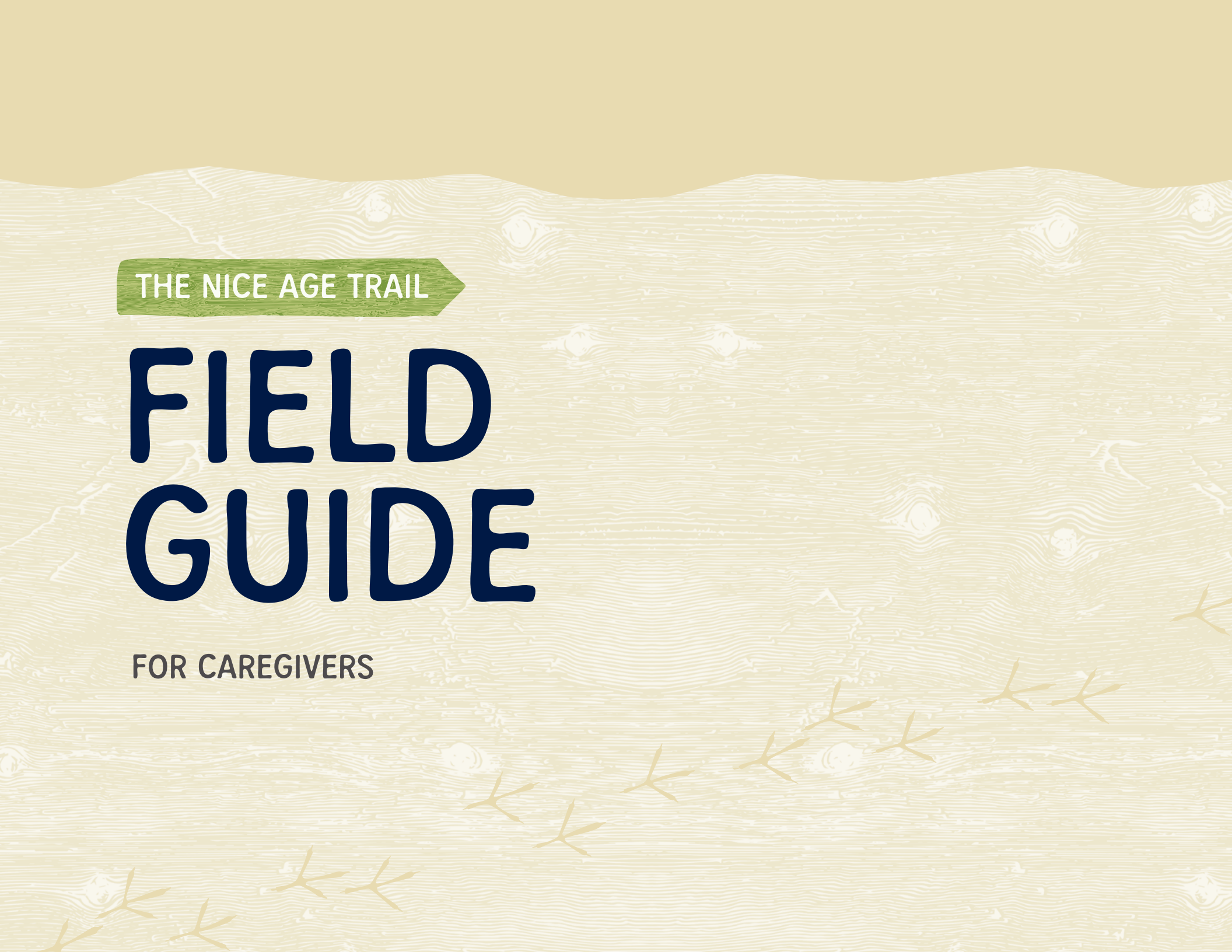




THE NICE AGE TRAIL

FIELD GUIDE

FOR CAREGIVERS



Be kind to all kinds.

Creating a bright vision for the future is crucial for young children growing up in a warming climate. We need to show them a future where there is enough for everyone, we help one another, and we respect all who share our planet. The Nice Age Trail offers age-appropriate activities that spark wonder, help children flourish, and inspire hope and collective action. Together, we can become great caregivers for our children and their future.

The Nice Age Trail is like a younger sibling to the Ice Age Trail, which stretches 1,200 miles through Wisconsin's forests and prairies.

The trail messages are based upon the mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum developed by the Center for Healthy Minds and Dr. Richard J. Davidson. They are also supported by the Caretakers of Wonder network's Climate Action Playbook for young learners and their caregivers.

Learning to pause and pay attention is an important skill for everyone, especially children. Strengthening “attention muscles” allows us to focus on things and switch away from distractions or worries when necessary. This builds resilience and helps us handle life’s challenges more easily.



A is for Attention

Ask your child to describe the water flea’s color, texture, and movement. Listen carefully.

Try noticing five things that are red wherever you are and make a list together.

Read The Fog by Kyo Maclear, a gorgeous picture book about noticing, paying attention, and connecting with others. Or try What Does It Mean to Be Present? by Rana DiOrio, a first step to mindfulness for children.



B is for Breathe

Ask your child to breathe together with you.

Try thinking of someone you love on an in-breath and sending your love to them on the out-breath.

Read Alphabreaths Too: More ABCs of Mindful Breathing by Christopher Willard & Daniel Rechtschaffen and practice playful breathing techniques together.

Learning mindful breathing helps us all manage stress. Starting these practices at a young age helps children develop self-care habits to ease discomfort. You can help your child by suggesting they take a deep breath and count to five when they are upset.

Learning to care for animals and plants helps children build empathy, compassion, and a connection to nature. Foster empathy by helping your child care for small animals, insects, and plants, and by recognizing caring behaviors in your child or others. Look for opportunities to show kindness wherever you go. This could be picking up litter, helping a neighbor, or giving up a seat on the bus to someone who needs it.



C is for Caring

Ask your child to sing a favorite lullaby to a family member.

Try noticing one caring action your child does each day. When you visit the zoo, park, or forest, observe caring behaviors in the animals.

Read [You Nest Here with Me](#) by Jane Yolen and Heidi E.Y. Stemple, a beautiful book about how different birds create safe cozy spaces for their babies. Or read [Shadow the Sandhill Crane](#) by Hazel Keays Northey, about how even young children can help care for cranes or other animals in the wild.



D is for Delight

Ask your child to describe one delightful thing about themselves.

Try finding one thing that delights you and your child in the next minute. Or share with your child something that made you happy today.

Read [The Caterpillar and the Polliwog](#) by Jack Kent, a charming picture book about friendship and change that will delight both children and adults.

Nature is full of wonders. Finding and sharing delight in small things like the beauty of a pinecone, a snowflake, or patterns in clouds helps kids' brains develop. Sharing moments of genuine delight with our children strengthens our bonds and their brains. Experiencing and expressing real joy can be infectious and keeps kids motivated and relationships strong.

Pretend play helps children explore emotions and different roles safely and learn that feelings change. You can help kids express and understand their emotions by reminding them that everyone experiences different feelings, which don't last forever. Time in nature can also generate positive emotions, like calmness, joy, and creativity.



E is for Emotions

Ask your child to name one person outside the family who makes them happy.

Try playing emotion charades, taking turns acting out and guessing emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, and fear.

Read Visiting Feelings by Lauren Rubenstein, a book that encourages children to explore and accept their feelings. Or try The Boy with Big, Big Feelings by Britney Winn Lee and Jacob Souva and discuss the different emotions the main character experiences compared to your own.



F is for Forgiveness

Ask your child if they have ever been upset at themselves or someone else and how they dealt with it.

Try forgiving yourself for a past mistake and notice how it lightens your heart.

Read Beneath by Cori Doerrfeld, a story about a young boy named Finn who learns about changing emotions while on a walk through the woods with his grandfather.

Encouraging children to forgive themselves and others helps them bounce back from mistakes and tough times. It feels good to let go of grudges and encourages kindness toward others.

Seeing and feeling gratitude every day builds resilience and kindness in children. Practicing gratitude and teaching children to say thank you sets a foundation for a happy life. When you focus on what you are grateful for, you feel more relaxed, fulfilled, and more connected to others. Expressing gratitude also gives children voice for positive change.



G is for Gratitude

Ask each other what you are thankful for about your time spent together.

Try saying thank you to everyone who helps you today and notice how good it feels.

Read Winter's Gifts by Kaitlin B. Curtice, a joyful celebration of nature, family, and gratitude. Or try The Winter Bird by Kate Banks, a heartwarming story of forest animals helping one another and being thankful.



H is for Help

Ask your child how they can assist the family.

Try creating a Helping Jar. Each time your child helps with a task, add a gem or rock to the jar. When the jar is full, choose a favorite activity to do together or visit a new park.

Read I Am a Beaver by Paul Covello, a board book that follows a beaver family working together to build their lodge. For older kids, read The Beavers' Busy Year by Mary Holland to learn why beavers are known for their industriousness and how much they help one another with their work.

Encouraging children to be helpful fosters a sense of belonging and connection, both vital for a happy and fulfilling life. Support your child's desire to help by assigning them simple tasks to choose from at home, such as sweeping, folding laundry, watering plants, or feeding pets. And remember, it's OK if their work isn't perfect.

Children have a natural gift for imagination and creativity, which can be nurtured by simple activities like finding joy in a passing cloud formation. Imaginative play not only fosters character and self-expression but also helps adults understand how they see the world. When caregivers understand children's perspectives, they can better support them, help them dream, and shape the future they envision.



I is for Imagine

Ask your child to imagine and describe what it would feel like to fly among the clouds. What sounds do they hear? What do they see from above?

Try lying down outside with your child, watching the clouds drift by, and letting your imagination run free.

Read [Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs](#) by Judi Barrett and talk about how fantastical adventures and using imagination can be delightful!



J is for Joy

Ask yourself what brings you joy. As adults, we often prioritize others' needs, so ensure you find moments of delight every day too!

Try being silly just for fun. Put on some music, dance with your children, and show your kids that adults like to have fun too.

Read [This Joy!](#) by Shelley Johannes, a lively picture book celebrating the joy found in life's simple moments and the importance of embracing each day as a gift.

Embracing joy, laughter, and fun not only feels good but also improves our well-being regardless of our age or circumstances. Joy reduces anxiety, enhances learning, and encourages children to try new things. Research shows that when we feel happy, we're more likely to step out of our comfort zones. Take time every day to invite joy in, share laughter, smile, and appreciate the little things.

Teaching children to see themselves as part of a larger community by considering all living beings as kin helps instill respect for nature. Encourage this mindset daily by discussing our interconnected family. Point out the beauty of a flower, the strength of a tree trunk, or the gracefulness of birds. These gentle touches and reminders of our relationships with other species nurture caring for our interconnected family and Earth.



K is for Kinship

Ask the children in your care to find one similarity between themselves and trees. Discuss what they have in common.

Try finding out names of the plants and animals in your community, or give them nicknames or kinship names, like Sister Tree or Friend Tree.

Read Who Am I? by Julie Buchholtz, a touching picture book from an Indigenous perspective that explores connections to ancestors, Earth, and each other, showing how we can help and add beauty to the world. Or read Can You Hug a Forest? by Frances Gilbert, which celebrates nature's beauty and encourages mindfulness, gratitude, and love for the environment.



L is for Listening

Ask the children in your care to name three sounds they hear right now.

Try playing telephone and notice how people interpret sounds differently and how meanings can change.

Read Listen by Holly M. McGhee, a delightful story that gently encourages young readers to listen to their heart, pay attention, and show love and empathy. Or read The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld, a story about managing turbulent emotions and the importance of thoughtful listening.

Active listening builds awareness, trust, and connection with others. It is the most effective way to build bridges and show that you care. Model good listening by asking questions and being patient. Practice this skill with your child through listening games like telephone or “story chain,” and by tuning in to the sounds of nature.

Pretending to be or moving like another animal, even for a moment, helps build empathy toward creatures unlike us. This is one of the first steps toward caring about the Earth and its many inhabitants. And active movement and pretend play stimulate brain development and promote healthy habits.



M is for Move

Ask your child to pretend they're a deer, a bear, or even a pine tree.

Try mindful movements that mimic plants and animals. Arch your back like a cat, stand tall like a tree, or sway gently like a blade of grass.

Read Move! by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page, which follows animals as they swing, float, dance, leap, and slide across the pages. Or read Seeds Move! by Robin Page to learn how animals help seeds move from place to place.



N is for Neighbor

Ask your child what qualities make a good neighbor.

Try naming as many animal or human neighbors as you can together.

Read The Circles All Around Us by Brad Montague, a heartwarming story that explores ways to create bigger and bigger circles of community and connection. Or try Finding Wild by Megan Wagner Lloyd, a poetic picture book that celebrates discovering the wild in urban neighborhoods.

Neighbors rely on each other for protection, assistance, and support. Expanding our understanding of neighbors to include people, plants, and animals helps children see our interspecies relationships more clearly. Feeling a sense of neighborliness fosters connection and community.

Trees host a variety of species who make good neighbors and depend on each other for survival.

See what catches your child's attention and encourage them to look carefully and describe what they see. Developing observation skills boosts cognitive abilities like critical thinking, attention to detail, and problem solving. These skills lay the groundwork for better decision-making, improved communication, and innovation in future years.



O is for Observe

Ask the child in your care to name five things they notice about an object they see (e.g., its color, shape, texture, material).

Try engaging in citizen science with your family by participating in projects like Great Backyard Bird Count or Project Squirrel. Both are ideal for kids and beginner citizen scientists.

Read Ruby's Birds by Mya Thompson, a captivating tale about a girl who discovers the wild side of her urban neighborhood and becomes a keen birdwatcher. Or try Noticing by Kobi Yamada, a book about paying attention and noticing big things, little things, imaginary things, and even hidden things.



P is for Pause

Ask your child to let you know when they need to take a break.

Try making a calming mind jar at home.
You just need a jar, glycerin, glitter, and some dish soap.

Read The Calm Down Jar by Jennifer Jones, a rhyming book that explores learning helpful ways to calm down.

Pausing is powerful.
It helps children learn to manage their emotions and control their actions. Practicing pausing teaches patience, self-control, and an understanding of emotions. It also helps in learning how to get along with others, especially when dealing with problems. Adults can benefit too. Pausing makes life less stressful and more peaceful.

Children need quiet environments to help their brains develop. Taking breaks in quiet helps kids relax and stay grounded. Being silent lets you and your child pay attention to everything around you.

The constant stream of distracting media in our lives makes this extra challenging, but even more important.



Q is for Quiet

Ask your child where they like to go when they want to be quiet.

Try spending time outdoors to reduce screen time and connect with nature. Note how it feels.

Read Owl Moon by Jane Yolen, a hope-filled story of a little girl and her father who go owling in the silence of winter and find peace in the quiet of nature.



R is for Root

Ask for help from friends and neighbors when you need it.

Try planting flowers together in a small container. Or try growing perennial plants outdoors if you have space. Join families with similar interests or join a play group at a museum, library, or community center.

Read [The Story of the Root Children](#) by Sibylle von Olfers. This is a classic story of root children living underground among tree roots through each season. Or try [Listen to the Language of Trees](#) by Tera Kelley to explore the network of creatures who live and support one another underground.

Having deep, strong roots helps us stay grounded, connected, and resilient during challenging times.

The deep roots of long-living prairie plants help them find food, interact with other prairie life to return nutrients to soil, and hold water during dry spells. An incredible community of insects, bacteria, and other beings all live underground and support each other, making themselves and the plants stronger.

We all need help with life's many challenges. Building community with others can support us when we're struggling and make kids feel like they belong. We can also help our environment by planting prairie plants or joining others to create positive change in our communities.

Kids learn to share by taking turns when they play, talk, or explore. You can help by praising good turn-taking and fairness. Children can practice sharing space with others by reading together or taking turns telling stories. Sharing takes time to learn, so don't worry if they seem selfish at first.



S is for Share

Ask the children you are with to share their favorite animal story.

Try writing down a story that your child tells and sharing it back with them later.

Read Mushroom in the Rain by Mirra Ginsburg, a story about soggy animals sharing shelter in the rain. Or try Sweetgrass by Theresa Meuse, a book about caring for the gifts of Mother Earth. Or read Brave Like the Buffalo by Melissa Allan, an inspiring book about braving the storms of life with strong support systems and a courageous mindset.



T is for Teamwork

Ask your child which household-task team they want to join, like laundry folding, sweeping, or emptying the dishwasher.

Try working together with others on projects that benefit everyone, like cleaning a park, starting a community garden, or sharing childcare.

Read Up the Creek by Nicholas Oldland, about a bear, a moose, and a beaver who cooperate to get their canoe home safely. Or try It Starts With a Bee by Aimee Gallagher to learn more about how bees help other creatures along their pollination journey.

Working together as a team shows that everyone can use their strengths to help out, no matter their skills or interests. Encourage your child to become a good team player by giving them small jobs at home, which will help them grow in confidence.

Bees are a great example of teamwork, especially in our changing climate. They work together to survive and thrive. Bees help plants reproduce by pollinating flowers, and in return, plants give bees food for their hive.

Teaming up with others is important for tackling climate change. You can consider joining a carpool, cleaning up a neighborhood, or sharing clothing or equipment with others.

Working together helps us accomplish big things, stay safe, and save energy. When we come together as one, we can accomplish amazing things. Talk with your child about times when you have worked with others toward a goal at home, work, or in your community. It is hard to solve big problems alone, but when many people work together it becomes easier and even enjoyable.



U is for Unite

Ask your child what makes them feel like they belong in school or with friends.

Try joining a group that supports a cause you care about, like a family group, community group, or environmental group.

Read We Are Better Together by environmentalist Bill McKibben, an inspiring book celebrating the power of human cooperation in addressing climate change and the beauty of life on Earth. Or read Going Home: The Mystery of Animal Migration by Marianne Berkes to learn about animals' incredible journeys across the Earth.



V is for Voice

Ask your child to tell you something nice about a person they know.

Try calling the kindergarten PepToc Hotline at West Side Elementary School in California to see how one group of kids spread kindness with their voices, 707-873-7862.

Read [My Voice Is a Trumpet](#) by Jimmie Allen, a lyrical celebration showing that everyone's voice matters and that children are never too young to express what they believe in.

Show your child the power of using your voice for good. Spread goodness in simple ways each day: with a smile, a kind gesture, or a caring comment. You can also use your voice to advocate for important causes through voting, talking with others, or writing letters to express your concerns to leaders.

Our survival depends upon healthy air, water, and soil, shared by all. Interconnectedness is a foundational idea of environmental science and lays the groundwork for understanding how systems in nature work. Understanding how everything is connected helps instill a sense of responsibility to care for and protect the Earth and all its inhabitants.



W is for Web

Ask your child how a bird might help a tree, and how a tree might help a squirrel.

Try adopting a tree in your neighborhood. Encourage your child to notice its trees and bark, give it a hug, draw pictures, and tell stories about it.

Read [The Invisible Web](#) by Patrice Karst, an uplifting book that celebrates the infinite bonds of humanity and the ways we are all connected to each other.



X is for eXhale

Ask your child to take one deep breath whenever they feel frustrated.

Try exhaling slowly and audibly, making a sound. Notice how it feels.

Read Breathe Like a Bear by Kira Willey, a beautiful collection of mindfulness exercises to help kids feel calm, focused, and energized wherever they are.

Encourage children to take deep breaths to show kindness to themselves, an important aspect of self-care. Being a caregiver is challenging too, so be kind to yourself. You've got this!

Approaching each day with optimism and a willingness to try new things fosters resilience in children, empowering them to tackle new challenges with confidence. Encourage your child to adopt an open, positive mindset by supporting them in trying new activities. Celebrate their efforts, regardless of the outcome. Stepping outside our comfort zones, no matter our age, helps us grow and have fun.



Y is for Yes!

Ask your child to name one thing they have never done but would like to try.

Try doing something you have never done before, just for yourself.

Read The Thing Lou Couldn't Do by Ashley Spires, and watch Lou face her fears, fail, and become empowered by her efforts. Or try Brave Irene by William Steig, a timeless tale of courage and determination as a young girl overcomes obstacles to help her mother.

Z

Zzzz is for sleep

Ask another parent for tips if you have trouble getting your child to sleep.

Try creating a regular bedtime routine, like reading a book together, looking for a star in the sky, singing a lullaby, or sharing whispered secrets.

Read Bear Snores On by Karma Wilson, a delightful book about a bear who snores and can't seem to get enough sleep.

Children need lots of sleep to grow up healthy and strong. Good sleep enhances concentration, problem-solving abilities, and creativity by promoting optimal brain function. Establishing nighttime routines such as reading, singing, and limiting screen time can help children unwind and drift off to sleep peacefully.

