



“Mother Nature is the best babysitter

depends on how safe your backyard is, but most afternoons you'll find the girls out there dancing on the grass, making stews with native plants and flowers or simply lying on the trampoline watching birds fly past.”

The Point Preschool's Lee structures the children's learning around what she considers

the best classroom of all: the great outdoors. She says the Oyster Bay community preschool, where she has been an early-childhood teacher for 16 years, has a rich outdoor playground filled with trees, birds, bark, dirt, lizards, chickens, a frog pond, worm farms, tadpoles, a vegie and herb garden and a fruit tree bearing, at last count, 129 passionfruit.

“The children are constantly busy when they're outdoors,” she says. “We have a big Sydney red gum in the yard and when bark falls, it presents a wonderful opportunity for them to use their imagination — they'll rake it and collect it, use it as food for their babies, build houses with it and paint it to make decorations. They use their imagination when they are engaged in unstructured play in a way

that they simply can't when engaged in structured lessons or play. It's so important they have the time to do this when they're young.”

A growing sense of danger and doom is also keeping children indoors. A new study shows 9-10 is the most common age parents will let their children venture outdoors on their own but more than 82 per cent of parents report feeling anxious at the prospect of their primary school-aged children being outdoors unsupervised.

The report was conducted by makes of children's tech product Moochies, which allows parents to check their child's location on a phone app and allows them to make and receive calls from 10 pre-approved phone numbers.

Safety4kids.com.au has lots of tips aimed at primary school aged kids to help them become aware of their surroundings when they are out and about without adult supervision. A good one to teach them is to be SMART, which stands for Safety Means Always Recognising Trouble. Another helpful technique is Yell and

Tell, which refers to screaming “Help!” or “I don't know you,” to get attention if a stranger makes you feel unsafe.



Helping Kids Find Wonder In The Everyday by Caro Webster, \$32.99, Sally Milner Publishing, out now



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