

Tree Hugging 101

Panelists shared a variety of suggestions for weaving green living skills into children's lives at the first Learn Green 2 Live Green program of the season.

Vrushali Gaud, environmental consultant and Live Green in Plano volunteer, explained five areas her five year old daughter practices on a daily basis.

1. Recycling: helping with the process of sorting trash from recyclables at home and making note of products made from recycled materials.
2. Conserving water: short showers, water is turned off when brushing teeth or washing hands, using stale water for watering plants, using reusable water bottles. (Vrushali showed the water conservation devices available free to Plano residents through the utility billing offices. Children can count how many shower heads, sink aerators, and toilet flaps are needed, ask for the items at the utility billing counter and help install them. Checking for toilet leaks is a simple and fun activity for a five year old.)
3. Natural drying: hanging washed towels, sheets and bedspreads outside to dry.
4. Get one give two: giving two things away for every one gift received.
5. The world beyond ourselves: reading about animals and how they relate to the planet and learning from books about other cultures.

Heidi Summers, Head of School for The Grove School, told about the eco-friendly remodeling of an existing school building before opening for registration. Daily activities exemplify the green values of "healthy mind, healthy body, healthy planet". She showed photos and described student activities: learning outdoors, finding a safe solution to a bunny in the vegetable garden, solar crayon art, using natural materials in math, creating art with reused materials. Traditional academic subjects are taught using hands-on thematic explorations.

Hannah Hale, Clark High School International Honors student and Live Green in Plano volunteer alumna, told about the impact of her experience at Catalina Environmental Leadership Program. She described her Girl Scout Silver Project teaching more than 100 Brownies about preventable water pollution. She showed her reusable water bottle and snack bag used for volleyball competition to avoid the waste of disposable water bottles.

Cynthia Riley, owner of two re-sale stores, Live Green in Plano volunteer and Hannah's mom, talked about the thrift children can experience in selling old clothes on consignment and the value of buying re-sale items. She demonstrated several ways to pack a zero waste lunch and advised packing the amount of food a child will actually eat to avoid waste.

Girl Scout Troop 377 is developing an "I Play Green" initiative to present to the local sport authorities. They are asking that the use of reusable beverage containers be written into the team protocol to avoid litter and so many recyclables ending up in the trash.

Enjoying and exploring nature is one of the surest ways to teach your child to love the planet. Spend 15 minutes in your backyard just listening and watching. Make a half day visit to one of Plano's Nature Preserves:

- Oak Point Park and Nature Preserve, 5901 Los Rios Blvd., Plano 75074
- Outdoor Learning Center at Bob Woodruff Park, 3401 E. Spring Creek, Plano 75074
- Arbor Hills Nature Preserve, 6701 West Parker Rd., Plano 75093

Get your family involved in Nature Challenge next spring and visit the museums, nature areas and science centers around the Metroplex performing a challenge activity at each one. You'll find just being in nature increases your attention, thinking, creativity and helps you reach a state of focus and calm that transcends relaxation. Being in nature grows children who care about their planet and want to take care of it. Adults will benefit as well!