



## Core Beliefs and Guiding Principles

*Green Hearts is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to restoring and strengthening the bonds between children and nature. Our commitment is based on the following beliefs and principles.*

### **Kids and Conservation Values**

- Nature holds an innate attraction for most children.
- Nature can be a friend, a cherished recreational resource, a source of emotional comfort, and an inspiration to children and adults who are comfortable in it.
- Frequent, unstructured outdoor play in natural settings during childhood has been shown to be the most common influence on the development of life-long conservation values.
- The conservation achievements of current and past generations will endure only if future generations have a strong passion for nature and the commitment to conservation practices that such passion typically creates.
- In order to grow in size and future influence, the conservation movement must ensure that children bond with nature during their early years, thus providing a vital foundation for later cognitive learning about our natural resources and how to use them wisely.
- Cognitive learning about ecology remains an essential part of creating an environmentally literate society, but the impacts of this learning are not likely to endure through adulthood unless they are layered atop a deep personal affection for nature that is best acquired in childhood.

### **Children's Outdoor Play**

- Active outdoor play is good for kids and is an important, memorable part of a healthy childhood.
- Play environments that offer frequent changes, imaginative play opportunities, endlessly re-arrangeable "loose parts" and other versatile components are better than fixed play structures.
- Active outdoor play is physically, emotionally, and cognitively more valuable for children than is passive, indoor electronic play.

## Children's Outdoor Play, *continued*

- Children value quiet, secluded outdoor spaces as much as active outdoor features, and the influence of this type of quiet "nature play" is equal to more active nature experiences.
- Individual outdoor play helps develop and encourage creativity, self-awareness, thinking, reflection, patience, and observation.
- Social outdoor play helps develop sharing, cooperation, teamwork, taking turns, consideration of others, story telling, and competition.
- Dirt, mud, water and vegetation can be great playthings, and frequent exposure to them can help develop a child's immune system.
- Developing a routine of active, physical outdoor play during childhood helps to establish exercise as a fun and engaging activity, and thus is a valuable step towards overcoming the obesity epidemic in American children.

## Early Childhood Development

- During the early childhood years, social, emotional, and physical development is just as important as intellectual development for school readiness and later personal success.
- Child-centered, discovery-based, concrete learning is more age-appropriate for the early childhood years than is drill, memorization, abstract thinking, and test-based instruction.
- Unscheduled, self-determined free play is just as important for a child's development as is organized and structured play.
- Gradually increasing independence in play choices is a vital part of growing up.
- Learning to recognize, assess, and overcome physical challenges, fears, and small dangers is an important part of childhood.
- Scrapes, bumps, and bruises are an acceptable part of childhood play, and contribute to the development of a child's judgment, caution, and empathy.
- Development of an individual sense of place is an important component of personal identity, family heritage, conservation values, and patriotism.

## Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood

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