# This session explores the importance of trees for our planet. All kinds of trees grow all over the world, producing air, providing shade and a home for birds and other animals. Trees can also make us feel calm and reduce stress – something most families are grateful for! Make the most of any trees you have around the space you’re using and encourage families to get up close and explore them together.

## Bible story

You could use the Parable of the Mustard Seed to illustrate a seed growing into a tree **(Matthew 13:31-32).**

*Tell the story below with actions:*

One day Jesus told a story about a mustard seed. He said that mustard seeds are very, very small. **Can you roll up into a ball and pretend to be a tiny mustard seed?**

But when the mustard seed falls into the ground, it starts to grow. **Can you slowly begin to uncurl and start growing?**

Eventually, the seed grows into a plant so big that it becomes an enormous tree. **Can you stretch up as high as you can and wave your arms to look like branches of a tree?**

In the end, the tree is so big that birds can come and build their nests in it. **Can you flap your arms like a bird flying to make its nest in the tree?**

## Activities

Why not choose from the activity suggestions below? You can find the details of these and other activities on [The Salvation Army Family Ministries Pinterest page.](https://uk.pinterest.com/familyministriesukit/)

As a guide, the suggested activities have asterisks to show how easy they are to prepare and set up, from simple (\*) to more complicated (\*\*\*).

**Tree trail \***

If you’re using a space with lots of trees, include a tree trail. For a simple trail, hang monkeys (toys or pictures) or other animals from trees for children to find, or use the printable tree trail.

**Tree art \***

Add fingerprints to tree pictures. Use nature paint, eg blackberries, or toddler-friendly finger paints or ink stampers.

**Leaf confetti \***

Provide a tray of leaves, toddler scissors and hole punches (lever punches are easier to press for little ones) and make some leaf confetti.

**Leaf rubbing \***

Collect some strong leaves with interesting shapes and textures. Do leaf rubbings on paper using crayons, or leaf painting and printing.

**Pine cone play \***

Fill a tray with different sized pine cones, acorns and sticks, and a set of different clear plastic jars and containers to fill, empty, and shake.

**Bark rubbing \***

Provide some small pieces of paper and some chunky crayons with the wrappers taken off. Send families off to find some trees with bumpy bark to make tree rubbings.

**Bird feeders\*\***

Birds make their homes in trees and rest on their branches. Make a bird feeder to hang in a tree. Explore simple options for toddlers, eg threading suet fat balls on to pipe cleaners.

**Tree planting \*\***

Fill a tray with soil and make simple trees using sticks and foam or cardboard treetop shapes. Little ones can ‘plant’ the trees in the soil. Include some small bird toys for more ways to play.

**Play-dough trees \*\***

Set out play-dough, different-sized twigs, small branches, pieces of bark, leaves and pine cones and an invitation to create a tree. You could also include jumbo beads or coloured pasta to thread on to the branches.

## Story ideas

Suggested books for story time or a story mat:

* *Tree* (Britta Teckentrup)
* *The Busy Tree* (Jennifer Ward)
* *It Starts with a Seed* (Laura Knowles)
* *The Play-Along Bible* (Bob Hartman), ‘Land Ho’ page 7
* *God’s Big Promises Bible Story Book* (Carl Laferton), ‘In the Beginning’ pages 16-20
* *The Lion Easy Read Bible* (Christina Goodings), ‘In the Beginning’, pages 6-11

## Questions

* Have you seen any trees today?
* I wonder what you like best about trees?
* Did you know there are around three billion trees growing in the UK? And they are all different shapes, sizes and colours! I wonder why God created so many different trees?
* Trees make good homes for birds and bugs. In the story Jesus told, he uses the tree to try and help people understand what it means to be part of God’s family. I wonder how you feel about being part of God’s family?

## Song suggestions

See first session of this series for more songs:

* ‘Creator God’ by Nick & Becky Drake:  
  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GM4IVZuljEI>
* ‘I Might be Small’, Allstars Kids Club:   
  <https://youtu.be/QCAoiVCDIqo?list=RDQCAoiVCDIqo>
* ‘He Made Me!’, DANCE FIT TOTS 2:  
  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cD6i_rBlyks>

## Prayer

*Practise the actions in italics before sharing the prayer together:*

Thank you, God, for the wonderful world you have made and for tremendous trees!

For the chunky, rough bark of the strong tree trunk. *(Stand tall with arms together above your head)*

For the leaves that give shelter to birds and other animals. *(Wave your arms like tree branches)*

For the flowery blossom that smells beautiful in spring. *(Pretend to smell a bunch of flowers)*

For fruit like apples, pears and cherries. *(Pretend to bite an apple)*

Today, we celebrate the importance and beauty of tremendous trees! *(Clap your hands)*

Thank you, God, that you made our wonderful world. Please help us to look after your world and each other.

Amen.