



# **Indiana Children & Nature Network**

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Happier, Healthier, Smarter

## **NATURE PLAY DAY RESOURCE PACKET**

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## **What is ICAN?**

Indiana has joined the national movement to get children outdoors through the Indiana Children and Nature Network (ICAN). ICAN builds collaborative efforts to encourage children spending time in the natural environment. The project is an initiative of the Environmental Education Association of Indiana (EEAI), a group of outdoor and environmental educators from around the state. ICAN encourages government, businesses, nonprofits, academia, individuals, and families to impact a societal change that allows more time to be spent outdoors.

Mission: Our mission is to foster the connection of children, families and communities to the natural environment so they can receive the physical, emotional and intellectual benefits of spending time outdoors, while building a lifelong love of nature.

We do this by:

- Raising awareness of the many benefits of connecting children with nature;
- Promoting unstructured play and time outdoors for children and adults;
- Engaging a diverse network of people and facilitate collaborations

## **What are Nature Play Days?**

What are your favorite childhood memories? Climbing trees, running through the woods, looking for crawdads, squishing mud, examining bugs, watching the clouds drift by, building a fort?

Today's children may list gaming systems, Snapchat, and other indoor activities. Few kids spend time outdoors these days and the consequences are profound and far reaching. In an effort to re-connect kids and their families with nature, ICAN is seeking out partner hosts for Nature Play Days in 2018. We are inviting hosts of all kinds to hold Nature Play Day (NPD) events during the week of June 9-17<sup>th</sup>. Concentrating events during this week will allow ICAN to lead a marketing effort where families can go on our website and find a NPD near them to jumpstart their summer with nature play. Our hope is that these events will allow kids to experience nearby nature and encourage them to create a habit of playing outdoors.

The goal of this guide is to help you plan and organize your day to meet your needs. If you have additional questions or need help with other practicalities of event planning, ICAN is happy to help! Please just email us for more assistance [npd@indianachildrenandnature.org](mailto:npd@indianachildrenandnature.org). We want to help make your Nature Play Day a success!

## **NPD Organization**

Depending on your location, budget, and staffing, your NPD can be as structured or free form as you wish. If your event is less structured, remember that some children and adults are not accustomed to outdoor play. They may be reluctant or unsure what to do without a couple of structured or guided activities to warm up with. Free play areas are also important to allow kids to explore, imagine, and create.

Decide if your Nature Play Day (NPD) will be hosted by your facility staff only or if you would like to involve other organizations or sponsors. The benefits of nature play cross many subjects and causes so consider organizations that you may have not previously partnered with such as hospitals, universities, childhood health/obesity organizations, and more.

Partnering with other organizations can open up additional volunteer bases, allow for additional publicity, and increase the impact of your event. If you can manage the organization and event logistics in house, consider contacting your local hospital or children's healthcare organizations for sponsorships. Sponsorships can provide advertising, giveaways like t-shirts and play supplies, and other support.

Try to attract segments of your community that could benefit most from time spent in nature. Economically disadvantaged or minority families have a lot to gain from introductions to nature. Transportation may be an issue for some families. Consider partnering with a local transportation group or school to provide transport to your event from a central location. Sponsorships may cover the cost, if any, for this service.

Nature Play Days should be free and open to all but it is up to you to decide if pre-registration is required or encouraged.

Don't forget to include information on how attendees can carry on this experience at home, future events, or with groups such as Scout groups or Boys and Girls Clubs.

## **Determine Location & Date**

Established parks and nature areas are likely accustomed to facilitating outdoor education or play events. That is great! Build on your previously successful program. If you have a program that gets kids outside, schedule it during the week of June 10-18<sup>th</sup> and make it your Nature Play Day.

If your park or site is less traditional, don't worry! There are activities that can be conducted in any type of location. A nature scavenger hunt for birds, flowers, and other items can be held in the most urban environments. Dirt and water in tubs can be a great way to walk in the mud or build mud pies. Bringing in loose parts for construction of forts or art projects can bring outdoor fun anywhere! See our list of Nature Play Activities for ideas for fun nature play in any location (available on resources page of ICAN website). We are asking hosts to schedule their event(s) between June 9<sup>th</sup> and June 17<sup>th</sup>. Concentrating events during this time period will allow us to support you with promotion and start the summer off with a push to get kids outside.

## Considerations

Consider all weather possibilities. Do you have shade for a hot day? Is there good drainage for rainy weather? Bathrooms? Water access? While a NPD is possible anywhere, thoughtful consideration of logistics, accessibility, and ease of use are critical to the success of your program.

Do you need help brainstorming activity ideas or logistical considerations for your event? **Let us know—we have volunteers with decades of outdoor event planning experience that can help!**

## Recruit volunteers

Unless you can utilize existing staff for your event, utilizing volunteers will be key in the success of your event. Be sure to have a well-organized plan of who will help with what activities, where, and have plenty of supplies for the volunteer to successfully fill their role. Open lines of communication will help volunteers feel prepared. Workers or volunteers should help children get oriented to the site and available activities and materials. Letting the children direct their own experience is key to successful nature play. Exploration, finding new ways to use tools and build, and maybe even taking a few risks help kids learn about themselves and nature. Volunteers may also help parents to step back and let the kids take the lead. Be sure your volunteers understand the importance of nature play for kids and are able to communicate that information to parents. After all, the goal of the NPD is to encourage kids and families to continue to play outdoors after the event and build a relationship with nature.

## Activity ideas for all kinds of facilities

Be sure to offer a mix of active and passive play opportunities for kids. It's important that all attendees feel comfortable and have a good time outdoors.

- Guided hikes
- Digging- dirt, sand, etc.
- Mud pies
- Water play
- Rock stacking
- Nature art
- Loose parts
- Pioneer games
- Sportsmen games (bow and arrow, gun safety)
- Horse/pony rides
- Live animal demonstrations
- Learn about outdoor first aid
- Cloud ID
- Obstacle course
- Plant a flower/tree
- Make a bird feeder
- Stump/log balance beams

- Fairy house/gnome building
- Story telling
- Educational stations
  - Pollinators
  - Snakes, wildlife, birds
  - How animals make their homes
  - Bike safety

Invite characters like Smokey Bear or local animal organizations like raptor rehabilitation centers that can bring live animals with which to interact.

### **Partners/sponsors**

The benefits of nature play are diverse across many fields and areas. This means that organizations with a variety of missions and causes can benefit from promoting outdoor play. Use this opportunity to identify and reach out to both traditional and non-traditional partners in your community.

- Local hospitals
- Federal or State agencies (Forest Service, local parks, NPS)
- State parks or Fish and Wildlife, DNR
- Major youth organizations (Boy Scouts of America, local groups in your area)
- Local parks
- Recreation businesses

### **Talking points for use with potential partners**

The National Wildlife Federation has compiled a list of statistics that highlight the health benefits of childhood nature play. This information may be particularly useful when reaching out to hospitals and physical, mental, and emotional healthcare partners.

<http://www.nwf.org/What-We-Do/Kids-and-Nature/Why-Get-Kids-Outside/Health-Benefits.aspx>

More facts from the Children and Nature Network news center:

<http://www.childrenandnature.org/>

- Childhood obesity has grown from 7% in the 1980's to 18% in 2012.
- Kids today spend ~9 hours a day on a device and over 90% of their time indoors.
- Pre-school kids are the fastest growing market for anti-depressants.

## Event Promotion

ICAN will be leading a statewide effort to promote Nature Play Days. Citizens will be encouraged to visit the ICAN website where a list of all statewide NPD's will be provided. Registering your event will ensure your event is listed.

Local promotion is up to you but consider these tips:

- Share info/flyers or a press release with local media outlets such as:
  - Local newspaper, radio, TV stations, internet calendars online newsletters, websites
- Share fliers with local schools, scouts, 4-H clubs and other groups.
- **Social media is key!**
  - Promote your events via Facebook, Twitter, etc. and ask friends and supporting organizations to do the same.
  - Create a Facebook event and be sure to update if your information changes—it's worth the effort.
  - Add Indiana Children and Nature Network-ICAN as a co-host to your Facebook event and we will be able to share your event with others.
- Place posters or flyers at local stores. Ask if doctor's offices may be willing to display a poster as outdoor play has significant benefits for children's health.
- See if your local government may be willing to issue a proclamation noting the significance of nature play and your event.
- Ask partner organizations or other groups you have relationships with to share info on your NPD in their e-newsletter or magazine or on their websites.  
Remember that large organizations, like hospitals, may need info far in advance to be able to include it in their publicity pieces.

**Don't forget to follow up with your media contacts with supplemental info/reminders one week and three days before the event!**

### Sample press release

See the ICAN NPD resource page for a sample press release to promote your event.

### Share the fun- NPD Photos

Encourage participants to document their experience using photography and to share on social media. Photos will serve as reminders of a great day and encourage attendees to get outdoors again soon for more fun. Candid and staged photos are both great. Encourage participants to utilize the **#ICANNaturePlayDays** hashtag. Download and print the #ICANNaturePlayDays photo frame/poster so your attendees can capture their image with the ICAN logo. Feel free to add yours as well!

Invite local media outlets to cover your event. Be careful to get guardian permission before photographing children. Photo releases or signage noting that attendees may be photographed may also be a good idea.

## **After the event**

Share your success!! Don't forget to promote the event's success to your media list. Share photos and details from the day as well as information on additional opportunities to continue nature play.

Don't forget to supply your promotional partners with newsletter articles, photos, or short info pieces on the success of the day and where families can go for more information or similar activities.

ICAN will reach out to event hosts with a follow up survey after NPD's.

## **More help is available**

ICAN is committed to helping you create a successful event. If you need more assistance than provided in this document just let us know! ICAN members have decades of experience in event planning, working with kids, and education. Please let us know what assistance you need--- activity ideas, supply resources, guidance on enlisting volunteers or sponsors? Just email us at [npd@IndianaChildrenAndNature.org](mailto:npd@IndianaChildrenAndNature.org).