



EXPLORING ANIMALS



0-3



individual or
group max 6



20-30' outdoor
up to 1h indoor



ANIMALS AND I

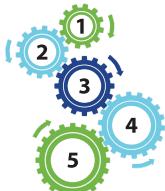


Nurturing Children's Love for Animals. If you watch toddlers playing in nature, you can see how carefree and enthusiastic they are about discovering the world around them. Probably there is something like a "basic love" for nature. One of the most important goals of all educators should be to prevent that when growing, children loose their natural bond with nature. You will learn to:

1. Use a "biocentric" approach in early care and education by providing opportunities for children to connect with living animals. Support children's inclination and love for animals and to nurture their feelings of connection by engaging all their senses and by making them feel that they are part of nature as well and that we need nature to survive.
2. Support children in their growing awareness and interest in animals through sense observation (e.g. hear a bird singing).
3. Build literacy through nature.



- Non-toxic face paints. Look for face paint labeled "free of parabens, formaldehyde, synthetic dyes or other harmful chemicals! You can also mix your own «homemade» face paint using cold cream, corn starch, and food coloring:
 - 2 tablespoons of cold cream, or other thick face cream
 - 1 tablespoon corn starch
 - Food coloring in assorted colors
 - Paper plate
 - Small paintbrushes
 - Optional: stencils



1. Go outside to observe living animals

If you visit a forest area with 3 years old children, choose an area with an easy access to flat paths. Kindergarten and primary school children are far more interested in animals than in plants. These animals can be just common wild creatures such as ducks, squirrels, and backyard birds or the neighbourhood cat or ants or snails. For small children they are all exciting and special. Parks or green urban areas are also a good observation area.

Preparation before the outdoor experience

The children should be prepared for the visit and their anticipation should be awakened. Children in this age group cannot yet be expected to have prior knowledge of nature, as this depends on their educational background. You can use a puppet telling a story like the following:

A fantasy story in preparation for a forest excursion

It was a glorious spring day and the mouse Maria wanted to do something special on such a beautiful day. Only what? She opened her toy-box, but she didn't really want to play. She could also play with her toys on a rainy day. So she fetched her painting things but actually she didn't want to paint at all. I can also paint another time. So, she took her bear Bernie because she had a great idea. Together they could take a trip into nature. "Bernie, have you ever walked through a park?" Maria asked. Bernie shook his head. "Bernie, have you ever sniffed at a flower or a butterfly?" Bear Bernie shook his head again. "Bernie, would you like me to take you on a trip into nature?" Yes, Bernie wanted that. Maria the mouse was thinking. What would she need for an excursion? She disappeared in the mouse hole in the wall under the staircase and got her backpack. Then she looked for solid shoes for herself and Bernie. But something was still missing. The weather could get worse, it could start to rain. So she added two raincoats. What if she or Bernie got hungry or thirsty? She put an apple and some water in the backpack. So, now the trip could begin. They got on a bus to reach the park. Maria was thinking again. Did Bernie the bear know how to behave in nature? She thought about some simple rules and told Bernie:

«Do not put things from the park in the mouth»

«Plants are very delicate. If you rip them off they cannot grow anymore.»

«Wild animals are very shy. Do not touch them! »

«Stay in my sight! – I want to see you!!

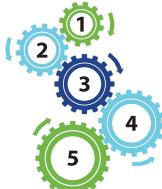
«Bernie - do not hold a stick at face level and do not walk with it. »

After Maria and Bernie had agreed on that, they wandered through the green park. They listened to the birds singing and watched a bee on a flower. Then they came to a beautiful meadow and decided to rest and eat their juicy red apples.



2. Outdoor: investigating and asking questions

Carefully observe children's natural curiosities outdoors. Detect how they behave in nature and then start to engage them explaining that wild animals are different from us. Remember that nature represents unpredictable and spontaneous opportunities for exploration!



- a) observe and explain the physical feature of the animal you are observing (wings, toe, ears, eyes, nose, shape, fur, skin...) and when possible make them listen to the sounds produced by the animal (e.g. birds). Use the senses of touch, smell and taste while the children are outdoor: for example, invite them to smell and touch the tree bark where squirrels/birds live, or the flower where bees land, the soil next to the ant's colony while imagining what animals might feel through senses while moving through their natural habitat. For taste, a facilitator can be simple snacks that are nature products that also animals usually eat or even produce – apples, walnuts, honey...
- b) observe habitat and shelter: explain where these animals live and that some of them build their own "home" (a nest, a cave, a hole... or they even carry their home with them). Some homes are for just one animal or for a «mother and her babies». Other homes are for a large group of animals to all live together.
- c) observe eating habits: explain that they have to find their own food and that they eat "particular things" like bugs or worms ...
- d) observe locomotion: explain that every animal has a "special power" like flying, digging or encourage children to imagine "what it is like to be that animal" (a duck, a squirrel or ant).



3. For the processing, the interpretation and the reflection of the outdoor experience combine it with a follow-up indoor activity that could be:

- a) use bright and vivid images of the animals observed for viewing and learning. Show the animals and name them. Otherwise use different stuffed toy animals to help children learn words like cat, dog, bird - they love being able to identify animals and imitate the sounds they make.
- b) make them listening to a song that incorporates animals. Make them move «like» animals. For example, the bird's wings can be our arms. This cognitive activity not only builds vocabulary and language skills, but it also helps children develop the habit of perspective-taking, which is another term for empathy. The same activity is suitable for outdoor.
- c) use face painting to identify with animals. In the eyes of a child, face paint is magical.

Here some examples. http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/wwf_wiw_facepaintingaw_1_.pdf
The guide was prepared by the WWF and contains easy paints so that you have enough time for a bigger group to be „transformed“ into a panda, a butterfly, a tiger.

Enrichment activities:

Set up a bird feeding area outside the classroom window or in another location where the children will be able to view birds.

