

Keeping Safe & Looking After Nature

Looking after nature when you're out and about:

Keep your distance from wild birds and animals so as not to disturb and stress them - especially those that are with young and in winter when food may be scarce. This also keeps you safe, as their behaviour may be unpredictable.

If picking up minibeasts, like insects, worms and spiders, handle them gently. E.g. You can use a paintbrush to gently put them into a bug pot for a closer look. Always return them carefully to where you found them and roll any logs or stones back as they were.

For activities like scavenger hunts, ask the girls to collect items which have fallen on the ground, e.g. fallen leaves, twigs, seeds, fruits. Only collect growing flowers, leaves, fruits, seeds, or berries where they are in abundance, and pick them with care and in moderation to avoid damaging the plant's roots.

Depending on the activity, ask the girls to pick part of the plant, such as a flower or petal. A useful guide is not to pick anything bigger than the size of a fingernail.

Be aware that some species are protected against picking by law. A list of these can be found on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)

Some local bylaws restrict activities on green spaces, including picking plants and handling insects, so please check these before visiting. Do not pick any mushrooms or fungi.

Be mindful of where the group is walking to avoid trampling plants and flowers.

On the beach, collect natural things sparingly, as they provide food and shelter for beach creatures. Under the Coast Protection Act 1949 it is unlawful to take any natural materials from any beach in the UK, including sand and pebbles.

While it isn't illegal to take seashells or driftwood, many beaches discourage the collecting of these materials as they provide a habitat for wildlife.

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Keeping Safe

Most of nature is harmless, although look out for hairy caterpillars as these are often poisonous or can cause skin irritation, so avoid touching them.

Some spiders bite, but none in the UK give fatal bites.

If stung by a nettle, move away from the plants, be calm, and apply some cold water or a cold compress. If you can identify a dock leaf rub this on with some water.

Brambles, holly, hawthorn and blackthorn have spikes, so look out for these and remind girls to do the same.

In urban areas, check for dangerous rubbish such as glass, metal or sharp objects and look out for dog poo.

Brief the leaders and group as to areas to avoid.

Remind the girls of trip hazards in more natural places such as rabbit holes and roots.

Dogs may be in public areas - advise the group if there may be dogs. You may need to speak to dog owners to ask them to keep their dogs on a lead around the girls. Advise the girls never to approach dogs or just stand still if one approaches them

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Engaging children and young people with nature

You don't need to know anything about nature to take your unit outside to explore!

- When it comes to wellbeing, the experience of nature is more important than knowledge.
- You can use a spotter sheet or book to look up anything you don't know.
- Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know what that plant/insect is, let's look it up together' or challenge the girls to go home and find out.
- Often it is just interesting to find out what something is or does and watch it.

Do the activity with the girls, and then challenge the girls to do more than you!

- Get involved and get muddier than they do, rather than standing back and watching.
- Research shows that one of the four key influences on a young person's connection to nature is the attitude of adults they encounter.
- If adults are afraid of insects or look bored it will affect the reaction of the girls.
- If you can be the first to hold the spider or the worm, then carefully hand it around the group, many more girls will try it for themselves.
- Even if you are unsure, don't let it show and keep reassuring the girls it's OK.

If the leader is interested and shows enthusiasm in something, the girls will be inspired to look too!

- You can focus their attention to look more closely at nature by simply stopping and pointing out things you notice or find interesting.
- You don't need to know what something is to point it out, instead notice the colour, shapes and movements.

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Let the girls be led by their own interest

- Give the girls basic instructions to understand the activity and any equipment needed, then let the girls be led by their own interest.
- The best experiences are often unstructured and led by the girls, where the adults are facilitating not leading.
- If the activity is a bug hunt and they end up looking at animal poo or just running back and forth through wet grass, let them!
- Allow time for the girls to just explore and play.

Prepare your unit for using all their senses to experience nature

- To prepare your unit for using all their senses to experience nature, you might want to do an energetic exercise first to burn off any energy.
- Try asking them to sit still and quiet, take a few deep breaths or close their eyes for a minute or two.

Make up a 'nature busy bag'

- You could make up a 'nature busy bag' of useful items for the girls to use to explore and investigate nature when outdoors on a walk or activity.
- It is a pre-packed bag which you can just pick up and go out with.
- You could include things like: pens and pencils, paper or a sketchbook, magnifiers, binoculars, wildlife spotter sheets, bug pots, teaspoons (for scooping up bugs), a CD for a mirror or a torch.