

GLASGOW EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE OUTDOOR POSITION STATEMENT





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INTRODUCTION

“Given the abundance of green space, both formal and informal, that exists across our city, we want to encourage all of our citizens to access it. For our youngest children our city’s parks and woodland are a fabulous resource, offering countless opportunities for play and learning. We must make every effort to make these spaces available for Glasgow’s children.

However, we must also recognise the incredible resource that can, and does, exist across our Early Learning and Childcare estate. We must embrace the guidance set out in Realising the Ambition which notes that a child’s learning environment includes ALL of the spaces, experiences and interactions offered to them within ELC. We recognise that not all of our ELC outdoor environments are equal and this guidance sets out some of the key principles and ideas to embark on developing, or enhancing, your outdoor provision.”

Heather Douglas, Head of Early Learning and Childcare

PURPOSE

Our vision is for outdoor learning to be an integral part of Glasgow’s Early Learning and Childcare offer with each child enabled to access the outdoors **daily**, to experience regular encounters with natural environments and to have the opportunity to engage in rich outdoor experiences both within the nursery setting and beyond. We believe in supporting children to experience and engage in adventurous play where they can learn to assess and manage risk within a supportive environment.

This guidance document will set out some of the key drivers in establishing outdoor early learning environments in each of our ELC establishments, from the benefits to the compliance.

A Working Group comprising Head of Centres and Team Leaders from across the city assisted in gathering information and background for this document with the group Co-Chaired by Liz Kerr, Area Manager and Mairi Ferris, Inspiring Scotland’s Thrive Outdoors Programme Manager.

The Working Group focused on three key questions for creating Outdoor Early Learning Environments at nursery and this document will offer guidance against each of these key questions as well as aim to answer some Frequently Asked Questions.

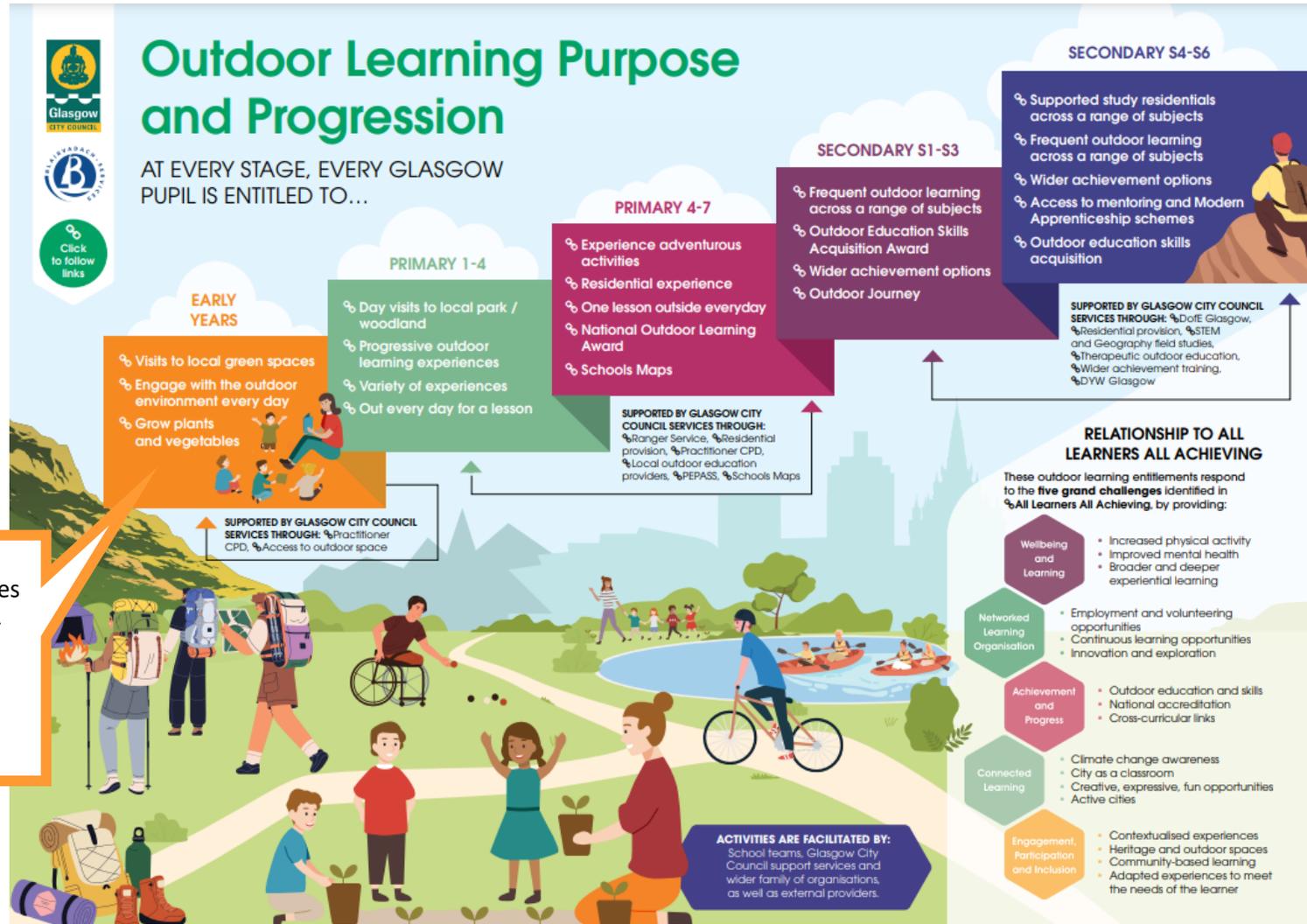
These key questions, used to frame the investigations of the Working Group and guide this document are:

1. Why should we go outdoors?
2. How we go outdoors?
3. What we do when we are outdoors?

WHY SHOULD WE GO OUTDOORS?



Glasgow City Council's *Grand Challenge* is our city-wide vision for all children and young people's learning journey. The following image describes the Outdoor Learning entitlement for all Glasgow's children and young people with the experience within ELC being a strong foundational element of that journey.



- Visits to local green spaces
- Engage with the outdoor environment every day
- Grow plants and vegetables



PRACTICE GUIDANCE

There are multiple ‘Whys’ for enabling children to engage with outdoor play and nature based learning. There is a growing evidence base from around the world and, increasingly, here in Scotland highlighting the benefits of outdoor play and learning on children’s development, health and wellbeing.

[Scotland’s National Position Statement on Outdoor Play and Learning](#) was developed by a coalition of 50 organisations and academic researchers in 2018 and sets out why outdoor play and learning should be a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland.

Glasgow City Council was a coalition member and as such a founder signatory of the Statement such is our belief that 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.”*

There are a myriad of national publications and guidance documents that outline the importance of Outdoor Play and Learning. Here are some to explore:



[Out to Play – Creating Outdoor Play Experiences for Children: Practical Guidance \(2020\)](#) is predominantly for supporting settings and organisations to provide fully outdoor Early Learning and Childcare provision but much of the advice can be applicable to establishing or enhancing onsite provision also.

This document also sets out some fundamental ‘whys’ of Outdoor Play and Learning:

Improves Physical Wellbeing	Improves Wellbeing and Mental Health	Enhances Child Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a healthier weight • better bone density • better fundamental movement skills • improved respiratory health • better immune system • improved eyesight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resilience is developed through taking and managing risks outdoors in a safe environment • self-esteem and confidence are increased making own decisions, problem solving and managing boundaries • emotional health regulation and interpersonal skills are improved • being outdoors in nature has a calming effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creativity • interpersonal skills • empathy and negotiation • essential element of learning for sustainability
<p><i>Importantly, it is fun and should be an everyday part of children’s play-based learning!</i></p>		



In 2017 the Care Inspectorate published “*Space to Grow*” as a design guide to support the growth of ELC through the expansion to 1140 funded hours. This has now been updated with the newly published “*Space to Grow and Thrive*” (2024) and focuses on onsite best practice and guidance.

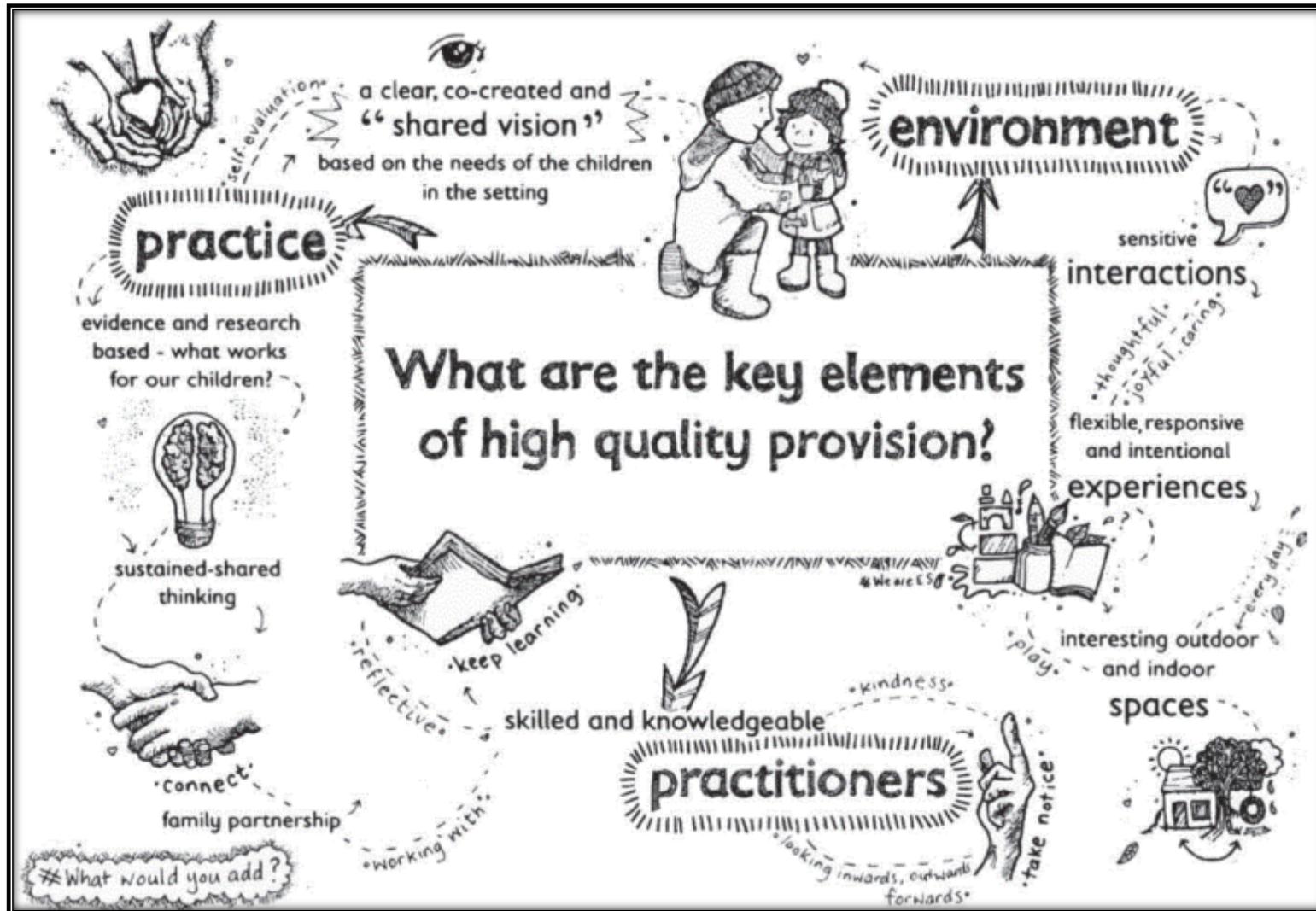


Although written in 2010, [Curriculum for Excellence in Outdoor Learning](#) remains a useful resource detailing the progressive approach to outdoor learning across the curriculum from 3-18. The vision set out within this document is that:

- *all children and young people are participating in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences which are clearly part of the curriculum*
- *schools and centres are providing regular, frequent, enjoyable and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors throughout their school career and beyond*
- *teachers and educators embed outdoor learning in the curriculum so that learning in the outdoor environment becomes a reality for all children and young people*



More recently, [Realising the Ambition: Being Me](#) (2020), was published by Education Scotland as the National Practice guidance for Early Years in Scotland.



This image also places not just the *environment*, but also the *practice* demonstrated by skilled and knowledgeable *practitioners* as key to high quality provision.

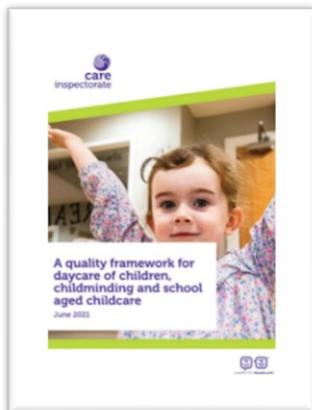


REGULATION

As well as practice guidance documents, we also have a raft of regulatory publications which emphasise the requirement to enable children to access outdoor play and learning experiences – establishments will be inspected against the expectation of providing children with these opportunities.



The [‘National Standard for Early Learning & Childcare’](#) in Scotland sets out the expectations and requirements for all services providing funded ELC to children. This lays out Scottish Government’s vision where every child in Scotland’s ELC sector will spend as much time outdoors as they do indoors. In recognition that this is a longer-term aim, the Standard currently requires that *“Children have daily access to outdoor play and they regularly experience outdoor play in a natural environment as part of their funded ELC offer”* (Sub-criteria 3.2).



[Care Inspectorate’s Quality Framework](#) states:

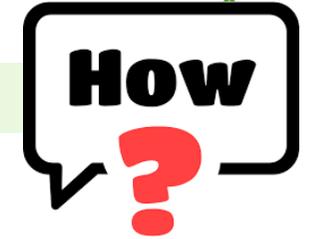
- Staff understand the importance of outdoor play for children’s health and wellbeing, promoting sustainability and caring for the environment. The setting reflects a risk benefit approach to children’s play, learning and development.
- Children can influence when they play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural play and learning environment.
- Staff understand the positive impact rich, multi-sensory outdoor play and learning has on children’s resilience, health and wellbeing. Children have uninterrupted time to become absorbed in their play and have fun.
- Staff have worked with parents to ensure that they understand the benefits of children enjoying riskier play.



Further, the Health and Social Care Standards have the following criteria:

- 1.32 I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment.
- 2.24 I make informed choices and decisions about the risks I take in my daily life.
- 2.27 I can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity

HOW DO WE GET OUTDOORS?



This section will outline some of the practicalities of establishing, developing and extending your outdoor provision. While going outdoors at nursery needs to be an everyday experience, it is more complex than simply opening the doors. As well as the pedagogical aspects of enabling outdoor play and learning which will be picked up in the ‘*What we do when we are outdoors?*’ section, consideration needs to be given to practicalities.



**SPACE TO GROW
AND THRIVE**
Design guidance for early learning
and childcare and school age
childcare settings



In Spring 2024 the Care Inspectorate published a revised guidance document *Space to Grow and Thrive*. This document builds on the previous *Space to Grow* document and includes guidance on providing outdoor spaces for indoor, and indoor/outdoor, establishments.

This can be found here

- <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/5784/space-to-grow-and-thrive.pdf>

In this section, we have broken the guidance into the most common areas where queries arise relating to the practicalities and logistics of facilitating outdoor play and learning at nursery:

- Staffing
- Access – moving from in to out and back again
- Clothing
- Storage
- Toileting and Handwashing
- Snack and Lunch



STAFFING

It is important to note that staffing ratios are no different outdoors as they are for indoors. In addition, the Care Inspectorate seeks a common-sense approach to staff deployment, which means that just because nine children want to move outdoors to play, it does not necessarily mean a second member of staff needs to relocate outdoors. Decisions on deployment should take the layout of the building and outdoor learning environment into consideration along with knowing your children. Some child, or particular groups of children, may require more staff support than others.

Challenges in staff numbers should not inhibit children's access to the outdoor learning environment. If staffing requires that some areas are 'closed' or restricted, the outdoors should always be available. Closing the outdoor space as the default position, will result in children whose learning environment of choice is outdoors being disadvantaged.

As with each establishment, we know that each individual practitioner will have different levels of confidence and experience of facilitating outdoor play and learning, and we must start from where they are. Opportunities for staff to develop their understanding, skills and experience are important. Outdoor play and learning training and CPD is routinely made available across the city and a growing number of practitioners and settings are confident and willing to share their skills and knowledge on a peer-to-peer basis.

As there is a requirement to enable daily access to the outdoors within the National Standard for ELC, facilitating outdoor play is an integral part of an early educator's role. That being said, teams should be sensitive to including flexibility in the deployment of staff to the outdoor area for wellbeing; being assigned to outdoors for three months when it is winter may require a different approach and mitigations to over the summer period.

ACCESS

There are a few things to consider in terms of children being able to access the outdoor environment daily but it should be noted that 'free flow' – where children can autonomously go out or in is best practice in the majority of settings but only a *requirement* for settings that are registered as 'indoor/outdoor' settings. In the main, older premises, may not be easily adapted to enable free flow, for example, those within old Victorian buildings. However, structural challenges should not impinge on children's entitlement for daily access.



TRANSITION SPACES

Transition spaces should be considered in practical terms, as high traffic areas where mud is likely. A setting with a smaller ante room from a playroom may make an ideal boot room in which to store and change into outdoor kit but not all settings have this opportunity. If the door to the outdoor environment comes directly from the playroom, floor coverings should be able to be mopped but not be slippy. Ideally pegs for kit and welly storage should be near the door as well as benches to help children to get ready.



Transition spaces can also act as visual guides for children to *remember* that the outdoor environment is there and invites them out to explore. If you have low windows and glass doors by the access point, try to keep these clear so children can see directly outside. Nature play curiosity tables, planting and images of outdoors and nature are also useful.



CLOTHING

Children should be encouraged to become independent in getting ready to go outdoors. Many establishments will have waterproof outdoor suits of either the thicker jacket and trousers/dungarees or all-in-one puddle suits. Two piece suits tend to be a better option as generally they are more robust but also allow children to get out of them a bit quicker if in need of a loo break.

To keep waterproofs in the best condition, and to save your washing machine from getting clogged with mud, suits should ideally be hung up to dry then brushed down to removed dried mud, or hosed and dried, or if they are really dirty, soap flakes can be made into a solution and sprayed on. Disinfectant breaks down the waterproofing. Reproofing can be purchased from outdoor stores to prolong the life of kit.

Establishments should also work with parents to help understand the purpose of outdoor learning and physical activity at nursery so that children come to nursery in appropriate clothing that enables them to explore, move, create and enjoy their play opportunities to their fullest. Clothes that restrict movement, such as skirts and dresses will inhibit exploration as will coming to nursery in their best clothes as children may be fearful of getting dirty.

Children also have different sensory needs. For some children they have a need to experience the world barefoot. This can be managed within ELC provision and even within the outdoor environment though engagement with parents and staff is key to making this a success. Not all children will experience heat or cold in the same way and should be encouraged to make autonomous choices about wearing outdoor kit and wellies. Staff may need to guide children in making choices appropriate to the weather and take their health and wellbeing into consideration but blanket approaches to what we wear when outdoors does not support learning. We don't wear our waterproofs on sunny days.





STORAGE

Depending on how secure your outdoor area is will dictate what type of storage you may need. If your loose parts and bought resources and equipment needs to be locked away a container or shed is the usual mechanism. If your space is more secure, you may only need storage for the purpose of looking after and tidying the resources.

Either way, children should be able to access resources as independently as possible and this will mean having a system where shelves and boxes are at child height (and weight) for them to access, ideally be clear so they can see what is inside and be labelled for literacy. Children should always be encouraged to help look after resources and to tidy up. Loose parts, while these may be sticks and pebbles should still be respected and stored away. Having designated areas for different sizes of loose parts is another good way of introducing mathematical concepts while keeping the outdoor resources maintained.



Many settings use grit bins or storage crates sited at different zones or areas in their outdoor space. For example, crates with pots, pans and utensils beside the mud kitchen, different sized and varieties of scoops, shovels and spades by the sand. This approach keeps the outdoor area tidy while giving children easy access to the resources across the space.

For small items, an idea is to use clear, or windowed, small drybags hung washing line style in an area. Children can easily see what is inside and access these independently. Again children should be encouraged and supported to also put things back appropriately.



TOILETING AND HANDWASHING

Many anxieties settings have around outdoor play and learning is around the logistics and practicalities of toileting and handwashing.

[Out to Play](#) (2020), although focused on offsite settings, has a lot of useful ideas and guidance on this topic. Children should have access to water for handwashing and supported to wash their hands at key points in their routines, for eating, when moving inside and after toileting. Within the nursery outdoor environment, you may only require handwashing facilities to be available at the entrance/exit point so that children can wash their hands on coming back indoors. But if you enable snack and lunch to be eaten outdoors (see following section) you will need to consider the best way for you to provide handwashing facilities outside. Health Protection Scotland guidance specifies that warm running water should be used for handwashing. Having warm water encourages children to wash their hands for the required amount of time to properly clean them. This does not need to be challenging or expensive to manage however. Some settings use solar showers, others insulated containers, purpose made free standing sinks or [SpaTaps](#) which can fit onto any disposable water bottle and water kept warm by being wrapped in bubble wrap.



Outdoor toileting may not be necessary to facilitate outdoor learning at your setting. However, you may find that children become very absorbed in their play and this may lead to accidents! Or it may just be a bit far for children to travel from the outdoors, wriggle out of their suits and to the toilet in time! If this is the case, you may wish to consider a pop-up toilet in the outdoor area. These are easy to provide and use a camping style toilet with either a chemical flush, or more simply, sawdust or cat litter can be added to the bag and waste bagged and put in the nappy bin. Children's privacy and dignity obviously needs to be respected and this can be done by having the toilet in a simple shelter, a specific toilet tent or by using tarpaulin to fashion a 'cubicle'.



[Creative Star Learning](#) has a useful blog about outdoor toileting for children – and is a fantastic resource for all things outdoor learning.

SNACK AND LUNCH

Many settings have adopted rolling or free flow snacks and lunches and this can also be done outside to facilitate the needs of children who prefer to stay outdoors. Some settings found that when children were required to return indoors for food, they simply chose not to, which is clearly not supporting their health and wellbeing needs! Provision of food outdoors needs to follow the same regulations as indoors but also needs to consider how to provide a level of shelter – could be tarps, sails, a polytunnel – and handwashing facilities (see previous section).

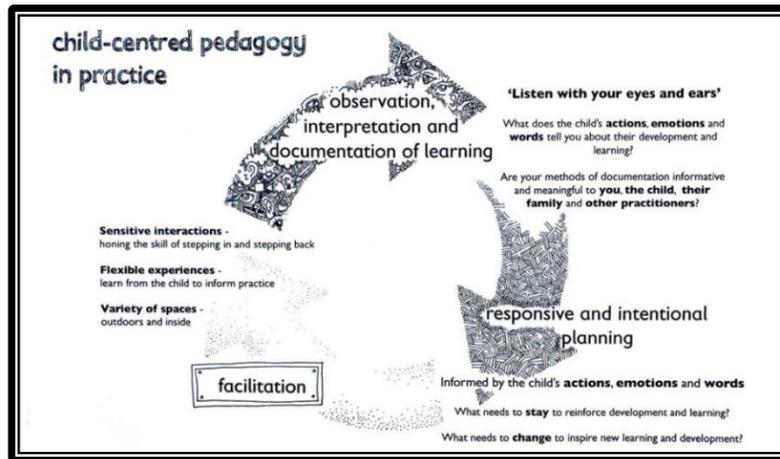


You may have more questions on practicalities that we have covered in the 'How we go outdoors' section. In the FAQ section later in this guidance document, we have tried to collect answers to questions that we have gathered for Heads of Centre and practitioners from across the city.



WHAT WE DO WHEN WE ARE OUTDOORS?

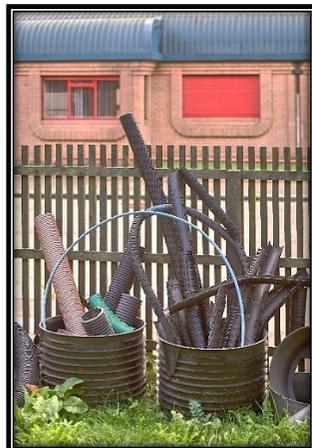
It is useful to remember that the *process* of facilitating child led play and learning outdoors is the same as you would do in the playroom. This image from *Realising the Ambition* highlights the practice of child-centred pedagogy and this should be applied outside and in.



In assessing the *spaces, experiences and interactions* of your outdoor learning environment it can be useful to think about the types of play that children will seek to explore outdoors. There has been significant research over many years on this topic.

Professor David Sobel is one academic who has researched this and he has created Seven Design Principles of Nature Play and these are outlined with examples in his book *Childhood, and Nature: Design Principles for Education*. Many of our establishments will have been introduced to these principles through outdoor training.

In 2014 Outdoor Early Childhood Education expert Jan White looked at the work of David Sobel and others and created a revised framework which pulled together the similarities across a range of research. This framework is used within Inspiring Scotland's [Loose Parts Play Toolkit](#) (2019) written by Theresa Casey and Juliet Robertson and will also be familiar with some establishments and practitioners across the city.





The graphic illustrates how these themes can be used to consider the play opportunities on offer within a setting.

ADVENTURE

Seeking out the unknown, stretching limits of possibility, taking calculated risks, anticipation, discovery and invention.

- exploring away from adult eyes (or perception of this)
- establishing a culture where adventure and uncertainty is supported
- creating spaces with many layers to discover
- providing time to listen to and hear children's experiences, should they wish to share.

ENCLOSURE, DENS AND SPECIAL PLACES

Creating space, shelter, security, hiding and secret places, refuge and territorial boundaries.

- resources for building dens
- props for developing play within a den or secret place
- scrap cardboard and writing materials for creating signs
- nooks, crannies, trees and bushes or undergrowth to hide in or be alone
- large cardboard boxes and pieces of material, both see-through and dark.

PROSPECT (HEIGHT)

Searching out high places, views and lookouts, surveying the landscape and mapping areas.

- being high up – top of a hill
- climbing trees, boulders and other objects
- balancing on features
- play on different levels
- spyholes, gaps and see-through spaces, including windows and doorways.

PATHS AND JOURNEYS

The need for exploration, mapping out an area in many ways, finding short cuts and secret routes, tunnels, knowing the local area, making one's mark in the landscape.

- map making and using opportunities – both real and through digital devices
- trail making with natural resources and props such as ropes or chalk
- freedom to explore and get to know a local area
- finding your way.

HUNTER-GATHERER ACTIVITIES

Searching, finding and collecting, stashing and hoarding, treasure hunts, traditional games like hide 'n' seek, foraging, bush craft skills, fire, tool use.

- time to invent and play games
- collecting and using natural materials
- containers such as pockets, bags, baskets and buckets
- using real tools to create, make and take apart different objects
- experiencing fire-making
- bush craft type activities: whittling, fishing, foraging.

ANIMAL ALLIES

Projecting self onto other living things, feelings for, and empathy with, plants and animals of all kinds, developing personal connections to wildlife through direct experience and fantasy, the significance of names.

- ensuring time and space to discover wildlife on children's terms
- creating places to hide and watch wildlife, creating habitat piles, bird feeding stations and nesting boxes, etc.
- simple props for dressing up and being animals.

IMAGINATIVE NARRATIVES (STORIES, IMAGINATION AND FANTASY)

Making sense of the world through fantasy play, small world play and creating stories and accounts of experiences that connect and deepen friendships and relationships between each other and the places they play in, creating memories and reaffirming order and meaning.

- constructing and deconstructing miniature worlds outside or in
- dressing up inside and out with open-ended props such as quick dry materials and simple, open accessories, marking or painting face and body
- making and creating fantasy characters
- listening to the stories children tell and recording them where appropriate
- ensuring ample undisturbed time for play to spark and emerge.

MAKING RITUALS

Deliberate, ceremonial, meaningful actions often with metaphysical or transformational intent, invented by and participated in by individuals or groups; honouring or celebrating events, places, features through art, music, dance and role play; giving and receiving gifts.

- attending to, honouring and supporting the development of the simple but significant rituals of children
- providing space, time, freedom and space for children to dance, make music and explore art inside and out
- celebrating play
- re-visiting places regularly and frequently such as local greenspace.



Using this framework as a lens through which to assess your outdoor learning environment can be a useful tool. Keeping Realising the Ambition in mind, we can then consider the physical spaces and resources needed to provide for these types of play, the experiences we can offer and the interactions we, as educators, have with children to spark imagination and wonder.



When thinking about the experiences that children will seek out in outdoor play, we need to spend some time considering our approaches to enabling risky, or adventurous play. This type of activity is essential for children's development and practitioners should be supported to gain confidence in providing opportunities for children to engage in them without their personal anxieties or the fear of reproach stifling children's experience and learning.



THE IMPORTANCE OF RISKY PLAY

To understand their world, children need opportunities to assess their own risks and abilities. We all have a sensory system called the vestibular system which gives us our sense of balance and spatial awareness. The best way to help babies and young children develop this system is by providing daily opportunities for physical play, especially outdoors.



Risky play enables children to problem solve, discuss, plan, building confidence in their own ability and taking their learning and progression to the next level. The benefits of 'risky play' outdoors include helping children to build resilience, to manage risk and to know their limits. Children will make mistakes, there may be accidents and while no one wants a child to hurt themselves the benefits outweigh the risk. We have all learned great things from mistakes we have made and children do just the same.

Taking parents on the journey with us empowers families to support their children throughout their experiences and understand the importance of enabling their children to make choices. When children are learning to walk they keep trying even after falling more than fifty times and as parents we keep teaching and encouraging them to try again. As practitioners we should never stop encouraging our children to engage in risky play and learning from their mistakes.

Over-protective adults who don't let children learn through experience and over-manage their life and activities results in reducing a child's ability to grow and inhibits their ability to assess risk, try new things and recover from failure. It makes children less safe!



Ellen Beate Sandseter is a Professor of Early Childhood Education at Queen Maud University College in Trondheim, Norway and is a world-renowned researcher on play and risk. In her research, [*“ScaryFunny”*](#), Professor Sandseter identified six categories of risky play:

Great Heights



Rapid Speeds



Dangerous Tools



Dangerous Elements



Rough And Tumble



Disappearing Or Getting Lost



Children have an intrinsic motivation to seek out these types of risky play experiences and therefore if we can provide these in a way which minimises the hazards and allows children to develop skills in assessing and managing the risk for themselves, they are (a) less likely to seek the thrill in a way and space where the hazards cannot be managed and (b) enables children to gain the essential life skills of risk assessment and management.



For each of these elements, we must be mindful of context. The experiences provided for a toddler will be very different from a preschooler about to move on from nursery. For the toddler, 'Rapid Speed' may be learning to run down a slight incline, whereas the preschooler may have moved on to racing a bike down a more significant slope! Similarly, 'Disappearing or Getting Lost' can mean anything from playing Peekaboo with babies to enabling hidey holes, tents, dens and hide and seek for older children.

You can read more about Professor Sandseter's work on risk in her blog: <https://ellenbeatehansensandseter.com/>

Another research who has undertaken significant work on risk and its importance for children's health and development is Dr Mariana Brussoni, a Canadian Professor and developmental psychologist.

Brussoni and her research team have developed a tool to support parents and educators to gain confidence in supporting children's outdoor play. It can be accessed here: <https://outsideplay.ca/>.

Further research by Dr Brussoni looks at keeping children "as safe as necessary," not "as safe as possible", which supports child development through outdoor play while preserving children's safety. Brussoni et al. (2012) Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3499858/>

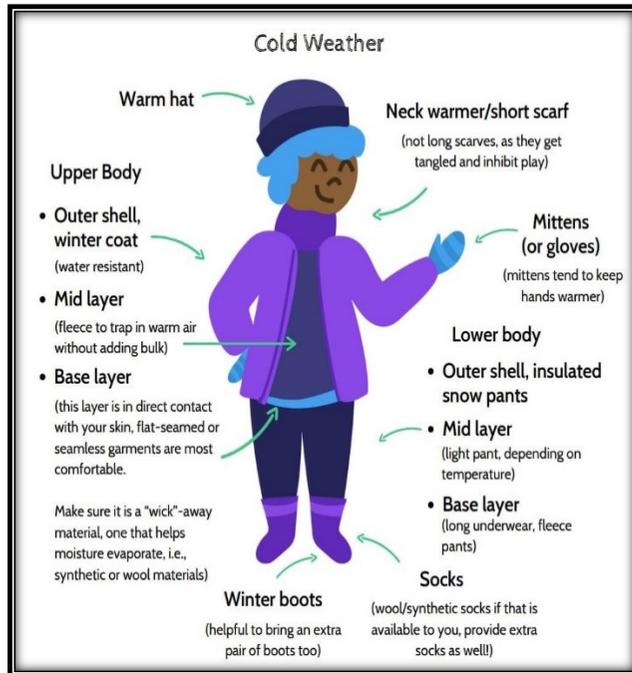
Children of all different ages enjoy the opportunities of being outdoors in all-weather from the splashing in the muddles to observing the changes in the leaves throughout the seasons. Outdoor play in all weathers has a profound effect on children's overall development and learning. Staff should recognise the many benefits of providing outdoor learning experiences within their establishment which are embedded in and contribute to all areas of the curriculum. Children should be encouraged to share and build on their ideas and interests outdoors to guide their development of experiences. We should take view that an outdoor learning environment is significantly different from our indoor learning environment and should be treated as such.



In our early year's establishments, we may encounter staff and children's reluctance in engaging in outdoor play in colder and wetter months. But the benefits outweigh the cons. Children are naturally resilient and promoting outdoor play within your establishments builds on their's and staff resilience in being outdoors in the colder wetter months. Children who build on their resilience and perseverance outdoors are more empowered to be creative, ambitious, imaginative and curious in a variety of ways which differ from being indoors.

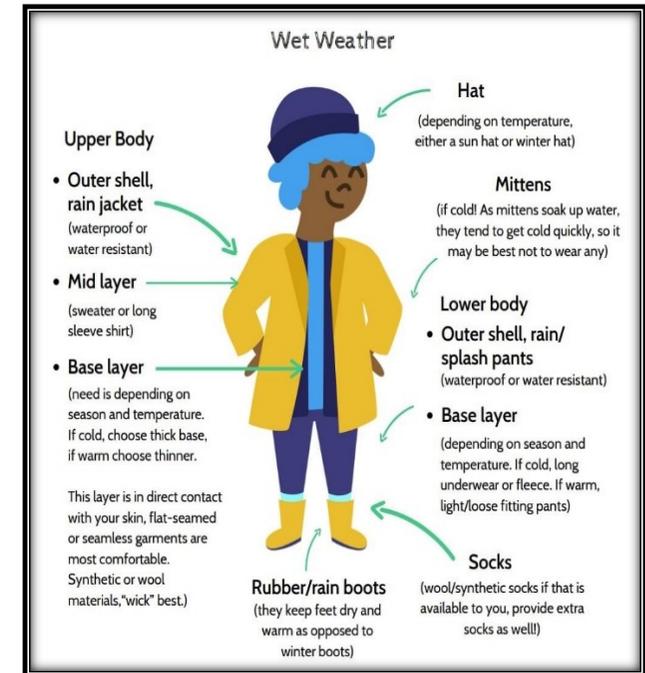
We also need to consider the impact of hotter, sunnier days as Scotland's climate changes and periods of significant heat and drought may happen. Not having children exposed to the sun when it is at its highest in the sky, does not mean that children are not allowed outdoors! We need to adapt our outdoor environments to ensure children's safety and enjoyment in all weathers. Shade, whether a more permanent structure or through the use of sails, tarpaulin or pop-up tents enables children to explore different weather conditions whilst being safe. Water should be available to ensure children remain hydrated and parents should be engaged about the use of sunscreen.





Outdoor clothing – appraising the quality of the garments

Item	Comment
Gender neutral	
Made from recycled material	
Responsibly manufactured	
Sufficient reflective tabs	
Value for money	
Suitable colour(s)	
Sufficiently waterproof – minimum 5000+ mm	
Taped seams	
Machine washable	
Dries quickly	
Jackets/ all-in-ones	
Removable hood	
Adjustable hood	
Hood will stay up	
Hood will go over a hat	
Long enough to cover waistband	
Soft collar	
Zip protection	
Dungarees/trousers/all-in-ones	
Braces easy to adjust	
Clips easy to fasten/unfasten	
Trouser waistband adjustable	
Elastic stirrup at feet	
Elastic or Velcro at arms and feet	
Can be easily put on or taken off	
Legs will fit over boots	
Children's concerns	
Easy to put on	
Zip easy to use	
Hood big enough to cover head	
Comfy wrists	
Not too noisy/rustles	
Choice of colours	
Other matters raised by children	



We all know that being outdoors is good for our mental health for both children and adults. Fresh air and exercise are good for us all. It can help you feel more energised, helps you sleep better and can have a positive impact on your moods. Our outdoor environments play a positive role in terms of social and emotional development, improved mental health and psychological and emotional wellbeing. Children build positive peer and adult relationships in an enriched outdoor environment and begin to understand and alleviate risk in a range of situations. This because outdoors is where children can most be themselves. With fewer restrictions, there is something about the outdoors that is exciting and exhilarating for them, a form of escapism. This feeling of freedom in open space brings with it a sense of happiness and wellbeing that is hard to beat in an indoor environment.

Our outdoor learning environments allow children the opportunity to view the world around them such as seasons, time and our interchangeable weather in a natural spontaneous way. Children make connections experientially with the real world; this helps them develop skills, knowledge and understanding in a real and meaningful context. The everchanging outdoor environment paves the way to develop children's understanding of sustainability and encourages conversations and learning centred around a focus on the environment.



LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND CONNECTION TO NATURE

Playing and learning outdoors is essential for our children and young people to understand, value, enjoy and protect our natural world. It connects them to their environment, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of its physical properties and diversity. It is a powerful tool through which children and young people learn to understand the world around them and their place in it, creating a sense of ownership of all of Scotland's landscapes.

It has never been more crucial to teach children to understand the natural world and their place in it – and the best place to do that is outside. However, we need to be mindful of the deeper learning and linking their outdoor experiences to Learning for Sustainability and ensuring environmental awareness is linked throughout the setting, the curriculum and beyond.

Learning for Sustainability (LFS) is “a cross-curricular approach which enables learners, educators, learning settings and their wider community to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society; and as an effective whole-setting approach which weaves together **global citizenship, sustainable development and outdoor learning** to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences.” (Scottish Government, 2023, P.5).

Learning for Sustainability is a priority in Scotland's education system and is seen as an entitlement for every learner, so how can we provide experiences in the early years? Highland One World have recently developed a great resource for early years practitioners called [Seeds for Change](https://highlandoneworld.org.uk/for-teachers/resources/seeds-for-change/). It provides practical guidance, suggestions and case studies from around Scotland to encourage global citizenship education through a child-centred, play-based approach.

<https://highlandoneworld.org.uk/for-teachers/resources/seeds-for-change/>

Modern lives are led increasingly indoors, either at home or school and with our reliance on devices, this means that often we/our children don't get to spend much time outdoors. This disconnection has been referred to as 'Nature Deficit Disorder' by Richard Louv, who has written about this in his books 'Last Child in the Woods' and 'Vitamin N'. Outdoors, in nature, is where the passion for learning, creativity, and the inquisitive nature of children can be cultivated. Children can learn by doing, and problem solve in an organic way, and it enables them to form and consolidate a connection to nature.

“If children do not grow up learning and appreciating the natural world, they won't understand it. If they don't understand it they can't protect it. If they don't protect it..... who will?”

David Attenboroug



This paper by Scottish researcher Dr. Alexia Barrable from 2019 makes the case for the inclusion of nature connectedness in early year curricula, as a distinct and valid goal. This outlines both the benefits of nature connectedness, as well as the ways in which nature connectedness aligns with current policy.

The Case for Nature Connectedness as a Distinct Goal of Early Childhood Education Alexia Barrable: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1225651.pdf>



MYTH BUSTING & FAQs

In this section we hope we have answered the many questions asked and busted some myths ...

- Weather
- Ratios
- Clothing for children
- Staff
- Spaces
- Parents
- Additional Questions
- Free Flow
- Play



WEATHER

Questions	Answers
Do we need a waterproof suit for every child?	No, but it can be a challenge during very wet weather to ensure the suits are dry in time for the next child.
What do we do if a child does not have appropriate footwear?	Settings should have spare wellies for children.
How do we ensure all staff are dressed appropriately for the weather?	Staff should wear their own warm layers as they would for any job. Additional waterproofs should be provided by the setting where possible.
How do we provide shelter from all elements including sunshine?	Shelter is important for both children and staff. Particularly on days where there may be a really heavy shower and people just need 5 minutes out of a downpour. Temporary shelters can be effective in the rain but not so good for the wind.
How do we ensure children are protected from UV rays?	Practitioners should be mindful of UV rays in all seasons and take extra precautions during particularly sunny days. (See sun safety below)

Useful Links:

Grants: <https://creativestarning.co.uk/developing-school-grounds-outdoor-spaces/permanent-shelters-in-school-grounds/>

Sun Safety: <https://www.sunsafenurseries.co.uk/>

file:///C:/Users/EK2000601/Downloads/Sun_Safety_Policy.pdf

<https://ndna.org.uk/blog/sun-safety-for-children/>



RATIOS

Questions	Answers
What is the staff child ratio outdoors?	<p>The Care Inspectorate recommends that two adults be present in the premises when children are being cared for. If a staff member is working on their own, providers must ensure systems are in place to enable them to access support if required.</p> <p>Staff with relevant skills and knowledge and ability are employed within the setting and are deployed at all times to meet and deliver quality care and learning experiences for all children.</p>
<p>Useful Links</p> <p>https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/ELC_adult-child_ratios_-_final_29.3.18.pdf</p>	

CLOTHING

Questions	Answers
Footwear – what happens when a child chooses not to wear shoes or wellies outdoors	<p>Support staff to have conversations with parents. If the child has a sensory need, it is our duty to respond to it.</p>
Footwear – do all children need their own wellies?	Children can share wellies. Hygiene procedures should be followed.
Jackets – what happens when a child chooses not to wear a jacket?	Children are moving and don't always feel cold. They can regulate their own temperatures and will know when they need to wear their outdoor clothing. Some children may need support or guidance.
What happens when a child chooses not to wear waterproofs.	Children should be allowed the freedom with guidance to choose their outdoor clothing. Visual reminders (see appendix 1) can be helpful. If children are already heightened and staff insist on certain clothing, a situation can escalate.
What are the procedures when children are wet?	Each setting will have a policy outlining who is responsible for changing children when they are wet from playing outdoors.





How do we care for waterproof clothing?	Don't fall into the habit of washing waterproofs after every wear. You only need to do this if they get dirty (as dirt will impair the performance over time) or if you notice that water is saturating into the fabric and has stopped beading on the surface.
<p>Useful Links</p> <p>https://muddyfaces.co.uk/outdoor-hub/outdoor-clothing/waterproofs-care</p>	

STAFF

Questions	Answers
How many staff should be outdoors each day?	Staff deployment – look at where the children want/need to be. Flexibility of staff who are willing to go outdoors rather than staying in an area.
What is the recommended length of time staff should spend outdoors and how should this work on a rota?	Each setting will be different and should look at the size of the outdoor space. Staff should be consulted on what works best for them and their children. There is an expectation that all staff should follow children's lead, therefore staff should be flexible in where they are working each day.
Do staff have opportunities to visit settings to observe good practice?	Good practice visits should be facilitated regularly as this enables staff to build their knowledge and understanding of the rich variety of experiences that can be offered outdoors.
Who provides outdoor clothing for staff?	Most settings have outdoor waterproof jackets for staff to use. It is the responsibility of all staff to dress appropriately for working with young children outdoors.
How do staff access cold water and hot drinks when working outdoors?	Staff should use thermos bottles/cups with lids for hot drinks and cold water when they are working outdoors.
Training and professional dialogue is required for all practitioners to develop their skills and knowledge.	Fire safety training – a minimum of 2 practitioners will be fire warden trained and everyone receives fire safety training annually. Appropriate extinguishers, exclusion zone (*training) sparks
<p>Useful Links</p> <p>https://www.playscotland.org/get-involved/schools/outdoor-play-and-learning/</p>	



SPACES

Questions	Answers
Rats – are children allowed out to play if there are rats?	Health and Safety policies and procedures should be adhered to at all times.
Vandalism – if you can't leave things outside	Unfortunately, some settings need to take everything indoors and set up each day. Working with local primary and secondary schools to share information about the impact of vandalism can be effective.
Slippy surfaces	Health and Safety procedures should always be followed. Metal stairs and ramps can be painted with special paint to coat the surface.
How do we maintain grounds with no funding e.g. concrete holes, damaged rubber crumb	Report issues to janitor who can report to NRSP. Regular maintenance through power washing and sprinkling sand can be effective.
How can you fund outdoor developments?	Grant funding can be helpful. (See links below)
Can we use water butts?	Use an enclosed water butt or one with a lid that children cannot easily remove, to prevent children accessing deep water. Bear in mind that the water is not suitable for drinking. Wash hands after using it and before eating as stagnant water poses a risk of legionnaires disease.
Do practitioners require specific fire training before using a fire pit/bowl?	Yes https://owlsotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Fire_Guidance2020.pdf
What is the safety guidance around ponds within nursery grounds?	Ponds should be covered by a metal grill to ensure no children are at risk. https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/resources/info-sheet/school-pond-health-and-safety#:~:text=Make%20sure%20the%20pond%20has,drop%20on%20the%20other%20side
Can we have generic risk assessments for ropes, heights, etc.	Yes but each aspect would be named or included in the risk assessment.
How can we remove permanent structures at minimal financial cost?	Local scrap metal dealers will often provide a free uplift. If the ground is damaged underneath, inform janitor and follow usual procedure for ground maintenance.



Is it ok to close an indoor space instead of outdoors when staff numbers are low?	Yes! Some settings are choosing to start their day outdoors for all children and as staff come on shift, they begin to open the indoor spaces. This is particularly helpful for children to transition from home to nursery as the fresh air and open spaces are beneficial to their physical and emotional wellbeing.
How do we ensure outdoor sand pit is safe?	Regular raking will be needed - ideally on a daily basis but never less than weekly. Periodic forking is necessary. Depending on the frequency of use the sand will need a regular disinfectant treatment - a weak solution of child-safe household disinfectant should be sprinkled on using a watering can or similar and sprayed in with a hosepipe (or substantial downfall of rain!). Children should be kept out of the sand area for a day. Annual topping up and occasional replacement will be required.
<p>Useful Links</p> <p>Sand: https://www.rospea.com/policy/play-safety/advice/sand-play</p> <p>Grants: https://creativestarning.co.uk/grants-outdoor-learning-and-play/</p>	

PARENTS

Questions	Answers
How do we address cultural differences towards outdoor play?	Transition from home to nursery induction programme should reflect parent's wishes and practitioners can reassure parents of the benefits of children playing outdoors in all weathers. The benefits of learning in and through nature and the holistic approach to the curriculum. Outdoor play policy leaflets can be translated into other languages.
How do we respond to a parent who has concerns about their child being outdoors when they have a cold?	The nursery induction process should include information about the benefits of playing outdoors strengthens the immune system. Playing outside allows your child an escape from indoor germs and bacteria. This will not only be good for healthy children; sick children benefit from the fresh air as well. Just make sure they are properly bundled up and moving around to capture and generate warmth. While spending time outside won't increase the severity of a viral infection, it is possible for cold air to make children more uncomfortable by worsening the following symptoms: Runny nose. Parents concerns should be listened to as they know their child well.
How do we respond to a parent who has concerns about their child being outdoors when they have asthma?	On days with an Air Quality I > 100, it is okay to be outside, but children should be encouraged to take more breaks and do less intense activities. They can follow their asthma action plan and keep quick relief medicine handy. Some children with asthma may be sensitive to air pollution when the AQI is between 51 and 100.



In some children with asthma, weather conditions and changes can bring on [asthma](#) symptoms or lead to an [asthma flare-up](#). Sometimes asthma symptoms get worse at certain times of the year. For others, a sudden weather change, such as a severe storm, can trigger a flare-up.

- Cold, dry air is a common asthma [trigger](#) and can cause flare-ups. This trigger may be more troublesome for children who have [exercise-induced asthma](#).
- Hot, humid air also can be a problem. In some places, heat and sunlight combine with pollutants to create ground-level ozone. This kind of [ozone](#) can be a strong asthma trigger.
- Wet weather and windy weather can cause problems too. Wet weather encourages mould growth, and wind can blow mould and pollen through the air.

Once you know what kind of weather triggers asthma symptoms, try these tips to protect the child:

- Watch the forecast for pollen and mould counts plus other conditions (extreme cold or heat) that might affect the child's asthma.
- Limit the child's outdoor activities on peak trigger days.
- If cold air is a trigger, consider having the child cover their mouth and nose with a loose scarf in very cold weather.
- The child's written [asthma action plan](#) should list weather triggers and ways to manage them, including any seasonal changes in medicine.

Useful Links

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



ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Questions	Answers
Are we allowed to use tyres?	Store loose tyres safely overnight. Can use tyres as planters but do not have them beside a fence as children can climb on them. Drainage holes should be bored into tyres to ensure rainwater can drain and prevent stagnant water.
Do we need a policy for stagnant water, fire, playing at height?	A separate policy is not required for each topic, but they should be covered within the outdoor policy. Risk assessments are essential. See appendix 3 and link below. Learning through Landscapes risk assessments
Should we only use biodegradable materials outside?	Biodegradable materials should be used wherever possible. This protects the local wildlife and environment.
Are there outside agencies who can work with nurseries to identify plants/animals etc?	Parks department and RSPB are useful contacts. Local libraries and museums are often willing to provide support.
How do we source loose parts?	Asking parents for specific donations can work, e.g. spare keys. Local businesses will often donate empty pallets and cable reels. Children can collect pine cones, shells, pebbles when out on a walk or holiday.
What are the best handwashing facilities to use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use warm water• Never share water in a communal bowl when washing hands• Use liquid soap• Dry hands thoroughly using paper towels. A designated, lined bin that the children can operate easily should be provided for disposal of hand towels• If there is no running water available, hand wipes may be used (children and staff should wash their hands at the first available opportunity)• Alcohol hand rub should be available for use by staff (hands should be washed with liquid soap and water if visibly soiled).

Useful Links

<https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/4858/elc-practice-note-trips-and-outings.pdf>

<https://ltl.org.uk/understanding-risk/>

<https://wosdec.org.uk/>

<https://www.playscotland.org/resources/loose-parts-play-toolkit-2019-web-2/>

handwashing: <http://www.docume/>



FREE FLOW

Questions	Answers
How do you record the number of children who are outdoors?	A system should be in place for children and adults to record who is outside/inside. This can be a register, dry wipe pen on a window, child's picture on wall, etc.
If the door to outdoors is open, the temperature in the playroom is affected. How do we control this?	Doors can be closed during very cold days. A simple solution is a door wedge so children can push the door open independently. https://cardea-solutions.com/product/happy-hands-door-stopper/?attribute_pack-size=Single&attribute_colour=Yellow&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiAu8W6BhC-ARIsACEQoDBS366bbYup8GOfmvtKdKLIInmJyhMWMznov5iYxacuJD1WT7XQn0l8aAuSZEALw_wcB
How do we provide freeflow to outdoors for babies and not just pram work?	Careful consideration should be given to the stage of development of all children and especially our youngest. Safety is the first priority at all times.
Do we require separate registers for indoors and outdoors/number during freeflow?	Yes, children should record where they are playing so staff know at a glance where children are at all times.

Useful Links

<https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/4852/elc-practice-note-2-transitions.pdf>



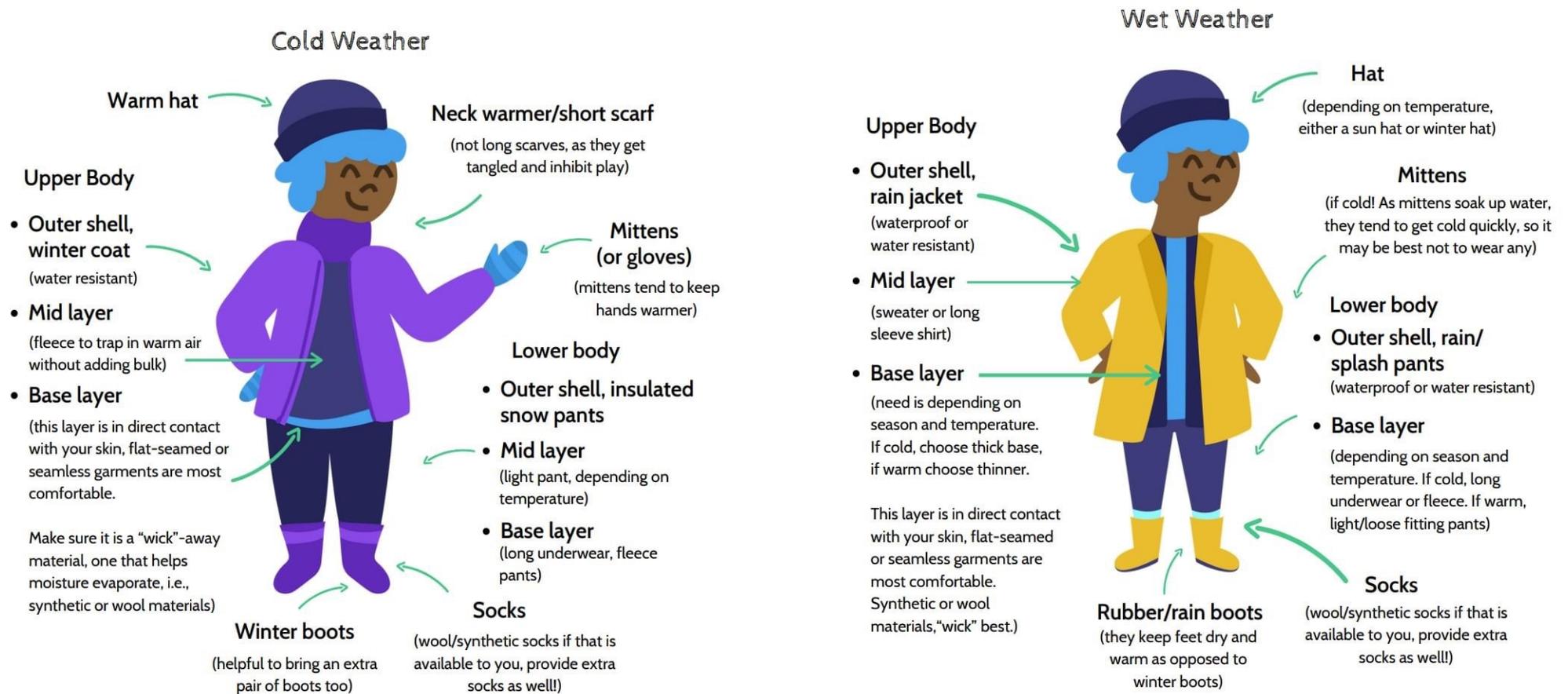
PLAY

Questions	Answers
<p>How do you balance risk and benefits in play?</p>	<p>To understand their world, children need opportunities to assess their own risks and abilities. We all have a sensory system called the vestibular system which gives us our sense of balance and spatial awareness. The best way to help babies and young children develop this system is by providing daily opportunities for physical play, especially outdoors.</p> <p>Risky play enables children to problem solve, discuss, plan, building confidence in their own ability and taking their learning and progression to the next level. The benefits of 'risky play' outdoors include helping children to build resilience, to manage risk and to know their limits. Children will make mistakes, there may be accidents and while no one wants a child to hurt themselves the benefits outweigh the risk. We learn great things from mistakes we have made, and children do the same.</p> <p>Taking parents on the journey with us empowers families to support their children throughout their experiences and understand the importance of enabling their children to make choices. When children are learning to walk, they keep trying even after falling more than fifty times and as parents we keep teaching and encouraging them to try again. As practitioners we should never stop encouraging our children to engage in risky play and learning from their mistakes.</p> <p>https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1264/managing-risk-in-play-implementation-guide.pdf</p>
<p>Do all staff have a shared vision for outdoor play?</p>	<p>All staff should be consulted on the vision for outdoor play, and this should be reflected in the policy within each setting.</p>
<p>What do children and adults you've consulted say about playing outdoors?</p>	<p>Children and adults can be consulted in a variety of innovative ways e.g. pebbles in a jar outside to vote on spaces, experiences that are popular.</p>
<p>What is the Health and Safety guidance around climbing/jumping at height onto surfaces including bark, sand, rubber crumb?</p>	<p>Risk assessments should be in place for climbing and jumping from height regardless of the surface.</p>
<p><u>Useful Links</u></p> <p>https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Outdoor-Play-Pamphlet.pdf</p> <p>https://www.froebel.org.uk/news/schemas-outdoor-play-and-froebel</p> <p>https://mindstretchers.academy/blog/shared-visions-and-values-for-outdoor-play-in-the-early-years</p>	



APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Visual Reminders





Appendix 2 – Example of an Outdoor Policy

Rationale

We are very fortunate at our nursery to have developed an amazing high-quality outdoor environment with the support of staff, children, families and our community.

At our nursery we place a high emphasis on outdoor learning and fully concur with current guidance Realising the ambition (2020) ***“The unique role of outdoor play it is undeniable that daily, high quality experiences have direct and positive impact on children’s physical, cognitive, social, mental health and emotional development”***.

In reflection to delivering a service with an 80-90% level of SIMD, we agree with my world outdoors (2016) ***“if staff provide children with rich learning through outdoors and nature, then we will see the children flourish, and for some children it can be seen as transformative”***.

Aims

- For our outdoors to continue to be an integral part of our provision.
- To provide a safe, stimulating, supportive and challenging environment for our children and families to explore together.
- To provide experiences to develop practical life skills in our outdoor/forest space
- To develop self-esteem, confidence and the ability for our children to make personal informed judgments on risk assessing independently.
- For our children to have full autonomy of their learning by choosing if they would like to explore indoors or outdoors by accessing free flow.
- For our children to spend lengthy periods of time outdoors without interruptions whilst leading their own learning.
- For our children to develop their children’s physical, cognitive, social, mental health and emotional development at their level with the support of staff and resources.
- To develop our children’s understanding, appreciate and care for the natural world we live in.
- For our children to be deeply immersed in the natural, open-ended resources which is enriching their experiences.

“The choice of experiences on offer should reflect on the environment of open-ended possibilities in which children can feel intrinsically motivated to explore and investigate”- RTA (2020)



Implementation Strategies

Health and Safety

- Our outdoors will have annual risk assessment checks as well as new risk assessment every time a new piece of equipment or area is introduced.
- Our janitor will carry out daily checks on our outdoor environment each morning prior to the children accessing outdoors. Our janitor will also ensure that all access points are locked. Any risks identified should be logged and acted upon by a janitor or SLT.
- Our staff and children will carry a daily risk assessment to ensure the children are involved in how to keep themselves safe.
- Staff to ensure our boot room doors are always securely open throughout the day.
- First aid bag and radio will be situated outdoors in an assigned area.
- Our children will self-register for indoors/outdoors to support staff monitor the number of children outdoors. Our appointed register staff member will oversee the fire register to ensure it is accurate. The register will be checked at again another 2 times each session to ensure all children are recorded. This will be displayed on our wall within our welcome area. Staff will record number of children outdoors.
- We have 4 staff members assigned to support outdoor play and learning. Where more children are accessing outdoors more staff should make themselves available to support outdoors in line with staff child ratios. Outdoor ratio is flexible when children require personal care. Please ensure this is communicated with your colleagues and staff support each other during these circumstances.
- When fire pit is being used this should always have a staff member there supervising until such times there is no risk.
- Our children are gently reminded about appropriate behaviours in line with our nursery values.
- To fully support our risk assessment staff should spread themselves across the outdoor space to support interactions, learning, and risk play. Staff should not congregate to engage in chatting.
- Sun protection – All parents must sign a consent form at their child's induction for staff to apply sun cream. Sun cream should be applied 10/15mins prior to accessing outdoors; shaded areas should be provided, and fresh drinking water should be readily available. Cold weather conditions – Children should have on warm appropriate clothing, including waterproofs and wellies. Shelters should be provided and a selection of cushions and blankets available for children to use. **This also applies to staff members.**
- Whichever staff member leaves the outdoor area last will check known areas where children can hide themselves.
- In line with our Fire safety policy staff members will store loose resources such as mud kitchen utensils, large blocks, bikes, hoops and art materials in the container. All loose tyres or pallets will be moved away from the building (See risk assessment).
- In the event of the fire alarm going off do not come back into the building but exit garden via the appointed emergency exit. **The boot room doors must be closed if the fire alarm goes off in line with fire procedures.**

(Please refer to the Outdoor risk assessment for further information)



Missing child from playground

“Children have the right to a safe environment and all adults and children should have the correct information about how to ensure children stay safe and healthy within it” - Article 24 (UNCRC 1989)

At our nursery the health, safety and wellbeing of all children is paramount, and the setting aims to plan effectively for this. We also recognise the need to plan for any emergencies that can have an impact on the service we are providing. This includes actions we take to prevent children leaving our setting unattended whereby any such incident that may occur will be dealt with using appropriate procedures and as calmly and effectively as possible.

We have reflected on the Care Inspectorate **“Simoa”** campaign and have used this to raise awareness and act responsibly to safeguard, protect and support children’s wellbeing. Staff should continue to make use of the Simoa (**Safety, Inspect, Monitor, Observe, Act**) to ensure they are confident they are providing safe, nurturing and supporting care and are keeping children safe. By engaging in regular risk assessing alongside the children ensures “I am helped to understand the impact and consequences of risky and unsafe behaviours and decisions – HSCS 2.25

If a child is feared missing the following procedures should be followed:

- Immediately alert staff including SLT and identify and clarify the main point of contact regarding the incident.
- Immediately initiate a search of the premises. The search will include all areas within the setting and the immediate surrounding area.
- Notify the child’s parents immediately. Ascertain whether a family member may have collected the child, or whether the child has made their own way home.
- In incidents where the child is not found after the initial search of premises notify the police. Record which police station was notified in the Accident and Incident book. Staff should continue searching the premises and surrounding area in a calmly manner until the police arrive.
- A record of any incident must be recorded in Accident and Incident book where police have been contacted. The SLT also must inform the Care Inspectorate within 24hours.
- The SLT must also inform our local authority head of service. An Accident and Incident report should also be submitted following the authority procedure.
- A follow up meeting should be arranged between the setting and the parents/carers to discuss the incident and any next steps or procedures to be put into place. A copy of any records of actions will be shared with parents.
- Duty of candour procedures will be adhered to following any incidents.



It is important that our staff team revisits the policies and procedures termly, to familiarise themselves with their responsibilities. We will also include these in our staff/student induction packs. The security of the setting policies and procedures are reviewed and updated annually or after an incident or concern occurs.

References

- The Scottish Government, Realising the Ambition (2020)
- Care Inspectorate, “A quality framework for day care of children, childminding and school-aged childcare” (2022)
- Care Inspectorate, “Guidance on Adult to Child Ratios in Early Learning and Childcare” (2018)
- The Scottish Government, “Health and Social Care Standard’s” (2017)
- Education Scotland, “How good is our Early Learning and Childcare” (2016)
- Care Inspectorate key notes – Keeping Children Safe

	Date	Signature
Created		
Reviewed		