally calm the nervous system while also encouraging curiosity, creativity, and movement.

Nature gives children:

- Opportunities for children to release energy in healthy ways
- Calming sensory input through sounds, textures, movement, and fresh air
- Open-ended experiences that reduce pressure and encourage exploration
- Space for problem-solving, cooperation, and resilience
- A slower pace that supports emotional recovery and regulation

What Self-Regulation Looks Like in Early Childhood

These skills develop gradually and require consistent co-regulation from caring adults.

Children who are developing self-regulation skills may begin to:

- Recover more quickly after becoming upset
- Use words to express feelings and needs
- Follow routines and transitions more successfully
- Focus attention for longer periods of time
- Work through frustration with support
- Engage more positively with peers

How Early Educators Can Use Nature to Support Regulation

Create Daily Outdoor Opportunities

Frequent outdoor time allows children to move their bodies, reduce stress, and reset emotionally. Even short periods outside can make a meaningful difference.

Use Nature as a Calming Space

Designate outdoor areas where children can sit quietly, observe nature, breathe deeply, or take a break when overwhelmed.

Incorporate Natural Materials

Sticks, rocks, leaves, pinecones, water, and sand provide calming sensory experiences and encourage focused play.

Encourage Mindful Observation

Invite children to notice the sounds of birds, feel the wind, watch clouds move, or observe insects. These moments help children slow down and become more aware of their bodies and emotions.

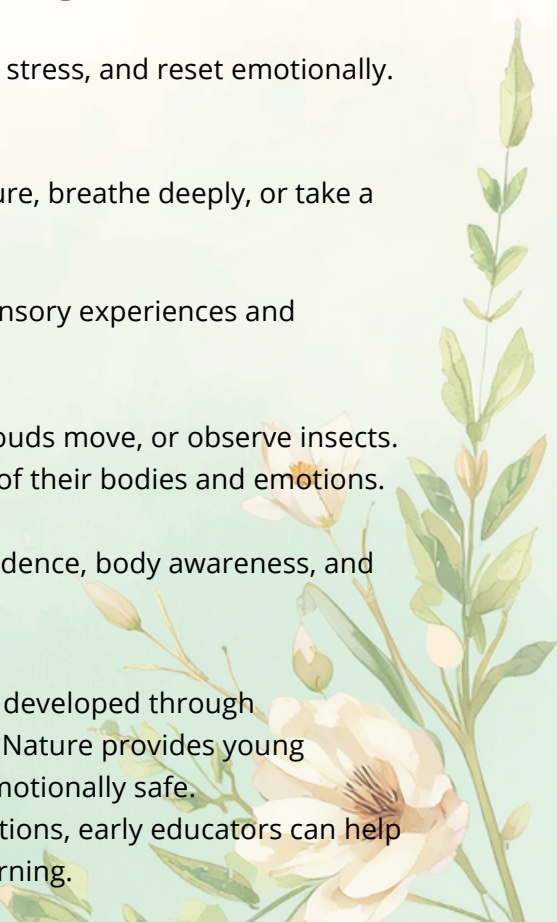
Support Risky Play in Safe Ways

Climbing, balancing, digging, and exploring help children build confidence, body awareness, and problem-solving skills.

Remember

Self-regulation is not something we “teach” in a single lesson — it is developed through relationships, repeated experiences, and supportive environments. Nature provides young children with opportunities to feel calm, connected, capable, and emotionally safe.

By intentionally incorporating nature into daily routines and interactions, early educators can help children build lifelong skills for emotional health, resilience, and learning.





What is messy play?

This hands-on, open-ended style of play allows children to explore their environment, textures, and materials in a less structured way. Jumping in mud puddles, making slime, and creating Picaso-like murals with sidewalk chalk allow children to learn at their own pace while having fun. Unlike playing with toys with a specific purpose, like a puzzle or a coloring book, messy play offers a multisensory experience with no limits except for the imagination.



Nurturing Messy Play

Benefits of Messy Play

- **Supports Brain Development:** Encourages curiosity, exploration, and problem-solving. Helps children make connections through cause and effect.
- **Develops Fine Motor Skills:** Strengthens hand muscles needed for writing, cutting, and self-help skills.
- **Builds Language Skills:** Introduces new vocabulary such as sticky, smooth, rough, squishy, and slippery and creates opportunities for conversations and descriptive language.
- **Engages the Senses:** Provides sensory experiences through touch, sight, smell, and sometimes sound.
- **Encourages Creativity and Imagination:** Open-ended materials allow children to create, explore, and think independently.
- **Fosters Independence:** Children make choices, test ideas, and learn through trial and error. Encourages risk-taking and resilience in a safe environment.

Messy play is not just about making a mess—it's about providing meaningful opportunities for children to investigate, discover, and learn through active engagement.

SUMMER BUCKET LIST

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| ☐ | GO TO THE BEACH | ☐ | GO TO THE ZOO |
| ☐ | VISIT A MUSEUM | ☐ | GO TO STORY TIME |
| ☐ | EXPLORE AN AQUARIUM | ☐ | WATCH FIREWORKS |
| ☐ | TAKE A HIKE | ☐ | GO ON A ROAD TRIP |
| ☐ | PLAY IN A SPLASH PAD | ☐ | WATCH A BASEBALL GAME |
| ☐ | PICNIC IN THE PARK | ☐ | GO ON A BOAT RIDE |
| ☐ | PLAY AT THE PLAYGROUND | ☐ | EAT FROM A FOOD TRUCK |
| ☐ | BACKYARD WATER PARK | ☐ | BLOW BUBBLES |
| ☐ | DRAW WITH SIDEWALK CHALK | ☐ | EAT AN ICE CREAM CONE |
| ☐ | FIND A COOL MURAL | ☐ | HAVE A CAMP FIRE |
| ☐ | GO TO AN OUTDOOR CONCERT | ☐ | GET MESSY! |
| ☐ | GO TO A PETTING ZOO OR FARM | | |
| ☐ | GO TO A GARDEN OR NATURE CENTER | | |
| ☐ | GO TO AN ORCHARD OR FARMER'S MARKET | | |



Source

Lending Library for Early Educators

Do you need to mix it up in your classroom? The Lending Library is available as a resource for you!

We offer kits including toys, puzzles, books, and more! Items are sorted by age group and titled based on the theme. We also have textbooks and other educational resources for teachers to borrow.



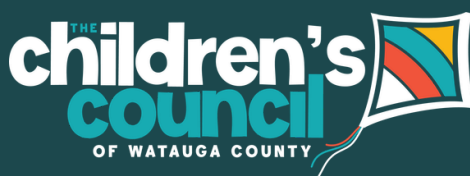
For a current resource list, click here to visit our website!

Now offering delivery on Friday afternoons! For more info, email jillian@thechildrenscouncil.org

Countdown to Kindergarten

We are excited to share the Countdown to Kindergarten calendar on our website, featuring a fun, easy-to-follow daily guide designed to help children build the skills they need to feel confident and ready for kindergarten. While activities are intended for families at home, you can easily adapt experiences for your classroom!

[Click here to view the calendar on our website!](#)



**Please help us plan future
training opportunities by
sharing your professional
development interests and
needs**

Early Educator Training Needs
Survey Summer 2026

