



Spring Newsletter | 2022

Director's Corner

Learning with Nature: SWCDC's Outdoor Classrooms

Nature provides an abundant amount of benefits that supports children's physical and emotional wellbeing and is crucial in their overall growth and development. Some benefits that support children's development include: increasing their self esteem and resilience against stress and adversity, improves their concentration, learning, creativity, cognitive development, cooperation, flexibility, and self-awareness. Although our society is more aware of these benefits, there is still room for more opportunities to incorporate learning with nature in everyday life.

At SWCDC, learning with nature is a vital part of our teaching practices. Not only does our Center provide multiple outdoor spaces for various learning opportunities, but we also bring the outdoors into the classrooms.



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What Does the Outdoor Environment Look Like at SWCDC?

Our preschool outdoor space consists of 4 different areas. These environments provide opportunities for the children to engage in multiple learning experiences.

The Playground

One area of development that the children practice while on the playground is their gross motor skills. Running, throwing, lifting, kicking, balance and core strength are all related to body awareness and can be practiced daily in this area.



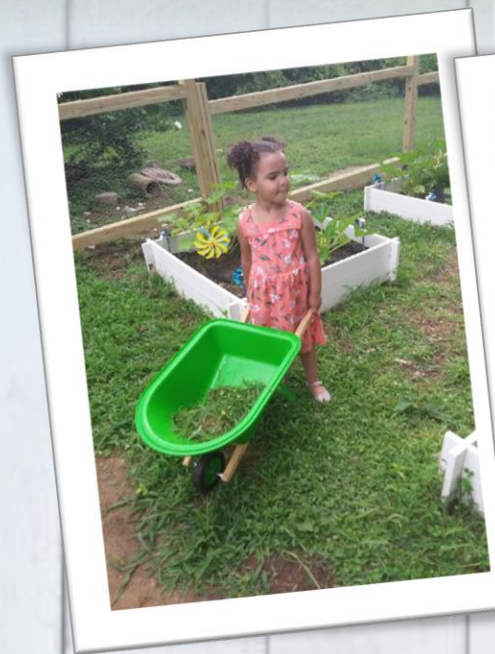


The Field

In our field, children are given the opportunity to work cooperatively with one another towards a common goal, practice problem solving and develop their communication skills. These skills are seen when the children are playing games such as “Red Light, Green Light”, “Red Rover” and “Duck, Duck, Goose”. They are also practiced when participating in obstacle courses, the parachute, and other group games.

The Garden

Our garden provides opportunities for the children to connect with nature on a scientific level. Understanding that living things have needs, seeing changes in nature over time and learning where food comes from all stem back to a child’s cognitive development and scientific thinking.





Nature's Classroom

In nature's classroom, our children freely explore their surroundings. Child initiated activities help children use their imagination, find a creative outlet and learn through their senses. Some activities that they explore include collecting, sorting, counting natural objects, and creating art with natural materials. We also use the stage in nature's classroom to hold large group activities or conduct circle time.

Although licensing requires that our toddlers remain in a fenced area, we still incorporate various outdoor spaces for them to learn with nature. In addition to their playground, we have a grassy area where the children can enjoy sprinkler play in the summer or sledding in the winter. It also has a garden bed for planting vegetables that we start as seeds in the classroom in early spring.



Nature in the Classroom

Bringing nature into the classroom is a great way to engage the children if weather does not allow for outdoor play. One example is adding snow to our sensory tables and bins in our classrooms when it is too cold for the children to play in the snow outdoors.

What else will you find inside the classrooms?

- Sticks, tree bark, leaves & pinecones
- Rocks and fossils
- Bugs & worms! Sometimes these are collected in a bug observation kit while other times they are preserved in a specimen viewer.
- Tree cookies & stumps
- Vegetables that are planted indoors in early spring
- Feathers, snake skins & beehives
- Grass, sand & mud



Not only is it important for SWCDC to incorporate nature into our practices because of the educational benefits, it is also fun!

“Nature is a tool to get children to experience not just the wider world, but themselves.” - Stephen Moss

Fireflies

Spring Activities to do With Your Child

Exploring the Outdoors

In South Windsor and surrounding areas, there are many things to explore during spring. South Windsor is home to many different nature trails with an abundance of wildlife to see as it warms. Some of our favorites include: South Windsor Wildlife Sanctuary, Major Michael Donnelly Land Preserve, and Nevers Park.

While on your nature walk you can bring along a scavenger hunt checklist. Make sure to add some things that you know you will see on your walk to make it exciting and hold interest. We like to make sure at least half of the scavenger hunt will be checked off at the end. Your scavenger hunt can include flowers, birds, bugs, animal tracks, types of trees, acorns, pinecones, or even a specific color. If your child is younger, you can have the sheet premade, and have pictures so they are able to check it off on their own. If your child is older, you may want to include them in the creation process. Have them work to make the pictures of what they will find, and work on labeling the photos as well.



Another activity is to make a nature board. You can use a piece of cardboard and a rubber band. While on a walk or a trip outdoors, you can instruct your child to pick up pieces of nature that they find. Then to save it, you can have them tuck it under the rubber band. During spring, this may include flowers like dandelions and clover, leaves, or sticks.



Activities at home:

To get in the spirit of spring, you can watch germination with your child! You can take any dried, uncooked bean and place it on a paper towel. Have your child use a spray bottle on the towel, or get it nice and wet in the sink. Then you can fold up the paper towel, place it in a plastic bag, and tape it to the window. Make weekly observations with your child about what they are noticing. You can also have them identify the different parts of the plant. After it grows a few roots, it's time to transfer to soil, or into the garden.

Spring brings rain! You can work with your child to identify the different kinds of clouds: Cumulus, Cirrus, and Stratus. Together you can make a cloud finder by cutting a square from a piece of cardboard to use as your viewport. Then, print pictures of the different types and have them under your "cloud finder" for reference. See our picture for a better reference.

Activities around South Windsor:

Located right over the South Windsor and Ellington Town Line, you can visit Burke Ridge Farms. This farm is open for the spring season and has a petting zoo, which consists of goats, pigs and donkeys! Burke Ridge also is a great place to visit for a sweet ice cream treat as well as to shop locally. This farm has a country store where you can shop for honey and spring flowers. Burke Ridge is also a great place to visit later in the fall season for family fun corn mazes and hayrides!

A Dinosaur and Dragon exhibit is coming to the Hartford Convention Center 4/30 and 5/1. This provides a walk-through of life-sized, realistic replicas of dinosaurs and dragons! The exhibit allows you to step back in time through the various prehistoric periods. Children can also participate during a story time session and a hands-on craft session. This exhibit also offers additional add-ons like inflatables, ride-ons and scooters. There is a sensory-friendly session available on 4/30 at 8:30 am.



Dragonflies

Understanding the Value of Print and Building a Love for Reading



As children grow through their early learning stages, they begin to make connections with print. Print can be found in books, on labels throughout the centers, nametags, daily schedules/calendars, and writing on the board at circle time discussions.

Teachers plan purposeful activities and conversations to foster the learning of words and help build the children's understanding of their meaning.

Parents can also help foster children's ability to understand the meaning of print through their day-to-day interactions and

experiences. The best way to promote print is through reading stories. Not only does reading provide a great modeling opportunity by leading by example, it also promotes knowledge of the mechanics of reading top to bottom, left to right, and helps create an understanding of a sequence of events. Letting the children choose the story will encourage them to feel they are a part of the experience.

Mem Fox, a children's author and an educational specialist in literacy created 10 read-aloud commandments to follow to promote a love for reading they are:

1. Spend at least 10 minutes a day reading aloud, from birth!
2. Read at least 3 stories a day, even if it's the same 3 stories the children wish to listen to
3. Read with animation
4. Read with joy and excitement
5. When reading, always read with the same "tune" by being aware of the volume of your voice.
6. Plan time for the children to have lots of different opportunities to have conversations about the book and the pictures throughout the story
7. Expose the children to rhyming and repetitive stories
8. Incorporate games throughout the story, such as looking for clues or hidden illustrations
9. Never ever teach reading, or get tense around books
10. Read to the children every day because you want to, not because it is the right thing to do.



Butterflies

Making Writing Fun in Preschool



In the preschool years, children grow and develop many new skills. One of these skills is learning how to write. As with everything else, learning how to write comes at a different pace for each child. They will go through different stages beginning with creating drawings or symbols that represent their thoughts and ideas. Next, children will typically begin to create marks or scribbles that they have intended to be writing, and then they begin to create “mock” letters before writing a string of various letters. Children will then begin to utilize the smallest part of a word otherwise known as a “phoneme” in order to sound out the letters to then write it. Educators describe this process as “inventive spelling”.

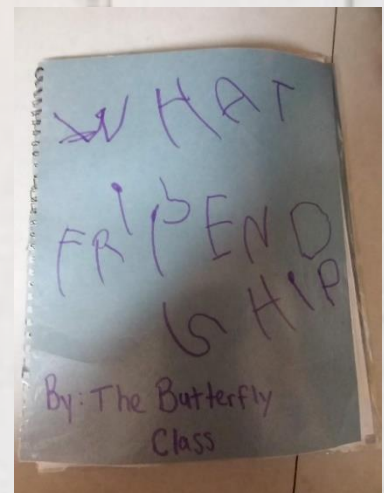
One of the first words children typically learn to write is their first name. Names hold the most meaning for children as they take ownership of it. Teachers expose children to their name throughout the beginning of the school year by labeling all of the child's belongings and artwork with a shape that has their name on it. We also provide the children with many opportunities to write their name on their artwork from memory or by using a nametag we have provided. When the children begin to show interest in writing words outside of their name, we build off this interest by providing them cards with words, names, and phrases that are significant to them such as the names of their peers, “mom,” “dad,” “family,” “I love you”, and names of holidays or special events.

To further expose children to writing, we strategically place writing materials such as pencils, paper, and clipboards throughout the classroom beyond just in the art area. We also provide collaborative writing opportunities for the children to participate in such as creating labels for art work displays, encouraging peers to support each other in their writing through spelling their names to each other, making classroom books, and creating thank you or birthday cards for various staff, classroom, and family members.

Here are some fun ways families can support writing at home:

- When going on vacation, celebrating holidays or special events, or taking day trips, families can work together with their child to create books that describe their experiences, what they saw, and who was with them.
- You can have your child send family members a letter or postcard with phrases and pictures of what they have been up to.
- When making cards for special occasions, have the children trace or write their own name on the card.
- In preparation for a grocery store trip, encourage your child to create a list of the items that you need to purchase.
- You can have your child practice tracing letters in the sand by providing them with a tray that has a thin layer of sand. This way they can trace a letter then erase it and try another letter.

Both teachers and parents play an important role in a child's development of their writing skills. There are many daily activities that you can incorporate writing into that create a wide array of writing experiences. The important thing to remember when practicing these skills is to make it fun and engaging for the child.





Bumblebees

Teaching Empathy and Compassion in the Preschool Classroom

What is empathy and compassion? Empathy is defined as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.” Meanwhile, compassion is defined as “sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” When children enter their preschool years they are naturally very egocentric and think mostly about their immediate wants and needs without much concern for other peers. Having a sense of empathy and compassion encourages tolerance and acceptance of others, builds a sense of security, and strengthens relationships children have with their peers and teachers. As children begin to build new relationships with their peers and teachers, empathy and compassion helps children work through conflicts with more confidence. While the world around us continues to change, developing empathy and compassion at an early age strengthens the children's ability to adapt and succeed.

How empathy and compassion is taught at school

- ✚ If a conflict occurs within the classroom, the teachers encourage the children to talk through what happened. The children will meet in a mutual area facing each other. The teachers start a discussion about the incident while allowing each child the opportunity to explain what happened. As the children work through the conflict that occurred, feelings are being labeled. For example, teachers will say “you look mad, can you tell your friend how it makes you feel?” With teacher assistance, solutions are found that can solve the problem at hand. Once solutions are found, teachers will support the children in testing them out.
 - ✚ The teachers will create different scenarios that may occur throughout the classroom and introduce them as whole group lessons. The teachers will act out the scenarios and give the children a chance to do the same in order to practice how they can resolve their conflicts.
 - ✚ If a child has been physically hurt by a peer, the hurt child will be checked on first and be given the appropriate care or support. The aggressor does not receive attention first as it is important for us to model empathy towards the injured child. The aggressor is encouraged to help their peer get an ice pack and to place it where it hurts. This allows the child to identify how their actions made someone else feel. The aggressor may also be looking for negative attention and we do not want to condone the behavior by giving them the attention first.
 - ✚ At circle time stories are read to the children while acknowledging the feelings of the characters. The teachers will ask, “How do you think the characters feel when this happens? How do you feel when that happens?”
- What you can do at home to encourage your child to be empathetic and compassionate towards others:**
- ✚ Label your child's feelings as well as your own. If they are upset or angry, state, “oh I noticed you look angry.” If your child is helping when a family member is hurt tell them, “You are being so kind, I am feeling much better.”
 - ✚ Talk with your child about what other people might be feeling. Discussing what others may be feeling helps to build their emotional language and encourages children to not only think about themselves and their feelings but to also think about the perspective of others.
 - ✚ Read books together. Using some of your children's favorite characters and stories can help to develop a sense of empathy as they associate the different characters' feelings and compare them to feelings they may experience



Blue Jays

Incorporating Math into Early Learning

What does math look like in Preschool? Math can be measuring, sorting, building, noticing patterns, making comparisons as well as labeling and describing shapes.

Today's mathematics is richer in problem solving, reasoning, communication, and making a mathematical connection to the real world. Teaching math is important because as children progress, it is essential that they develop an ability to visualize spatial relationships (geometry, measurement, patterns), approximate (estimation and number sense), reason mathematically (logical thinking, and reasoning), and to know the importance of developing math skills at a young age. A child's math knowledge at the start of kindergarten predicts later academic achievement better than early reading or attention skills.



"Parents' mindsets about math influence children. Children notice when adults feel anxious about math or say things like "some people are just not good at math." Instead of saying "I'm not good at math," try saying, "Let me try to figure that out." Focus on problem solving. Your words and attitude matter!" -Allison Master.

How can we support children to use math on a regular basis?

- Count steps/stairs while walking. Count items when cleaning up (e.g. Blocks, small manipulatives, stuffed animals).
- Allow children to help set the table for meals (introduce sets: 1 plate, 1 napkin, 1 fork, 1 knife, 1 cup for each person) Model for children how each place setting matches.
- Play a matching game when making pairs of socks.
- Measure the ingredients while following a recipe.
- Measure family members and compare sizes.
- Find items around the house and in your yard that resemble particular shapes.
- Use concrete items to collect, sort and count (rocks, buttons, bottle caps).
- Find items around the house and in your yard that resemble particular shapes.
- Play board games (Candyland, Snakes and Ladders, Memory Games (Concentration)
- Read, Read, Read!!! -Have children to (tell) predict what will happen next. Ask questions while reading, point out page numbers.



Benefits of Baking and Cooking With Young Children



Getting kids involved in the kitchen can be a rewarding experience for both children and adults! It is a fun, realistic, lifelong skill to have. Many people have fond memories of cooking and baking with their families when they were young and wish to implement that with their kids, but find they do not always know how to with young children. First, it is important to set the scene. Make sure that the kitchen area is safe and age appropriate. If needed, a highchair or a stool will ensure that things remain at eye level. Investing in child-safe cooking materials (i.e.- knives, cutting boards and peelers) can also be helpful in ensuring safety in the kitchen.

Children are naturally curious about the foods they eat and where those foods come from. The kitchen is a great place to help facilitate these discussions. Having children participate in all areas of food preparation; going to the grocery store, choosing their produce, prep work and cooking, all encourages children to try new and different foods.

Below are some further suggestions on how and why to bake with young children.

Why bake/ cook with children?

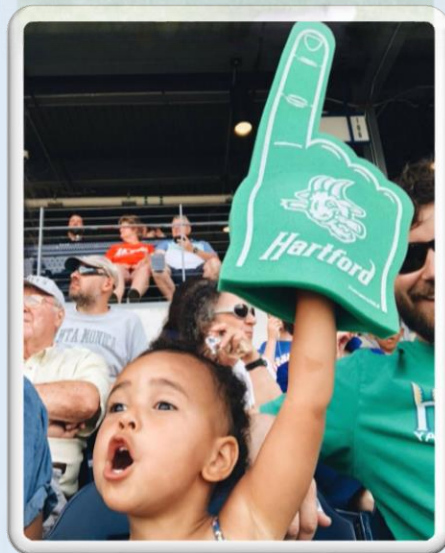
- Helps them practice following directions
- Teaches sequencing
 - First, we pour the ingredients into the bowl and then we mix them together
- Supports early math skills
 - Measuring
 - Adding
 - Counting
 - Temperature
- Encourages children to try new foods
- Promotes hand-eye coordination
- Fine motor development
 - Mixing
 - Pouring
 - Scooping
 - Peeling
- Boosts self confidence
- Enhances learning with their senses
- Contributing to family life
- Learning new life skills



How can I have my child help in the kitchen?

- Counting and collecting ingredients
- Wash fruits and vegetables
- Slicing ingredients with safety knife or scissors
- Mixing ingredients
- Setting the timer
- Pressing buttons
- Taste testing!

Spring Events in the Community



April

- **April 8:** Hartford Yard Goats opening day
- **April 9, 10, 15, & 16:** Ride the Rails with the Easter Bunny at the Connecticut Trolley Museum. Meet the Easter Bunny on the "Eggpress" in East Windsor. Purchase tickets online at <https://www.ct-trolley.org/events/easter-eggpress/>
- **April 10:** Egg Day at the Lutz. Lutz Children's Museum is hosting an egg hunt on their back lawn at 1:00pm (ages 5 and under) and 2pm (ages 6-10)
- **April 15:** Easter Egg Hunt at South Windsor High School - 9:00am-9:30am
Sensory friendly egg hunt, 10:00am-11:15am <https://southwindsor.recdesk.com/Community/Page?pagelId=23482>
- **April 23:** Fireworks with the Hartford Yard Goats! Join the Yard Goats from 6:05pm-10:00pm for a fun filled evening of baseball and fireworks. Tickets can be purchased online at <https://www.milb.com/hartford>

May

- **May 7:** 2022 Enfield Mother's Day Madness Craft and Vendor Fair from 10:00am-3:00pm at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel
- **May 30:** East Hartford Memorial Day parade at 10:00am starting on Riverside Drive.

June

- **June 4-October 8:** South Windsor Farmers Market summer season
- **June 11:** Strawberry Festival in Nevers Park 9:00am-5:00pm <https://swstrawberryfest.org/>
- **June-July 4:** Strawberry season at Dzen Farms begins!

Important Dates to Remember

April

- 11-15 No Part Day Preschool (Public School Spring Break)
 - 26 Family Night & Art Show (Bumblebees, Blue Jays, & Butterflies)
 - 27 Family Night & Art Show (Fireflies, Dragonflies, & Hummingbirds)
-

May

- 12 Annual Family Picnic at Nevers Park
 - 30 Center Closed (Memorial Day)
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June

- 1 Open House for 2022-2023 School Year
- 21 Last Day for Bumblebees
- 22 Last day for Blue Jays- Blue Jays Graduation
- 23 Full Day Preschool Graduation
- 24 Last Day of the School Year. (Center closes at 1PM)
- 27 Summer session for the 2022-2023 school year begins

