

Outdoor play and learning in the early years.... what do parents and carers need to know?



East Ayrshire Council is committed to offering outdoor learning at all stages from the early years through to secondary. The Learning Outdoors Support Team support this initiative.

Why are we offering so much outdoor play and learning?

We know that being outdoors is vital for children's health and wellbeing. It boosts physical activity and promotes happiness. For example, children need to spend regular time outside for their distance vision to develop effectively.

Covid 19 means we need to maximise time spent outdoors as evidence shows transmission of the virus is reduced outside.



Riccarton ECC



Craighead Country Nursery School

The Scottish Government has enshrined children's right to play outside every day in the Health and Social Care Standards - *'As a child I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment'* HSCS 1.32

The National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare sets out the commitment in Criteria 3 for the delivery of high quality outdoor play and learning for all children: *"We know the benefits of outdoor learning, exercise and play for children. Playing, learning and having fun outdoors helps to improve wellbeing and resilience, increases health through physical activity, provides children with the opportunity to develop a life long appreciation of the natural world and has a positive impact on educational attainment"* p. 23/24.

The unique contribution of outdoor play and learning

"Consider how fresh air, natural materials and areas for digging, growing and splashing in puddles can contribute to a child's learning and development in ways that could never be achieved indoors"
'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' p. 56.

What about the weather?

Why being outdoors in all weathers is essential for wellbeing and development

Wellbeing

The Chief Medical Officer recommends children under the age of 5 should experience *at least 180* minutes of physical exercise every day and that should include outdoor play.

'Realising the Ambition: Being Me', Scottish Practice Guidance for early years stresses the importance of outdoor play and learning in all weathers:

"Children flourish when playing outdoors in all weathers. Feeling sun, wind, rain snow and ice first hand is important as it connects us as human beings to the planet we live on. Being in nature stimulates the senses and nurtures a sense of wonder and awe at the processes of life. Outdoor environments can offer different surfaces, different levels, lots of natural features to explore, trees to climb and bushes and shrubs to hide and build dens in. Different natural spaces can simultaneously ignite creativity and imagination whilst fostering a sense of wellbeing and calm." p.56.



Muirkirk ECC

There is a saying '*There's no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothes*'

The benefits to children's learning and development from being outdoors mean we need to ensure everyone has the right clothes to enjoy playing and learning outdoors in all weathers.

Learning for Sustainability

"An important aspect of outdoor time is the possibility to observe the changes of nature, the transformation of the elements and the interdependence of all living things. Besides the obvious element of 'scientific' learning, these experiences, in my opinion, give the child a deep sense of belonging, allowing them to feel part of a wonderful, ever changing world. Ultimately, these are the seeds of resilience". 'My World Outdoors' p. 27.

Outdoor play and development and learning in the early years



Newmilns ECC

'Adventurous' Play

The opportunity to face challenges in a supportive environment helps children to assess and manage risks for themselves which is vitally important for their development.

Adventurous or 'risky' play builds children's resilience and allows them to learn to make decisions and keep themselves safe. Staff carefully assess and monitor appropriate levels of challenge for all children.



Darvel ECC

Movement and Coordination


There is a direct link between movement and coordination development and the development of fine motor and concentration skills.

"For instance, a young child with a developing vestibular system will find it almost impossible to sit still for any length of time or possess the fine motor skills and coordination required for writing before they are ready.

The best way to help children develop this system is through providing daily opportunities for physical play, especially outdoors." 'Realising the Ambition: Being Me', p.24.

How can parents and carers support outdoor play?


CHECKLIST FOR OUTDOOR PLAY


 Ensure your child is wearing the right clothes for the weather. Layers are great, they can be added or removed to suit the conditions. A waterproof jacket and wellies are essential. Waterproof trousers or an all in one suit are also useful. *Check with your establishment for specific recommendations.*

 You can help your child develop self help skills by supporting them to learn how to put their outdoor clothes on independently.

 Bring a hat and gloves and wear warm socks in the colder months.

 Old clothes are perfect for nursery, your child needs to feel they can get messy if they want to.

 It is useful to have a change of clothes available when needed. *Check with your establishment on how this should be managed.*

 If your child comes home a bit muddy or messy, ask them what they were doing. Try and encourage them to enjoy outdoor play and learning.



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Where to go for more information:

Parent Club: <https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/play-outdoors>

Thrive Outdoors: <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/what-we-do/our-funds/thrive-outdoors/>

Learning through Landscapes: <https://www.ltl.org.uk>

Key documents:

Realising the Ambition: Being Me:

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/realising-the-ambition/>

My World Outdoors: <https://hub-careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/care-inspectorate-programmes-and-publications/my-world-outdoors/>

thank you

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