



# ENGAGING WITH NATURE

*children are washable*

byKass Unger







Children and nature have a special connection. It is one that exists for everyone. Unfortunately for adults, as they grow older, the wonder, adventure and sheer enjoyment of outdoor play often fades or simply becomes a lower priority.

When children encounter nature they automatically become hands on. Clambering up rocks, climbing and hanging from trees, jumping in puddles, picking flowers, holding worms and building and digging sand. However, nature not only engages their sense of touch but all their senses. Encouraging children to think, investigate and discover. What is it? What colours can be seen? Why does it feel like this? What does it smell like? How does it move? What can I do with this?

These questions lead to endless possibilities for play and imagination, but also foster a sense of wonder and engagement in learning about the natural world, their place in it and how they can help protect it.

It is not enough to simply see the sacredness in creation but we need to find ways to play and connect with creation and the sacredness found in these space. As adults there is a need to find ways to support not only our own connection to nature, but that of the children in our lives. Often, when we are open to it, children can support and encourage our experiences in nature in return.

#### How can adults support children in nature?

- Provide opportunities and time for both independent and directed activities and play outside in the natural world.
- Ask questions engaging the senses. What did you hear/see/smell/feel/taste?
- Enhance exploration, provide shovels, magnifying glasses, cameras, pencils and paper.

#### How children support adults in nature:

- Cause adults to move slower through-out the world and pay attention to what is around them.
- Encourage adults to actually engage all their senses and be fully present in the moment.
- Continue to learn and seek answers to big questions. Why does rain smell the way it does?

#### Nature activities and resources

- There are lots and lots of books on animals and environmentalism. Two of my favourites are *Greta and the Giants* by Zoe Tucker and Zoe Persico and *The Mess We Made* by Michelle Lord.
- *The Octonauts* and *Dirtgirlworld* are both ABC kids TV series.
- Animal songs: see how many songs you know about animals.
- Alphabet treasure hunt: try and find something that begins with each letter of the alphabet.
- Rainbow flowers: take pictures of different flowers trying to get all the colours of a rainbow.
- Nature mandalas: a circular, symmetrical pattern made using different nature pieces; flowers, leaves, berries, seeds.
- Fabric printing: Lay flat a piece of light, thin material on a sturdy surface. Arrange fresh nature on top and add another layer of material. Pound with a hammer onto the fabric to extract the colours from the nature.
- Long term sustainable activities: composting, home chickens, reduce the quantity of animal products consumed, recycling, 3 for the sea (picking up 3 pieces of plastic each time you visit the beach), participate in clean up Australia days.

