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Lime Hollow Center for Environment and Culture offers summer camps as a way to develop children's connections to nature and the environment.

Lime Hollow connects children with nature

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Contributing writer

Lime Hollow Center for Environment and Culture has long recognized the importance of studying the environment and connecting children with nature by making environmental education a top priority.

While not new, the concepts of nature study and its benefits are still debated in the culture. But, regrettably, they are not often acted upon.

Fortunately, Lime Hollow has a summer full of nature camps that focus on developing children's connections to nature. In 2009, Lime Hollow adopted Jon Young's "Art of Mentoring" model, which provided Lime Hollow's leadership with a comprehensive approach and a compass to follow in reconnecting with nature.

An essential component of the "Art of Mentoring" is the implementation of core routines. These are exercises or activities done repeatedly over time to develop learning habits, build awareness and deepen the bonds with nature. They include:

Sit Spot: A key starting point in any "Art of Mentoring" program is the sit spot routine. Campers are asked to visit one place in nature repeatedly and to get to know it as well as they can.

In this special spot, they learn to sit still, be by themselves, and enjoy the feeling of familiarity and knowledge of place which develops over time. The sit spot can be in sight of each other and within a short distance to the center of the group spot.

Ultimately, a camper's sit spot will become like a safe home from which their curiosity can lead further into nature's mysteries.

Story of the Day: While the sit spot routine is important to the development of highly refined naturalist skills, equally significant in that development is having some way to catch the stories of one's nature experiences. Simply by recalling the Story of the Day, discoveries and knowledge are shared and

one's awareness of place is strengthened.

Journaling: Journaling is used routinely to help catch stories of the day and to add details about plants or animals of interest. Journaling reinforces lessons from a nature experience and develops the memory for details. It helps one to pay attention, interpret experiences and fosters creativity.

Wandering: Taking a wander is a chance for campers to be free of the structured and goal-driven schedules of everyday life. Nature is full of unexpected surprises, so campers routinely go on hikes without time, agenda, or destination. Campers stay open to the surprises along the way and learn to trust

their intuitions.

Crittering: This is the term for developing a nature museum during the camp week. Along with a fully-stocked library of nature field guides, there are terrariums and aquariums set up to temporarily hold and care for "critters" collected during the week on nature tables.

Campers collect and try to identify bones, feathers, nests and occasionally live animals such as snakes, frogs, turtles and salamanders. Crittering not only allows campers to increase their natural history knowledge, but it teaches them how to properly care for an animal. At the end of the week, campers return their guests to the spot where they were collected.

While the core routines allow mentors to program predictability into the daily camp schedule, the staff is given maximum flexibility to let the young naturalists wander and explore the mysteries and wonders of nature.

The "Art of Mentoring" is a powerful approach to bonding children to nature. At Lime Hollow, the entire staff is prepared to share the joy and excitement of nature with all campers.

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