

MESSAGE IN A BACKPACK™

Going Beyond the Playground

Math, Science, and Outdoor Fun

Rachel J. Franz

Going outside for a walk or to a local park to play are great ways to help your children learn! In addition to spending time at the playground, take time to explore: do you see trees to count, neighbors to greet, or street signs to read?

Here are some ideas for playful learning that will help you make the most of your family's time outdoors.

Street sign scavenger hunt

While walking through the neighborhood, invite your child to look at and identify signs, like Stop and No Parking. Talk about them. This helps children understand that written words and symbols have many important purposes: to keep us safe, to help us work together, and to spread essential information. Try prompting your child's thinking with questions like, "What signs do you see? I wonder what clues help us figure out what the signs say." Work together to identify the colors, letters, and numbers on different signs!

Science on the hill

Hills are such fun for rolling, running, and exploring. Did you know that hills are also great for learning science concepts and vocabulary? Try this in the park with your child: collect different nature items (pinecones, pebbles, sticks) and test whether they roll down a hill. Use words like *faster*, *slower*, *speed*, *weight*, *mass*, and *slope* as you experiment. Children also love to roll their bodies down hills!

Help your child be a noticer

Practice noticing numbers, letters, and other details as you explore outdoors. Encourage your child by saying and doing things like these:

- › "I see numbers on this sign! I see the number three. I wonder what it means" and "What other numbers can we find on our walk, and what do they tell us?"
- › "I see some footprints going across the ground. I wonder who made them. Where are they going?" Create a story together about the footprints!
- › "I spy with my little eye . . . a cloud shaped like the letter O! What do you see?"

Identify the parks and other outdoor spaces in your neighborhood

Sometimes the most magical places are just around the corner. Websites like findyourpark.com/your-parks can help you identify nearby parks. Even the tiniest spaces can hold magic for you and your family!

Photograph: © Getty Images

This magazine is meant to be cut out, stored, and used as a resource.