



Resource 2

Out-of-School Learning Opportunities

Local communities offer many learning opportunities that are often free or inexpensive. Use the following ideas to plan activities that support your children as learners and members of the community.

What does it take to grow? Teach cause-and-effect relationships. Use two similar, healthy plants. Ask your child to water one plant and ignore the other for a week or two. Keep both plants in the same place. What happens? Inspect animals and insects found near your home. Ask your child to watch them and record their behavior. Check out library books and movies to learn more about plants and insects.

Let your voice be heard. Promote good citizenship by helping your child write letters to the editors of local newspapers about issues affecting children. For example, suggest a bike path be built near the school or that a city event be planned for children. Children are citizens and their ideas are worth sharing.

History time line. Record history at home. Stretch a roll of paper along the floor. Use a ruler to make a line about three feet long. Ask your child to fill in the important dates in his or her own life, starting with the child's birth. Family members familiar with family history could fill in other major dates. Display the finished time line in a special place for all to see and to add to as major events occur.

The foreign touch. Travel overseas at home. Visit ethnic shops, food stores and restaurants in your community. Using a map, have your child find the different countries you might "visit". Encourage your child to talk and write about what he or she might see. Check out library books and films about the countries, including cookbooks and books on how to make arts and crafts from the different places.

On the move. Sharpen math skills on trips. Use even short trips around town. For example, at the gas station, ask your child how much gas you needed and the cost per gallon. On the highway, ask your child to read the signs and check the different speed limits. Then ask the child to watch the speedometer readings and notice how fast or slow the car is going. Have your child estimate distances between cities and check the estimates on a road map.

A trip to the supermarket. Ask your child to choose a dish to prepare for a meal, such as a pudding, a salad or a sandwich. Have your child check to see what supplies are on hand, and make a shopping list. First, let your child decide which items are the best buys and make selections. Next, have your child write the price of each item on the list, and if possible, figure the total. Afterward, the child can check the prices against the sales receipt.

Community smarts. Gather maps and schedules to a special place in your area—a zoo, a museum or a baseball stadium. Let your child plan a trip for friends or family. Determine the travel time required, the cost and the best time to make the trip. This puts the child's reading and math skills to practical use.

Camps. Whether choosing an overnight or day camp, keep in mind your children's interests. 4-H, YMCA, schools, churches and civic organizations often have camping opportunities that focus on building skills and talents or are geared toward specific subjects, such as environmental camps.

Classes. Swimming, art, karate, cooking and foreign languages are just a few of many programs you may find. Often, libraries have special programs at low or no cost for children of all ages.

Recreational activities. Local parks departments may sponsor organized sports activities. Soccer, baseball and basketball are just a few sports sometimes offered. Ask for a schedule of events.

Arts and entertainment. Local arts councils often sponsor plays, concerts and “arts in the park” activities to promote cultural awareness.

Tourism promotions. Contact your local tourism commission. Find out what points of interest are promoted in your area, and obtain a schedule of season highlights. Many state parks offer free entertainment and activities during tourist seasons. Visit local historical attractions and check out the history of your area. Often there are tours, festivals and programs celebrating historical events.

Visit the library and get online. In addition to printed materials, libraries often lend audiotapes and videocassettes of books and movies, and most libraries have computers available for public use. Many libraries also offer special programs after school and during school vacations.

Local parks and museums. Local parks, museums and businesses can offer a wide range of activities and special events that are of interest to children, youth and families. Check to see what is offered in or near your community.

Tour local businesses. Many businesses such as bakeries, factories, bookstores, veterinarians and printing companies offer tours for small groups of children or families. When you call around and express interest about what is offered near your community, you may be surprised at the many learning opportunities you may find.

Local colleges and universities. Taking young children and youth to tour campuses of colleges and universities gives them a sense of what college is like, as well as incentive to attend one day. Many colleges and universities also offer classes for children and youth on Saturdays and evenings.