



# Leader Certification

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Chapter Five:  
Engaging Children with Nature

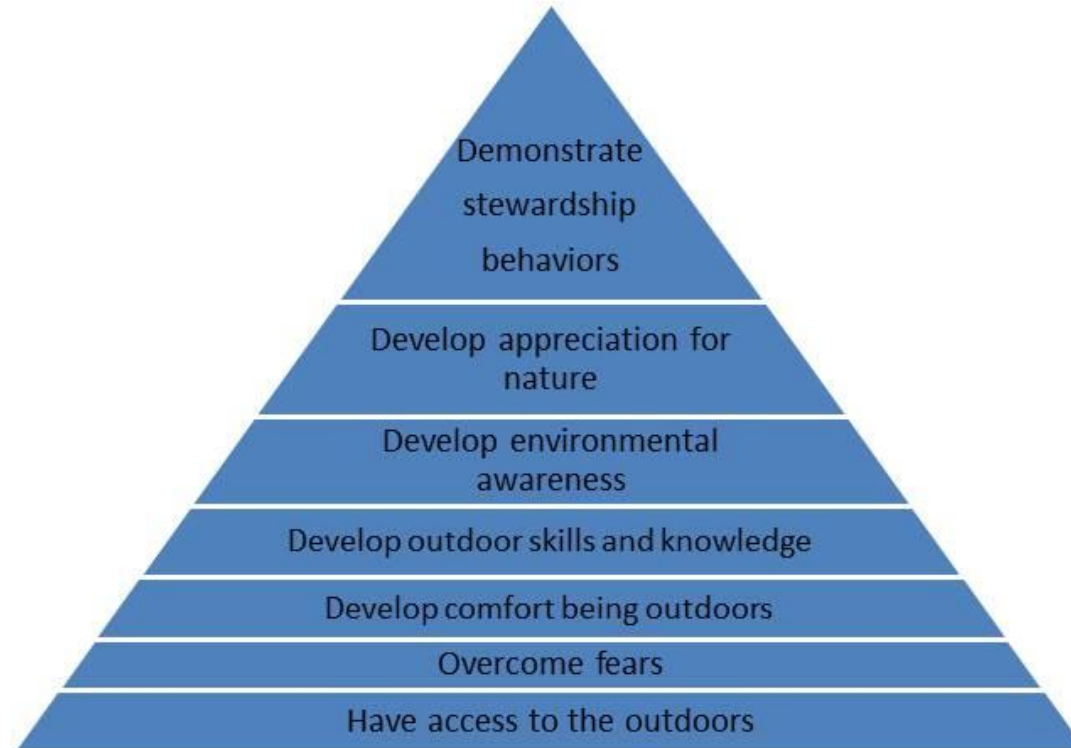
# Activity Trivia

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- If you have a Minnesota State Park permit, jump three times.
- If you have ever visited a National park, clap your hands five times.
- If you have a fishing or hunting license, turn around two times.
- If you are a member of a conservation organization like Sierra Club, Audubon, etc., touch your toes.
- If you have ever participated in an Earth Day service project, pat yourself on the back.
- One long-term measurement of success for this Project GO effort will be a future increase in participation of these sorts of outdoor activities and efforts among former program participants.



# Hierarchy of Outdoor Awareness



# Your program could be the Gateway!

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# Tips for Engaging Children with Nature

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- Ask questions that encourage children to explore and ponder the world around them.
- Reflect a positive attitude about the natural world.
- Find and discuss the positive aspects about the natural objects around them.
- Demonstrate enthusiasm for the outdoors. Enthusiasm is contagious!
- Maintain sincere regard for the safety of program participants.
- Wish to learn more about the natural world them selves.



# Outdoor Scenarios

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- You will be divided into 6 groups.
- Each group will be assigned an outdoor scenario.
- You will have 15 minutes to come up with a skit to act out your scenario and how you might handle the situation.
- Practice what you would say to a child in that situation. Model behaviors and talk to each other like you would in real life.



# Scenario #1

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The Project GO group of elementary school-age kids has headed out for a nature hike at Whitewater State Park. Some of the participants are not excited about this activity. They are complaining that they do not like walking and hikes are boring. What are some ways you can change their attitudes?

# Scenario #1

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Some ideas...

- Distract their attention from the negative behavior by asking them questions about things you hope to see on the trail or things you do see.
- Make the hike into a fun game (scavenger hunt, sensory, team building).





## Scenario #2

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It's the first day of Project GO and several of the children don't know each other or any of the volunteers. They are middle school-age and nervous about trying new activities and are not comfortable being out on the trails in the woods at the local park. How can you help make the children feel more comfortable with one another and with the outdoors?

# Scenario #2



Some ideas...

- Try some icebreakers and team building activities to help kids get to know one another.
- Maybe hold off on a field trip until the kids are more used to the program.
- Program volunteers should display upbeat, positive attitudes about the program and day's activity with comments such as, "What a great day to be outdoors!"



## Scenario #3

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While exploring the beach at a county park, one of the high school participants at your program sees a water snake and becomes terrified. His fear spreads among the other children and soon many are scared to enter the water. How might you handle this situation?

# Scenario #3

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Some ideas...

- Keep a positive attitude.
- Stay calm.
- Focus on the positive aspects of nature by saying something like... “Snakes are important animals. Can you think of ways that snakes help us?”



## Scenario #4

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Some of the elementary school-age children at your program are talking about how they wish they were at home working on the next level of their video games. They are acting like they are “too cool” for the program and say their parents made them come. What do you do?

# Scenario #4

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Some ideas...

- Wear a smile and keep an upbeat attitude.
- Try to point out the positive aspects of the outdoors, even if it's hot and humid or below zero.
- Ask older youth or youth who are disengaged to take on leader or helper roles.



# Scenario #5

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During a snowshoeing activity, one of the junior high kids makes a racist comment to a younger participant who is not properly dressed for the cold winter weather. How do you handle this?

# Scenario #5

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Some ideas...

- Immediately pull aside the older child and explain to him that those kinds of behaviors are not tolerated.
- Follow up with a conversation with the parent.
- Talk with children and follow up with parents about appropriate outdoor clothing.
- If you have low-income families, consider a clothing bank at your site so kids can borrow jackets, snow pants and other winter clothing for outdoor time.





# Scenario #6

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On a walk at a local bike trail, your pre-school age kids see some beautiful flowers in bloom near the trail's edge. You aren't very good with identification of wildflowers but you also know that this could be a great nature experience for the children to get up close with these neat plants. What could you do to enhance this experience?

# Scenario #6

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Some ideas...

- Stop to look closely at the flowers, squatting down to observe the details. (aka: The Naturalist Crawl)
- Exclaim with much excitement that these are beautiful flowers and ask “I wonder what kind they are! If you could name them, what would you call them?”



# The best things in life are FREE!

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- Be resourceful and creative!
- REI and Cabela's have us brainwashed! You don't need fancy gear to enjoy the outdoors!
- Remember how most of our childhood outdoor memories revolved around simple, free things we did in our backyards and neighborhoods?
- Try to replicate those sorts of activities that children can easily access again and again, with or without parental involvement.



# Backpack Activity

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- Gather back into your teams from the last activity.
- Each team will get a backpack and will be assigned an age group, a season and some items from your backpack.
- Your team will have 15 minutes to come up with an activity to lead for the rest of the group.



# Finding Nature at Your Site

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- Nature is everywhere!
- If you don't have a yard or garden, take walks and explore the neighborhood.
- Is there a park within walking distance?
- Can you make container gardens or put up a bird feeder?
- Can you bring nature into your center?



# Bring nature inside!

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- Incorporate kid-friendly greenery (Christmas cactus, Boston fern, spider plant, miniature rose...)
- Container gardens
- Natural décor (photos, wall décor, mural, carpets, etc.)
- Bird feeder window
- Nature library
- Nature themed “center”
- Try natural soundscapes during nap or quiet time



# Create a Nature Play Area!

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[www.greenheartsinc.org](http://www.greenheartsinc.org)









Project  
Get Outdoors

# Things children like in their outdoor environments include:

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- Water
- Vegetation, including trees, bushes, flowers and long grasses
- Animals, creatures in ponds, and other living things
- Sand, best if it can be mixed with water
- Natural color, diversity and change
- Places and features to sit in, on, under, lean against, and provide shelter and shade
- Different levels and nooks and crannies, places that offer privacy and views
- Structures, equipment and materials that can be changed, actually or in their imaginations, including plentiful loose parts







Alphabet Learning  
with chalk and rocks



AND NEXT COMES L



[www.laughingkidslearn.com](http://www.laughingkidslearn.com)



# Animal Yoga For Kids



## 25 Kids Gardening Activities

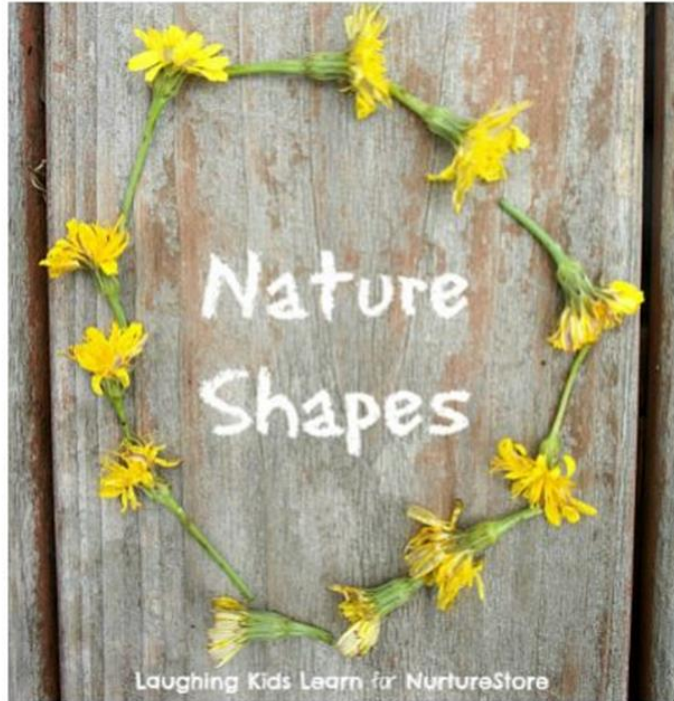


Lessons Learnt Journal





## KID MADE BIRD FEEDERS





NATURE SENSORY BOTTLE FOR BABY

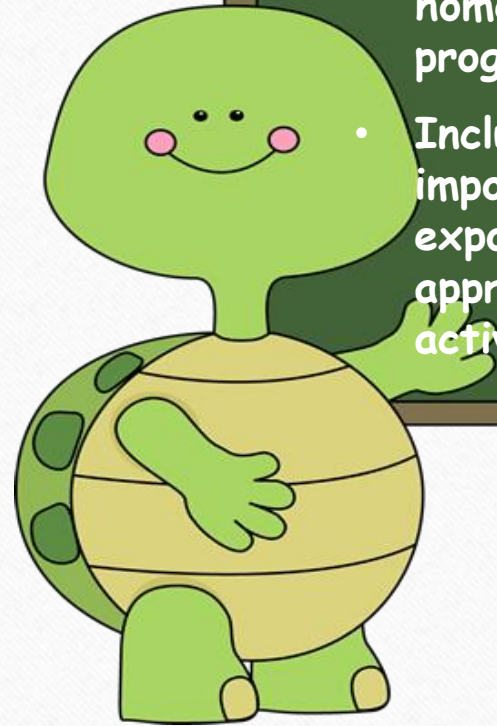


How to Make

**NATURE BLOCKS**



# Lessons Learned



- Send a welcome letter home at beginning of the program year.
- Include in letter the importance of nature exposure and how to dress appropriately for outdoor activities.





# Lessons Learned



- Stock pile lost and found items at winter's end to use the following year.
- Talk with site supervisor about allowing children to get "dirty".



# Resources

- ***Project GO Activity Calendar*** <https://www.mnprojectgo.org/resources>
- ***A Parents' Guide to Nature Play***, Greenhearts Institute for Nature in Childhood, 2009. [www.greenheartsinc.org/uploads/A Parents Guide to Nature Play.pdf](http://www.greenheartsinc.org/uploads/A_Parents_Guide_to_Nature_Play.pdf)
- ***I Can Teach in the Outdoors***, Wisconsin 4-H/Upham Woods, 1985.
- ***Natural Teachers Network Tools and Resources for Educators***, Children and Nature Network, 2012.
- ***Outdoor Play for Every Day – A Parent's Guide to Overcoming Common Obstacles for Kids and Outdoor Play***, National Wildlife Federation, 2012. [www.colchesterct.org/uploaded/General Information/Health Wellness for Children/BOT-ParentGuide2012 5 5x8 5-3.pdf](http://www.colchesterct.org/uploaded/General_Information/Health_Wellness_for_Children/BOT-ParentGuide2012_5_5x8_5-3.pdf)



# Recommended Viewing

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- ***Boy Scouts of America – Webelos Outdoor Leader Skills training (OWLS)***  
[www.scouting.org/filestore/training/pdf/511-336.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/training/pdf/511-336.pdf)
- ***Project GO Pinterest page*** <https://www.pinterest.com/projectgo/abcs-for-the-outdoors/>
- ***University of MN - Minnesota Master Naturalist course***, brochure in Chapter 5, handout 4  
[www.minnesotamasternaturalist.org](http://www.minnesotamasternaturalist.org)
- ***University of WI Extension - Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Center Professional Development and Educator Training*** [www.fyi.uwex.edu/uphamwoods/programs/adult-education](http://www.fyi.uwex.edu/uphamwoods/programs/adult-education)



# The End

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