

Why Environmental Education is Important for Kids

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Ghostwritten by [Kyle Biemiller](#) for agency client.



The term **nature-deficit disorder** was coined by author Richard Louv to describe the effects of people spending more time indoors than out in nature. Childhood obesity, diminished senses, and attention difficulties are only some of the problems our kids face when they don't get enough outdoor time.

Spending time with nature will make our kids more active and attentive, but there's even more they can learn beyond just a love of the outdoors when we teach them about environmental education.

What is Environmental Education?

More than just promoting nature, the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** defines environmental education as "a process that allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem-solving, and take action to improve the environment."

Kids are encouraged to research, investigate how and why things happen, and form their own opinions on complex issues rather than just being told information. Environmental education promotes critical and creative thinking skills and inspires kids to become more engaged with their communities. It helps kids understand why the environment is important and provides them with the building blocks they need to live eco-friendly and sustainable lives.

Rubicon's **Trash or Treasure™** campaign couples the recycling of candy wrappers with long-term recycling awareness in kids. Each year we create educational materials to bring to life the importance of recycling and waste diversion, while introducing the concept of the "circular economy," an important evolution of today's mainstream "take-make-waste" production model.

Here are four reasons why environmental education is important for kids:

1) Nature Nurtures and Instills Passion for the Environment

Spending time outside will make you care more about the environment. Caring more about the environment will make you want to spend more time outside. While not exactly synonyms, environmental education and outdoor education are closely related, and both help improve the lives of our kids as well as the environment.

Nature can have a profound impact on our kid's physical and mental health. **Just two hours of nature per week** is associated with good health and well-being. Introducing kids to the great outdoors can also lead to **higher academic performance, reduced stressed levels, improved social skills, and more.**

Nature offers kids the freedom to be kids. Kids explore, run, shout, and laugh; they hop over puddles and climb up trees; they invent games and fictional worlds. These activities let kids take risks, discover things, question, and experiment. This self-expression is invaluable to their development and allows kids to discover themselves while interacting with their natural surroundings.

This interaction instills a love of nature and inspires kids to do their part to give back to the environment that has done so much for them.

2) Encourage Children to Form Sustainable Habits

Teaching our kids about the environment can help them develop sustainable habits that are likely to stick with them as they grow up. Even small actions have large impacts over time. Some simple sustainable habits can be performed at any age:

- Recycling
- Bringing reusable bags to shop
- Turning water off while brushing teeth
- Keeping lights off when not in use
- Using reusable water bottles

Lead by example and be sure your kids understand why each of these actions is important. Take the time to explain that keeping the lights off not only conserves energy, but also **improves air quality** by limiting the amount of work that air-polluting power plants have to do. Explain how the entire life cycle of a plastic bottle uses large amounts of fossil fuels that contribute to climate change, and how your reusable bottle keeps plastics out of landfills and moves us towards a circular economy.

Kids equipped with this knowledge are more likely to consider how their actions affect the environment and think of ways to make a positive impact instead.

3) Raise Eco-Friendly Consumers

Nearly half of consumers in the United States said that they were "likely to change what they buy to meet environmental standards," according to a **2018 Nielsen survey**. We can use the opportunity to educate our kids about sustainability in the marketplace.

Kids tend to imitate their parent's consumption habits, so set a good example by:

- Supporting **sustainable businesses**
- Using energy-efficient appliances
- Stopping using single-use plastics
- Purchasing natural and eco-friendly cleaning products
- Avoiding **fast fashion**

Again, make sure your kids understand why their purchasing decisions have an impact on the environment. Teach them how, like lightbulbs, energy-efficient appliances protect the environment by conserving energy and burning fewer fossil fuels that would release harmful greenhouse gases into the air.

You and your child can search the EPA's **Safer Choice** website together to find eco-friendly products that contain ingredients that are safer for our health and the environment.

4) Educate the Next Generation of Environmental Advocates

It's clear now that **climate change will continue its disastrous effects** unless we do our part to live more sustainable and environmentally friendly lives. Climate change requires a long-term solution—it won't be fixed overnight.

The abundance of educational resources available online makes it easier than ever before to get your kids more involved with the environment.

The EPA provides **learning and teaching resources** for both students and teachers, including **lesson plans, community service project ideas, and homework help**. They also support the **National Environmental Education Training Program (NEETP)**, which provides long-term support for educational professionals to bolster their ability to teach about environmental issues.

The **National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF)** also has helpful resources, including infographics, activity guides, and even a list of apps that bring environmental education to your mobile devices.

The **National Wildlife Federation (NWF)** hopes to inspire future environmental stewards with their **page of educational resources**. Their website also includes a **site specifically for kids** with games, jokes, fun activities, and information designed to get kids interested in wildlife.

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Early environmental education can help our kids become curious and passionate about nature, climate change, environmental issues, and protecting our planet. By encouraging this passion at an early age, we have a better chance at raising a generation of lifelong environmental advocates that will continue to live sustainable lives into their adulthood.