

Tatjana Gjurković & Tea Knežević

# I care for nature for it gives me so much back

Illustrations:  
Jelena Brezovec

ECOLOGICAL EMPATHY

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Advice for parents  
and caregivers





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Čuvam prirodu jer znam koliko mi daje

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## Ecological empathy

Empathy is defined as understanding or feeling someone else's emotional experience. When we talk about empathy, we primarily have in mind how we relate to each other, and how much understanding and compassion we have for other human beings.

However, at the same time, society is becoming increasingly aware that all living things in this world are very much connected – people, animals, and nature are interdependent and the experience of empathy should be expanded if we want good for ourselves, others, and especially future generations.

Experts generally describe that empathy can be partly an innate trait and partly a consequence of upbringing and life experience. They also agree that upbringing focused on empathy should start from the earliest age. Children learn from us, observe us, and react to our direct incentives, so it's crucial to give empathy a great importance in children's upbringing.

Education about the importance of caring for the environment is increasingly widespread, but besides learning how to protect nature and our surroundings, it is also essential to develop empathy as a foundation for pleasant feelings and positive behaviours toward all living things around us. This type of empathy is called ecological empathy.

In this picture book, children will meet Gregor, Lucy, Loreen, and Matthew who play together everyday in the city park. Their games included picking flowers, breaking branches, and catching bugs, until a little bee reminded them how important nature is to us, how much it gives us, and how important it is to preserve it. At the end of the picture book, there is advice for adults where we provide guidelines for how to respond when a child's ecological empathy is too intense and overwhelming, as well as how to act when we notice that it is not expressed enough.

Reading itself, your soothing voice, and the attention and closeness you establish with the child you are reading to, play a big and important part in developing empathy.

Enjoy those moments together. ♥

”

Hi! I am Gregor and yesterday I was playing with my friends in a big park. We were having so much fun!

Girls were bending branches, and boys were catching bugs and picking flowers. But something wasn't right. A little bee explained to us that with our games we were actually destroying the park we love and enjoy so much. If everyone would tear branches, and flowers and bother the animals, soon our park wouldn't be so beautiful anymore, and it wouldn't be nice to play in at all.

Make yourself comfy and listen to my story...





– Woohoo! It’s sunny outside, I want to go out and play! – Gregor was shouting with excitement. – Mum, mum, I want to go to the park, can you call Lucy’s mom so Lucy can come to the park too?

– Of course, honey – mum confirmed.

Mums quickly agreed and soon headed to a nearby park with their children.

As soon as they arrived, Lucy and Gregor started jumping on the autumn leaves that had fallen from the trees and covered the grass. Loreen and Matthew joined them when they heard them laughing. They had so much fun!





– Let's race. We need to run from this branch here to that big rock over there – Matthew suggested and laid a branch on the ground that marked the starting line for the race.

– The one to run over there first is the winner, okay? – Matthew suggested.

– Okay! – everyone quickly agreed.

During that time, the boys were catching grasshoppers, and then they decided to pick some flowers to lure butterflies so they could catch them too.

After a few rounds of running, the girls went to the big weeping willow tree whose branches were reaching all the way to the ground. They were playing with the branches and tried to make braids out of them. But they also tore off some branches and threw them to the side.





A little bee was watching all this and she was sad to see the damaged willow branches, torn flowers, and injured bugs. She decided to remind the children about the nature around them being alive and how those kinds of behaviour harm it.

– Hey, children, I'm glad to see you enjoying the park, but I have noticed that you were tearing willow branches to make wreaths and that you were picking flowers and catching bugs – little bee was direct.

– Well, yes, but it was only a game, and we were having fun – Loreen answered with a big smile on her face.

Little bee understood that children were just having fun and that they had no bad intentions. However, even without bad intentions, sometimes bad consequences happen.

– It's okay and important to think about what makes you happy and brings you joy, but it's not enough. It's also important to think about how our play affects others and the nature around us – little bee explained.

– A moment of joy from picking flowers or catching a grasshopper lasts briefly, but nature takes a long time to recover. Willow branches won't grow back quickly, flowers need time to bloom again, and small animals are fragile and our touch can hurt them or break their wings and legs. Not to mention how scared they are because they are so tiny.

– Oh, we didn't want that. Sometimes we forget to think of others when we're having a good time – Gregor said.

