

Introduction

This factsheet explores why outdoor play is important, explains the types of play children engage in and how you can support your child when playing outside.

Key points

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, engage with the world and discover new sights and experiences including bugs, plants and trees. They will have a go at climbing and other activities, learning how to take and manage risks.

Outside play is active and keeps children fit and healthy

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.

Statutory guidance in England (EYFS) and Wales (The Foundation Phase) for working with young children, includes providing opportunities for children to spend time outside in the fresh air, this means that your child will play 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 were originally developed in Scandinavia as an outdoor learning programme for pre-school children. The children were found to be calmer and more socially confident and now it is accepted as a programme in this country for all ages. It involves regularly visiting woodland or a wooded space for a prolonged period of time which allows learners to become familiar with the site and develop a sense of ownership for the environment.

What does this mean for me?

You will need to ensure that your child has suitable outdoor clothing for all weather types with them, 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 that will be accessed by the children onsite and offsite to ensure your child is safe.

You will be asked for permission for your child to take part in outings, for use of transportation and use of equipment such as large climbing frames.

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. The outdoor environment offers the space for children to play with balls, parachutes, to hide and seek, and to run, jump and climb. All of these opportunities allow children to take risks safely with the freedom to make their own choices.

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 if you have no garden) so children can plant, grow and taste food.

Build dens and tents. 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 stories out, for example, pretend you are going on a bear hunt.

Go outside as often as possible.

Statutory Guidance

England

Department for Education (2021) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*.

Wales

Welsh Government (2015) *Foundation Phase Framework*

Welsh Government (2016) *National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care for children up to 12 years of age*

Additional resources

National Trust website aimed at children with a list of 50 things to do before you're 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ visit <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/50-things-to-do>

The Wildlife Trust has a special children's area on their website, and runs wildlife events locally, visit <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>

Forestry England has free educational resources visit <https://www.forestryengland.uk/learning>

The Woodland Trust has lots of nature ideas and activities for children visit <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

You might like to explore Forest Schools and what your child does when participating in this type of activity, find out more at <https://forestschoollassociation.org/>

Children's books

Leaf Man – Lois Ehlert

Stanley's Stick – Neal Layton and John Hegley

Stick Man – Julia Donaldson

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