

NIGHT IN NATURE – IN SCHOOL OR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

HOW ABOUT SPENDING A NIGHT IN NATURE IN THE YARD OF YOUR OWN SCHOOL OR KINDERGARTEN?

You don't always have to go far, an overnight camping trip in the yard of your own school or kindergarten is certainly an experience! You could sleep in a tent, under a tarp or with older children even under the fir branches. The most important thing is to enjoy nature throughout the night.

A night in nature can be an experience that brings the whole group closer together. It helps to get to know each other better and to understand their point of view. In nature - especially preparing for an overnight camping trip - one can express strengths and skills that would not come up in regular classroom situations. In nature gender roles are equalized and a night in nature develops persistence, perseverance and self-reliance. It strengthens self confidence, when the children feel they've succeeded in something and manage the adventure together. A sense of community decreases bullying and unwanted behavior.





Staying in nature lowers heart rate, blood pressure and the level of cortisol (also known as "stress hormone"). Spending time in nature helps you to relax and forget your everyday worries. Finnish studies show that nature makes people feel happy. The natural environment also attracts movement, and in particular children's movement is more versatile in nature than in a built environment. Interaction with nature promotes the psychological, physiological and social well-being and health of people of all ages. According to research, young people say they can focus on learning better after nature experiences.

Time spent in nature also correlates with how confident we are about the future. In the goals of education and teaching, ecosocial approach to well-being pursues three values; responsibility, moderation and interpersonal skills. A night in nature and preparing for it increases meeting others as equals. The ability to listen to and interact with others increases. When practicing a variety of skills - while preparing for a shared adventure - tolerance for uncertainty, agency and participation increase. All of these skills are important when forming one's self image and defining what kind of global citizen they will be in the future.



GOOD PREPARATION IS THE KEY FOR A SUCCESSFUL ADVENTURE

Start by thinking about the following things:



TIMING OF THE TRIP

You should know your group well enough to ensure safety during the overnight camping. Autumn might be warm enough for sleeping outdoors, so if you are familiar with the group, it could be perfect timing. In the spring the class already knows and trusts each other - also the temperature may rise during the night time enough to make camping possible. Winter is not an easy choice for a night outdoors, but if you are familiar with winter camping, you might try this too.

THE GROUP SIZE AND NUMBER OF ADULTS NEEDED

How many children are there in the group? Can you get parents, school staff or other adults from local organizations to join? For example volunteers from local outdoor organizations, church or scouting groups may be willing to offer a helping hand.



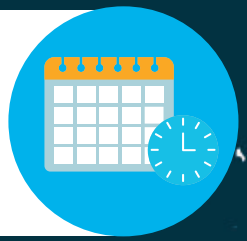


SAFETY PLAN AND RISK EVALUATION

It is necessary to evaluate the risks in advance and to familiarize yourself with the safety precautions. The actual safety plan can be made closer to the event. Knowing your group well is part of the safety planning: do you know the childrens' allergies and other possible support needs considering you will be spending a night outdoors? Check also the first aid kits and the first aid skills of all the adults involved.

DOCUMENTATION NEEDED FOR THE SCHOOL/ DAYCARE

Include the camping trip to the year plan and make sure the insurances are valid for this kind of action.



GEAR

Where could you lend tents or other accommodations? Do the families have them or could you lend them from local organizations (scouts, outdoor organizations)? In addition you will probably need extra sleeping bags and sleeping pads. Make sure to contact families and other possible partners in time to make sure you have everything you need.





LOCATION

Where could you spend the night outdoors? Is there a fireplace and toilets or do you need to figure out another solution for food and wc? Camping at the school yard is an easy option for getting water, going to the toilet etc.

THE JOURNEY IS OFTEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE DESTINATION

Preparation and practicing can be part of the fun in spending the night outdoors. Maybe the actual event can culminate the whole year of training. Could Night in Nature serve as an optional course or theme for the whole year? It could consist of getting to know the camping gear, familiarizing with safety issues and first aid, practicing setting up the tent, learning orienteering and navigation or preparing food outdoors. Inform the families about the themes you are practicing.



Ways to prepare for night in nature:

- Practice cooperation and interaction skills. An overnight camping trip can be an exciting experience, so social safety is an important aspect. Practice trust skills and do team building exercises.
- Day hikes offer mutual experiences that strengthen the sense of community and connection with nature. If possible, you should do more than one day hike with the group during the school year.
- Practice how to set up a tent and use other accommodations.
- Have a school day in a tent.
- Have a trip to nearby nature in the evening with parents or grandparents.
- Make a plan and schedule for the overnight event together with the children. What kind of activities do you want to include in the actual event (games, cooking, story times etc.)?
- Form a mutual contract for your overnight camping trip (who is responsible for what). These contracts should be signed both by children and their parents. Everyone should feel safe and have an encouraging attitude when they participate in the overnight camping trip, no one should be left alone.
- Share the duties and responsibilities in advance. Agree how you will take care of the breakfast etc.



BEFORE THE ACTUAL EVENT

LOCATION
Spending the night in tents near school or kindergarten is easier and not too exciting. It also makes it possible to get inside if the excitement gets too high.

MEALS
Prepare or book the meals and equipment needed. Good snacks are part of successful camping trip, so agree on what everyone is allowed to bring with them.



COMMUNICATION
Inform families about the overnight camping well in advance. You can find an example of a letter to home attached. In the letter you should tell about: what gear is needed: snacks, cutlery and plates, water bottle, seat pad, extra clothes, personal hygiene items, a small towel, accommodation and sleeping pack (if they have their own ones), head torch etc., schedule of the overnight trip, questions of responsibility: when are the parents responsible for the children, when are the teachers.

Remember to enjoy every moment

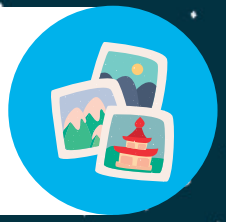
GROUPS
Form groups: who will spend the night in the same tent.

SAFETY
Remember to write an emergency plan and deliver the needed documents for the school or daycare. Check that you have the contact information for every child easily accessible. Go through the responsibilities and duties with all the adults involved. If some parents only take part in part of the program, agree what time they must be present and when they can leave.

TENTS
Check again you have the right amount of accommodations, sleeping bags and sleeping pads.



DOCUMENTATION
Document the camping by photos, videos and interviews with the children.



PROGRAM
Plan a mutual start and ending for the event.

HYGIENE
Think about the hygiene: make sure you have enough water, soap and hand towels. Practical tip: you can make useful small hand towels out of used bed sheets. Making them can be part of the preparation. Each child should have their own hand towel. This decreases the amount of waste and helps them to be hygienic.

What if someone can't sleep during the night or misses home? Having a safe adult as a companion and a hug is often needed at night time. Talk about nice things, listen to the voices of nature or tell small stories while eating something sweet. Staying up one night is not serious, as long as you can rest the next day.

EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK



Go through the learnings of night in nature together.

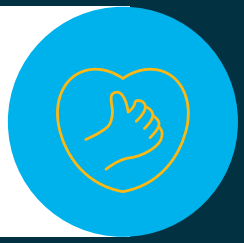
Write a story, make a movie or picture collage, podcast, blog post etc.





Have a feedback discussion with all the adults involved.

Remember to thank everyone who participated or made the event possible: parents, cooperating organizations, those who lended gear, supporting staff at school etc.



SOURCES

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ATTACHMENT

Example of a letter to families

Night in nature with group _____

Our overnight camping trip begins at ___ ____ o'clock. We will meet at _____ _____address).

Parent/guardian/supervisor of the child is welcome any time. We hope the parents staying overnight will join us ____ o'clock the latest.
To those going home in the evening we'll say goodbye at ____. If a parent or guardian is present, they have the full responsibility of their own child.
The whole family is welcome for the overnight camping trip.

We will serve soup for dinner for everyone around five - otherwise bring your own snacks (for evening bonfire and breakfast). To avoid using paperware please bring your own dishes and cutlery (spoon, knife, fork, cup and plate for soup).

It is possible to stay overnight. If you do so, please bring your own tent or other accommodation. If the weather is right, you can also sleep under the sky. If you don't have a tent of your own, please let us know. We have borrowed some tents from _____.

Remember to check your sleeping bag is suitable for the season and bring enough warm clothes for the night and day. Extra set of clothes is always a good idea. If you are unsecure what gear and clothes to bring we are happy to help.

What to pack:

- your own tent or other accommodation, if possible
- sleeping pad
- sleeping bag (check that it's suitable for the season)
- a pillow
- hat and warm socks for the night
- a little towel for washing hands
- toothbrush and other hygiene products
- personal medication
- warm clothes for the evening and night, extra set of clothes
- raingear, if needed
- warm shoes, suitable for the weather
- snacks (enough for the evening and breakfast)

Additional information: _____



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