



Winter Outdoor Learning Activities

It's getting colder and darker and there's a risk of snow. Christmas is on the horizon and soon we'll be celebrating a new year. It may seem like there is nothing going on outside, but there are still lots of opportunities to get out and learn with your children. Here are some great ideas to try with your little ones this winter. Just remember to wrap up warm – no one will feel like exploring with frozen fingers!

Go on a winter scavenger hunt. Make a list of things to find on your walk – examples include pine cones, nuts, seeds, acorns, holly leaves, moss, lichen and a leaf skeleton. Make it more challenging by specifying a colour, or introduce some maths by asking for something bigger or smaller.

If it's really cold outside, make some icy tree decorations. Bring the objects you found on your scavenger hunt home, and place them in different shaped containers, such as yoghurt pots. Fill the pots with water and insert a loop of string, then freeze until solid. Remove the objects from the pots and hang them outside on trees and bushes.

If you're lucky enough to have enough snow, go one step beyond the usual snowman and make another snow sculpture – perhaps an animal or a building. Alternatively, use cotton wool, sugar cubes, and granulated sugar on a black or blue background to make a snowy picture.

Make a funny face tree: Buy some clay from an art shop, then go for a walk through the woods. Find a suitable tree and, using your clay and other found materials such as pine cones, twigs, and pebbles, create a funny face for the tree. Photograph it and then leave it there for other people to enjoy! Remember to always be respectful of the environment and aware of risks to wildlife.

Gather some equal-sized blobs of snow. Put each in a different place – for example, outside, in the fridge, in the hall or next to a radiator (in suitable containers!). Predict which one will melt quickest/slowest and why. If you have no snow, use ice cubes or similar-sized ice balloons. Talk to your child about why the blobs of snow/lumps of ice need to be the same size (to make the test fair, as a larger lump of ice may take longer to melt).

Make ice balloons: Fill balloons with water and freeze them until they are solid. Add food colouring, sequins or glitter if you wish. Remove the balloon and then hide the balloons outside for your child to find. Once inside, or if the weather isn't suitable; ice balloons are great for science exploration. Try dripping paint, food colouring or salt onto the ice and see what happens.

When out and about, look for wildlife. Signs of wildlife might include dens or burrows, nibbled trees, droppings or even a sighting of an animal. Talk about animals that hibernate and discuss why they do this. Research animals you might see in winter, then go out again and see what you can spot.

As the snow falls, let your child try to catch a snowflake. Talk about how all snowflakes are unique, and find some magnified pictures to look at. Have a go at making your own snowflakes by folding a circle of white paper and cutting out sections. Decorate with glitter and display against a black background.

Decorate a pine cone: Collect some pine cones and place each either in a mini flower pot (available from garden centres) or onto a blob of playdough. Decorate the tree using beads, sequins, pipe cleaners, string and so on; secured with a blob of glue.