

# THREE REASONS WHY WE NEED TO TALK TO OUR KIDS ABOUT BEES

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The world is 'abuzz' with the plight of bees. From farmers to flower growers, these little creatures are in big demand. But they are in trouble, and the recent attention of their population decline is for good reason: bees are essential to our world, as we know it.

We need to talk with our children about bees because:

1. Food production relies on bees to spread pollen. This natural pollination is crucial to forests and crops, and two thirds of Australia's agricultural output is dependent on bees. Their population decline is causing serious problems, and in some countries, such as China, farmers are taking pollination into their own hands, literally, and pollinating crops themselves.
2. As well as producing food, bees are fundamental to food security. Their activity creates biodiversity in food crops as well as native forests, allowing natural ecosystems to adapt and thrive.
3. Some foods rely 100 percent on bees for survival. Without bees, some of our most popular crops would disappear. Apples, blueberries, onions and pumpkins all need bees to produce food.

So, why is the bee population declining? There is much debate on this topic. Climate change and the use of pesticides are said to be contributors to the problem. And, studies show these small creatures are already too busy to satisfy our demand for food, so bees deserve undivided attention and immediate action.

What action can we take to help our bees? By helping our children understand the critical role bees play in our lives, we can raise awareness of the problem and children can play an active role in helping solve the emergency. We need to engage our children in a positive way, so they feel they can play a role to assist the bees' plight.



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Firstly, we can explain the important role flowers play in attracting bees. The colour of the petals and the pollen on the stamen will fascinate children, and pointing out the different parts of the flower helps them learn something new.

We can show our children budding fruit and vegetables in the veggie patch, and explain how the plants grow food for us to eat. And where there are flowers, there are bees, so they can see first-hand the work that goes on.

Visiting a farmers' market is another way we can teach our children about seasonal produce and the different crops that bees help produce. Children will learn direct from the farmers that the freshest produce changes throughout the year, and that bees bring about a large variety of food. And, small-scale farmers are less likely to engage in monoculture production,

offering a larger variety of plant species for bees to pollinate.

Visiting your local garden nurseries is a great experience for children and allows them to see and touch the many plant species that rely on bee pollination.

And, if you are a honey connoisseur, you may be able to establish your own hive. Check with local council and consult credible bee keeping associations for more information.

By helping children understand the fundamental role bees play for our food, we assist the survival of these amazing creatures, and that is a sweet thing indeed.

Sources: Marcelo, A. and Lawrence, D., 2009; Wheen Bee Foundation study; Berkeley University of California study; Victorian Apiarists Association Inc.