

# Outdoor play

## Key points:

- Experts agree that active play outdoors is essential to the healthy development of children. However, due to worries about safety, lack of green spaces and the lure of digital technology, children are not spending much time playing outdoors as they used to.
- Many parents remember playing outside all day long as children - having adventures in parks, woodlands and fields and playing traditional street games such as hopscotch, skipping and hide and seek. Most parents agree that their children have fewer opportunities to play outside than they did when they were young. We need to think about how we can recreate some of these early experiences for children and provide more opportunities for them to play outdoors.
- Being outdoors has a positive impact on children's sense of wellbeing and helps all aspects of children's development. Children naturally explore and play, discovering new sights and experiences. They will have a go at varied activities, learning how to manage risks. Outside play is active and keeps children fit and healthy. It allows opportunities for doing things in different ways and on a bigger scale than when indoors. It gives children first-hand contact with weather and nature.
- Child care settings provide opportunities for children to spend time outside in the fresh air, playing outside every day either in a specific play area or by taking part in nature walks or visiting parks. Your child may take part in 'Forest school' activities which are about children building self esteem and independence through exploring and experiencing the natural world. Typical activities include hunting for mini-beasts, pond dipping and building dens.

## What can you do at home to support your child?

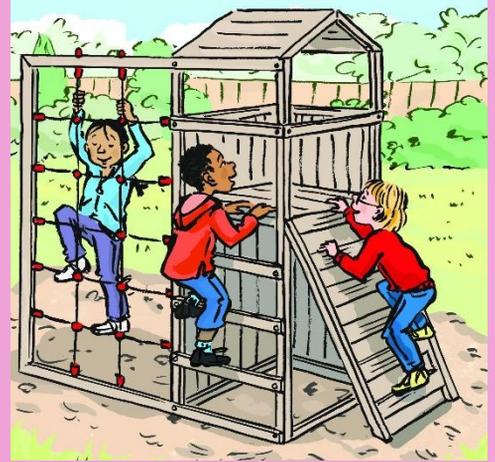
- Investigate your local community resources such as parks, woodland and beaches where you can take your children to play.
- Talk to your child about where they have been during the day at their setting, for example, if they have been for a walk, ask what they saw.
- Name plants and animals in nature, learn together with an identification book. Create an edible garden in pots or on a patio so children can plant, grow and taste food. Plant sunflowers and measure them as they grow.
- Build dens – have a basket or box of materials that can be used again and again, for example, sheets, scarves, cushions, pegs, logs and stones.
- Share books with your child about being outside and act out stories, for example, pretend you are going on a bear hunt.
- Go outside as often as possible!



## Benefits of 'Risky Play'

Allowing children to be adventurous and to take some small, managed risks has many benefits. Children learn to recognise what they are confident to do themselves and what they need help with so that they don't put themselves in unnecessary danger. They can learn to make calculated decisions such as 'should I jump off this log?' or 'can I climb this tree?'. This helps them to gain skills to cope with challenges they may encounter later on.

Many settings now use 'Risk Benefit Analysis' – a positive way of assessing activities where the possible risks are weighed up against the potential benefits. Often the practitioners will decide that cutting food in a cooking activity might carry a small risk of minor injury but the benefits for the children far outweigh the risks. A stimulating and challenging learning environment where children can take some controlled risks is the aim.



## Suggested Resources

### What does this mean?

You will need to ensure that your child has suitable outdoor clothing for all weather types, for example, you may be asked to provide wellies and sun protection in the summer. The setting your child attends will have policies, procedures and risk assessments on all aspects of the environment to ensure your child is safe. You will be asked for permission for your child to take part in outings and other experiences.



The [National Trust](#) have a list of 50 things to do before you're 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>

[The Wildlife Trusts](#) has a special children's area on their website, and runs wildlife events locally.

[The Forestry Commission](#) has information on Woodlands for Learning.

[The Woodland Trust](#) has lots of nature ideas and activities for children.

You could explore [Forest Schools](#) to understand what your child does when participating in this type of activity.

### Children's Books

**Stick Man** – Julia Donaldson

**We're going on a Bear Hunt** – Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury

**The Worm Who Knew Karate** – Terry Denton and Jill Lever

**Bogtrotter** – Margaret Wild

PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years) [pacey.org.uk/parents](http://pacey.org.uk/parents)