

Take a sensory walk

Now that the snow seems safely behind us, it's time to explore the great outdoors. A sensory walk is a wonderful way to help children engage with the outdoors, boosting their knowledge of their senses as well as their imaginations. Focus on what they can see, hear, smell and touch.

Start by asking your child to describe 3 things they see - one on the ground, one at eye level, and one above eye level. Guess what they see based on their description. Once they've mastered this game, focus on sound. Can they hear a nature sound like leaves rustling in the wind or a brook babbling? Are there live sounds like a bird chirping? What about a man-made sound like a car or airplane in the distance? Smells are often harder to notice because they are so localized. Have your child smell pine needles or wet grass. If your child can handle touching natural objects, try to find things of different textures like smooth rocks, rough sticks, a spider's web.

You can go on a sensory walk in your own backyard or around the block, but there are wonderful local places to explore as well. Here are a few to get you started:

The [South Mountain Reservation](#) offers more than 2000 acres to explore, including a 25-foot waterfall at Hemlock Falls. For a simpler nature exploration, park on Brookside Drive near the PaperMill Playhouse and watch fisherman casting and wading in the "river"!

The [Reeves-Reed Arboretum](#) in nearby Summit offers trails, gardens, a fish pond, and a variety of children's programs.

And for older kids: explore the [West Essex Interpretive Trail](#), part of the Essex County Environmental Center.