



# Childcare Matters

## Children Caring for the Planet

Newsletter 101  
Provider Edition  
April 2007

*This Month's Theme:  
Caring for Our Planet*

*Even preschool children can learn to be respectful of our planet. You just have to start with things they're familiar with in their homes and yards.*

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April 21

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Caring for Children with  
Asthma and Allergies

Being environmentally sensitive is something children can learn from the adults around them. We can begin making them more aware by the actions we take in our homes. Start by having them learn to respect those things the earth provides for us and help them make a connection between themselves and the planet. Couple that with teaching them the good habits they need to keep the earth clean, beginning in your own backyard or local park.

On January 30, 2007, scientists gathered in Paris and released reports to convince the general public that global warming is a real danger. However, the effects of global warming are far too frightening to teach to preschoolers. Teach them to be more environmentally sensitive and as they grow they will understand that they are the caretakers of the earth and will act accordingly. The following are four basic themes that preschoolers can relate to.

### Connect Children to the Earth

The best way to keep children connected to the earth is by allowing them the freedom to enjoy the outdoors and by gardening. Being

outside allows them to discover the wonders of Mother Nature. While field trips are fun, children can make great discoveries in your backyard or a nearby park. Let them dig in the dirt, touch the flowers and grass and hang on a tree limb. Make a bird feeder and invite nature into your yard. Growing fruits and vegetables



allows children to experience the true circle of life. They can plant the seeds, harvest the plants, save the new seeds, mulch the food scraps, feed the earth with the mulch and plant the seeds again. (See page three for more information.)

These are long term projects that can have educational value for children and help heal the planet.

## Help Children Understand Our Dependence on the Earth

We can take the lessons of this month's theme, *Caring for Our Planet*, and expand them to teach children that we are dependent on the earth. As children grow closer to school age, expand your curriculum through great science, literature, field trips and projects to explain to children how the sun and rain contribute to our food source and the health of our bodies. They can begin to understand that the circle of life that gives us food also gives us air to breathe and water to drink. As time progresses they will start to understand that we should care for the earth because the cycles of the earth support our life.

## Teach Children How to Keep the Earth Clean

The basics of keeping our space clean are:

1. Do not litter.
2. Learn to recycle.

Young children can easily learn these habits. When you're out with the children, make sure they throw their trash in appropriate containers. At home put large labels on your recycling cans and have the children use them. Toddlers love to sort. Let them help you clear the table and put things in appropriate cans. When you deliver your recyclables to the recycling center, bring the children with you so they can see what happens to it there.

## Teach Them to Be Good Citizens

Learning good citizenship is something that grows over time but begins very early when you invite

the children to participate in daily activities. Clean up time should always be a group effort. Children can learn to help put plates on the table and help one another. It's very important that you not give children rewards for accomplishing these tasks. They receive an inner reward from knowing they are important cogs in this big wheel that keeps turning. Let them know their contributions are needed.

One of the best ways to teach children to be more environmentally responsible is to act as a model. The following are things you can do that are very visible. You can find more information on changes you can make in your home from the sources at the end of the story.

*Turn off appliances, lights, computers and TVs when not in use.*

*Turn off the water when brushing your teeth.*

*Recycle as much as your town allows.*

*Unplug anything you're not using.*

*Plant a tree.*

*Bring your children to buy locally grown produce at farm markets. Bring canvas bags instead of using paper.*

*Buy fresh foods instead of frozen. Frozen food takes ten times the energy to produce.*

*Eat less meat. Cows are one of the greatest producers of methane gas, which scientists believe damages the ozone.*

*Drive less. Walk more. It's good for everyone.*

This is a short list of the things you can do that will begin to form good environmental habits in your children. As your children grow, they can begin to observe how you make shopping decisions. Your consumer vote is extremely powerful. Car companies are producing alternative energy vehicles, not because it's kind, but because consumers are purchasing them. Let children in on the process when you make consumer choices. They'll follow your lead and be better stewards of the earth than we've been in the past.

## Great Books for Adults

**An Inconvenient Truth**  
by Al Gore

**50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth**  
by The Earthworks Group

**Clean and Green: The Complete Guide To Non-toxic and Environmentally Safe Housekeeping**  
by Annie Berthold-Bond

# Theme Activities

## Caring for Our Planet

### Earthly Literature

#### **The Great Kapok Tree** by Lynne Cherry

The Kapok Tree stands regally in the middle of the Amazon Rain Forest. One day a man comes to cut down the tree. While working he grows tired and lies down for a nap. In his dreams all the creatures of the forest come to him to explain their connection and dependence on the tree. The illustrations are lush with greenery and the animals detailed and realistic in a gentle way that will be attractive to children. When the man awakens, he sees the images he has dreamed about and decides to leave the tree as it is. (ages 3 - 7)

#### **One Less Fish** by Kim Michelle Toft

Children who are fascinated by the ocean will enjoy this nonfiction counting book that helps them understand the greatness and fragility of our Great Barrier Reefs. "Ten dainty clown fish wondering where to dine. People started drilling. Now there are nine." Each set of facing pages has a number with the rhyming text and a scientific explanation for how human activity affects the reef. Those under three will enjoy counting the colorful fish. Older preschoolers will understand how what we do on the land can affect our oceans. (ages 2 - 8)

#### **Our Big Home: An Earth Poem** by Linda Glaser

Captivating, smiling children and animals celebrate all the wonders of the earth. There is no sadness or mention of destruction but a celebration of the things we all share like the sun, moon and the air we breathe. This is a perfect choice for sensitive toddlers who should be focusing on what we can do instead of what we don't do. The illustrations proclaim happiness, a powerful message to pass down to toddlers. (ages 1 - 7)

#### **The Lorax** by Dr. Seuss

The message of the Lorax has now become universal. Published in 1971, Dr. Seuss raised quite a few eyebrows with his message of wasteful consumption. Today, we know he was way ahead of his time. The "Seussical" rhyme is a pleasure to read aloud. The little Lorax with his big personality is easy to relate to as he tries to save the Truffula Trees, the food source for the Bar-ba-lots. (all ages)

### The Children's Garden

Children are natural gardeners. They love digging in the dirt and being outside. Vegetable gardening lets them do what they already love, connects them with our food source and helps them understand our dependence on the earth. The following are particular plants that lend themselves to this lesson.

**1. Plants with large visible seeds help children understand the concept of the seed producing a plant and then the plant producing its own seed.** These include pumpkins, squash, sunflowers, cucumbers, beans and peas. All these plants grow quickly and will bear edible fruit with large seeds the same season they are planted. They grow best in the soil in a sunny location, but can be grown in large pots placed in a sunny spot.

**2. Leafy greens that grow quickly.** This includes all lettuce, spinach, kale and other greens. Some of these can be started early in Spring and be ready to eat by early Summer. These can be grown in large pots, if yard space is unavailable.

**3. Natural herbs you can pick leaves from throughout the season and still leave the plant growing.** Basil, oregano, thyme and mint all grow quickly and can be used in your favorite recipes.

Find a space in your yard or on your patio to grow your plants, allowing the children to do most of the digging and watering. Use organic plant foods. They are healthier for your yard and safer for the children.\*

Keep a journal of what's happening with your garden and include pictures as the seeds sprout until they're ready to harvest. Dry the seeds and use them again. This, like so many other educational activities, is long term with many opportunities to spin off other activities from farm field trips to cooking to the production of your journal at the end of the harvest season. Use your imagination. The goal is to make the connection between the earth that feeds the plants to the plants that feed us. Whenever you can, include your garden as you design your curriculum over the seasons.

\*Please note that even organic plant foods contain concentrated elements and can be dangerous. Keep them on a high shelf, so you can always supervise when plants need feeding.

# Celebrate Earth Day

## Banana Slug String Band

These award-winning CDs and DVDs teach children about caring for the environment through music and dance. Songs like “Dirt Made My Lunch” help children understand their dependence on the earth, while “Solar Energy Shout” introduces them to new vocabulary that will help them understand environmental issues. While these are written for children, there has been no lack of attention to the quality of the music. The whole family will enjoy listening to them. They’re available at Amazon.com or [www.bananaslugstringband.com](http://www.bananaslugstringband.com) on the products page.



## A Clean Place To Be

Let’s never drop  
papers or wrappers.  
*(Shake your head  
“NO”)*  
A garbage can’s  
where they should be.  
Let’s use and reuse  
and recycle.  
*(Roll your hands.)*  
Let’s make earth a  
clean place to be!

Beverly Qualheim

## One Light, One Sun by Raffi from Evergreen, Everblue: An Ecology Album

One light, one sun,  
One sun lighting everyone.  
One world turning,  
One world turning everyone.

One world, one home,  
One world home for everyone.  
One dream, one song,  
One song heard by everyone.

One love, one heart,  
One heart warming everyone.  
One hope, one joy,  
One love filling everyone.  
One light, one sun,  
One sun lighting everyone.  
One light warming everyone.

## This Land Is Your Land by Woodie Guthrie

I’ve included the chorus and two verses to this classic folk song, which is enough for preschoolers. If you want the full lyrics, they are widely available on the web or in your library.

### **Chorus**

*This land is your land, this land is my land.  
From California, to the New York Island,  
From the redwood forest, to the gulf stream waters,  
This land was made for you and me.*

As I was walking a ribbon of highway,  
I saw above me an endless skyway,  
I saw below me a golden valley.  
This land was made for you and me.

### **Repeat Chorus**

The sun came shining as I was strolling,  
The wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling.  
The fog was lifting, a voice come chanting,  
This land was made for you and me.

# More Earth Day Activities

## Bird Seed Balls

1 lb. of flour  
1 lb. of cornmeal  
1 lb. of shortening or suet  
½ lb. peanut butter  
1 lb. bird seed mix.

Melt the lard or suet. Add the peanut butter. Cool the mixture until it can be handled. Allow the children to mix in the dry ingredients. Form the mixture into balls. Wrap the string around the balls approximately 4 times leaving 1 foot at the end. Use the loose end to tie to a branch.

## Rainy Day Activities

April showers bring May flowers. So how about a rainy day movie or a game with a message. The following are family movies that all have an environmental theme. All but Happy Feet, still in theatres at the writing of this story, are available to rent now. Happy Feet will be available in the near future.

### Happy Feet

### Fern Gully

### The Lorax

### A Bug's Life

### Antz

### Finding Nemo

### The Wild Thornberrys

### Cooperative Board Game

**A Beautiful Place** - Planet earth has been damaged. Can the players work together to help clean it up before it's enveloped by a big pollution cloud. Ages 5 - 9  
Available at [www.ecotoytown.com](http://www.ecotoytown.com)

## From Garbage to Art

### A Cooperative Recycling Project

We've all recycled aluminum, tin, cardboard and glass, but what about recycling other trash and turning it into art. Explain to the children that you're going to place a box by the trash for things they can glue on paper. Include a lid so you can supervise what goes in the box. Anything that is dry and pastable is acceptable. Packaging will be a major contributor. Make the children aware as they unwrap their snacks that there is something left behind and discuss whether it should go in the box. Take



any larger packaging and cut it into pieces. Your junk mail will also make a great contribution. Gift wrap and dried flowers will also work. The process of collecting the scraps and then pasting them on paper encourages the children to be aware of reusing rather than tossing things in the trash.

## Earth Day 2007 Saturday, April 21 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Come out and celebrate nature on this nationally recognized day dedicated to our very own planet, EARTH! Activities include a live honeybee demonstration, nature walks, a composting demonstration, canoeing, kayaking, container gardening, fishing, music and more. Don't miss the many activity sites and information tables of local environmental groups, outdoor enthusiasts, and other earth-minded organizations working in our bioregion. Snacks and refreshments included.

Cost: Free all day and open to the public.

Location: Essex County  
Environmental Center, Roseland

## Earth Day in Newark Friday, April 20, 1 pm

Newark will be the national story on Earth Day. On Friday, April 20th, 42,000 students will get out of school one hour early to fulfill a historic learning mission. Media from around the state and nation will watch as Newark's students "own" specific street segments near their school, pick up litter, plant a million flowers citywide, and fulfill the mission of a more beautiful Newark. All adults, companies, faith-based institutions are invited to join and help the young people plant a million flowers on this historic day. Your Family Child Care Center can join the event. Show your children how to be part of their greater community.

## You Asked?

Send your questions to  
FCCservices@programsforparents.org and  
we may answer them in the newsletter.

### What's an open-ended activity?

Open-ended activities are projects and play-times that don't have an expected end result. The following chart shows you the difference between an open-ended activity and a results-oriented activity.

Open Ended	Results Oriented
The caregiver tells the children there are paper and pencils out so they can write notes.	The caregiver gives the children letters to trace over.
The caregiver announces it's block time and takes the blocks out for the children to play	The caregiver requests that the children go to the block corner and build a play house.
The caregiver lays an assortment of red, white and pink paper on the table after reading a story about Valentines day.	The caregiver displays a Valentine and then gives the children the supplies to make one.

Open-ended activities are used when designing curriculum for toddlers and preschoolers for a number of reasons.

1. They encourage the children to exercise their creativity rather than copy something that's already been done.
2. They encourage social interaction and group cooperation. Children playing in the block corner will cooperate and come up with their own designs. Children told to build something will focus on the correct outcome that will please the authority figure.
3. Young children very often don't have the ability to produce something they see and become disillusioned. Allowing them to create without comparing it to others' creations keeps the focus on the process, rather than the outcome.

#### Read More About This Subject:

Preschool Art: It's the Process, Not the Product by MaryAnn Kohl

## Education and Conferences

**NJAEYC Conference**

**Health in Child Care Conference**

May 30th, 2007

Doubletree Hotel, Somerset NJ

Go to: [www.njaeyc.org](http://www.njaeyc.org) for updated information

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