**Explore A Park**

*Prepared by Julietta Sorensen Kass* | *60-90 min* |

**OVERVIEW**

**Description**

Participants will be given an opportunity for unstructured play and self-led discovery in a local, treed area

**Learning Outcomes**

* Self-discovery and exploration of nature
* Opportunity to internalize lessons from previous activities
* Experience the emotional and health benefits of being around trees

**Outline**

1. Discuss travel plans (5 min)
   1. Safety
2. Travel to park (15-20 min)
   1. Walk or bike as a group
3. Establish parameters (5 min)
   1. Boundaries and time limits
4. Exploration (20-30 min)
5. Reconvene (5-10 min)
   1. Sharing
6. Travel back (15-20 min)

**MATERIALS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Quantity per participant** |
| Magnifying glasses | 1 per pair |
| Journals | 1 journal |
| Pens or Pencils | 1 pen/pencil |
| Media Devices (camera, ipad, phones) | 1, if desired (provided by participant) |
| Field Guides (local trees, birds, insects, flowers, etc.) | Bring some of the books/documents listed under references and resources |
| Map (or access to map) | 1 physical or digital map for group |
| Emergency cell phone | 1 cell phone for group |
| First Aid kit | 1 first aid kit for group |

**KEY INFORMATION**

For background information regarding the philosophy behind this activity, read:

Burdette HL, Whitaker RC. Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation, and Affect. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2005;159(1):46–50. doi:10.1001/archpedi.159.1.46

Shwartz, A., Cosquer, A., Jaillon, A., Piron, A., Julliard, R., Raymond, R., Simon, L., Prèvot-Julliard, A. (2012). Urban biodiversity, city-dwellers and conservation: how does an outdoor activity day affect the human-nature relationship? *PLoS ONE,* *7*(6).

**LESSON PLAN & PROCEDURE**

**Outline**

1. Discuss travel plans (5 min)
   1. Set up a buddy system, explain expectations for walking
   2. Give participants an estimate of how long the walk will be

2. Travel to park (15-20 min)

1. Walk or bike as a group

3. Establish parameters (5 min)

1. Set physical boundaries within the park to ensure participants stay within sight or earshot of supervisors
2. Determine a meeting place for when the activity ends
   1. Give participants an estimate of how long they have to play
   2. Provide participants with materials such as field guides and magnifying glasses, and encourage the use of photography or iNaturalist apps to engage with nature

4. Exploration (20-30 min)

1. It may seem odd, but unstructured play is important for brain development, and can lead to a richer experience of the world around you
2. Allow participants to play in whatever way seems best to them. Only intervene to prevent safety hazards or inappropriate behaviour such as bullying. Lying on the ground and watching the clouds is a perfectly acceptable choice!

5. Reconvene (5-10 min)

1. Join up as a group
2. Invite participants to share interesting things they found, enjoyed, or noticed
3. Provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions, anything that has come to mind while they were exploring

6. Travel back (10-15 min)

1. Review safety
2. Return to camp

**Debrief**

● Ask participants why we didn’t have a formal activity planned. Do they think this kind of activity is important? Sometimes we learn best by finding things out for ourselves. Outdoor play is also good for developing our creativity, and it contributes to our mental and physical health.

**SUGGESTED PARKS (Halifax Regional Municipality)**

* Admiral’s Cove Park
* Birch Cove Park
* Conrose Park (for proximity to Dalhousie University)
* Hemlock Ravine Park
* Point Pleasant Park
* Sir Sanford Fleming Park
* Shubenacadie Park

**REFERENCES & RESOURCES**

Burdette HL, Whitaker RC. Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation, and Affect. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2005;159(1):46–50. doi:10.1001/archpedi.159.1.46

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Ordóñez, C., & Duinker, P. N. (2013). An analysis of urban forest management plans in Canada: Implications for urban forest management. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, *116*, 36-47.

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