

# NATURE-BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

To children of past and future

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## OVER 200 YEARS

adapting to health, educational,  
and environmental concern

### H I S T O R Y

**1890s~1920s:** Nature Study Movement in US

Initiated in response to **industrialization** children were becoming disconnected from nature

**Early 20th Century:** Forest Schools in Germany

For children recovering from **tuberculosis**

Integrating public health and education.

**Mid 20th Century:** Denmark, UK, US

Characterized by **full immersion** in outdoor learning, with children spending most of their time in natural settings.

**Late 20th Century:** Modern Evolution

Emphasis on **child-nature relationships:**

- child-directed exploration (learning through curiosity and discovery).
- Unstructured play (enhancing creativity, resilience, and risk-taking).
- Sustainability education (developing environmental awareness and responsibility).

**21st Century**

The Role of Nature-Based ECE

Renewed interest in outdoor education due to the **COVID-19 pandemic**

Schools turned to outdoor learning as a health measure.

## NATURE AS A PATHWAY FOR HEALING

### Strugglings

- Chronic health problems
- Mental health issues
- Substance use
- Poor nutrition and health
- Academic difficulty and truancy
- Disconnection from the natural world

### Benefits of nature-based ECE

- **Physical health**
- Improved **self-regulation** (both emotional and behavior)
- Increased **social skills** (better communication, cooperation, and interaction)
- Improved **self-esteem** and **confidence** (ability to take independent actions)
- Better **attention**
- Increased **problem-solving skills** and **creativity**
- Higher levels of **exploratory and imaginative play**, which supports cognitive flexibility
- **Diverse play opportunities**, including imaginative, risky, and cooperative play
- Higher **nature relatedness** (stronger emotional connection to nature)
- **Environmentally responsible behaviors** (e.g., caring for plants, recycling)
- **Family bonds** and communication

- Poverty
- Neglect
- Violence
- Abuse
- Mental health issues

### Adverse childhood experience

- Permanency and stability
- Safety in the outdoors
- Healing for families and youth
- Self-regulation
- Family connection
- Cultural connection
- Community health
- Connections to nature

### Health outcome of children and families

## RESOURCE & RESEARCH

Children & Nature Network



free toolkits, reports, infographics and advocacy tools is designed to help you or your organization connect children, families and communities to nature.

