



# 15 Ways to Address Nature-Deficit Disorder Anywhere, Anytime

*Nature-Deficit Disorder* is a term coined by Richard Louv in his 2005 book, “Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder.” It refers to the psychological, physical and cognitive consequences stemming from a lack of time in nature. Fortunately, it is really easy, and fun to address Nature-Deficit Disorder... so let’s get outside! We hope you enjoy sharing these experiences with the young people in your life. You don’t have to go far. Nature can be found right outside your back door or in your local park.

1. **Have a picnic together.** Grab a towel or blanket and enjoy lunch outside.
2. **Go cloud watching.** Look up—watch how fast the clouds are moving. Invite children to share what shapes they see in the clouds?
3. **Go bird watching.** Ask children how many different species they can find. The seek app by “iNaturalist” ([https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek\\_app](https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app)) is a great resource to help identify the species you see.
4. **Make a bird feeder and see all the different birds that visit it.** This can be as simple as collecting a few pine cones, slathering them with peanut butter, or shortening if nut allergies are a concern. Sprinkle with a bit of bird seed. Help children hang it from a branch or just set it outside a window.
5. **Plant a tree or some flowers together.** You can do a large project in your yard, or a small planting in a pot or two. Either way, planting is a great way to explore and care for nature.
6. **Dig up some worms.** Use a small shovel to dig up a patch of shady, moist soil. See what creepy, crawly critters you find. You’re likely to find worms, ants, grubs, potato bugs, and so many more. Kids will be amazed at all the creatures living below their feet. Be sure to return the soil and creatures to the hole you made.
7. **Make mud pies together.** Have fun squishing your fingers and toes in the mud. See how you can shape it. What can you add to it to make it more interesting?



*A youth excitedly shares the nature treasures he’s discovered.*

8. **Go on Nature Scavenger Hunts.** Search for nature right where you are. Use phones or inexpensive cameras to document findings. Sample searches might include:
  - a. elements of nature starting with each letter of the alphabet (ant, bug, caterpillar, dog, egg, flower, ...)
  - b. different categories of nature (insects, spiders, worm, beetle, mammals, plants, ...)
  - c. elements of nature in different colors (something blue, brown, green, ...)
  - d. shapes in nature (find a square, a rectangle, a triangle, ...)
9. **Collect leaves.** Ask youth how many different types of leaves they can find. Help them make leaf rubbings for a neat art display of their outdoor adventures.



Dr. Alan Leslie leads youth in a forest pest session.



Youth learn how to evaluate the health of the forest.

- 10. Grab a light colored towel or sheet.** Lay it on the ground under a bush. Shake the bush and see what falls on the sheet. (A hand lens would be a great addition here.)
- 11. Take a "Square Foot Adventure."** Find and mark a small patch of grass or soil, about 1 square foot in size. Lay down and look closely. What's living there?
- 12. Nature journaling.** Encourage youth to draw an element of nature that catches their eye, and to add a few descriptive words or phrases. Encourage youth to add to this each time they visit the outdoors.
- 13. Discover Art in Nature.** Go on a photo safari together. Invite youth to take pictures of the nature that catches their eye: interesting rocks, flowers, grasses, insects...
- 14. Play Outdoor Games together.**
  - a. Tag
  - b. Red Light, Green Light
  - c. Mother May I
  - d. Hide and Seek
  - e. Capture the Flag
- 15. Play Nature Bingo together.** There are hundreds if not thousands of Nature Bingo cards online, or you can make your own.

## For More Information

Lang, A. (2020, September). *Thriving Naturally in 4-H (FS-1148)*. University of Maryland Extension and the Department of 4-H and Youth Development. <https://extension.umd.edu/sites/extension.umd.edu/files/publications/Thriving%20Naturally%20in%204-H.pdf>

Louv, R. (2008). *Last child in the woods: saving our children from nature -deficit disorder*. Updated and expanded. Chapel Hill, NC, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill

Mass Audubon. (2020). *Explore the Outdoors with Nature Bingo* [Web page]. Retrieved from <https://www.massaudubon.org/places-to-explore/activities/family-fun/nature-play/nature-bingo-scavenger-hunts>

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*All photos by the author*

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