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Your child and the great outdoors

A Parents' Guide



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Lancashire County Council

Why play out?

Outdoor provision is vital for babies, toddlers and young children.

A rich outdoor play space will offer your child:

- Space to be noisy, active and boisterous
- Fresh air – allows more oxygen to the brain
- Experience of different weathers and seasons
- Direct contact with the natural world
- Freedom to explore in ways that are not possible indoors
  Make mess!
- Multi-sensory experiences
- Emotional and physical well-being
- Real experiences such as growing, digging, sweeping
- Risk and challenge and awareness of safety
- Natural light - essential for learning

What will your child enjoy?

- Filling, emptying, lifting and carrying
- Hiding and going in and out of boxes, tents, etc.
- Digging and exploring materials like soil, mud, sand, woodchip
- Looking for and learning to care for living things
- Collecting objects and arranging these in rows and patterns
- Splashing in puddles; feeling the wind and rain
- Exploring natural materials like leaves, cones and pebbles



How can you support your child's outdoor play?

- Provide suitable clothing for all weathers
- Encourage your child to care for living things
- Provide simple open-ended resources to explore
- Share snack and meals outside
- Role model and involve your child in outdoor activities such as gardening, washing the car, cleaning windows, sweeping the path, feeding wildlife or camping



Some ideas for outdoor play at home

Outdoor resources need not cost the earth. Simple, everyday objects with many uses are just, if not more, valuable.

- Boxes, buckets and baskets
- Ribbons, streamers, bubbles
- Cones, pebbles, shells, log off-cuts
- Sponges, brushes, rollers
- Sand, water, soil, woodchip
- Guttering, pipes, watering cans, hosepipe
- Bread or milk crates; large boxes
- Blankets, pegs, clothes maidens
- Tyres, planks, ladders

What does the EYFS say?

- ‘Being outdoors has a positive impact on children's sense of well-being and helps all aspects of children's development
- Being outdoors offers opportunities for doing things in different ways and on different scales than when indoors
- It gives children first-hand contact with weather, seasons and the natural world
- Outdoor environments offer children freedom to explore, use their senses, and be physically active and exuberant’

Within the EYFS document ‘Effective Practice: Outdoor Learning’ the key messages are:

- The outdoor environment has unique characteristics and features
- Outdoor learning has equal value to indoor learning
- Outdoor learning has a positive impact on children’s well-being and development
- Children need the support of attentive and engaged adults who are enthusiastic about the outdoors and understand the importance of outdoor learning
- Outdoor learning is enhanced by an environment that is richly resourced with play materials that can be adapted and used in different ways
- An approach to outdoor learning that considers experiences rather than equipment places children at the centre of the provision being made

‘Children can learn to make decisions, solve problems and grow in confidence in their own abilities outdoors and they need plenty of time to investigate their outdoor environment purposefully. They will make predictions about what may happen based on their previous play experiences and test out these ideas and theories.’

20 outdoor things to try while you're a child

(Ensure children are supervised)

- Roll down a grassy hillside
- Splash in puddles
- Play pooh sticks
- Lie on your back and look at the stars
- Jump in a brook
- Climb to the top of a mountain and look at the world
- Stroke your hand on a mossy wall
- Make a daisy chain
- Kiss through a kissing gate
- Make a den
- Chase a butterfly
- Feed a bird from your hand
- Split a blade of grass and blow through it
- Make a snowman
- Swing on a five barred gate
- Feed a horse a carrot
- Climb a tree
- Make a fire
- Swing on a rope swing
- Look at the clouds through your legs

There are so many more wonderful outdoor experiences you can have with your child.

Add your own to our list.