



How does learning outside the classroom contribute to the Early Years Foundation Stage?

Very young children learn through play and real experiences. At this stage of development, children's opportunities for learning are all that they see, hear, feel or do — both indoors and outdoors. Babies, toddlers and young children thrive when given plentiful access to stimulating outdoor environments. They learn best through involvement in play activities that are meaningful to them and through experiences that build on their current curiosity, enthusiasms and interests.

Children's learning outdoors will need to include a balance of the following opportunities:

1. experiences that practitioners create and plan for
2. spontaneous activities that children initiate for themselves
3. naturally occurring cyclical opportunities linked to seasons, weather and nature.

When organising their outdoor curriculum, early years practitioners will need to take account of these three elements and will also need to adhere to the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the framework that sets the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five years of age.

The outdoor environment is an essential part of high quality provision for babies, toddlers and young children. Effective use of outdoors supports delivery of all four themes within the Early Years Foundation Stage:

1. A Unique Child
2. Positive Relationships
3. Enabling Environments
4. Learning and Development.



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How can I plan continuity and progression for learners?

Play and learning outdoors is vital to the development, health and well-being of babies, toddlers and young children. It offers them unique experiences and opportunities that are hard to replicate in the same way indoors. For example:

- fresh air, and contact with the natural world, weather and seasons
- multi-sensory experiences
- more space and the opportunity to gain a different perspective on their world
- freedom, challenges, expeditions and adventures
- play and exploration of a wider range of materials, including moveable and
- open-ended resources
- a place for interaction and sociable activities with other children, adults and the local community.

To ensure continuity and progression of children's play and learning experiences, practitioners will need to create outdoor provision that is informed by ongoing observations, and assessments that consider what children can do, what they are interested in, and what could be provided next. The outcome of these discussions might involve reorganising, supplementing or adapting what is currently offered outdoors; or might involve organising an expedition into the local community for a small group of children to build on and extend or inspire further play around that particular interest.

Every Child Matters

The following examples show how good use of outdoors also offers meaningful opportunities for practitioners to promote the five outcomes of Every Child Matters.

Be Healthy

Healthy lifestyles are promoted and children's physical and mental health is supported. This outcome is supported through outdoor provision that ensures children have:

- fresh air, contact with nature, weather, seasons
- opportunities for growing and eating healthy food
- opportunities for physical activity and exertion, and rest and relaxation.



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Stay Safe

Children are provided with a safe environment and children, parents and carers are informed about key risks and how to deal with them. To support this outcome, practitioners:

- must ensure that the safety policy and procedures are clearly understood and shared/endorsed by all
- have to 'risk assess' outdoors to enable and support children to experience new challenges and learn how to manage risk
- have to ensure that parents and carers are supported to understand why risk-taking is important to young children.

Enjoy and Achieve

Children are enabled and encouraged to attend school and other settings, they are supported to develop personally and academically, and to enjoy recreation. To support this outcome, practitioners need to plan carefully and ensure that the outdoor space:

- is a stimulating environment richly resourced with open-ended flexible materials that support play and learning across the curriculum
- is a dynamic, flexible and versatile place where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play
- offers children the unique opportunities that indoors cannot, by harnessing the special nature of the outdoors
- is a well-designed, well-organised, integrated environment, preferably with indoors and outdoors available simultaneously so that children can choose where to spend their time
- is full of irresistible stimuli, contexts for play, exploration and conversation, offering children meaningful experiences and contact with the natural world and with the wider community
- enables children to have long periods of time outside on a daily basis so that they can return to their play and develop their ideas over time
- provides children with supervised and appropriate opportunities for challenge and risk within a framework of security and safety.

Make a Positive Contribution

Children are helped to develop socially and emotionally, and to develop self-confidence and positive relationships. They are able to engage in decision-making and develop positive and enterprising behaviour. Outdoor provision will support this outcome when practitioners:

- provide children with opportunities to be enterprising and develop their own play ideas
- encourage children to initiate experiences and make decisions for themselves about their play
- ensure resources can be accessed independently by children.

Achieve Economic Well-Being

Although many of the key judgements regarding this outcome relate to older children and those entering the workforce, it also has relevance to younger children and their families. Early play experiences enable children to begin to experiment with a variety of contexts for achieving economic well-being and security



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in their community. Through their play children begin to become prepared for a working life. Outdoors also provides opportunities to actively support families to maximise their economic well-being. To support this outcome, practitioners need to:

- encourage children's future economic activity by providing a positive early experience of 'work' through regular opportunities to engage in real-life practical tasks and activities outdoors, similar to those that they may carry out later in their future working and everyday life
- offer children opportunities for a wide range of role-play experiences outdoors; through their play children can explore what it feels like to assume a variety of roles and responsibilities, many of which they see being performed by adults around them
- offer parents and carers opportunities for involvement in the development and maintenance of outdoors, for example they can share existing skills, develop new skills, create and publicise fund-raising initiatives for future developments outdoors. This can raise levels of confidence and self-esteem in parents and carers, and this in turn supports them to achieve and maximise their economic well-being.

For more information on the early years learning environment visit

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/site/3/3.htm