

## a letter to families

**Now that nice weather is here, it's time to think about outdoor adventures with your little one. Time outdoors brings great joy and variety to families and schools. It also brings awareness of possible safety concerns in outdoor play. Try the activities below with your child as you enjoy the great outdoors together!**

### **Awaken to Nature**

Have you noticed your child's shining eyes when you pass a dog while on a stroller ride? Have you seen a look of wonder cross her face as a bird or butterfly flies by? These responses show that outdoor experiences with your child are not only enjoyable but provide opportunities to further early learning.

### **Sow Some Seeds**

Encourage your toddler to work alongside you as you plant seedlings in little pots to get them started for replanting outdoors. Talk to your child about how the plant will grow big and strong. Take joy in his help! Let him spoon potting soil over the seeds. This activity increases finger control and improves dexterity.

### **Tending the Garden**

If you are planting outdoors, involve your toddler at every stage of setting out new plants for the summer season. Kids especially love the power of using a water hose, so be sure that his clothing is appropriate in case he becomes too enthusiastic with the hose! Explain to him how he is giving the new little baby plants a drink of water, and how much they need a drink to grow strong and big. You are encouraging early compassion while growing something outdoors.

### **It's for the Birds!**

After you take down your easy-to-fill plastic bird feeder, give your toddler small cups of birdseed and let her fill up the bird feeder scoop by scoop. You may need to be patient, because this requires a lot of wrist control. Your child will feel so proud of helping you feed the birds. Share with her the names of the bird-food seeds. They'll sound exotic to a little one!

### **Build Muscles**

In warm weather take your child to the park as often as possible. By climbing on equipment and learning to pump her legs on a swing, a child grows sturdy muscles and improves large-muscle control.

### **Flower Power**

Babies love fragrant scents! As the flowers bloom in your community, be sure to wheel your child to places where flowers have been planted. As you lift your child up to sniff the flowers, you teach an appreciation of nature's beauties and give delight to his visual and olfactory senses.

### **Time Together**

When you provide happy outdoor experiences for your baby, you enhance respect and awe for nature. Late in summer, eating a cooked carrot grown in your own garden will be a source of special pride for your child. Your time together outdoors will give a boost to your own spirits, help your baby sleep better, and provide hours of special shared treasures.

*Alice Sterling Honig, Ph.D., a professor emerita of child development at Syracuse University, is the author of many books, including Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant-Toddler Attachments in Early Care Settings (NAEYC, 2002; \$15) and, with H. Brophy, Talking With Your Baby: Family as the First School (Syracuse University Press, 1996; \$16.95).*