

## Learning **Doing** In Nature

If a child or young person has a developmental interruption at Doing (as defined in the Thrive FTC model), the supportive adult's key task is in helping that child build their confidence and curiosity in doing things.

We become the child's co-adventurer and co-discoverer, continuing to support their Being needs for safety and secure attachment, but now venturing out together to explore what they can learn to do. At the same time, we are there to provide a running commentary where appropriate to express our genuine interest in the activity and help to name the child's sensations and feelings where they can't yet do it for themselves. In this way, vital neuronal connections are being laid down between the emotional and cognitive regions of the brain. Unhealthy conditioned responses that tell the child "I'm no good at doing things", or "I'm always getting things wrong", or of others "not being interested in helping me accomplish things" can be replaced with positive experiences of wondrous exploration, of dealing with and bouncing back from disappointment, and thereby developing their immense potential to achieve things.

Nature is a sensory treasure-chest of textures, colours, sounds, and movement. It's a great place to test physical capabilities and bodily limitations. It's the ideal experimental play-space, where one can endlessly explore, observe and be creative. It's all about having fun, trying new things, and sometimes getting dirty/messy. It ought to go without saying that the natural world can be dangerous and unpredictable. Go with care, understand the risks, and be prepared.

### **The Beach**

The coastal zone is a superb play area for young people. There are endless possibilities for developing Doing potential by playing in the sand. You can build amazing structures, dig wells and tunnels, create irrigation channels and divert streams, either individually or in a group. You can draw pictures in sand with your hands or your feet, feeling its abrasive texture between your fingers and toes.

You can also fall over without injury, which is hugely important for learning your bodily limits and abilities – running, jumping (jumping from sand dunes is the best fun), spinning around until you're dizzy, gymnastics (headstands, handstands, cartwheels and so on).

Rock pools and shale beaches are excellent places to explore textures and new materials, collecting jetsam, shells and coloured pebbles, examining the varieties of seaweeds and anemones, collecting species of crustaceans and small fish in nets. For urban young people especially, the joy of independent adventures as simple as rolling up your trousers and exploring rock pools can be a transformational experience.

If you can find a long, low, dry, smooth (not too jagged) platform of rocks near the beach, devoid of weed, there is an excellent, non-competitive exercise you can play that involves simply walking across the rocks without stepping onto the sand. The effect is like yoga, in that it involves a delightful combination of body, breath, balance and meditative focus without requiring any athletic ability beyond walking. Correct footwear is essential – protective trainers not flip-flops. Once you reach the end of the rock formation you can talk about how it felt to do it. Did you notice your breathing? Did you get better at balancing? If you lost your balance or stumbled, were you thinking about something else?

Swimming, and learning to swim with an adult, is another highly beneficial Doing activity for the beach. Waves are an added fun-factor, jumping over and diving through and under them. Body-

boarding and surfing, with an adult initially, is an ideal co-adventure at the beach. You start with both on the same board, and gradually you allow them more and more control as you grow in confidence – choosing the wave and steering. Eventually you can let them go on their own with a skilful push and let them ride their own waves.

### **Camping**

The camping experience often involves group work in the Thinking and Power and Identity developmental stage tasks, but there are excellent opportunities also for Doing activities – such as collecting dry wood, building a fire, erecting a tent. Camping is also about Being, taking care of essentials and the basics of survival - feeling safe in a new environment (which may appear threatening at first) and having your needs anticipated and met in order to stay dry, stay warm and get fed. In contrast to daily life, young people can take a very active role in Doing to meet these basic needs, by organising their own living space, drying their own clothes near the fire, and cooking their own food. The camp fire is perhaps the single most powerful and ancient focus points for human beings to gather around, where young people can be empowered to do things – whether it be to keep the flames stoked with fresh wood, or to create music and entertainment – dancing, story-telling and making music (either with real or makeshift instruments such as sticks, bottles, cans, spoons or clapping hands).

### **Hiking**

Young people unused to hiking will be amazed by looking at a map at the end of a day's walk and viewing their route – a distance they might previously have associated only with motorised travel. It can open up a new world of understanding of what your own body is capable of, one step at a time. Hiking (and biking) also bring a visceral understanding of nature's forces: how much power there is in the wind, how much effort it takes to walk into it; the true scale of that hill we climbed – its suddenly more than contours on a map or a silhouette against the sky, my aching legs tell me exactly the scale of the hill I have conquered. As ever, and in all tasks involving young people, there must be careful consideration to ensure that everyone succeeds.

### **Wandering in the countryside**

There is no limit to the joys of simply playing in the countryside:

- Observing the sounds of birds in the woods, the buzzing and flitting of insects
- Playing roly-poly down a grassy knoll
- Launching sycamore seeds helicopters
- Making trumpets out of grass blades between two thumbs;
- Making firing pistols out of dandelion stalks
- Playing the cock or hen game with grasses
- Making fish skeletons out of beach leaves by removing the leaf and leaving the only the bones (veins)
- Kicking through mounds of leaves – having leaf fights
- Tracking: identifying and following animal tracks
- Fishing: digging up worms and using them for bait
- Making daisy chains
- Collecting, identifying pressing flowers and grasses
- Geology expeditions: collecting and identifying different rock samples
- Making whistles out of branches
- Making a dreamcatcher
- Foraging for blackberries
- Having sword fights with dried cowslip stalks
- Playing fir-needle championships (you compete to break the other's "V" shaped

- needle in a tug of war)
- Playing Pooh-sticks on the riverbank
- Making toy boats and sending them downstream (at night you can light a tea candle on top and see which one stays afloat the farthest)
- Find good trees to climb
- Learn how to choose the best skimming stones and counting how many skims you can do across a stretch of flat water
- Making mini assault courses, and (holding the young person's hand if they ask for it) leap from grass patch to grass patch, or from rock to rock, or along a fallen trunk/log – get from A to B without touching the floor
- Bouldering – or horizontal rock climbing, working your way along a boulder or rock face, staying only a short fall above the ground.

#### Resources

Regenco. Jeremy Thres works with individuals and small groups offering nature- based exercises and rites of passage for adults and young adults (17 – 25 years). Jeremy is also happy to advise on similar programmes for school projects. Contact Jeremy Thres at Epona, Week Down, Chagford TQ13 8ER. Tel: 01647 221444. Email: [ojl1@btinternet.com](mailto:ojl1@btinternet.com)

Wildwise. Chris Salisbury offers environmental education and bushcraft for young people. Lower Lodge, West Spitchwick, Ashburton TQ13 7NU. Tel: 01364 631104

Circle of Life Rediscovery. Marina Robb works with teenagers at a wild wood in East Sussex. [www.circleofliferediscovery.com](http://www.circleofliferediscovery.com)

The School of Lost Borders. Based in the USA with international affiliates, the School of Lost Borders runs programmes specifically for adolescent groups.

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

The Earth Watch Institute

Operation Raleigh

The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme