

Principles and Goals of the Children and Nature Network 2008

To move forward, the children and nature movement is developing an evolving set of principles:

1. Parents and other guardians, as well as educators, health care professionals and other individuals responsible for the welfare of children, must know about the health, emotional and cognitive benefits of nature for children.
2. Parents and other positive adults must be intentional about taking children into nature; we cannot assume that the young will do this on their own – and, unlike the attitudes of previous generations, the prevailing concern about safety will require far more adult presence.
3. We must engage every sector of society, among them: parents, grandparents, and extended family members; developers, planners and architects; health care professionals; educators; farmers and ranchers; conservationists; government; businesses and more.
4. The benefits of the nature experience for children and families must be part of the international, national and community debates about the future of health care and public health, education, economics, and the health of natural ecosystems.
5. While action is needed by governments and specific institutions, the most powerful engines for change are multi-cultural, multi-sector, multi-disciplinary campaigns at the regional, state and local levels. (This is, after all, a place-based issue.)
6. We must identify focal points for the movement: nature centers; schools, PTAs and other parent groups; business; nearby nature, parks, and wilderness; national and international engines of the movement; national conservation organizations; national conferences; and a host of unlikely and non-obvious allies.
7. One size does not fit all. Each region and community has its own challenges and opportunities, ecologically, socially and economically. However, these regional and state campaigns and movements can and should learn from each other. Mechanisms must be created to encourage that communication.
8. While seeking cultural change, we must attend to design; for example, we must challenge current assumptions about urban and suburban planning and architecture. We must emphasize the value of nearby nature within urban regions, as well as more distant wilderness.
9. Effective use of technology must make the latest information about best practices as well as the most recent research about the relationships between children and nature available to anyone, anytime, anywhere in the world — from parents and their children, to businesses, to movement organizers, to educators and health care providers, and to policymakers in every field.
10. Successful communications will recognize the universal though fragile current appeal of the child-nature connection, while also appreciating the diversity of family backgrounds and neighborhoods. Institutions, organizations and individuals— especially those that have been working on this issue for many years — must be supported with better funding and moral support. The best way to accomplish this will be to bring new players to the table, broadening the funding base and increasing the number of informed allies.
11. We must begin where children, youth and parents are — physically, emotionally, socially, culturally, politically, and economically — as opposed to where the programs are. Creating cultural change works best when partnerships are established with young people and adults who are not now engaged in policy debates.
12. Beyond programs and legislation, our ultimate goal is deep cultural change, connecting children to nature, so that they can be healthier, happier and smarter.