

Outdoor Learning

Category: Early Years

Risk Management and Legal Implications

Failure to manage risk may impact on the delivery of Service objectives and the outcomes achieved by Service users. Education and Children’s Services aim to mitigate the implications by ongoing management and review of risk in all elements of work activity.

The production of this document is one way in which we aim to reduce our exposure to risk. By providing staff with information on good practice, making reference to other guidance that is available across the Council and providing clarity on how we should do things, we can ensure that the management of risk is intrinsic to what we do.

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Outdoor Learning

Rationale

Young children come to Early Years settings as active, experienced learners with a natural curiosity. They are unique individuals eager to make sense of the world, to develop relationships, and to extend their skills.

(Curriculum For Excellence)

“Even the most uninspiring outdoor spaces can be transformed into a rich play environment creatively and inexpensively through the provision of loose parts play. Instead of focusing on recreating indoor play areas outdoors, reflect upon the unique opportunities outdoor play affords for big movement and dynamic play.

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 – Being Me)

It is essential that young children get frequent and regular opportunities to explore and learn in the outdoor environment and this should not be seen as an optional extra – indeed, in Fife, it is viewed as an important part of the core curriculum. Curriculum for Excellence places a strong emphasis on the importance and value of daily outdoor experiences for children’s holistic learning and development.

In recent years there has been a cultural shift in our society that has reduced the access and use of outdoors for many young children. Contributory factors include increased fear amongst adults in relation to children’s safety and technological advances.

However, the benefits of providing the children with a learning environment beyond their immediate indoor environment whether that be a local forest, the beach or the immediate outdoor area of the nursery are:

- Learning outdoors supports the development of healthy and active lifestyles by offering children opportunities for physical activity, freedom and movement, and promoting a sense of well-being.
- It gives children contact with the natural world and offers them experiences that are unique to outdoors, such as direct contact with the weather and the seasons.
- Playing and learning outdoors also helps children to understand and respect nature, the environment and the interdependence of humans, animals, plants, and lifecycles.
- Outdoor play also supports children’s problem-solving skills and nurtures their creativity, as well as providing rich opportunities for their developing imagination, inventiveness and resourcefulness.



- Children need an outdoor environment that can provide them with space, both upwards and outwards, and places to explore, experiment, discover, be active and healthy, and to develop their physical capabilities.
- The outdoor environment offers space and therefore is particularly important to those children who learn best through active movement. Young children learn predominately through their sensory and physical experiences which supports brain development and the creation of neural networks.
- For many children, playing outdoors at their Early Years setting may be the only opportunity they have to play safely and freely while they learn to assess risk and develop the skills to manage new situations.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that;

“ELC will take place in physical environments, indoors and out, designed to maximise the experience for children and improve the quality of learning..... This will include encouragement to include well-designed outdoor space as part of this expansion. Space will be designed to be welcoming and inclusive of parents and carers too. We know the benefits of outdoor learning, exercise and play for young children in terms of their health and wellbeing, physical and cognitive development. Therefore, we will encourage ELC providers to ensure that children have opportunities for exciting and challenging physical activity.”

(A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning & Childcare in Scotland)

Outdoor learning should flow seamlessly between indoors and outdoors making the most efficient use of resources and building on children’s interests and enthusiasms, therefore allowing children to make connections between their indoor and outdoor environments.

Children outdoors experience enjoyment, and sense of wonder and excitement that is generated when they are actively engaged with their environment.

The natural world is a rich learning environment that allows the complex brain to create itself. Play provides a safe space in which a child can explore new concepts and develop a range of skills needed for adult life. Curriculum for Excellence emphasises the importance of play and hands-on learning experiences to enhance children’s’ understanding.

Curriculum for Excellence emphasises the crucial areas of child development:

- Physical Development
- Health & Well-being - Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language

Additionally, the curriculum specifies the importance of learning skills associated with:

- Numeracy & Maths
- Literacy & English
- Sciences
- Expressive Arts



Outdoor learning encompasses the entire range of learning experiences for children and should be valued and planned for as we would for indoor experience. Outdoor learning should provide rich challenging learning experiences for all learners. Observation lies at the heart of planning to ensure we are meeting the needs of learners. Reactive planning ensures we take account of the 'here and now' as we respond to the exciting learning taking place. Children should be consulted about their learning and encouraged to identify their next steps in learning outdoors. Children's progress and significant development should be recorded outdoors and should inform their Personal Learning Journals (PLJs). The quality of the learning experiences we provide for our children is of paramount importance regardless of the place in which it occurs.

It should be noted that any loose parts play/outdoor equipment and furniture to support learning should be stored in line with fire safety guidance.

Forest/Beach Kindergarten

Forest/Beach Kindergarten is based around child-centred learning through play. Forest/Beach Kindergarten offers young children frequent, regular play opportunities outdoors in a natural setting, in almost all weathers throughout the year.

Children learn most effectively through play experiences. This is about creating interactions with people and the places where they play, learning to care for nature and the world in which we live. The concept of sustainability is best understood through experiential learning. Being outdoors in a natural setting enables children to develop a connection with the natural world that can lead to long-term environmental awareness, understanding and positive action. As with all children's learning, their learning experiences should be free flow as well as planned for in response to their interests and in consultation with them. The children's progress and significant development should be recorded outdoors and should inform their Personal Learning Journals (PLJs).

Risk Benefits Approach

The Care Inspectorate supports care service providers taking a positive approach to risk in order to achieve the best outcomes for children. This means moving away from a traditional deficit model that takes a risk-averse approach, which can unnecessarily restrict children's experiences to a more holistic risk-benefit model. We are therefore actively promoting a risk-benefit approach on risk in play both indoors and outdoors whether that be within the vicinity of the nursery or in a local forest area, at the beach or elsewhere in the local community.

We encourage staff to use risk assessment to support children to enjoy potentially hazardous activities, exploring nature and learning in their local community.

Further guidance can be found at;

[space-to-grow-and-thrive.pdf \(careinspectorate.com\)](https://www.careinspectorate.com/space-to-grow-and-thrive.pdf)

Early Years in Fife

