

# Nature Kindergarten in Fife



Early Years in Fife



Please note, this is an interactive document. You can navigate the Contents Page by clicking on the numbered titles on the page

# Contents

1. Introduction
2. What is Nature Kindergarten?
- 3 - 4. Nature Kindergarten in Fife
5. Outdoor Play & Learning Across Fife
- 6 - 8. Unique Experiences in Nature - Forest/Beach
- 9 - 10. Connecting to Nature
- 11 - 12. Benefits of Nature Kindergarten
- 13 - 14. Right to Play in Nature
- 15 - 16. Supporting Health and Wellbeing
- 17 - 20. Learning Opportunities
- 21 - 22. Loose Parts
- 23 - 24. Practical Guidance
- 25 - 28. Planning Your Session
- 29 - 30. Risk Benefit Approach
- 31 - 32. Nature Kindergarten Training
- 33 - 38. Case Study - Beanstalk Family Nurture Centre
- 39 - 42. Case Study - Childminders
43. Final Thought
- 44 - 45. Useful Links
- 46 - 47. Useful Guidance
48. Useful Books
49. Acknowledgements

## Fife Council Early Years Team 2024



# Introduction

The Nature Kindergarten in Fife resource has been created to support practitioners to develop their practice in offering high quality outdoor learning opportunities through Nature Kindergarten. It will support staff who have attended the practical training as well as staff who are beginning their journey in Nature Kindergarten. We hope this resource will ignite your passion and enthusiasm for outdoor learning experiences in natural spaces.

**“It is our shared responsibility to support and enable all of Scotland’s children and young people to access our diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purposes of playing and learning. We commit to working together to meet these responsibilities.”**

- Scotland’s Outdoor Play and Learning Position Statement (2018)

**“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.”**

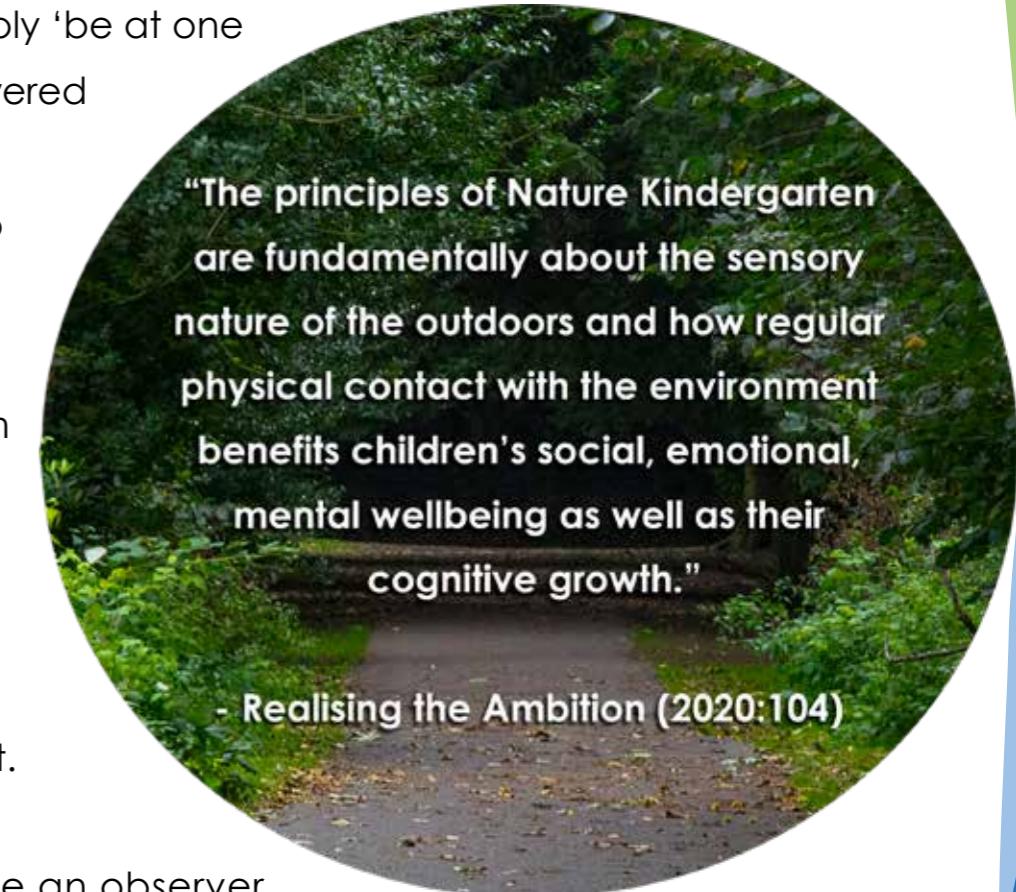
- Realising the Ambition (2020:56)

# What is Nature Kindergarten?

Nature Kindergarten is based upon a child centred approach to learning and the natural environment provides a multitude of sensory rich experiences. Nature Kindergarten can take place in either forest or beach environments.

Children learning freely within a designated natural environment has gained momentum across the world as the developmental benefits to children are acknowledged.

The philosophy underpinning Nature Kindergarten empowers the child to have the right to simply ‘be at one with nature’. As empowered and trusted individuals children take ownership of the designated natural area they visit regularly. The curriculum is not planned but is created spontaneously according to the children’s social interactions and interest.



**“The principles of Nature Kindergarten are fundamentally about the sensory nature of the outdoors and how regular physical contact with the environment benefits children’s social, emotional, mental wellbeing as well as their cognitive growth.”**

- Realising the Ambition (2020:104)

We are privileged to be an observer as the children construct their own learning within a natural environment and as such, we need to respect their right to experience and appreciate the sounds of nature.

# Nature Kindergarten in Fife

Fife's Early Learning and Childcare establishments have integrated regular nature kindergarten sessions for children in a sustainable way since 2007 with support and in house training from Fife Council's Early Years Team.

Nature Kindergarten was added to the Fife 'Core Provision Document' in 2016 with an expectation that all children attending ELC settings have access to regular Nature Kindergarten experiences in natural spaces throughout all seasons.

In Fife we believe Nature Kindergarten experiences should:



Recognise the child's right to play in a natural environment, creating opportunities and providing resources for quality experiences to take place, including the promotion of 'loose parts' play.

Be child centred – children set the agenda. Play is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.

Encourage children's independence, supporting their development and growth by creating opportunities for 'risky', challenging play.

Adopt a risk-benefit approach, maintaining balance between the developmental benefits and well-being.

Account for and work to overcome barriers and obstacles that may vary within different play settings.

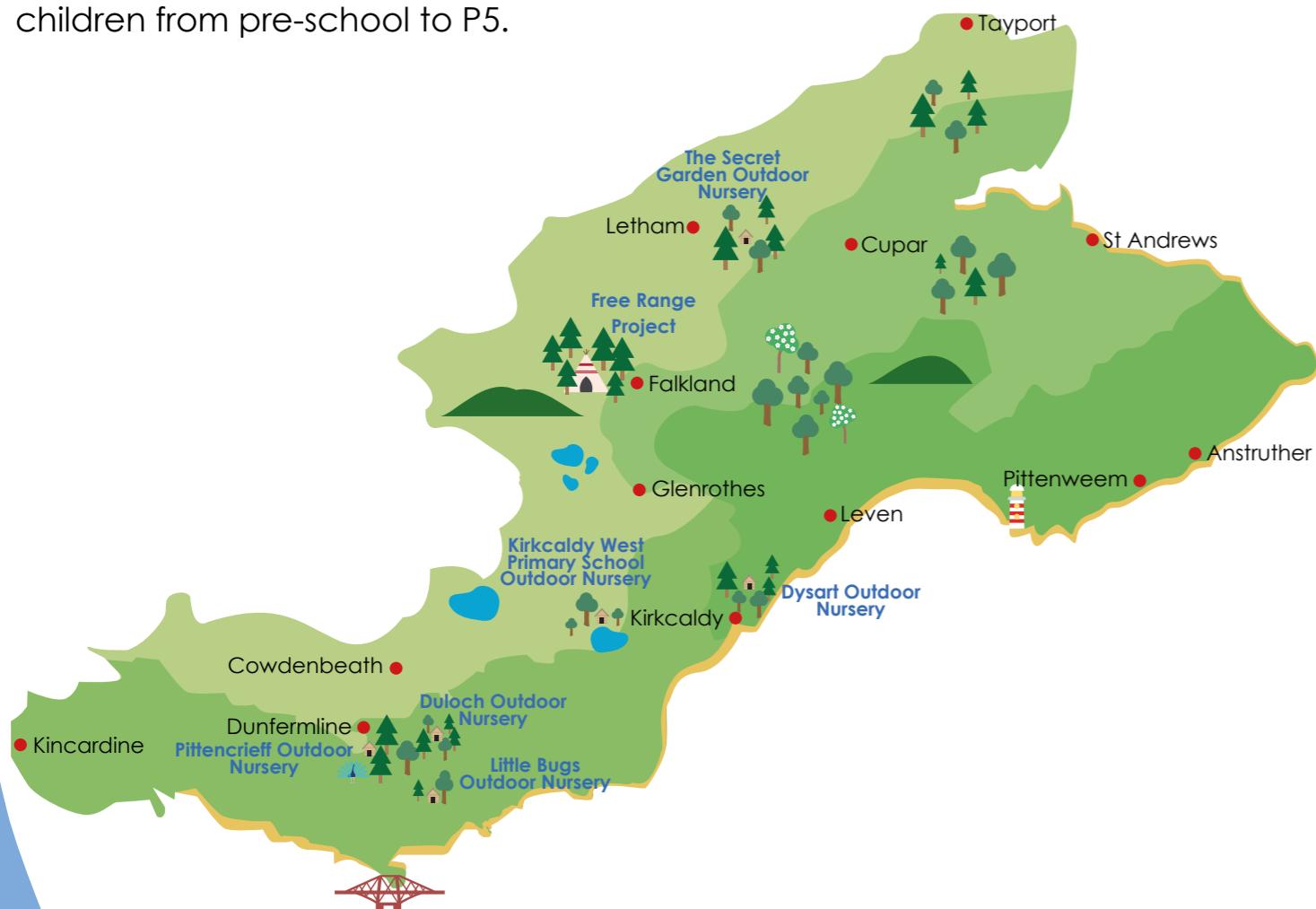
Ensure that children have regular access to outdoor play opportunities in almost all weathers.

Provide a nurturing and caring environment within which children have access to opportunities that will help them to develop greater confidence, skills and a sense of responsibility.

# Outdoor Play and Learning across Fife

Fife Council currently has three local authority outdoor nurseries. Two are woodland based services in Dunfermline; Pittencraeff Primary School Outdoor nursery, based at Pittencraeff Park and Duloch Primary School Outdoor nursery, based at Calaismuir Woods. Dysart Primary School Outdoor nursery is based at Ravenscraig Park which has access to both forest and beach environments. There is also Kirkcaldy West Primary School Outdoor Nursery based in Beveridge Park. We are also in partnership with two further outdoor nurseries, The Secret Garden in Letham and Little Bugs in Dunfermline.

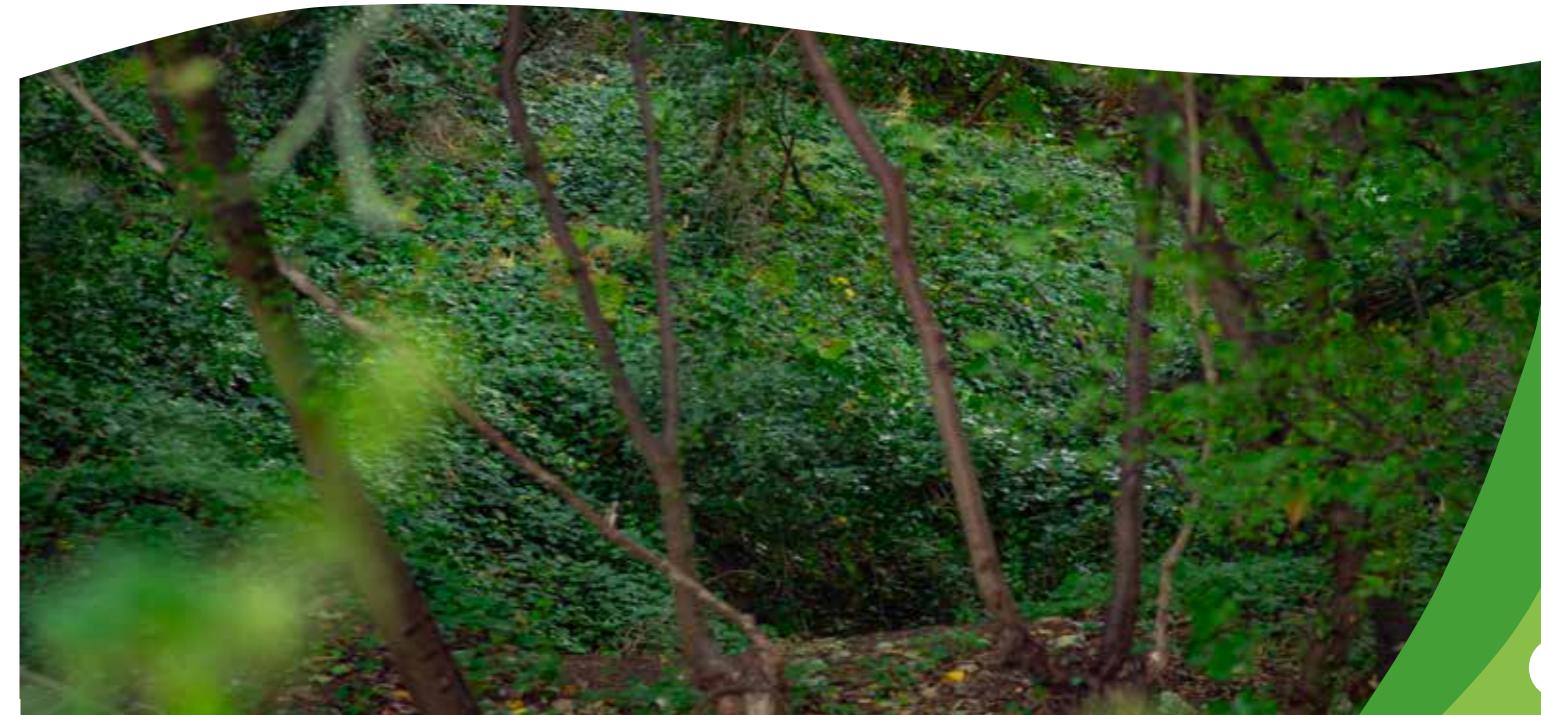
Also during school holiday periods, we run the [Free Range Project](#) which is a referral based outdoor play project, based at our site at Falkland Estate for children from pre-school to P5.



## Unique Experiences in Nature

In Fife there is so much opportunity to explore and experience nature in all its diversity, and these experiences support the understanding of the world around us.

Consider the unique experiences that you can have in Fife. They may range from getting drookit in the rain and jumping in puddles, hiding in trees, hearing the trees getting blown around as the winds howl, making snowballs in the baltic cold, watching the haar coming inland from the harbour on warm days and playing at the beach on summer days.



## Forest

As children explore in the forest, they develop a connection to nature and an understanding of their environment. The forest allows children to stimulate their senses through what they see, hear and smell. Children can navigate through winding paths and follow the stream as it meanders through the forest.



## Beach

### Beach Fun Fact!

The Fife coastline stretches over 100 miles with a wide range of beaches. No fewer than 14 beaches are award-winning, the highest of any Scottish local authority.

Play, exploration and discovery on the foreshore allows children to use their senses to build their knowledge and understanding of beach life including developing their awareness of seashores, habitats and how to manage risk.

Twice a day the tides deposit seaweed, shells, driftwood, and the occasional jellyfish along the high tide line of our beaches. On rocky shores, as the tide goes out, rockpools are revealed providing an insight into the hidden world of wildlife beneath the water. None of these experiences can truly be explored indoors.

### Forest Fun Fact!

Woodlands of all types occupy 11% of the Fife land area, a total of 16,508 hectares of woodlands in Fife. Fife's most common native trees and shrubs include Scots pine, birch, alder, oak, ash, hazel, willow, rowan, aspen, wych elm, hawthorn, holly, juniper, elder and wild cherry.

The Curriculum for Excellence emphasises the importance and value that outdoor experiences have for children's holistic learning and development. Being outdoors in a natural setting enables children to develop a connection with the natural world, which can lead to long-term environmental awareness, understanding and positive action.

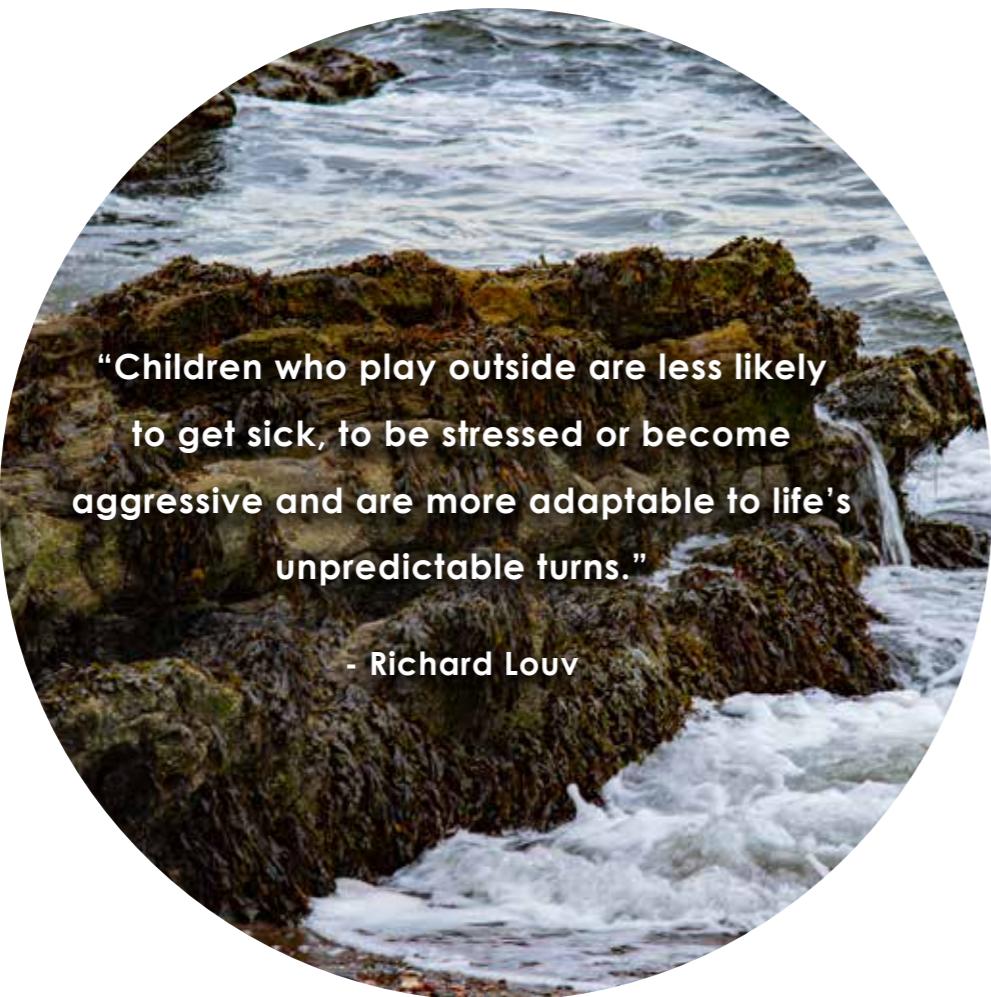


# Connecting to Nature

Nature Kindergarten affords children the opportunity to follow their innate biophilic tendencies to connect with nature and experience the abundance of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing benefits associated with exposure to natural light, complex biological structures, patterns, textures, colours, and sensory stimulation.

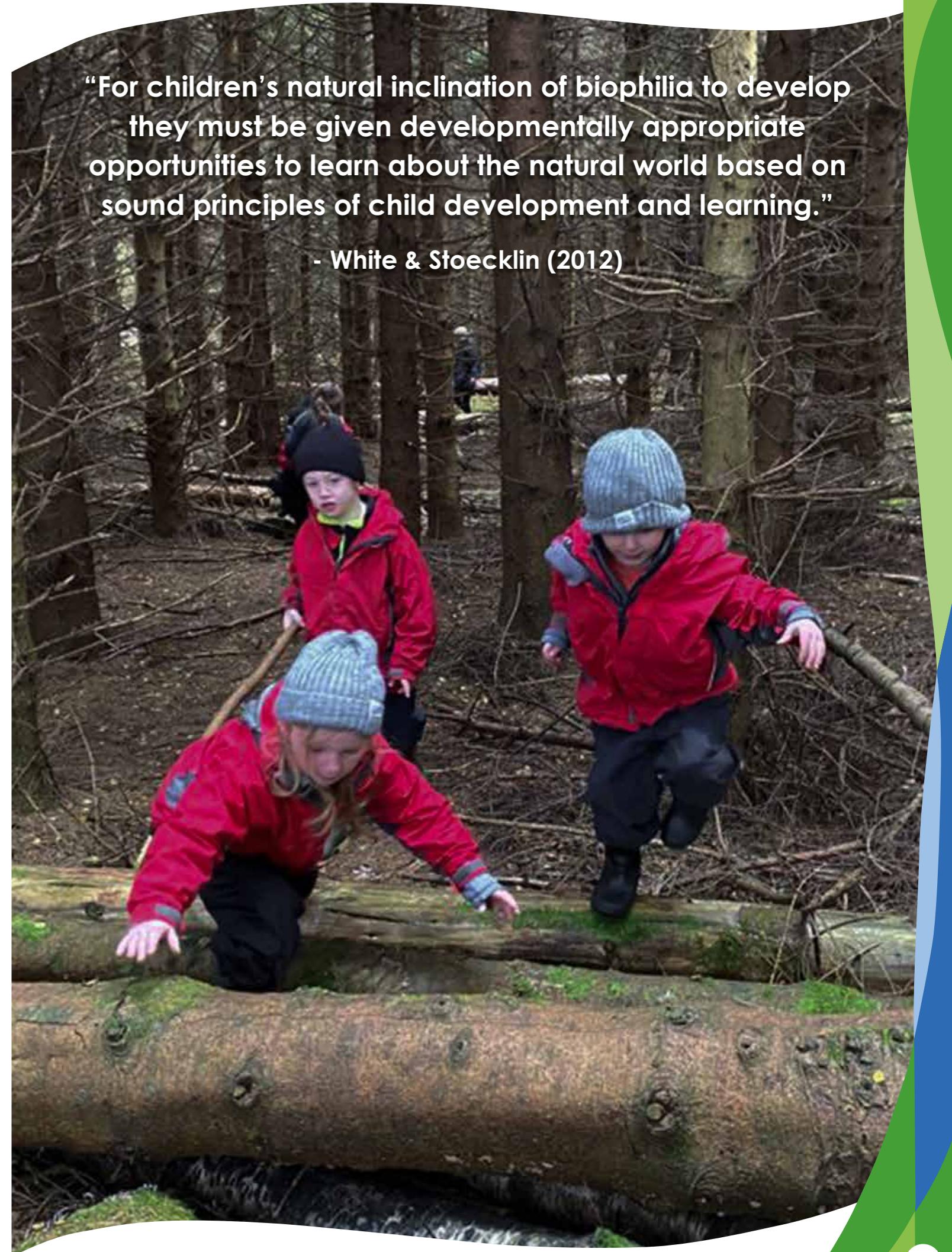
There is a growing body of research which indicates that regular contact with nature can have a profoundly positive impact on quality of life; reducing stress, anxiety and illness, whilst enhancing physical and mental health, immune system, cognitive function, and creativity.

See the following blog from Thrive Outdoors for further information on [Connection to Nature](#).



**"For children's natural inclination of biophilia to develop they must be given developmentally appropriate opportunities to learn about the natural world based on sound principles of child development and learning."**

**- White & Stoecklin (2012)**



# Benefits of Nature Kindergarten

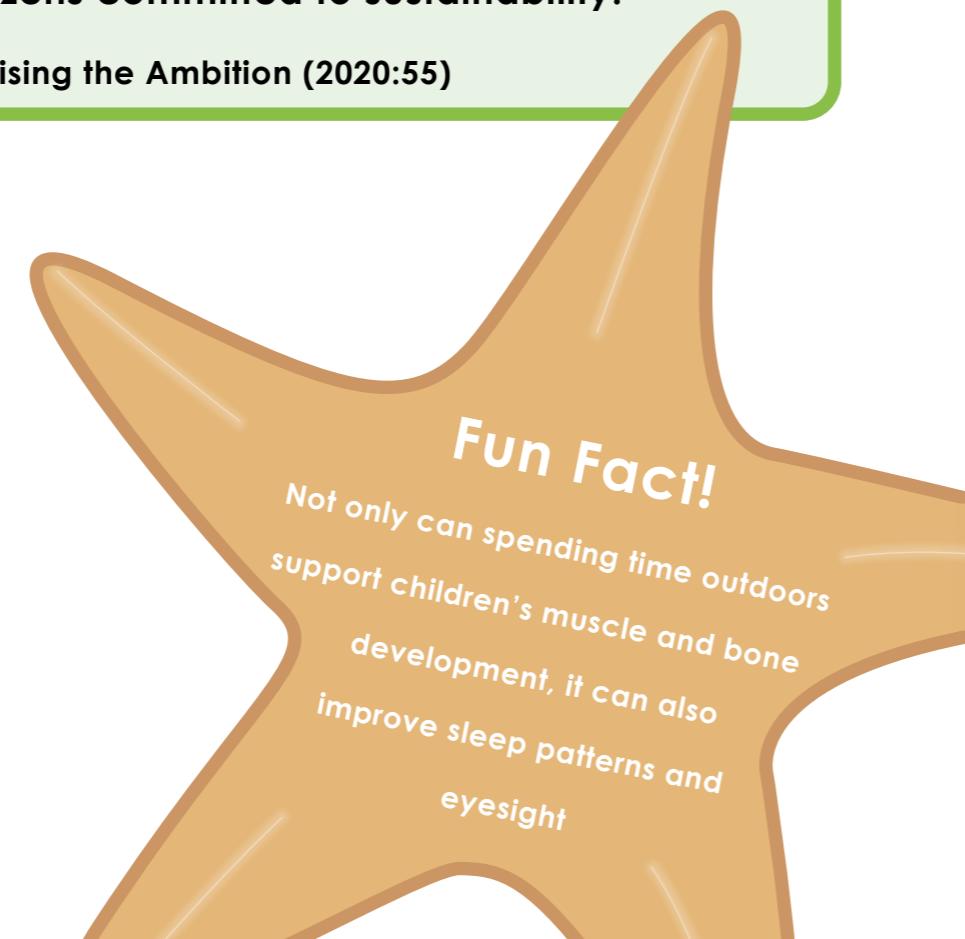
Spending time outdoors is beneficial for children's health, wellbeing, and learning. Providing opportunities to access outdoors during early years, can support children to experience benefits that can have a life-long positive impact.

Within Scotland, there is an expectation that Early Years settings facilitate opportunities for children to have contact with nature on a daily basis; engaging in risk, challenge, and free play.

Positive experiences with nature are central to learning for sustainability, development of progressive attitudes towards being outdoors, and nurturing children's sense of responsibility for the natural environment.

**"This regular contact with nature can engender an appreciation and respect for biodiversity. It can also connect them to their local community and sense of place, helping them to develop as responsible citizens committed to sustainability."**

- Realising the Ambition (2020:55)



## Benefits

*Developing knowledge and understanding about nature*

*Provides sensory stimulation*

*Inspiring a sense of wonder*

*Freedom to move, shout and make noise in a less restrictive way*

*Creativity, experimentation and imagination!*

*Builds relationships and social skills*

*Develop resilience*

*Emotional regulation*

*Manage risks and risk assess*

*Confidence and self esteem*

*Oportunities for physical, gross and fine motor development*

*Cognitive development*

# The Right to Play in Nature

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasises that children have the right to an education that supports them to develop respect for the natural environment, and have their voices heard in decision making.

In Scotland, the Government has enshrined children's right to play outdoors every day in its national Health and Social Care Standards.

**"As a child, I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment."**

**Health & Social Care Standards (1.32)**

By providing rich Nature Kindergarten experiences where children are able to play and learn freely, practitioners have the opportunity to observe, evaluate and extend children's learning.

Many Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes can be covered by nature kindergarten.



Nature Kindergarten experiences provide great opportunities to consult and involve children in all aspects of the planning and preparation.

The focus of Nature Kindergarten sessions should be to provide healthy, safe and nurturing spaces to grow and play, free from the stresses and strains of their everyday lives.



# Supporting Health and Wellbeing

The SHANARRI wellbeing indicators within Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) are based on the national outcomes for children and young people from the Curriculum for Excellence for all children to be Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors, Successful Learners and Responsible Citizens.

Offering regular Nature Kindergarten sessions can support children to meet their health and wellbeing needs.



**SAFE** – Develop personal safety skills and understanding in an outdoor environment

**HEALTHY** – Having daily opportunities to outdoor play with access to nature, all year round in almost all weathers.

**ACHIEVING** – Being supported to experience challenging, risky and adventurous play that allows a sense of achievement and success.

**NURTURED** – Having access to spaces that have meaning and feel safe, where we can develop a sense of belonging and place attachment. Having access to suitable outdoor clothing and footwear.

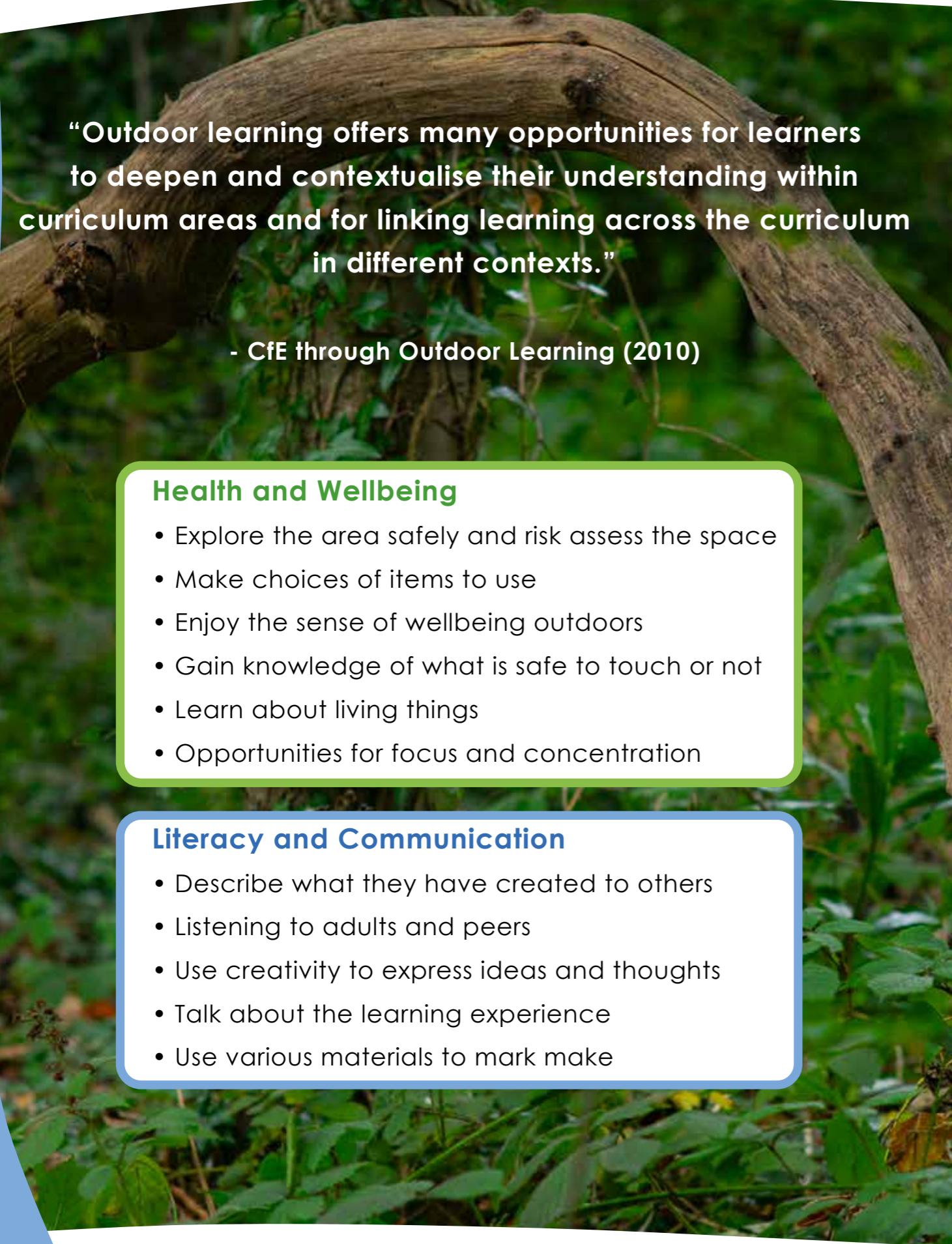
**ACTIVE** – Having the freedom to use our bodies and to be physically active within a natural outdoor environment.

**RESPECTED** – Having the right to play and be respected and supported. Giving children opportunities to be actively involved in the planning and evaluating the nature kindergarten sessions.

**RESPONSIBLE** – Have opportunities to work together to ensure we demonstrate responsibility to ourselves, others and the environment we play in.

**INCLUDED** – Having opportunities to follow my own interests either on my own or with others in a group. Being supported to play in the way we would like to.

# Learning Opportunities



**“Outdoor learning offers many opportunities for learners to deepen and contextualise their understanding within curriculum areas and for linking learning across the curriculum in different contexts.”**

- CfE through Outdoor Learning (2010)

## Health and Wellbeing

- Explore the area safely and risk assess the space
- Make choices of items to use
- Enjoy the sense of wellbeing outdoors
- Gain knowledge of what is safe to touch or not
- Learn about living things
- Opportunities for focus and concentration

## Literacy and Communication

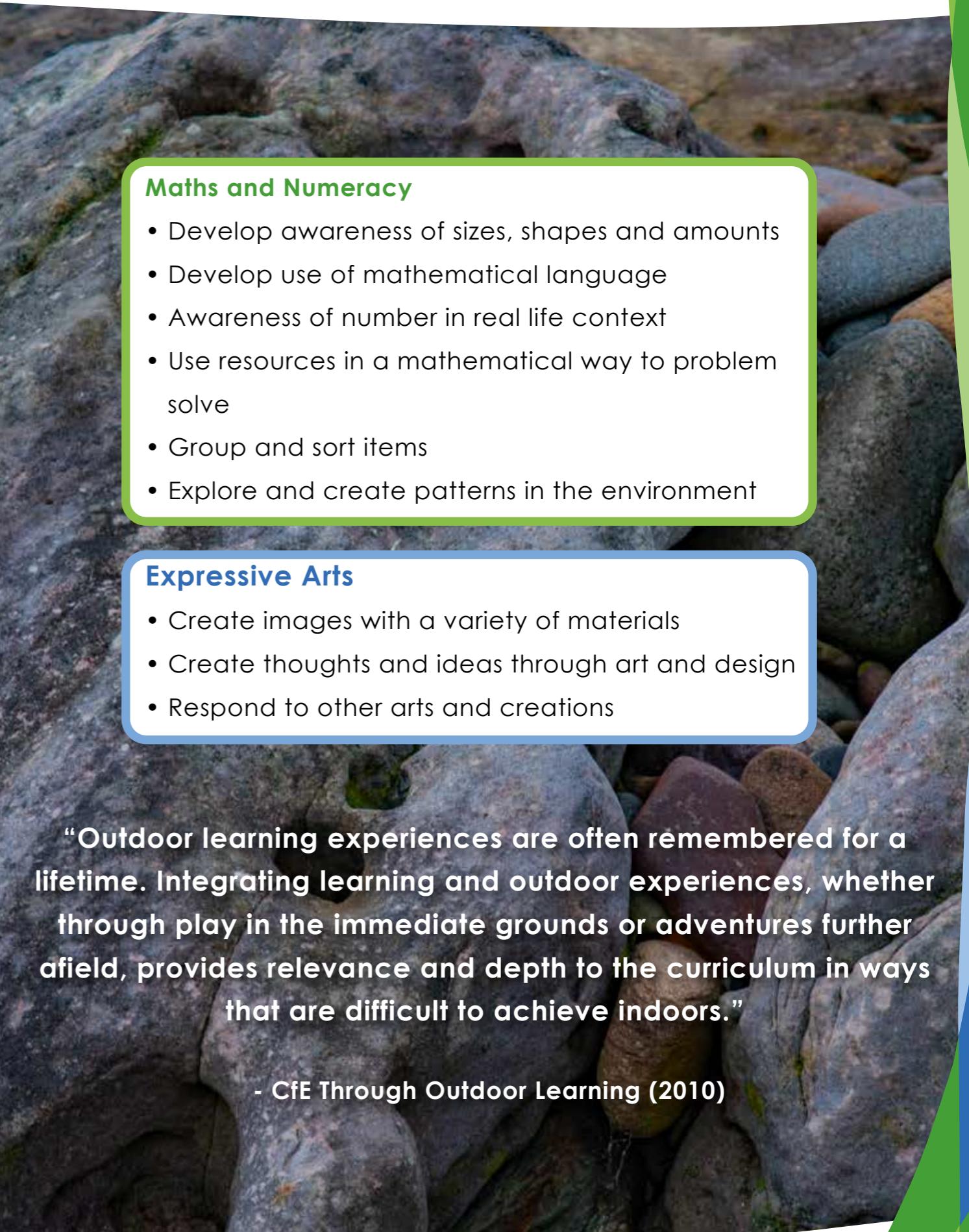
- Describe what they have created to others
- Listening to adults and peers
- Use creativity to express ideas and thoughts
- Talk about the learning experience
- Use various materials to mark make

## Maths and Numeracy

- Develop awareness of sizes, shapes and amounts
- Develop use of mathematical language
- Awareness of number in real life context
- Use resources in a mathematical way to problem solve
- Group and sort items
- Explore and create patterns in the environment

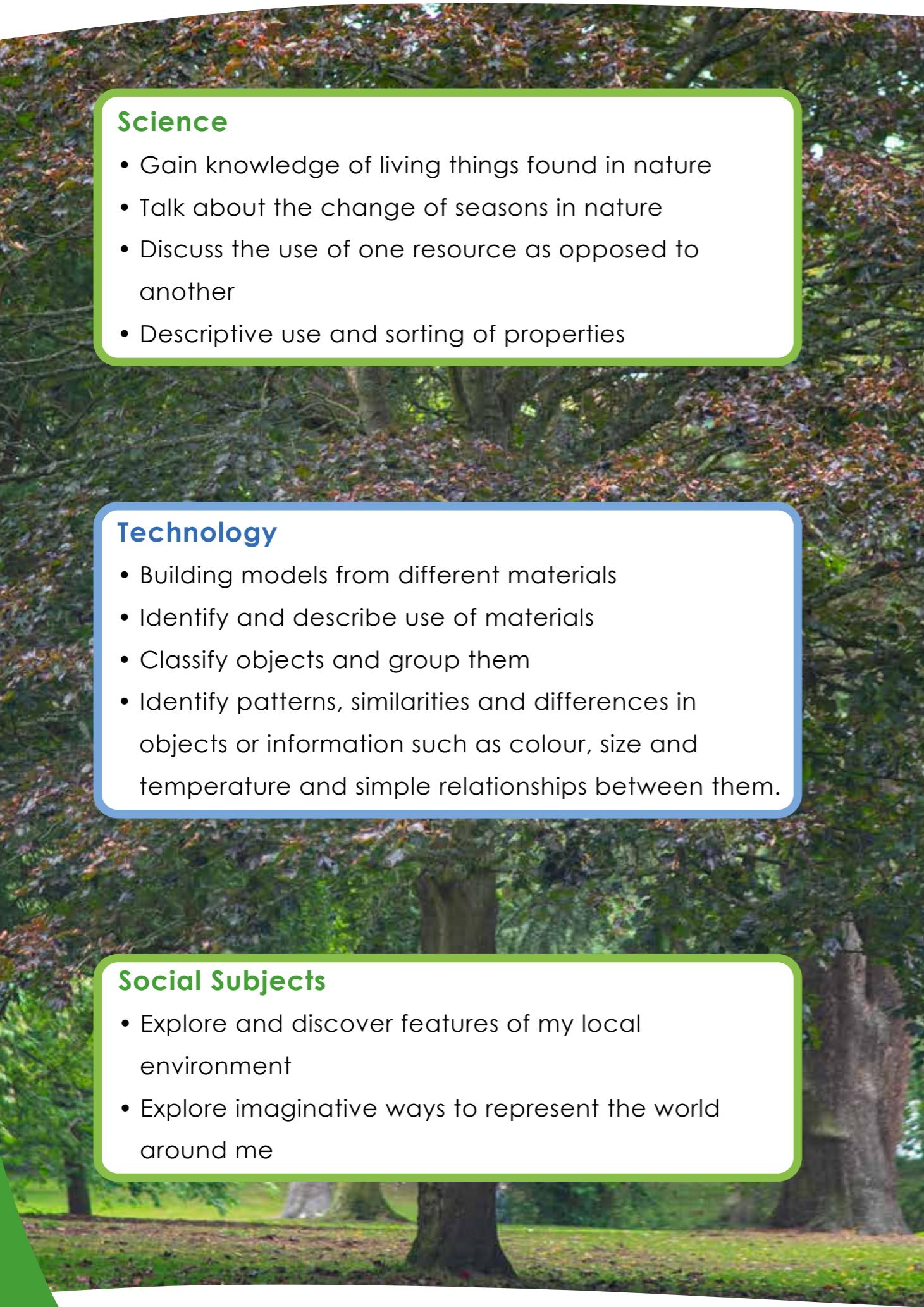
## Expressive Arts

- Create images with a variety of materials
- Create thoughts and ideas through art and design
- Respond to other arts and creations



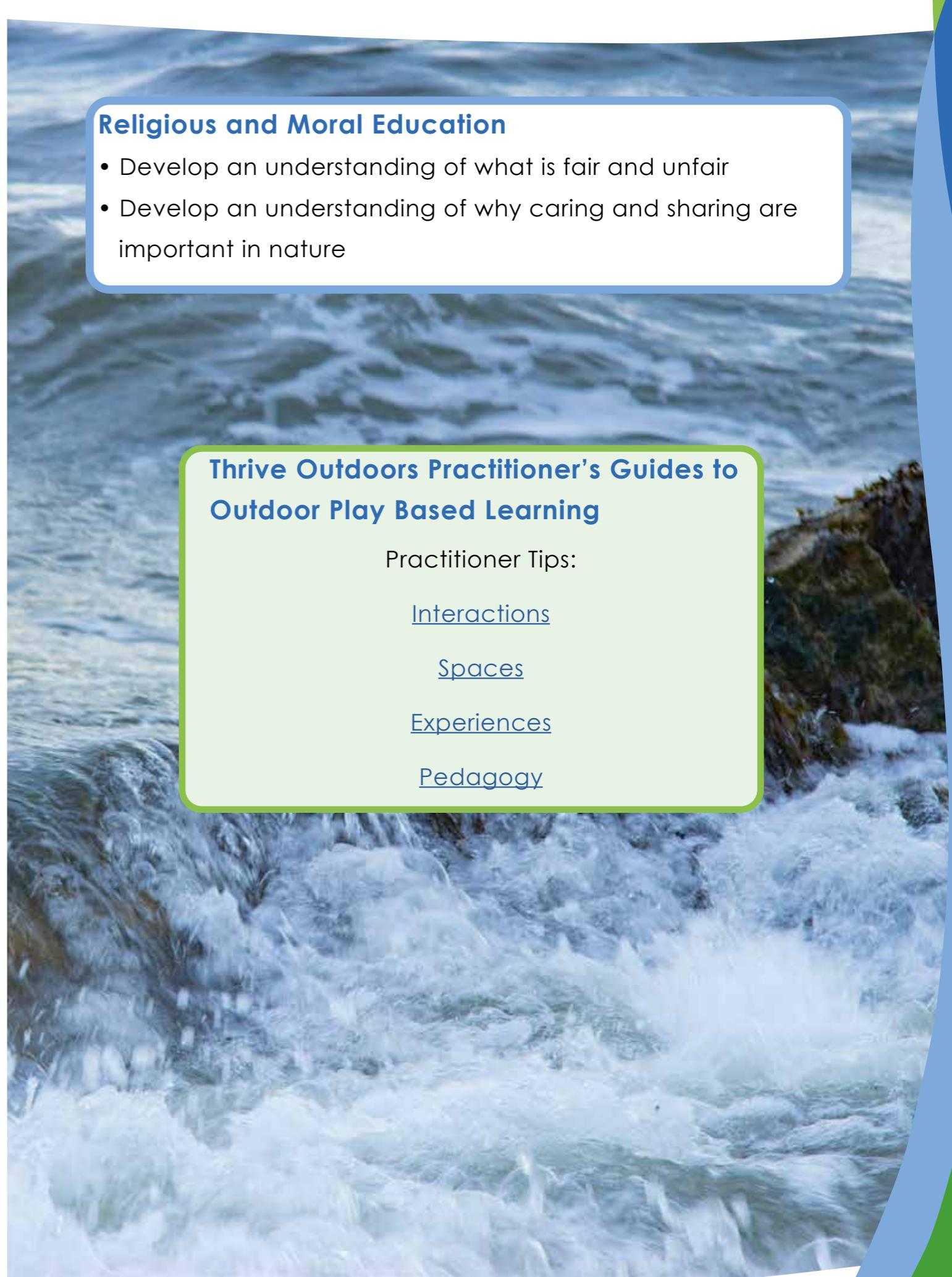
**“Outdoor learning experiences are often remembered for a lifetime. Integrating learning and outdoor experiences, whether through play in the immediate grounds or adventures further afield, provides relevance and depth to the curriculum in ways that are difficult to achieve indoors.”**

- CfE Through Outdoor Learning (2010)



### Science

- Gain knowledge of living things found in nature
- Talk about the change of seasons in nature
- Discuss the use of one resource as opposed to another
- Descriptive use and sorting of properties



### Technology

- Building models from different materials
- Identify and describe use of materials
- Classify objects and group them
- Identify patterns, similarities and differences in objects or information such as colour, size and temperature and simple relationships between them.

### Social Subjects

- Explore and discover features of my local environment
- Explore imaginative ways to represent the world around me

### Religious and Moral Education

- Develop an understanding of what is fair and unfair
- Develop an understanding of why caring and sharing are important in nature

### Thrive Outdoors Practitioner's Guides to Outdoor Play Based Learning

Practitioner Tips:

[Interactions](#)

[Spaces](#)

[Experiences](#)

[Pedagogy](#)

# Loose Parts

In a natural space such as a woodland or beach, there are an abundance and diversity of natural loose parts. These environments can be described as having a high play affordance, providing lots of play possibilities and real world learning for all children and young people.

**“In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity and the possibility of discovery are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.”**

- Simon Nicholson: Theory of Loose Parts (1971)



Photo Credit to [Learning Landscapes Design](#)

Loose parts or variables can be found objects such as shells, seaweed, drift wood, conkers, pinecones, sticks, leaves, mud, sand, grass, logs, stones, pebbles as well as naturally occurring and disappearing phenomena such as water, ice, snow, shadows, cobwebs and rainbows.

The learning resources you find outdoors are primarily loose parts, it is important to think about how these can stimulate learning across all curriculum areas.

It's also important to consider how you facilitate all types of play in the natural environment. Play Scotland's website sets out the [Play Types](#) identified by Bob Hughes.

**“The concept of variables and affordances come to life outside. The interplay between children and the loose parts, landscape, elements, and season creates an ever changing, growing, evolving play space, especially in natural environments that are loved and cared for.”**

- Loose parts play: A Toolkit (2019)



## Useful Guidance:

[Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit \(2019\)](#)

National guidance on the use of loose parts.

[Out to Play - Caring for Outdoor Spaces \(2023\)](#)

This guidance will help you to make the most of the outdoor spaces your ELC and Childcare settings use and caring for the environment through Learning for Sustainability.



# Practical Guidance

In 2018, the Scottish government launched the practical guidance document: [Out to Play: Practical guidance for creating outdoor play experiences](#).

This offers guidance and advice for early learning and childcare settings and practitioners on how to access outdoor spaces to create safe, nurturing and inspiring learning experiences.

Key sections of Out to Play based on frequently asked themes from practitioner's attending Fife's Nature Kindergarten training:

Section 4 - Finding the right outdoor space  
Appendix 2 – Site Appraisal Form

Section 5 – Creating your Space  
5.5 Handwashing  
5.6 Toileting  
5.12 Risk Benefit Assessment

Section 6 – Using Your Space  
6.4.6 Fire  
6.4.7 Playing Near Water  
6.11 Missing Child Procedures  
6.4.12 Foraging & fungi  
6.4.13 Potentially harmful plants



# Planning Your Session

## Before You Go

- Visit the site prior to the Nature Kindergarten session
- Staff should consult tide times for beach visits
- Ensure all staff are familiar with **your own setting's Risk Assessment** for Nature Kindergarten sessions.
  - Staff can refer to [Fife Council's Generic Risk Assessment](#) for guidance
- Establish micro-routines with children i.e. clothing
- Ensure you have access to appropriate Handwashing/Toileting resources
- Prepare your setting's First Aid Kit and any required Medication
- Have access to your setting's mobile phone (fully charged) and up-to-date emergency contacts
- Prepare any food and drinks required



## Helpful Resources

Rigger Gloves	Spring Pegs	Forest Guides
Tarpaulin	Vegetable Peelers	Kneeling Mats
Whistle	Beach Guides	Rope
Binoculars	Hacksaw	Magnifying Glass
Clipboard	Hammer	Tent Pegs



## Ratios

Establish adult/child ratios for the nature kindergarten session. There are no separate ratios for outdoor learning, ratios are in the Care Inspectorate guidance. For nature kindergarten sessions, each setting should risk assess and make sure there is enough staff to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and that the experience is beneficial.

### Useful Care Inspectorate Guidance:

[Guidance on adult to child ratios in early learning and childcare settings](#)

[Keeping Children Safe - SIMOA and Practice Notes](#)

[Safe Staffing Programme: Information for ELC services](#)

## Group size

Think carefully about the size of the group going to Nature Kindergarten sessions. These sessions offer rich learning opportunities where staff should have capacity to interact and extend learning in the moment. Large groups can restrict staff from quality interactions resulting in 'crowd control' to ensure children's safety.

Consider what is manageable for your setting, you may need to take a smaller group for all children to be included and have a rich learning experience. Staff should reflect on individual staffing and children.

### At your site

- Conduct a Dynamic Risk Assessment at the site
- Establish ground rules with the children, parent helpers and staff at the beginning of each Nature Kindergarten session
- Ensure key messages shared within your team are consistent

### Remember

Nature Kindergarten sessions offer rich learning opportunities to complete quality observations and scaffold learning through high quality interactions.

### Fun Fact!

Over 10,000 species of plants and animals can be found within the Kingdom of Fife. Including, the iconic, yet near-threatened red squirrel. These can be spotted in Devil's Forest, Tentsmuir and Falkland Estate.

# Risk Benefit Approach

It is important to manage risk in play and learning environments and exposure to some risks is often a benefit.

Adopting a risk benefit approach is particularly valuable if you are thinking about providing more adventurous, challenging play opportunities in outdoor contexts such as in Nature Kindergarten sessions.

“It is the role of the provider and staff to work out the main physical and environmental risks and take steps to reduce them.

You need to balance the risks against the benefits and make children the main focus of the risk-benefit assessment process.”

- **My World Outdoors (17:2016)**

The Care Inspectorate promotes a holistic risk benefit approach as advocated in their position statement on taking a positive approach to risky play.

[Care Inspectorate Position Statement - Positive approach to risk in play](#)

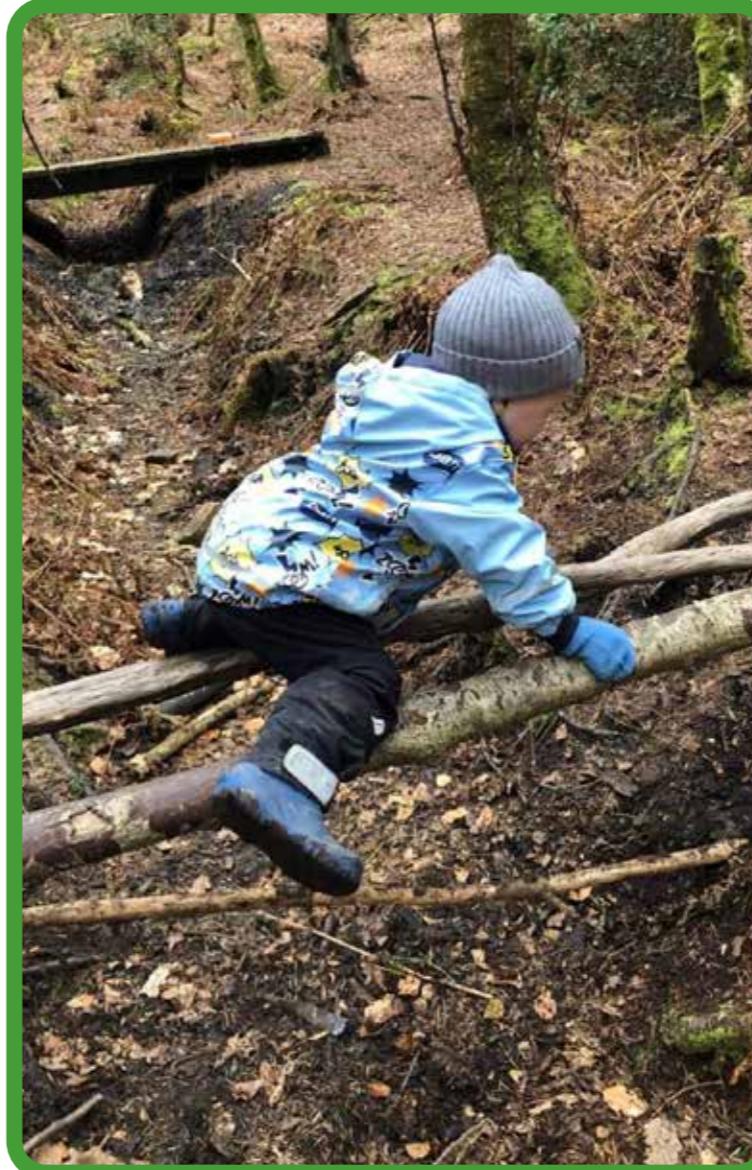
Education Scotland have produced a helpful risk benefit tool to support practitioners to evaluate and improve their practice in managing risk in outdoor learning.

[Education Scotland: Managing Risk in Outdoor Learning Risk Benefit Tool](#)



“Risk and learning through playful risk is key in developing resilience, and the learning and self-reliance that brings to a child in their formative years.”

- **Out to Play (72:2019)**



The following Thrive Outdoors practitioner guide to outdoor play-based learning focuses on the benefits of ‘Outdoor Risky Play’

[Thrive Outdoors: The Benefits of Outdoor Risky Play](#)

# Nature Kindergarten Training

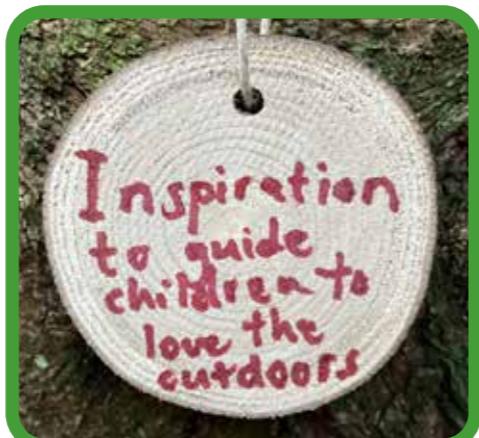
Our [Nature Kindergarten training](#) supports child-centred learning through play in a natural environment. It explores the philosophy of Nature Kindergarten and looks at how this relates to both the 'Curriculum for Excellence' and 'Realising the Ambition' documentation.

It is a full day training course where participants will engage in a variety of experiential learning opportunities within both forest and beach environments.



## This includes:

- Fire building
- Rockpool exploration & understanding tides
- Den building using both natural and manufactured resources
- Loose part play
- Using a hammock with young children



"A really enjoyable and interactive course. Loved being involved and participating in the tasks and really like the reflective learning that was involved with the questions and thinking about current practice and how we can enhance our practice using new skills."

"I thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of this course. It was well planned and delivered by experienced practitioners. I now feel comfortable leading and supporting outdoor sessions in both the forest and the beach. The range of activities give ideas of how staff can support and develop children's ideas, curiosity and problem-solving skills outdoors. I am very much looking forward to putting this into practice in my own settings."

## The day includes learning discussions around:

- Adult's role in supporting and extending learning in a natural environment
- The benefits to children when exploring a natural environment.
- A risk-benefit approach
- Signposting to key guidance and national practice documents



# Case Study - Beanstalk Family Nurture Centre

## Planning

We plan 4-5 week blocks of nature kindergarten sessions; these sessions take place on the same morning each week, with the same group of children and staff. This provides continuity for all children. We find that children immediately re-engage in play with their peers when it is the same group returning. It also supports extension of learning as staff observe and extend the interest from week to week.



The team discuss which group of children should attend a block. We keep track of which children have/have not attended to ensure that everyone is given the same opportunity.

Prior to any blocks of nature kindergarten beginning, staff visit the location to complete a risk assessment. Risk assessing continues on every trip as the weather has a significant effect on the environment.

## Sharing Information

We share an information letter as well as an informative [forest kindergarten SWAY](#) with our parents/carers. This informs them about the benefits of nature kindergarten session, as well as practical advice about what the child will need. It shows pictures of the location and explains how the children will travel to and from the session in the minibus.

We support children to understand what to expect during our nature kindergarten session through the use of a pictorial keyring. A copy of this can be taken home to help parents/carers prepare their children within the home.



Once a group of children have attended a nature kindergarten session, we display photographs within the room. The children enjoy looking at the photographs, revisiting and reflecting on their learning experiences. This also supports children who have not yet been on a nature kindergarten session to understand what to expect. The pictures have dialogue explaining the learning that is taking place. Our parents/carers like to look at this and see the benefits of nature kindergarten.

## Nature Kindergarten Experience

The children travel to the location and we set up a 'base camp'. This is the area we should all gather at the start and end of the session and also where we have a group snack. Staff speak to the group about rules and boundaries i.e. always being able to see a member of staff, returning to base camp when asked, staying within the boundary.

On the first session, the children and staff create a boundary and always discuss what is safe. Allowing children to take the lead in this affords them some ownership of their space and responsibility for their safety.

The children are free to explore the natural environment and engage in free play.

At the end of the session, we gather together and all of the children have the opportunity to share their learning experiences.



## Adult's Role

The role of the adult is to support children to challenge themselves physically, building their confidence and resilience, providing opportunities for children to risk assess and problem solve independently. We also observe, evaluate, record and extend children's learning without being intrusive.

Our observations show progression in children's skills and confidence over the weeks that they participate. We observe children encouraging each other to be resilient and celebrate each others achievements.



# Beach Kindergarten Experiences

## Exploring the Rocks



Climbing the rocks

Challenging physical abilities



Developing team work, self esteem and confidence

## Eating Snack



Developing social skills



Enjoying eating outdoors

## Exploring the Sand



Sandbathing



Making a sand angel



Drawing in the sand

## Exploring the water



Exploring the water



Guddling in the rockpool

# Case Study: Childminders

## Childminders' Experiences of Nature Kindergarten

We are three childminders based in South Fife who work together daily. This provides us with opportunities for peer support and evaluation, whilst also giving the children a larger core group of friends to share their day with.

Our services have evolved to be predominantly outdoors. We enjoy a variety of pre risk assessed natural environments which are familiar to the children. By their very nature, the weather, tides and seasons present something new in terms of challenge and adventure. These experiences support the child's right to be active.

We appreciate we are very fortunate to have both an abundance of beautiful environments on our doorstep and very few time constraints to enable the children to enjoy unhurried experiences.

### Risk and Challenge

We are massive advocates of risky play and provide opportunities for this daily. We believe the children should have freedom within their time outdoors to lead their own play and seldom make use of adult driven activities. This has allowed opportunities for the children to experience high quality imaginative play.



On arrival at our destination, we bring the children together to have our safety conversation. This has now progressed to children being able to deliver these talks themselves with support. Children's emerging skills in literacy in our 3 and 4 year olds is particularly impressive.

Through identifying our boundaries of which the children are very experienced, enables the children to identify the risks for themselves and develop an awareness of our environment. The children have opportunities to take the lead on making the area safe, such as litter picking. We also identify risks together such as the weather, the tide, as well as other factors such as estuary mud or litter, and any birds that have succumbed to bird flu.



The children's gross motor skills are incredibly impressive having the confidence and ability to scale tree rooted embankments at great height, climb trees, old ruins, and varying degrees of rock formations on beaches and waterfalls.

From exploring these risky play environments daily and having the opportunity to lead their own learning, the children have become resilient, strong and confident in their decision making skills. We support and extend the children's learning in an unintrusive way, allowing them autonomy and control over their learning.

## Spaces and Experiences

During our sessions the children have access to mark making materials such as paint, pastels and paper however, we usually make use of the loose parts found in the natural environment itself, engaging in transient art. The children are now able to use the direct environment to support their learning and follow their interests, building their skills.

Examples of this include using sea water mixed with flour to make dough, adding their own found loose parts such as sea glass, rocks, shells, pebbles, leaves, and twigs. These experiences allow the children to learn about weight, measure, shape and the living world through identifying various shell types. Similarly, the children are familiar in exploring rock pools and identifying sea life.



The children have also used other things they have found to enhance their play such as using ropes to make rope swings from trees that has supported cooperation and turn taking. Wooden planks and used tyres have also been utilised as well as using fallen tree branches to cross waterfalls and ditches is commonplace.

We believe our daily outdoor play experiences give the children an opportunity to run freely and to express themselves physically which is a vital non verbal form of communication. They are developing an understanding of their own bodies, how their hearts beat and when they require rest. We are always on hand to support children's learning by taking account of individual children's learning styles.

## Benefits

Seeing the absolute joy, confidence and sheer abilities of all our children and especially our 1 and 2 year olds is something we don't feel could be replicated in an indoor environment and we are particularly proud of them. Their physical development is outstanding and the language rich nature of this kind of play has contributed to enhanced cognitive and language development.



The children are calmer, more inquisitive, more adventurous and this had led to us providing more challenging environments for the children to explore. Also, the children are competent at sharing and helping each other, nurturing younger peers, including others in their play and supporting their learning.

All the benefits of mixed age play, in natural environments have come to fruition.

- Gillian McKeown, Fiona Smillie, Angie Harrison

# Final Thought

“Young children are active learners with their best learning occurring with hands-on, interactive play and discovery. Young children have a natural curiosity that requires direct sensory experience rather than conceptual generalisation. To be effective and engage children based upon their developmental abilities and ways of learning, their hands-on sensory experiences need to be immersive and open-ended rather than structured and scripted. When it comes to environmental education, the best learning environments are informal and naturalistic outdoor nature-scapes where children have unmediated opportunities for adventure and self-initiated play, exploration and discovery.”

-White & Stoecklin (2012)



# Useful Links

## Early Learning in Fife Website

<http://www.bit.ly/FifeELC>

## Fife Council - Free Range Project

[Free Range Project](#)

## Thrive Outdoors - Outdoor Play Resources

[Thrive Outdoors - Inspiring Scotland](#)

## Creative Star Learning - Nature Play and Learning Resources

[Nature Play & Learning | Creative STAR Learning](#)

## Outdoor Woodland Learning Scotland - Early Years Resources

[OWLS – Early Years Resources](#)

## Froebel Trust - Children and Nature Training and Resources

[Froebel Trust | Children and nature](#)

## Muddy Faces - Equipment & Resources

[Muddy Faces Equipment](#)

[Muddy Faces Outdoor Hub Resources](#)

## The Scottish Outdoor Access Code

[The Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)

## Tide Information

[Fife Tide Times, Tides for Fishing, High Tide and Low Tide Tables](#)

## Learning Through Landscapes – Forest Kindergarten Resources

[Forest Kindergarten](#) | [Learning through Landscapes](#)

## Learning through Landscapes – Risk Benefit

[School Risk Assessments](#) | [Outdoor Learning](#) | [Forest School](#)

## Community Playthings: Nurturing Children's Biophilia

[Nurturing Children's Biophilia](#)

## Community Playthings: Training Resources

[Training Resources - Learning Outdoors](#)

## Woodland Trust Resources & Activities

[Tree Tools for Schools – Woodland Trust](#)

## Useful Guidance

### Scotland's National Outdoor Play and Learning Position Statement (2020)

[National-Position-Statement-Dec-2020.pdf](#)

### Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland (2020)

[Realising the Ambition](#)

### Out to Play, Scottish Government, (2020)

[Out to Play: Practical guidance for creating outdoor play experiences in early learning and childcare](#)

[Out to Play Section 11: Practitioners Supporting Children with Additional Support Needs \(2021\)](#)

[Out to Play, Section 12: Caring for Outdoor Spaces \(2023\)](#)

### My World Outdoors - Care Inspectorate (2016)

[My World Outdoors](#)

### Space to Grow - Scottish Government (2018)

[Space to Grow: Design guidance for early learning and childcare and out of school care settings](#)

### Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit

[Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit](#)

### Play Types Toolkit (2017)

[Play Scotland - Play Types Toolkit](#)

## Outdoor Learning - Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland

[Outdoor Learning - Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland](#)

## Education Scotland – Summary of Outdoor Learning Resources

[A summary of outdoor learning resources](#)

## Curriculum For Excellence Through Outdoor Learning

[Curriculum For Excellence Through Outdoor Learning](#)

## Education Scotland - Managing Risk in Outdoor Learning

[Education Scotland: Managing Risk in Outdoor Learning Risk Benefit Tool](#)

## Education Scotland - Early Level Play Pedagogy Toolkit 2019

[Education Scotland - Early Level Play Pedagogy Toolkit](#)

## Care Inspectorate Position Statement - Positive Approach to Risk in Play

[Care Inspectorate Position Statement - Positive approach to risk in play](#)

## Care Inspectorate - Guidance on Adult to Child Ratios

[Guidance on adult to child ratios in early learning and childcare settings](#)

## Care Inspectorate - Keeping Children Safe

[Keeping Children Safe - SIMOA and Practice Notes](#)

## Care Inspectorate - Safe Staffing Programme

[Safe Staffing Programme: Information for ELC services](#)

## Useful Books

**Dirty Teaching: A beginners guide to learning outdoors (2014)** -

Juliet Robertson

**Fascination of Air: Wind (2013)** - Claire Warden

**Fascination of Fire: Charcoal (2012)** - Claire Warden

**Fascination of Earth: Wood Whittling (2012)** - Claire Warden

**Fascination of Water: Puddles (2012)** - Claire Warden

**Messy Maths: A playful approach for early years (2017)** - Juliet

Robertson

**Nature Kindergartens and Forest Schools: An Exploration of Naturalistic Learning within Nature Kindergarten and Forest Schools (2012)**

- Claire Warden

**Nurture Through Nature: Working with Children Under 3 in Outdoor Environments (2012)** - Claire Warden

**Playing Outdoors: Spaces and Places, Risk and Challenge (2007)** - Helen Tovey

- Helen Tovey

**The Essential Guide to Forest School & Nature Pedagogy (2021)**

- Jon Cree & Marina Robb

# Acknowledgements

Thanks to all who contributed to the development of this resource.

## **Fife Council's Early Years Team**

Sharon Faulkner, Practice Development Officer

Aileen Allan, Partner Provider Development Officer

Scott Bissett, Training Development Officer

Kerryn Marshall, Early Years Development Officer

Lilian McWhirter, Partner Provider Development Officer

Lesley Leitchman, Funded Provider Development Officer

Lewis Currie, Information Services Support Officer - Design, graphics and media

## **Thanks to the following ELC providers who contributed to providing information for the case studies**

Beanstalk Family Nurture Centre, Dunfermline

## **Childminders in Partnership with Fife Council:**

Gillian McKeown, Childminder

Fiona Smillie, Childminder

Angie Harrison, Childminder

# Notes

# Notes

© Fife Council Early Years Team 2024

