

Benefits for Early Years of Learning Outside the Classroom

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It is essential that young children get frequent and regular opportunities to explore and learn in the outdoor environment and this should not be seen as an optional extra. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Curriculum, which covers children aged birth to the end of the Reception year, became statutory in September 2008 and places strong emphasis on the importance and value of daily outdoor experiences for children's learning and development.

In recent years there has been a cultural shift in our society that has reduced the access and use of outdoors for many young children. Contributory factors include increased fear amongst adults in relation to children's safety and technological advances leading to an overwhelming prominence of more sedentary indoor activities, such as television, video and computer games. Here are some powerful arguments for taking every opportunity to take young children beyond their immediate indoor environment:-

- Learning outside the classroom supports the development of healthy and active lifestyles by offering children opportunities for physical activity, freedom and movement, and promoting a sense of well-being.
- Learning outside the classroom gives children contact with the natural world and offers them experiences that are unique to outdoors, such as direct contact with the weather and the seasons.
- Playing and learning outside also helps children to understand and respect nature, the environment and the interdependence of humans, animals, plants, and lifecycles.
- Outdoor play also supports children's problem-solving skills and nurtures their creativity, as well as providing rich opportunities for their developing imagination, inventiveness and resourcefulness.
- Children need an outdoor environment that can provide them with space, both upwards and outwards, and places to explore, experiment, discover, be active and healthy, and to develop their physical capabilities.
- The outdoor environment offers space and therefore is particularly important to those children who learn best through active movement. Very young children learn predominately through their sensory and physical experiences which supports brain development and the creation of neural networks.
- For many children, playing outdoors at their early years setting may be the only opportunity they have to play safely and freely while they learn to assess risk and develop the skills to manage new situations.



Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

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- Learning that flows seamlessly between indoors and outdoors makes the most efficient use of resources and builds on interests and enthusiasms.
- Anyone who takes children outside regularly sees the enjoyment, and sense of wonder and excitement that is generated when children actively engage with their environment.