Developing an Early Years Play and Learning Outdoors Policy

Working in early years care and education you will, almost certainly, be working as part of a team. Whilst this has many plus points, a team may create potential for confusion and disagreement with so many differing views and opinions regarding practice. Developing an outdoor play policy, that is drawn up taking on board the views of everyone involved at the setting, including practitioners, support staff (kitchen staff, cleaners etc), children and staff, will help to deliver an agreed philosophy on such an important aspect of early years provision and it is crucial that everyone within the setting has an active input into the forming of the policy.

What should/could be in your policy?

1. An agreed vision, rationale and overall aims of play and outdoor learning at the setting.

2. Planning- how early years learning and development is supported in the outdoor environment, be this within your setting’s grounds or off site. You may want to include details of particular areas of learning.

3. Roles and responsibilities- include brief details of how the practitioner will support and extend children’s play and learning outdoors. You may want to also include a brief list of duties outdoors, such as Health and Safety checks, updating diaries and observations, care of resources and equipment. Where there is a section on Governors, Early Years would replace with a management committee. Similarly, instead of a Headteacher, consider the responsibilities for a leader/manager.

4. Resourcing- include here the types of resources available for the children’s learning and development

5. Observation and assessment – how observation outdoors will help to build up a holistic picture of individual children’s development

6. Parents- you may want to mention how parents will be communicated to regarding provision outdoors, including off site provision as well as that in the setting’s grounds and how parents, who volunteer to support outdoor learning are managed/ guided.

7. Health and safety – this section could include details of risk assessment, accident procedures, ‘checking the grounds’ procedure, rules for safety and behaviour management (in a positive context)

8. Weather – you may want to include guidelines on how you will respond to different weather conditions, i.e. guidance on clothing and protection in strong sun, wet weather and cold conditions.
9. **Off site experiences**- this section can include the types of off site learning opportunities provided, for example how you may use the local park and going further afield for specific outings. You may also want to refer to your charging policy and include details of ratios, first aid, transport, risk assessment and insurance as well as other details pertinent to your setting.

10. **Equality and inclusion**- include here statements about how you will ensure all children, whatever their ability, are able to play and explore the outdoors within the setting’s ground and further afield; gender issues; how provision in the afternoons will be of the same quality as that of the morning sessions; respect for cultural issues- clothing, visits to religious buildings.

11. **Monitoring and evaluation**- monitoring and evaluating learning and play outdoors are important to gauge the effectiveness of practice and the policy. Existing procedures within the setting should be appropriate and used to inform any improvements.