



VERMONT EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

MODULE 2: FAMILY ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: SENSORY ADVENTURE: OUTSIDE EXPLORATION!

AGE: Infants, Younger and Older Toddlers

WHAT YOU'LL NEED: A place to walk outside

PURPOSE

Babies and toddlers are eager to learn all about their world – they are natural scientists and want to explore the sights, smells, sounds, tastes and textures that are all around when they go outside. Each season offers new opportunities to learn. Taking your baby or toddler outside to explore can be a great way to develop your child's curiosity about nature!

This activity relates to these elements in the **Approaches to Learning** domain of the VELs:

- Play and Exploration
- Initiative
- Problem Solving

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Find a time when you can take a walk. While you are outside, show your child how to use their senses to explore.



TOUCH

- Talk with your child about the weather – is it hot or cold? Is the wind blowing and the sun shining? Talk about how the air and sun feel on their skin.
- Look around you for different types of plants and trees. Ask your child to touch leaves, flowers, dirt, grass, rocks and bark with their hands and talk about how they feel. Use words to describe what they feel to help build their vocabulary (such as soft, wet, dry, rough, slippery).
- If it is warm enough and you are in a safe place, take your shoes off and walk barefoot. Talk about how the grass or dirt feels on your feet (for instance, is it cold? soft?).



SIGHT

- Exploring outside offers a great opportunity to learn colors, size and shapes. As you explore, talk with your child about the colors you see in the plants, animals and the sky. Use size words to describe what you see, such as, “Look at that tall tree!” or “What a tiny flower you found!”
- There are many animals outside to see and explore. Together, look at the ground for bugs, and the trees for birds and squirrels. If you live near a pond or stream, you can look for frogs, turtles or fish.
- During the winter, explore the footprints that you make on your walk in the snow.

TASTE

- When it snows or rains, have your child catch snowflakes or raindrops on their tongue. Talk about how they taste.
- If you have a garden or have access to a community garden (and have permission to pick and eat the items in the garden), explore the different tastes of the fruits and vegetables available to you. Use descriptive words like sweet, bitter, crunchy or squishy to describe the things that you taste.



SOUNDS

- At different points on the walk, pause and listen to any sounds you hear. For example, “Do you hear the airplane? Where is it?” Other sounds might come from birds, neighbors’ pets, the wind, chimes or vehicles on the road.



SMELLS

- As you explore different things outside, take deep breaths to see what you can smell. The different seasons offer different types of smells; for instance, in the spring you may smell the sweetness of flowers. In the summer, you may smell the tang of freshly mowed grass. The fall leaves and a fresh snow also have aromas that can be explored and named. Talk with your child about what you smell and how it smells.

SWITCH IT UP!

Here are some different ways that you and your child can do this activity throughout your day together.

- Babies and toddlers are learning new words for many things that they see outside and are not yet imitating or saying the words themselves. Using simple signs or gestures with spoken words is another way to help your child develop their vocabulary. For pictures of simple signs and videos, visit [Baby Sign Language](#).
- Explore other outdoor areas in your community, including your neighborhood playgrounds, parks, or trails.



BRIDGING ACROSS DOMAINS

These are ways to work on other areas of development (or bridge across domains) during the same activity.

- **Motor development:** Help your child think about different ways to get from here to there, safely. Choose different paths outside that have your child skip up hills, jump across rocks, or tiptoe on a log or curb. This will help your child learn how to balance, how their body moves and how to change their speed or direction as they play.
- **Social and emotional development:** The more the merrier when exploring! Include siblings or neighborhood friends in the exploration; this will give your child the opportunity to learn turn taking jumping in the leaves, sharing playground swings and talking to each other about what they see, hear, smell, taste, and feel.



CHECK IT OUT!

Visit your local library and check out these books to read with your child.

- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* – Eric Carle
- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* – Eric Carle
- *I Went Walking* – Sue Williams
- *Bringing the Outside In* – Mary McKenna Siddals



Activity adapted from:

- Millette, C. *Exploring nature and the outdoors...Babies and toddlers.*

NOTES
