

## Understanding Outdoor Learning, Learning Outdoors & Loose Part Play.

### Outdoor learning:

This is when children have the opportunity to explore the outdoor environment and learn new skills across the curriculum using nature, covering real depth and knowledge.



Using natural materials such as leaves and rocks to represent numbers and create natural equations.



2D to 3D shapes: Use sticks to learn about shapes, dimensions and reflection.



Bridging the Gap: Build a bridge that will hold your weight and enable you to cross a puddle, raging river or lava!



Design a board game. You could recreate one you already know or if you're feeling creative you could even create your own!



Music/Loose Parts: From tiny drips to a clap of thunder use sound effects to perform a rainstorm round.



Parts of a Plant: Identify the parts of a plant using real plant material rather than a worksheet.

## **Learning Outdoors**

This is commonly mistaken for Outdoor Learning. Learning Outdoors is simply taking a lesson that was originally going to be taught in class and taking it outdoors (for fresh air). Although this is enjoyable for children, it is structured and usually involves pencil and paper/clipboard. One popular activity for learning outdoors is story telling. Children may enjoy a story from their teacher whilst sitting comfortably on a log/cushion and being outside enjoying the fresh air. They feel more relaxed with four walls being taken away.

## **Why Play? Benefits of Play**

Play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development.

Play allows children to experience and make sense of their world, to challenge themselves, practise skills and manage their emotions, interact with others or enjoy time alone. Numerous studies, including 'Growing Up In Scotland' show play to be a crucial factor in a child's educational achievement. The benefits from playing and having fun ***cannot be underestimated.***

From playing on iPads to watching television, children seem to be spending more and more time indoors. The increase in numbers of children spending a predominate amount of time inside has led to numerous studies being published highlighting the negative impact this is having on their health and development. At the same time, research has also discovered that there are many benefits to children playing outdoors. Here are six of them:

### **1. Creativity**

Outdoor play is great for encouraging children's creativity. Away from the constraints and confinement of indoor play, being outside children's imaginations are often stimulated by the objects around them and they quickly tap into their creativity.

### **2. Health**

There are numerous health benefits to playing outside. With more room to play in, children are often more active when outside, which helps them to build strong bones and good fitness levels, while also enabling them to burn off extra energy and calories. As well as this, being in the sunshine, even in winter, means children naturally absorb vital vitamin D, a lack of which can lead to Rickets.

### **3. Social skills**

As outdoor spaces are usually less crowded than indoors, it is less intimidating and helps children to naturally come out of their shells and be more social. This means that children will be more willing to join in games and activities, while they will also be more likely to talk to different children and make new friends. This all encourages children to learn social skills and how to interact with other children away from adult supervision.

### **4. Well-being**

Giving children the freedom of playing outdoor helps them to feel happier and calmer. As already stated, being outside means that children naturally get vitamin D, which is proven to

help improve moods and create a positive mental attitude. The freedom outdoor play also encourages children to get rid of built up energy, particularly if they tend to be fidgety when sitting for long periods of time, this leads to them becoming calmer and ultimately helps them to be more focused when in the classroom.

## 5. Independence

The large space in which to play means that when outside children are often away from direct adult supervision. This helps them to learn independence when socially interacting with other children, as well as learning to play by themselves. They learn how to take turns playing games, to pick themselves up when they fall, and how to negotiate unfamiliar equipment, resulting in children learning how to be independent and self-reliant.

## 6. Explore

Often outdoor play equipment has a little more risk than indoor toys. Whether it is encouraging children to use slides they might be a little afraid to go down, or to try challenging play trails; outdoor play equipment can help children to learn to push their boundaries and become good at risk assessment. It also teaches them to explore new games and become confident in learning to try new things without being guided by adults.

## Loose Part Play

Loose parts create richer environments for children to play, giving them the resources they need to do what they need to do.

Loose parts aren't prescriptive and offer limitless possibilities. A stick, for example, may become a fishing rod near real or imaginary water, a tool to nudge a football that is stuck in a tree; it can be thrown, floated, snapped, pinged, bent, hidden, added to a pile, burnt, tied to something else, split, catapulted or discarded.

***Static, unchanging play spaces do little for children*** whereas environments which can be manipulated, where things move and can be moved open worlds of possibility. At a beach, for example, there is an abundance of water, sand, stones, rocks, smells, sights, vistas and textures which enable children to be highly inventive and creative in their play. Natural environments such as mature woodland or beaches often provide significantly more loose parts with higher levels of affordance than many artificial play spaces.



The list of possible loose parts is endless but can include;

- Natural resources - straw, mud and pine cones
- building materials and tools - planks, nails, hammers
- scrap materials - old tyres, off-cuts of guttering and, most essentially, random found objects.

