

In times like these, where going outside feels abundantly necessary for mental and emotional wellbeing, we educators at **Pearlstone** huddled together and asked—what can we offer families in this moment without being physically present with them? How can we truly be in service to children and families seeking nature connection?

We settled on sharing some of the tools that we use in our programs all the time—games, crafts, activities, and ideas—that are simple, fun, flexible, and intentionally Jewish, using materials or spaces that are commonplace or easily accessible. In this list you’ll find a mix of Shabbat-friendly and weekday specific activities so that it can be useful for the whole week. May it be so that these help you find joy and connection with family, plants, creatures big and small, spirit, and yourself. Thank you, and have a rejuvenating Shabbat! Look out for Part 3 of this list coming soon!

Build a tiny kingdom or city

Did you know that every inch of the earth is a holy kingdom unto itself? To discover this, we at Pearlstone use toothpicks and string/yarn to create a walled city or kingdom on a patch of ground in our fields and forests, but this can also be done in your backyard! First, tie toothpicks together 4-6 inches apart using one long piece of string or yarn. Then invite your child to stick the toothpicks in the ground around the patch of ground in whatever shape they would like. Then they can imagine that the plants, objects, and insects within the “borders” are people, buildings, obstacles, and features of a giant city that they watch over! Observe, tell stories, or draw about what happens in this new and tiny city



Play with mud

Building with mud is also an ancient method of architecture with many [ecological and human health benefits](#), and was likely practiced in the land of Israel for [thousands of years](#). Beyond its ancient history and benefits, mud play is important developmentally because it is a creative, relaxing, and process (rather than product) oriented activity that helps children feel a sense of self, place, and connection with the earth. Given small hand tools like shovels, buckets, and rakes, children can spend hours playing! While some children hesitate or react negatively when offered the opportunity to play with mud, once they see others do it, or let go of the need to be clean, they often love it! For more information on the benefits of mud play, click [here](#). For a more advanced mud-builder, check out this kid-friendly resource for making [mud bricks](#).

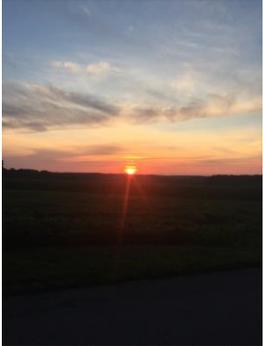
Create a scavenger hunt

Participating in a scavenger hunt is a tried-and-true way to get oriented to a place. However, creating a scavenger hunt is arguably an even better way to achieve the same result. Encourage your children to create a simple scavenger hunt for objects and experiences, in or outdoors! For example, they can require taking photos of a leaf or bush, collecting rocks or plants (in moderation), finding a hidden message or map, or going to a known place using a new route or method of movement (like crabwalking). As a parent, this will help you to get to know your children a little better, and they will enjoy watching you or a sibling searching for something they hid! You can also flip the script and create a scavenger hunt that your children participate in. Whatever brings joy to your home, find it!



	<p style="text-align: center;">Go on a blessing walk with your family</p> <p>Did you know that there are blessings for seeing and hearing beautiful things in nature? So often we simply walk by flowers or plants without noticing them. Next time you go outside, use this guide to make as many blessings as you can. Expressing gratitude is a fundamentally human practice that increases our sense of connection and happiness, which is especially important during this difficult time. Give thanks! For a list of blessing cards that you can take with you on your walk, check out these beautiful cards here.</p>
---	---

<p style="text-align: center;">Upcycle planting</p> <p>During this time, where resources feel scarce and going outside might be scary, it is important to remember that we have abundant resources available to us if we re-frame how we think about them! Upcycle planting underlines this exact ethic of re-thinking—we find plastic or metal containers that we would otherwise recycle or throw in the trash, and collect root ends of certain vegetables (like romaine lettuce and scallions), and plant them in soil or sprout them in water to grow more food! This is called plant propagation, and thankfully our Farmer Educator Tome wrote a great and detailed blog post on Pearlstone's website about how to get started. As for repurposing recycled materials, our Educator Clara made a lovely video explaining how she upcycles materials to create planters. Happy upcycling!</p>	
--	---

	<p style="text-align: center;">Play a Navigation/orienteering game</p> <p>Navigational skills and directional awareness are important for everyone to learn, but especially children. One way to start doing this is reminding children that the sun is an important navigational tool—it rises in the east, sets in the west, and is in the south at the middle of the day. Every so often, have your child find the sun, and then guess what direction they are pointing based on their prior knowledge. To bake this knowledge in, and have fun doing it, play Partner Directions (from the website Gone Outdoors). This game improves kids' understanding of the directions north, south, east and west; helps them learn to read a compass; and improves communication skills. Check it out in the link above!</p>
---	--

<p style="text-align: center;">Lay down under a tree</p> <p>During this time, it is important to intentionally make time for yourself and your family to slow down and process without a specific purpose in mind. Lying down under a tree on a sunny or warm day is perfect for this—find a tree that you like with a nice spot to lie down, and listen to the branches move in the wind, and watch the sun dapple through the leaves while the clouds pass by. Breathe. Smile. Cry. Laugh. Listen.</p>	
---	---

Thanks for reading! You'll other activities, videos, and more online learning opportunities in the coming weeks at pearlstonecenter.org/online. For a fun Shabbat prep video, check out this [Havdallah besamim bag crafting tutorial](#) with Lead Educator Sarah! Shabbat Shalom, see you soon!