

There are many reasons for taking learning and play outdoors. Experiencing changes in the weather and seasons supports a child's understanding of the world around them. Numeracy and problem-solving can be tackled through activities on a larger scale. Creating dens and hiding places can help develop life skills. And, of course, fresh air and activity are essential for children's wellbeing and health. But it's important to remember that the best outdoor play experiences require well-chosen resources and active, engaged adults. Consider the following suggestions when planning your time outside:



Planning MAKES perfect

3 Observe and assess

A key element of successful outdoor play practice is observation. Encourage practitioners to look for key indicators of wellbeing in children such as being happy, being spontaneous, being expressive, being relaxed, being open and approachable, and being lively. Where such indicators are not present, encourage practitioners to look for explanations and to change the physical spaces, resources or routines to improve the experience for the child. The happier, more spontaneous, relaxed and open a child is the more likely they'll have a strong sense of wellbeing, and that their social, emotional, physical and intellectual development will thrive.

1 Get value from your resources

The best resources are those that provide the greatest play value by offering a high number of potential uses. A child's natural sense of curiosity and imagination is stimulated by these resources – which are often used in ways we would never think of ourselves. Many of them can be gathered at very little cost.

Natural resources have far greater play potential than most manufactured toys. A plastic car will determine how a child plays with it while a stick can have a thousand possibilities and uses. Natural resources might include stones, shells, sticks, bark pieces, pine cones and conkers.

Everyday objects like kitchen utensils, pots and pans, brooms and dustpans, buckets, pegs and flowerpots offer opportunities for children to explore their physical world and discover the social aspects of their lives.

Resources for construction allow children to build, adapt and change their environment, so consider providing blocks, ropes, crates, tarpaulins, boxes, tyres and blankets.

Curriculum-linked resources can allow different areas of your provision to be enhanced and offer opportunities for the children to explore, independently, all areas of learning. For example, in a construction area, add in resources such as cardboard boxes, clipboards, rulers, glue, straws and wooden blocks.

Make the most out of your outdoor space with these useful tips from **Learning through Landscapes...**

2 Make sure the adults are on board

For children to appreciate the outdoors they need staff and parents as partners who appreciate the value of the opportunities available. To help children develop their own positive attitudes, changing the attitude of practitioners can sometimes be the biggest challenge for a setting. Factors may be physical (do you provide adequate clothing?), administrative (does your timetabling actually allow for engagement?) or developmental (are practitioners actually confident outside?). Developing a shared vision for outdoor play as a staff team is a great first step to meaningful practice.

Raising awareness of the value of outdoor learning and play with your parents is vital too, as children value what their parents value. However, getting parents to see the importance of being outdoors daily can be a challenge. Concerns about safety, dirty clothes and

even misunderstandings of the term 'play' can all undermine your outdoor play policy. When parents visit, with or without their child, send out a strong message about the value you place on your outdoor area. Be aware of the messages that your outdoors gives to visitors:

- does your space look inviting?
- are children at ease in it?
- are the perimeter boundaries reassuring or intimidating?
- is your outdoors accessible for all children?

find out more

For help auditing and developing your own outdoor provision, visit Learning through Landscapes' website, ltl.org.uk