

## Nature Play

Over the last few years we have been on a journey of developing our approach in the area of Nature Play. In the past, playing outside in nature was a part of everyday, normal childhood experience. Many of us have fond memories of time spent outdoors riding our bikes around the neighbourhood, swinging from the clothesline, climbing trees, playing backyard games of cricket or soccer that spilled out onto the street, picking fruit straight from home grown trees, camping, bushwalking and picnics in our beautiful national parks.

Children today are increasingly unable to relate to these experiences. In fact, South Australian children are spending less time outside in nature than at any other time in our history. In the space of just one generation, there has been a dramatic shift in childhood activity from outdoors to indoors driven by a number of factors including the advent of new screen-based technologies and the emergence of a risk-averse culture.

This has far-reaching consequences for our community. In parallel with the shift indoors we are seeing increasing rates of childhood obesity, depression and behavioural disorders. Research across the world supports the view that unstructured outdoor play is fundamental to childhood. Opportunities for outdoor play and immersion in nature are essential to the health and wellbeing of children, helping them to develop to their full potential.

Participation in nature play has the ability to enhance children's cognitive flexibility and creativity, boost self-esteem and improve resilience. 'Nature play' includes any unstructured play outdoors such as riding a bike, climbing a tree, gardening, bushwalking and swimming at the beach (Nature Play SA website).

At Augusta Park Childhood Services Centre, we believe that being outdoors and experiencing nature is an important aspect of our children's day. We will provide plenty of opportunities for children to be outside and set up a range of experiences that reflect our belief in this vital aspect of children's play. This may include water play, sand/mud play, using tools like binoculars/magnifying glasses, observing insects and creatures, monitoring the weather, gardening, caring for our vegetable garden or composting, cubby building, using natural objects in play (e.g. Gum nuts, seed pods, logs/sticks, rocks, etc.) and the list goes on! Nature play can be messy and wet (which is why we ask families to send spare clothes) but it is a lot of fun. Sometimes children need to be given permission to get grubby and engage with nature and reassurance to 'have a go'.

Nature play will be a feature of our curriculum throughout the year and we will provide information for families about ways that you may continue this and support this learning at home. Our excursions (or visitors to kindy) each term generally have a nature based focus.

Examples include: regular walks through the sand hills and playing on the Salt Lake, visits to the Arid Lands Botanical Gardens, visiting other parks and outdoor play spaces & visiting animal programs.