

Learning Outdoors

What are your happiest memories of playing as a child? It's very likely they will be of playing outdoors with your friends. When asked for childhood memories it's what most adults seem to remember most fondly. Children love to be outdoors where spaces are bigger and there are fewer restrictions on getting dirty or making a mess. Often the simple pleasures in life are what a child enjoys most such as splashing in a puddle, building a den or holding a ladybird in their hand. These pleasures offer great outdoor learning opportunities.

Benefits of Playing Outdoors

Getting out in the fresh air and sunlight benefits your child's health and running around in the play park or riding bikes and scooters provides good exercise for them.



However these are not the only benefits of getting outdoors with your child. The outdoors, whether you live in a town or city, rural area or by the coast, provides endless opportunities for your child to learn in situations that are real life, exciting, and meaningful for them.

Walks in the park, woods or by the seashore can fire their imagination to invent and build pretend worlds. With your help they can learn to judge risks and their own ability to manage them.

They can learn to solve problems while involved in activities such as climbing, balancing, crossing puddles or small streams, or even just crossing the road safely in a town.

Together you can discover facts about your local environment. It may be discoveries about nature or just about the different types of houses in your street.

Outdoors they can practise skills such as counting, number recognition, categorising, sequencing and much more in real life situations.



A Free Resource

The outdoors offers endless possibilities for fun and learning that change constantly with the seasons and are free whether in the garden, street, park, country or at the seaside.

Learning outdoors doesn't always have to involve a planned outing. You can take advantage of what is on offer as you go to the shops or travel to nursery together.

Some General Tips to Get You Started

- Go out in all weathers by dressing appropriately e.g. puddlesuits, wellingtons, anoraks.
- Share your child's desire to discover new things and encourage curiosity and observation.
- Encourage them to be as independent as possible and to use their own initiative.
- Ask open-ended questions using words such as 'why', 'what if', 'how' to make them think.
- Don't solve problems for them but help them to make choices by offering several solutions.
- Make sure they experience some successes but also allow them to learn from mistakes.

Depending on your child's age and stage of development turn over to find some suggestions to try at home 



Here are some suggestions to help you enjoy outdoor learning with your child

As well as encouraging physical activity the outdoors offers a lot of opportunities for your child to learn in different situations including the park, beach, town.

The world outdoors is a multi sensory experience for your child. Each time you are outdoors things will have changed and evolved. Discuss the different seasons. Remember to encourage your child to look carefully and talk about what they see, hear, smell and touch.

- Collect different textured items and make a sensory box. Remember to collect things that have different smells.
- Gather a variety of leaves of leaves, shells, pebbles, feathers. Look at the similarities and differences.
- Have a sensory hunt in the woods, on the beach or in the town. What sort of things have you collected?
- Go on a wet weather walk. Let your child splash in the puddles. What happens to the puddle when it stops raining? Listen to the sound of the rain. Does it always sound the same?
- Fly a kite. You could make your own kite to fly. See when it flies best. What does the wind feel like on your face? Run with the wind and against the wind. Which is easier? Roll and throw balls in the wind. What happens to them?
- Lie down on the ground and look at the clouds. Are they moving quickly? Are they all going the same way?
- Give your child trowels, spades and buckets. Let them play in the mud. What does it feel like? Make messy mud pies. Put sticks, leaves and stones in the mud. What can you make? Use plastic animals to create a mud swamp for them.
- Put a bird feeder out for the birds. Watch the birds that come to it. What are they like?
- Give your child a magnifying glass. Let them examine flowers, leaves, plants and insects. Go on a bug hunt.
- Collect different sized sticks. Use them for drawing in the soil, building towers or throwing from bridges.

- Go on a town walk. What do you see? Encourage your child to look up as well as down. Look at the different buildings.
- Listen to all the different sounds you hear when outdoors. Can you identify them? Find natural things that you can make a sound with. Drop a stone in the water. What does it sound like?
- Give your child a pencil and clip board. Let them draw what they see. Write and draw in the sand at the beach or in the soil.
- Ask your child to collect a certain number of items. Encourage them to make patterns, sort them and match them. Count how many you have.
- Make pattern rubbings from stones, wood and leaves.
- Go on a night walk. Take torches and shine them on different objects. What do they look like? Look up at the sky. What do you see?
- Grow vegetables or flowers .Watch them grow. What is happening to the seeds? What do you need to make it grow? What will you do with the vegetables or flowers when they are grown?
- Encourage your child to display the items they have found outdoors. They could keep them in a shoebox.

Hopefully these suggestions will have sparked some ideas of your own. Remember when you are outdoors with your child and they are playing there is no right or wrong way to play. Keep things simple and let them explore and enjoy the outdoors.

