

# Book Review

---

## **How to raise a wild child: The art and science of falling in love with nature**

**Sampson, S. (2015). Mariner Books.**

How to raise a wild child is a toolkit for how to foster a love of nature in children, despite the obstacles modern life can place on this goal.

Written by dinosaur paleontologist Scott Sampson, the book argues that a meaningful connection with nature can play a role in alleviating many of the problems of the modern world, including obesity, technology addiction, apathy around climate change and, of course, the ongoing project of how to make our lives happier and more fulfilling. Forging a strong connection with nature, especially from a young age, has benefits for children at cognitive, physical and emotional levels.

When I was younger, my mother would drag my siblings and I out of bed pretty regularly on a Saturday morning to go tramping. We'd drive to a national park or one of the many walks in my mum's guidebook and spend our weekend trudging up to a hut, with nothing but the wilderness, each other and a pack of cards to keep us company.

Especially as I got older, there were times when I really didn't feel like going. I wanted to spend my weekend watching TV or spending time with friends. In response, my mother would always say, "But you like tramping! You said it gave you a chance to think."

Now that I'm no longer at an age where I can rely on my mother to wake me up on a Saturday and turn my words against me, this book served as a timely reminder of how precious those weekends were.

How to reap nature's full potential

Yet Sampson's advice extends beyond simply getting out in nature more. The book is structured around how to maximise your child's time in nature to reap its full potential of benefits. Sampson encourages parents to take on the role of "nature mentors" and at the end of each chapter offers "nature mentoring" tips.

Sampson recognises getting a teenager into the wilderness poses different challenges to drawing out a seven-year-old. He provides different chapters for each child's developmental stage, calibrating his advice to the different needs of the age group. In middle childhood, for example, children transition from being highly dependent on their parents to desiring freedom and independence. Sampson offers suggestions on how to manage this transition while still facilitating their engagement (in this case, become a "hummingbird parent" rather than a helicopter one, encourage your child to join nature related clubs, etc).

While the book is mostly directed at parents, nature mentoring tips such as having a regular “sit spot” place (a place to simply sit in nature with no distractions) and finding ways to “open your senses” are not only useful to cultivate in children, they are something we can all learn from and take on board.

### **Educational and practical**

A huge part of the value of the book is that it’s both educational and practical, balancing academic research with personal experience and useful tips. Yet what is perhaps most compelling is the sense that it’s written from a perspective of gratitude. I get the feeling that Sampson is trying to give back what he experienced in his childhood, and what he worries many children are missing out on. Whether by providing the chance to think and reflect, to meet and surpass challenges, to develop curiosity about our natural world, or to simply enjoy being active, it’s hard to deny the positive impact that spending time in nature can have.

As *How to Raise a Wildchild* shows its readers, in all likelihood, a strong bond with nature will do all these things, and more.

**Reviewed by Nicola Corner, Communications Assistant at the Mental Health Foundation.**

The Mental Health Foundation's Information Service brings you reviews as part of the Good Reads feature for Mental Health Awareness Week. To view more go to <https://mhaw.nz/>