

Trees & Me Correlations to NAAEE Guidelines for Excellence:

EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Project Learning Tree is committed to supporting educators in providing learning experiences that help to meet education standards. This document identifies correlations between [Trees & Me](#) and the *North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) Guidelines for Excellence: Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs*. These guidelines outline six key characteristics of excellent environmental education programs for early learners. The chart below identifies the guidelines for each key characteristic and provides evidence for how Trees & Me meets each. For more information about the guidelines, see [Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence](#).

Visit plt.org/treesandme for additional *Trees & Me* content correlations.



KEY CHARACTERISTIC & GUIDELINE	DESCRIPTION	TREES & ME: EVIDENCE OF GUIDELINE
KEY CHARACTERISTIC 1: PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY, PURPOSE, AND DEVELOPMENT		
Guideline 1.1—Focus on nature and the environment	The program’s philosophy, goals, and objectives related to nature and the environment are established and clearly articulated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction articulates PLT’s philosophy related to nature and environment (in sections titled About Project Learning Tree and Learning about Trees and Forests) Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning and Appendix H: Bringing Nature Inside articulate philosophy regarding collecting.
Guideline 1.2—Focus on education of young children.	Program philosophy, goals, and objectives related to the education of young children are clearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction articulates philosophy related to young children learning about nature (see Nature and Young Children). Appendix A: Engaging Early Learners articulates philosophy of young children learning in and about nature.
Guideline 1.3—Culturally appropriate goals, objectives, and practices.	The program’s philosophy, goals, and objectives reflect the need for the early childhood environmental education program to incorporate, mirror, and accommodate the cultural traditions of the audiences served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appendix B: Diverse Learners, Diverse Needs and Appendix E: Traditional Knowledge and Gratitude Walk identify approaches to incorporate and accommodate students with different cultural traditions and backgrounds. Appendix J provides American Sign Language cards for key words.
Guideline 1.4—Environmental literacy: board, staff, and providers	The program’s philosophy, goals, and objectives promote the environmental literacy of board, staff, and providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each activity provides background information to deepen the environmental literacy of adult leaders.
Guideline 1.5—Health and safety	The program’s philosophy, goals, and objectives are designed to ensure the health and safety of the children served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities detail appropriate safety considerations to help adult leaders maintain a safe learning environment. Ten of the 12 activities provide activity theme-related suggestions for a healthy snack.

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KEY CHARACTERISTIC 1: PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY, PURPOSE, AND DEVELOPMENT		
Guideline 1.6—Ongoing evaluation and assessment	The early childhood environmental education program has an evaluation and assessment plan that is instrumental to teaching and learning, program, and facility improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction articulates PLT’s philosophy related to nature and environment (in sections titled About Project Learning Tree and Learning about Trees and Forests) • Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning and Appendix H: Bringing Nature Inside articulate philosophy regarding collecting.
Guideline 1.7—Partnerships	Active communication is maintained with a variety of interested individuals and organizations to support networking, resource sharing, enhanced program development, and expanded audience outreach. Partnership activities strengthen their respective organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLT’s programs are distinguished by the commitment and extent of its national and state partners, as well as its international network of implementation and support. Visit plt.org/about-us/network-partners for more information. • Support materials for each of the activities are available at plt.org/treesandme and highlight PLT partner efforts.
Guideline 1.8—Interpersonal and intergenerational relationships	Positive relationships among children and between children and adults are essential for developing a sense of personal responsibility, building a sense of being a community member, and promoting a feeling of personal worth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of the activities include Group Experiences, which enable children to develop positive relationships as they work with and alongside others in the group. • All of the activities include a Family & Friends page, which promotes positive relationships with adults in the family and others, including grandparents and other intergenerational segments of the population.
KEY CHARACTERISTIC 2: DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES		
Guideline 2.1—Based on research and theory	Early childhood environmental educators understand and apply appropriate research and learning theory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLT provides professional development to support educators in using its materials, including information about and practice applying appropriate research and learning theory. Visit plt.org/trainings for more information.
Guideline 2.2—Authentic experiences	The developmentally appropriate program responds to children’s needs to explore, discover, and discuss their experiences in the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All activities center around learning experiences where children explore the environment and discuss what they discovered
Guideline 2.3—Child-directed and inquiry-based	The developmentally appropriate program is child-directed and inquiry-based.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All activities include a variety of child-directed and inquiry-based experiences. • Experiences that incorporate a range of STEM skills are identified with a specific icon (see page 5). • Several of the activities include an engineering challenge that invite learners to use problem-solving skills and design a solution.
Guideline 2.4—The whole child	The developmentally appropriate program is planned with the whole child in mind.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities use variety of teaching methods and strategies. • Activities include indoor and outdoor explorations, snacks, music and movement, math, woodworking, and read-aloud books.
KEY CHARACTERISTIC 3: PLAY AND EXPLORATION		
Guideline 2.1—Based on research and theory	Early childhood environmental educators understand and apply appropriate research and learning theory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLT provides professional development to support educators in using its materials, including information about and practice applying appropriate research and learning theory. Visit plt.org/trainings for more information.
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KEY CHARACTERISTIC 4: CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING		
Guideline 4.1—Social and emotional growth	Early-learner programs provide opportunities for young children to participate in a variety of social interactions, including play and exploration in the outdoors that allow them to grow as contributing members of their community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the activities include experiences where children interact with each other and with the environment. Play and exploration are integral to each activity.
Guideline 4.2—Curiosity and questioning.	Early learning programs provide children with opportunities to develop curiosity, ask their own questions and begin to develop reasoning and problem-solving skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All activities provide ample opportunities for children to explore and to ask and answer questions about the world around them. Section 1 activities focus on experiencing the natural world through the five senses. Several of the activities include an engineering challenge, through which children can use problem-solving skills to design a solution.
Guideline 4.3—Development of environmental understandings	Early learning programs provide children with opportunities to develop knowledge related to environmental and social systems, including the place where they live.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each activity explores an environmental theme related to trees and forests. Activity 11: Community Explorers focuses specifically on the built environment and the people therein. Each activity also includes a forest-related career and age-appropriate suggestions for exploring the career.
Guideline 4.4—Skills for understanding the environment	Early learning programs provide opportunities for children to experience a variety of environmental conditions and encourage them to investigate topics of their own choosing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All activities suggest a variety of opportunities for children to explore environmental conditions where they live. Section 2 activities emphasize experiencing trees through the four seasons.
Guideline 4.5—A personal sense of responsibility and caring	Early learning programs model environmentally responsible actions and provide opportunities for children to make decisions about their own activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family & Friends pages within each activity identify a Do Your Part! suggestion for actions they can take together to make a difference in their community. Activity 11: Community Explorers invites children to consider rules for being environmentally responsible.
Guideline 4.6—Physical	Early learning programs provide young children with a wide variety of physically challenging experiences, including opportunities to run, jump, and climb in the natural environment. Early learning programs also provide young children with opportunities to explore ways they can improve their own health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All activities incorporate Music and Movement suggestions as well as ideas for games and outdoor challenges.
KEY CHARACTERISTIC 5: PLACES AND SPACES		
Guideline 5.1—Spaces and places to enhance development	Indoor and outdoor places and spaces provide opportunities for development across social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development domains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each activity provides ideas for experiences that can be done in either indoor or outdoor spaces, or both. Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning and Appendix H: Bringing Nature Inside provide suggestions for using indoor and outdoor spaces for exploring nature.
Guideline 5.2—Natural components	The integration of natural components throughout places and spaces is essential if learning opportunities and development are to be maximized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each activity provides ideas for experiences that can be done in either indoor or outdoor spaces, or both. Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning and Appendix H: Bringing Nature Inside provide suggestions for using indoor and outdoor spaces for exploring nature.
Guideline 5.3—Comfortable for both children and adults	Comfortable and inviting places and spaces are necessary for learning and development to occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning provide suggestions for creating a comfortable and effective outdoor living space.
Guideline 5.4—Maintenance and usability	Places and spaces must be well maintained to provide a safe, exemplary environment for the program that complies with the Americans for Disabilities Act.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities detail appropriate safety considerations to help adult leaders maintain a safe learning environment.

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KEY CHARACTERISTIC 5: PLACES AND SPACES		
Guideline 5.5—Health, safety, and risk	In order to ensure the safety and health of the children, adequate planning, inspection, and vigilance are essential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities detail appropriate safety considerations to help adult leaders maintain a safe learning environment. Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning includes information on “Keeping It Safe.”
Guideline 5.6—Environmental sustainability	Programs and facilities should model environmental sustainability and provide positive examples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences are designed to use minimal, simple, and natural materials.
KEY CHARACTERISTIC 6: EDUCATOR PREPARATION		
Guideline 6.1—Foundations of early childhood environmental education	Early childhood environmental educators combine their understanding of child development and developmentally appropriate practice with a basic understanding of the goals, theory, practice, and history of the field of environmental education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Learning Tree provides in-person and on-line training to support adult leaders and educators in providing the best-quality instruction, including professional development on how to use <i>Trees & Me</i>. See plt.org/trainings for more information.
Guideline 6.2—Professional responsibilities of the educator	Environmental education is a profession that maintains high standards for instruction and professional conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Learning Tree provides in-person and on-line training to support adult leaders and educators in providing the best-quality instruction, including professional development on how to use <i>Trees & Me</i>. See plt.org/trainings for more information.
Guideline 6.3—Environmental literacy	Early childhood environmental educators possess the understandings, skills, and attitudes associated with environmental literacy and teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Introduction, Appendices, and Background for Adult Leaders in each activity help to promote environmental literacy for adult leaders. Project Learning Tree provides in-person and on-line training to support adult leaders and educators in providing the best-quality instruction, including professional development on how to use <i>Trees & Me</i>. See plt.org/trainings for more information.
Guideline 6.4—Planning and implementing environmental education	Educators provide interdisciplinary, investigative learning opportunities that are central to environmental education and developmentally appropriate for young children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Trees & Me</i> provides developmentally appropriate activities to guide youth ages 1–6 in learning about the environment.
Guideline 6.5—Fostering learning	Early childhood environmental educators create a climate in which children are motivated to learn about and explore the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Learning Tree provides in-person and on-line training to support adult leaders and educators in providing the best-quality instruction, including professional development on how to use <i>Trees & Me</i>. See plt.org/trainings for more information.
Guideline 6.6—Assessment and evaluation	Environmental educators possess the knowledge and skills to assess learner progress and evaluate the effectiveness of their own programs. Through these assessment activities, educators can identify children who may need additional assistance as well as evaluate progress toward meeting goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each activity includes an Assessing the Experiences section to help educators assess learning and evaluate the effectiveness of the experiences.

