


OUT TO PLAY

INSPIRING SCOTLAND



Practical guidance for creating outdoor play experiences in early learning and childcare

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SECTION 01

FOREWORDS

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

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The Scottish Government knows the importance of the early years of life for a child's development. That is why we have committed to expanding entitlement to funded early learning and childcare to 1140 hours/year by August 2020.

This expansion is rooted in delivering a high quality experience for our children and both our indoor and outdoor environments are key to that. We know the benefits outdoor play and learning can bring for young children in terms of their health and wellbeing, and physical and cognitive development. An important part of this is ensuring that our children have the daily, active outdoor play experience that we know is fundamental.

We recognise that one of the barriers to increased outdoor learning and play is a perceived difficulty in setting up or accessing an outdoor space. Within the Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland: Quality Action Plan we committed to help remove this barrier by producing this guide which supplies

practical advice and support for Early Learning and Childcare settings and practitioners as well as the wider childcare sector.

This guide builds on a number of resources which promote outdoor learning within the education and childcare sectors. In 2016, the Care Inspectorate published the guidance My World Outdoors, which encourages further development of high quality outdoor play, and in 2017 Space to Grow was published as guidance for the Early Learning and Childcare 2020 expansion. This How to Guide complements these publications and also provides the important step-by-step, practical advice that we know will promote more use of the outdoors. As well as nursery settings, the guide is designed to be used by childminders, schools and out of school care settings who are looking to utilise local greenspace to enhance children's learning.



SECTION 01

FOREWORDS

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

I would like to thank the Care Inspectorate and Inspiring Scotland for their work this year in shaping this guide. I commend its publication as an important step towards increased outdoor play and learning as part of the expansion of early learning and childcare by 2020 and beyond. I'm in no doubt of the impact this will have on nurseries, schools, after school and holiday clubs looking for guidance on how to utilise their local greenspace, whether that's in rural settings or right in the heart of our cities. I hope it assists in making it easier to get children outdoors, and to ensure that we create safe, nurturing and inspiring outdoor learning experiences which will no doubt help foster a true love of the outdoors in our young people that stays with them for a lifetime.

Maree Todd
Minister for Children and Young People

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SECTION 01

FOREWORDS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE FOREWORD

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Playing and learning outdoors is life-enhancing. Jumping in puddles, playing hopscotch in the street, exploring your local wood and throwing snowballs with friends is not just the stuff of fond childhood memories. It is how children grow, learn and discover.

Playing outdoors is good for children's health and wellbeing, it develops their social skills and it helps with cognitive development, preparing them for a lifetime of learning. Research from around the world shows the huge benefits of playing outdoors. At Inspiring Scotland, we want all Scotland's children to have the best possible start in life. And we passionately believe that having fun outdoors from an early age is the best way we can help our children to thrive.

Embedding outdoor play into the fabric of young people's lives will require us all to work together. Nurseries, schools, councils, community groups and families all have a role to play in supporting our children to get outside but we recognise that many people don't know where to start.

In producing this how-to-guide, we hope to equip you with the skills and knowledge that you need to make playing and learning outdoors an everyday experience for our children.

I would like to thank Scottish Government for their consistent and passionate support for outdoor play and learning, and to acknowledge their commitment to making Scotland the best place to grow up.

And I would like to thank Care Inspectorate and many other partners for producing this guide alongside us and their commitment to increasing outdoor play and learning. We believe this will be an invaluable publication that can support us all to do the best for our children, and to reengage us all with our beautiful environment, making Scotland an even more wonderful place to live for generations to come.

Celia Tennant
Chief Executive – Inspiring Scotland

SECTION 01

FOREWORDS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE FOREWORD



This new guide is a result of partnership working between the Care Inspectorate and Inspiring Scotland.

The resource is important as it helps support the Scottish Government's A Blueprint for 2020: the Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland. In particular, this resource links to the Quality Action Plan (action 10), namely to, '...promote greater use of outdoor learning and physical activity by producing a 'how-to-guide on finding access to suitable outdoor areas and making the most of the opportunities that these offer to promote children's development.'

It provides practical advice on how to access local outdoor spaces and how outdoor nursery experiences can be developed, and takes into account Scotland's new Health and Social Care Standards.

The expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland brings challenge and opportunity. There are exciting new opportunities to invest in and transform the way in which early learning and childcare is shaped and delivered. As part of this, we also have an important and timely opportunity to ensure that all children are offered high quality experiences as part of their provision.

We all know the benefits of outdoor learning, exercise and play for children. Playing, learning and having fun outdoors helps to improve wellbeing and resilience, as well as physical and mental health and also provides children with the opportunity to develop a life-long appreciation of the natural world. A growing body of research also shows a positive impact on educational attainment. The expansion of funded early learning and childcare provides an opportunity to define the type of experience we offer children during their early years.

I am pleased the Care Inspectorate and Inspiring Scotland have been able to support the development of this guide to setting up outdoor play-based childcare provision. It has been a welcome opportunity to support Inspiring Scotland's work with a number of local authorities, and their progress to deliver outdoor natural learning opportunities that will increase capacity in line with expansion, as well as to support quality outcomes. The benefits of outdoor play are highlighted and celebrated in the popular My World Outdoors resource and the Space to Grow publication. I hope you will find this 'how to' guide to be an equally practical and helpful resource.

Gordon Weir
Interim Chief Executive – Care Inspectorate

SECTION 02

WHY OUTDOOR PLAY-BASED LEARNING

2.1 Vision

All Scotland's children have the best possible start in life through access to outdoor play-based learning to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

2.2 Children's Rights

Children have the right to play and learn - the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) sets out in Article 31(1). Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life.

In Scotland, the Government has enshrined children's right to play outdoors every day in its national Health and Social Care Standards - As a child, I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment (HSCS 1.32)

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SECTION 02

WHY OUTDOOR PLAY-BASED LEARNING

2.3 Benefits

Playing and learning outdoors is fun. When we cast our minds back to childhood, many of our best memories are from outdoor play whether it's climbing the big tree, building a den for the first time or planting and nurturing a seed. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that outdoor play-based learning is positive and life-enhancing.

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More importantly however, there is strong and compelling evidence that playing and learning outdoors has many benefits for children:

- Improves physical health – children playing outdoors are more physically active so are likely to have
 - a healthier weight
 - better bone density through improved strength and greater exposure to vitamin D
 - better fundamental movement skills,
 - improved respiratory health
 - better immune system by experiencing a greater range of microbes
 - improved eyesight
- Improves wellbeing – children's wellbeing and mental health is improved by playing outdoors
 - Resilience is developed through taking and managing risks outdoors in a safe environment
- Self-esteem and confidence are increased through free play outdoors, making own decisions, problem solving and managing boundaries
- Emotional health regulation and interpersonal skills are improved through negotiation and conflict resolution
- Wellbeing is improved by being outdoors in nature which has a calming effect
- Enhances child development – high level functions such as creativity, interpersonal skills, empathy and negotiation are improved
- Improves learning for sustainability – developing a connection to nature and an understanding of environment and place as a child increases likelihood of caring about these things as an adult
- Is cost-effective in meeting the expansion of funded childcare – an outdoor setting does not need a fully functioning building to deliver high quality, flexible early learning and childcare.

And importantly, it is fun and should be an everyday part of children's play-based learning!

SECTION 02

WHY OUTDOOR PLAY-BASED LEARNING

2.4 National Position Statement on Outdoor Play and Learning

Fifty organisations and academics have come together to agree a national position statement on outdoor play and learning to promote these benefits, identifying evidence to support the benefits and commit to a number of actions to embed outdoor play-based learning as everyday activity for children in Scotland. The number of signatories is growing as individuals and organisation come forward to be part of the movement; if you would like to sign up let [Inspiring Scotland](#) know! The full text of the National Position Statement on Outdoor Play and Learning, the list of signatories, the context including the Scottish policy framework and the evidence is at [Appendix 1](#).



Playing outdoors is fundamental...

All children and young people have the right to play and the right to learn as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Children.

Playing outdoors enhances learning and is fundamental for children and young people to thrive in health, wellbeing and development.

It is our shared responsibility to support and enable all of Scotland's children and young people to access our diverse green-spaces and natural landscapes and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purposes of playing and learning. We commit to working together to meet these responsibilities.

Playing and learning outdoors is life-enhancing.

- It improves the physical health of children and young people by increasing physical activity¹⁻³ and equipping them with the skills and attributes essential for living a healthy and active life, thereby contributing to reducing health inequalities⁷ and supporting the aims of national health policies.
- It promotes mental, social and emotional wellbeing^{8,10} by helping to reduce stress, increase self-esteem and confidence, develop emotional resilience^{11,12} and build children and young people's confidence in their own capabilities and ability to manage risks and deal with uncertainty¹³.
- Importantly, it is fun! And through that fun, it promotes the development of essential social skills, helping children and young people to develop compassion and empathy and to build lasting and loving relationships^{14,17}.
- It supports wider learning by helping to boost creativity, imagination and understanding. These benefits are enhanced further when playing outdoors in diverse green-spaces and natural landscapes, particularly when the play is led by the child or young person. This provides multiple and enjoyable challenges and creates and enhances learning opportunities. It can also prepare children and young people for more structured learning, thereby supporting the aims of national education policies^{18,22}.
- It brings people together, connecting children and young people with their local areas and communities and helping to develop a sense of place and feeling of belonging and inclusion. It provides a wealth of opportunities for intergenerational activity, enhancing community cohesion, reducing social isolation, and helping to build inclusive, resilient communities²³.
- It is a powerful tool through which children and young people learn to understand the world around them and their place in it, creating a sense of ownership of all of Scotland's landscapes. Playing and learning outdoors is essential for our children and young people to understand, value, enjoy and protect our natural world. It connects them to their environment, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of its physical properties and diversity²⁴⁻²⁸.

We commit to life-enhancing outdoor play and learning for all of Scotland's children and young people by:

- Widening access to the high-quality, diverse green-spaces and natural landscapes that exist throughout all our communities to ensure that all children, young people and families have easy, local access to excellent outdoor play.
- Opening up more of our communal and publicly-managed spaces for playing and learning outdoors, ensuring that children and young people know they are entitled to access these spaces and feel safe and comfortable using them.
- Enhancing and enriching urban greenspace and built environments to be inviting, play-friendly places, offering easy access to the outdoors and nature close to home.
- Empowering every adult involved in the lives of our children and young people with the confidence, enthusiasm and skills to encourage and support them to play and learn outdoors.
- Generating and sharing knowledge and evidence-based research to promote better understanding of the benefits of playing and learning outdoors.

We will work together to embed playing and learning outdoors as an everyday activity and we will celebrate it as a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland.

Full document and signatories available at: <https://bit.ly/2CZNYCC>

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SECTION 03

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

3.1 Who this guide is for

This document is a step-by-step guide providing practical advice on how to access outdoors spaces, including land or forest areas owned by local authorities, private landowners or national bodies (such as the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage) to create safe, nurturing and inspiring outdoor learning experiences. The guide is intended to provide good practice examples of how to use outdoor play to promote high-quality learning experiences, and to support providers through the Care Inspectorate's registration process for outdoor provision.

With the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) (set out in the [Blueprint for 2020](#)), comes an opportunity to transform the way childcare is delivered. All children should have high quality experiences as part of their provision and this guide focuses on that provision being made outdoors.

Things to think about

1. Are you simply looking to improve and increase outdoor play and learning experiences using your existing nursery as your base?
2. Are you looking to expand your existing service by using your existing outdoor space? Consider the size and quality of that outdoor space and whether it will enhance children's learning? Does it offer a natural environment? Is it freely available to children at all times?
3. Are you considering expanding your service by registering an outdoor space elsewhere? Will you continue to offer both services within the same management structure? Will children have the option to attend each service offering them both indoor and outdoor experiences?
4. Are you planning to provide a new service? Is it based outdoors? Have you established a demand in your local community for outdoor provision? Have you consulted with local parents?

This guide is aimed at:

- those wishing to improve or increase their access to the outdoors
- those who intend to set up a dispersed outdoor service (ie satellite) which shares the management structure with an existing early learning and childcare setting nearby and
- those who intend to establish an outdoor setting with minimal built infrastructure and its own management, structure and registration.

SECTION 03

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

While the guide is primarily aimed at early learning and childcare settings, much of it is relevant for those providing out-of-school care and play experiences in an outdoor environment.

The document highlights key areas to think about as you develop your plans and complements [My World Outdoors](#) and [Space to Grow](#) which share good practice and provide guidance setting out expectations regarding the provision of outdoor play.

How to use this guide?

This document provides guidance on all key practical issues while recognising that many users may only require advice with some aspects.

We have therefore divided the guide into four key sections:

- Finding the right outdoor space
- Creating your space
- Using your space
- Staffing

Each section begins with some questions for you to consider which link to relevant advice.

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SECTION 03

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

3.2 Different types of early learning and childcare settings

To date, four different types of approaches for the delivery of early learning and childcare have emerged and these are described briefly below. A fuller description of each delivery type can be found in the Care Inspectorate practice guidance on their [Knowledge Hub](#).

Indoor setting – Traditional early learning and childcare setting using a building and outdoor space.

Indoor/outdoor setting – Early learning and childcare setting where Space to Grow has been implemented enabling up to 20% additional capacity.

Dispersed or satellite setting – Early learning and childcare setting where a satellite model is also used: accessible local park, woods, beach or other green space.

Outdoor setting – Early learning and childcare setting where the provision is outside requiring minimal infrastructure.

These are not the only ways children can experience outdoor early learning and childcare and the Care Inspectorate will continue to support and encourage innovative models of outdoor experiences and opportunities for children.

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SECTION 04

FINDING THE RIGHT OUTDOOR SPACE

Whether you are accessing the outdoors on an ad hoc basis or setting up an outdoor nursery, the first step is to locate and identify the right space. Woodland, fields, beaches and mixed habitats all currently host successful outdoor provision. Whatever you're considering, you'll need to weigh up many important factors to ensure a potential new site has the capacity to provide a range of high quality play-based learning experiences for young children which are positive, challenging, playful and enjoyable.

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THINGS TO THINK ABOUT in this section

1. Are you trying to map land and natural spaces in your area? In considering spaces, how easily can local families access your proposed setting? Who else might it affect and who else uses the space? **4.1 Identifying your Space** will help with links to mapping tools and accessing your space.
2. Do you already own land you can use? If not, are you considering buying some land – you will find **Section 4.2** helpful.
3. Do you want to rent land from a landowner – **Section 4.3** covers that.
4. It is possible to use public land – **Section 4.4** explains how to go about it. Is planning permission required? **Section 4.4** also covers this.
5. How can you get to know your space – the nature, the history, what to expect as the seasons change? Are you aware of the impact of the Scottish Access Code and what impact that might have on your plans? **Section 4.5** will help.
6. What should you think about in managing your space and the environment? **Section 4.6** looks at how to manage the environment and Learning for Sustainability
7. Have you thought about specific insurance needs for an outdoor setting? **Section 4.7** advises on that.

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FINDING THE RIGHT OUTDOOR SPACE

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To help you assess and compare potential sites, you can use (and adapt to suit) the Site Appraisal Form in **Appendix 2**, used with permission from the Forestry Commission Scotland. The form asks you to consider:

- The learning and play value in relation to natural features
- Opportunities in the local area for further exploration
- Practical considerations such as access
- Possible hazards

SECTION 04

FINDING THE RIGHT OUTDOOR SPACE

4.1 Identifying your space

Looking for land to use? What land is there nearby? A local woodland or park green space might be an area which could be adapted easily. Try an [online map service](#) and search for a natural space in the area. There is also Scottish Natural Heritage's [Greenspace Map](#) based on Ordnance Survey data. Registers of Scotland provide a property search [service](#) to find the owner of properties in Scotland which incurs a small charge.

To find out who owns land, ask your local greenspace charity, local authority environmental services, countryside ranger, environmental or planning department. You can also search online for the many greenspace audits and local development plans provided by local authorities. Many public bodies, including Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Environment Scotland and others have recently joined a coalition in support of outdoor play and learning and so will be keen to explore the potential of using their land for outdoor play opportunities for children and families. The National Position Statement on Outdoor Play and Learning in [Appendix 1](#) lists those in the coalition.

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If the space you have identified is already being used, you need to consider how your setting will work with others and what impact if any, you might have on people who use the same space, or live or work nearby. If you are planning to use public/community space it is likely that there will be other people who use it regularly so you should engage with them early in the development stage about your plans. It may be helpful to organise a public meeting for existing users together with local parents/carers. You may want to leaflet local businesses or do a walkabout to talk to local dog walkers.

Evergreen Outdoor Nursery in Glasgow operates in a part of Dawsholm Park popular with professional dog walkers. Through engagement and by beginning to establish their presence, the dog walkers have largely adjusted their routine to avoid the areas Evergreen uses.

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You will also need to consider how easily families can access your space. If there is no regular public transport and your site is not easily accessible for parents without this, you may need to consider providing some form of transport. Bear in mind that not all parents and carers will be able to walk far or over rough tracks especially if they have younger siblings in tow. You may need to consider a drop-off point for parents. If so, you need to ensure it is adequately staffed during the drop-off and collection times as not all parents can be there at the same time.

Summerlings Outdoor Nursery in the Highlands have a bothy where children are dropped off at one end of a track and they make the trip to the site fun through electric bikes, balance bikes and walking. Others provide a minibus. You will need to take into account costs if you need to make similar provision.

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FINDING THE RIGHT OUTDOOR SPACE

Staff will also need to access the space and may need to bring equipment etc with them – many outdoor nurseries use festival trolleys to carry equipment, water, first aid kits etc and these can also be useful on site.

4.2 Buying land – what to consider

Having a space to call your own will give you some control over installing infrastructure to support your outdoor experience. Some infrastructure may require planning permission – always check with the local planning department in advance. Police Scotland have an architectural liaison service and employ Architectural Liaison Officers trained in interpreting architects’ drawings and assessing the physical environment with the purpose of assessing for safety and crime prevention. Advice is free and can be accessed via the Police Scotland architectural liaison officer [service](#).

Bear in mind that not all sites will already have utilities such as water or electricity. If you feel you want these services, you will need to ascertain if there is mains access and the related costs; or you may prefer to operate off grid as several existing outdoor nurseries do.

Owners have overall responsibility for maintaining the land, and this is part of the cost of ownership. The level of maintenance will be dictated by environmental considerations, See [section 6.4.3](#) for more guidance about site maintenance and environmental impact.

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Along the way, you'll need to liaise with a range of organisations. The list below illustrates some of the partnership working that may be required. It is worth checking the signatories of Scotland's National Position Statement on Outdoor Play and Learning ([Appendix 1](#)) as you may find some of the organisations you need to contact are signatories or are members of organisations that have signed the statement.

- Care Inspectorate
- Council Environmental and Planning department
- Utility specialists and building controls within local councils
- Architects
- Council Finance departments and advisors
- Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA)
- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)
- Forestry Commission
- Insurance companies

- Architectural Liaison Officer (before establishing a site) and Crime Prevention Officers (after establishment)

4.3 Renting land – what to consider

If you plan to rent from a landowner, you will need to establish what you are responsible for maintaining and what is the responsibility of the landowner. This should be clarified, along with associated costs, before you sign any agreement. You'll have to agree an appropriate location and give them information about the planned activities and where these will take place, along with copies of all of your risk-benefit assessments. There may be some restrictions from private landowners about what's permitted on site. Outdoor & Woodland Learning Scotland also has [guidance](#) for landowners which may aid your discussions.

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4.4 Gaining permission to use land - what to consider

Publicly-owned greenspace is often closer to populated areas and easier for families to access, minimising the social, environmental and financial impacts of providing private transport. What's more, when children spend time in local greenspace, they benefit from gaining an intuitive sense of place, belonging and stewardship of their environment and community.

All public landowners - councils, government departments and agencies - will have a process to follow to gain permission to use the site. This process supports users while enabling the landowners to understand who is accessing their greenspace and why, as well as defining limits for users such as fire use and sensitive areas due to plant/animal habitats, plus any supports that need to be put in place. Each Council will have a land/environmental services team or similar which may be able to help you

conduct helpful checks when you're using the site to ensure it's safe and, if not, can advise when alternative areas should be used. Sometimes this may be to accommodate planned maintenance, reduce the environmental impact by rotating use or allow for seasonal changes such as nesting birds or flowering plants.

You need to consider and discuss with the landowner issues such as density of trees and drainage of land.

There is a site appraisal form at [Appendix 2](#) adapted with the permission of Forestry Commission Scotland which you can tailor and use to suit your outdoor setting.

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Landowners, particularly community owners and trusts, recognise the benefits of outdoor settings on their greenspace and many are keen to explore the idea without providing the service themselves. So, your proposal may offer a good opportunity for partnership working. It's wise to form links and build good relationships with all relevant community owners and users early in the development stage. You could consider setting up a 'friends of...' group to engage with the community. Be proactive. This will ensure that your service runs as smoothly as possible and any issues that arise can be resolved.

Fostering community connections can also create opportunities for the children to meet and learn from other people and organisations. It is important to allow plenty of time to get permissions; establishing ownership is not always straightforward.

Whether you are using public land, are renting land from a landowner or are the owner, if you plan to construct buildings, you will need to get planning permission from your local council. It is worth contacting your local Planning Department as early as possible for advice on what might or might not be acceptable. There is a [planning portal](#) where you can get some information and through which you can submit and track applications. You may also need to consider other infrastructure – water, power, Wi-Fi – these are covered in [Section 5.9](#) on Utilities.

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4.5 Getting to Know Your Patch

One of the key advantages of an outdoor setting is that staff, children and their families get to know their local green space intimately. As months go by, you can all learn what plant grows where and at what time of year – and spot the signs of wildlife activity. You'll understand how the landscape changes through the seasons and how this affects the plants and animals who use the space.

If you need to improve your natural or local history and folklore knowledge, take advantage of learning opportunities such as:

- Identification courses or events run by local wildlife groups, countryside rangers and other naturalists. Bush-craft experts, gardeners and wild food foragers are also sources of advice.
- iSpot and other identification websites and apps. Woodland Trust Scotland has a range of resources to support environmental awareness for children

which can be accessed on their [website](#).

- Regular visits from a local specialist through each season to help staff and children learn about flora and fauna.
- A local storyteller to share legends and tales associated with animals and plants.
- Download the free [Tree Stories pack](#) from The Forestry Commission Scotland. It provides a story for each month.

By doing so, you'll also contribute to our Scottish culture and heritage, which has grown from the landscape, sharing the rich folklore and stories that have passed through the generations.

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SECTION 04

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Environmental stewardship - a key benefit

“If children don’t grow up knowing about nature and appreciating it, they will not understand it. And if they don’t understand it, they won’t protect it. And if they don’t protect it, who will?”

Sir David Attenborough, Learning through Landscapes, Trust Patron

As previously noted, one of the most important benefits of outdoor play-based learning is that it supports children to understand and connect with nature and the environment. So an understanding of [Learning for Sustainability](#) and [Curriculum for Excellence](#) (CfE) is important (see [section 7.3](#)).

Your impact on the wider environment is important within a Learning for Sustainability (LFS) context - the Learning for Sustainability Implementation Group produced [Vision for 2030+](#). LFS is a unique concept developed in Scotland, based on local and international research. It brings together Education for Sustainable Development, Global Citizenship and Outdoor Learning with the intention of helping children and young people understand, envision and act positively to secure a sustainable future.

LFS has implications on how you handle resources and consumables, how you deal with waste, and the environmental impact of transporting children to sites as opposed to locating sites in the heart of communities.

What’s more, everyone working in the outdoor environment needs to be aware of the [Scottish Access Code](#) and the potential impact of their proposals on it especially when considering transport, environmental impact of site usage, resources and waste materials.

The three principles are:

1. Respect the interests of other people
2. Care for the environment
3. Take responsibility for your own actions

Land managers have specific responsibilities in relation to the Scottish Access Code. Whether you own, rent or share the space, make sure you’re fully aware of these responsibilities. Leaflets and posters are available from the Scottish Access Code website, together with a useful calendar highlighting seasonal points to consider.

SECTION 04

FINDING THE RIGHT OUTDOOR SPACE

4.6 Environment

You will need to manage the impact of your outdoor activities on a site, whether it's privately or publicly owned. Staff and children have a responsibility to treat the environment with care and respect. Include your range of strategies in a site maintenance plan, whether you own or rent land. On a public site, discuss what you'll do with the landowner or manager.

Outdoor & Woodland Learning Scotland have produced [Guidance for Landowners](#) which identifies what makes a good woodland setting for learning and provides some suggestions on activities that have minimal impact on the environment.

Land managers may also advise times when particular areas of your site shouldn't be used in order to look after nesting birds or plants such as bluebells, for example, or for land management such as felling.

An essential part of being outside is helping children understand their place in their wider world and how they can protect and improve their environments at community and global levels. Outdoor settings can demonstrate a positive way forward by providing a sustainable education system – economic, social and environmental – and a joy of the natural world around them.

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Find out more.

- Get advice and support from [Learning for Sustainability Scotland](#) on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- See examples of practice on Education Scotland's [National Improvement Hub](#)
- Download free resources from [Children in Permaculture](#). Their principles, caring for people, caring for the earth and sharing surplus, dovetail with Learning for Sustainability.
- RSPB Scotland has useful information on children and young people connecting to nature on its [education page](#).

Children learn through experience so modelling good environmental behaviours is key to supporting a broader awareness of how we care for our planet. Routines around snack and lunch times can include providing separate bins for compostable material such as food waste; recyclable material; and rubbish and use these to encourage children to mirror good environmental behaviours. Using ethical products for cleaning and repurposing materials for loose parts and construction activities also reduces the environmental impact of your service.

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SECTION 04

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4.7 Your insurance needs

Suitable insurance is a requirement, although some insurance companies are unclear about what an outdoor setting involves. You may need to explain the difference between an outdoor setting and an outdoor activity centre. Some insurance companies may add specific conditions to the insurance relating to your specific site, for example if it is mature woodland or your service offers activity opportunities (kayaking etc). It is a good idea to speak to fellow outdoor early learning and childcare providers who have navigated the insurance issue before you. The Care Inspectorate website lists existing registered outdoor [settings](#). Each local authority and landowner is different so check their expectations about public liability insurance. Ensure all your activity and site risk assessments are in place, as you will be asked about these when enquiring about insurance.

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SECTION 05

CREATING YOUR SPACE

After finding and securing a suitable space and the necessary permissions, you can consider how to create your space. What needs to be done to make it fit for purpose? How can you create a high quality environment that enables your children and staff to thrive? This section covers the key points you need to consider.

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THINGS TO THINK ABOUT in this section

1. What is a **quality learning environment**? Will your space encourage energetic activities outside? Will there be calm spaces? How and where will you store things. How will you assess and balance benefits and risks? How will you involve children in that assessment while retaining responsibility? **Section 5.1** covers key aspects
2. Do you plan to make **regular excursions** beyond your boundaries or your satellite setting? **Section 5.2** provides a link to guidance produced by the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education (SAPOE) which may support your planning.
3. What kind of **shelter** are you planning to provide? Is there existing built or natural shelter you can use or adapt? **Section 5.3** describes the options and factors to consider.
4. What will your entrance look like? How will the **boundaries** of your site be set and signalled? Are there fixed boundaries that will need to be maintained? Go to **Section 5.4** for advice on this.
5. How will you ensure children can **wash their hands** and develop good hygiene practice in comfort – **Section 5.5** sets out Health Protection Scotland's guidelines and some advice about how to follow those guidelines.
6. How will you ensure children have access to **toilets**? These do not have to be fully plumbed in porcelain but must be easily accessible and afford children privacy and dignity. Where will you **change nappies**? See **Section 5.6**
7. Where will children be able to **sleep or rest**? What makes a suitable spot? What equipment will you need? **Section 5.7**.

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8. How will you **keep children warm** when it's cold or keep them dry when it's wet? Do you need to provide **clothing** for staff? How will you dry wet clothes? How will you store or transport clothes? **Section 5.8**
9. Do you have access to **utilities** such as electricity or mains water? If not, what do you need to do? Do you need to transport items? **Section 5.9**
10. Having worked out what you need for shelter, toilets, handwashing, do you need to **buy equipment** to transport or store items. **Section 5.10**
11. What will you do when the **weather is bad** enough that you can't go to your usual site(s)? How will you decide? How will you ensure that children still have a positive experience? How and when will you inform parents? **Section 5.11**
12. How will you **balance risk against benefits**? How will you support children to assess risk in a safe environment? How will you ensure your staff are confident about balancing risk and benefit? How will you reassure parents? **Section 5.12**

5.1 Achieving a high quality learning environment

The unique nature and location of your setting will shape the possibilities for play-based learning. In fact, each child will read the physical landscape and perceive play opportunities in their own way. Framing this, you need to develop routines and ways of working that create a nurturing environment. It should be a constantly evolving space that changes in line with the children's interests and needs.

Put the wellbeing (SHANARRI) indicators from [Getting It Right for Every Child](#) at the heart of your practice and decision-making – not just as you plan but as the setting evolves. Staff will need to reflect and ensure the space is always a motivating and challenging learning environment. Actively involve the children in creating the outdoor space, making the ethos of your setting evident to children, parents, carers and all staff.

A quality care and learning environment features the following:

- A space that encourages children to engage in energetic activities outside.
- Calm spaces to rest and sleep away from the hubbub of the other activities or where they can spend time on their own if they choose.

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- A nurturing outdoor provision, incorporating the wellbeing (SHANARRI) indicators. See the examples in Education Scotland (2011) [Outdoor Learning – Practical Guidance, Ideas and Support for Teachers and Practitioners in Scotland](#) p 28 and [My World Outdoors](#)
 - Well-organised fixed or mobile storage.
 - Children can easily access suitable resources, whether provided or found, and understand the routines and expectations.
 - Well maintained information for parents/ carers/other visitors are personalised and relevant to children’s needs and interests.
 - Natural materials found outdoors are gathered in line with the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) and other relevant codes. By-laws and landowner requests are followed.
 - Where semi-permanent play structures are created, this should involve the children and systematic checks should be in place to ensure the structures are safe for the children’s developmental levels.
- The changing weather, seasons and nature are the predominant resource. Use with sustainable systems to ensure ethical sourcing, good maintenance, organisation and accessibility.
 - Indoor environments such as shelters complement and extend the learning opportunities outside.
 - Consider the Inspiring Scotland [Loose Parts Toolkit](#) and the play types identified by Bob Hughes in his book *A Playworker’s Taxonomy of Play Types* which are helpfully explained on [Play Scotland’s website](#).

This extract taken from a recent Care Inspectorate report clearly shows the range and depth of learning which is achievable in an outside environment.

“Children were being given inspiring opportunities to grow and develop, be adventurous, build their resilience and be active, independent and innovative in their play and learning. For example, hammocks and tents provided cosy spaces for the children to sleep and rest, tarpaulin erected under the trees created sheltered areas where the children could come together for circle time, enjoy games, stories and their lunch together with friends. We were able to see children having fun swinging on tyres and branches, exploring and learning about foraging for mushrooms, measuring the rainfall and reading the temperature gauge on the weather station. As well as filling up the feeders for the wild birds and the water for the chickens. Staff had also opened snack time up to let children decide for themselves when they should take a break from all their energetic play and have some food, helping them to recognise when they were hungry and needed to eat.” Care Inspectorate Report, Stramash Elgin

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While risk-benefit assessment is the professional responsibility of staff, involving children in risk-benefit assessment routines can help them develop an understanding of risk and ensure they feel secure.

5.2 Going Out There - Scottish Framework for Off-site Visits

If you have a designated site and make regular excursions beyond the boundaries of your setting, you need to take account of this guidance. It was developed by the Scottish Government, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education (SAPOE), Education Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education, with input from other partners including voluntary organisations and providers. See also [section 5.12](#) below on risk-benefit assessments.

Unsure about how your practice fits the framework? Just contact your local authority outdoor education officer for advice. [Going Out There](#) contains a number of toolkits including examples of generic risk assessments for a variety of off-site visits which will require tailoring for your group.

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5.3 Providing shelter

In any outdoor setting, children will need places that provide respite from the elements so you will need some form of shelter. Children need to be able to access the shelter independently whenever they wish to.

In addition, building dens and creating hidey holes offers some shelter and fulfil other important functions. They help children develop a sense of belonging. They provide private space away from adult gaze, time to spend alone for playing, resting and napping. They're also a place for small group sharing time allowing wee conversations and supporting literacy.

There are many ways to provide shelter.

- **Potential natural shelter**

As children are small, it's important that you get down to their height when assessing natural options. What may feel like a strong wind to an adult standing up can feel totally different at ground level

behind a stone wall or in a little homemade den. Natural hollows and dips also provide shelter, and tree species that reduce wind airspeed year-round can help. Your site maintenance and management plan may include approaches to improve the natural shelter of your site in the long term such as tree planting.

- **Costs of procuring and maintaining shelter**

Take account of the higher wear and tear that may happen as a result of constant exposure to the elements. Remember to consider any potential out of hours visitors to your site and the precautions needed.

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- **The shelter location**

If constructing a temporary or permanent building, make sure the doors or openings face away from the prevailing wind to reduce draughts. If your site is fairly open with little or no tree cover, think about how to provide shade from the sun. Equally, in a woodland site, consider what to do in windy conditions.

Different types of shelter work better in different areas. For instance, yurts have been less successful in wetter and windier areas in western Scotland but have worked well in more sheltered areas in drier parts of the country. Temporary tarpaulin shelters will have less impact on the environment than semi-permanent shelters which in turn will have less impact than permanent ones.

- **The children's needs**

It is important that children feel warm on cold days and can warm themselves up in a range of ways, including shelter and heat. For example, sitting on insulated mats feels more comfortable. Also consider the children's ages and appropriate length of sessions.

- **Adults' needs**

The needs of staff and other adults who visit the site need to be taken into account. Adults also need to be able to shelter and may have different seating requirements. Staff may need somewhere sheltered on-site to have a break or to do paperwork.

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- **Engaging learning space**

Create an indoor shelter that's also an engaging learning space. Consider what the children can do inside and how you can facilitate learning.

- **Static or roving**

Do you intend to be based in the same place, or move around on a rotational/nomadic basis? Nomadic or temporary sites require shelter that's easy to erect, making the most of existing natural resources. Tarpaulin can be tied to trees or fences and pop up tents can be erected in minutes.

- **External factors**

Are there any planning restrictions or landowner expectations to consider?

When your setting is in the early stages of getting established, it may make sense to use temporary measures while your community works out what it really needs. Many settings do this. What's more, taking a participatory approach to building

shelters with children, co-creating the space, is empowering for everyone involved.

You can find more information from [My World Outdoors](#) and [Creative STAR Learning](#).

5.4 Boundaries

Think carefully about making your entrance inviting and exciting for children and visitors. This is your most important boundary line and it conveys a message about your vision, values and ethos.

You can use many types of boundaries in an outdoor context. Informal features include:

- a change of surface where the edge of a path or a line of trees visually indicate the boundary
- scarves, ribbons or other decorations to create a working boundary in a woodland
- cones, branches or markers on grass in a public park

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- natural feature such as an outcrop of rocks or a line drawn in the sand on a beach.

With regular practice that focuses on children's independent ability to stay within boundaries, almost all children remember and meet the expectations. If a child struggles with this, consider why and how to positively support the child to manage this;

- How could resources and equipment be personalised to meet the child's needs and interests in the designated area?
- How interested and engaged is this child in the play?
- What support is needed?

Observe what happens when a child chooses to ignore the boundaries. Are they seeking attention from an adult? Are they finding a space to be alone away from the group? Are they following their curiosity about something or someone? Understanding their intentions will help you provide focused support.

Involve the child in determining the boundaries. It could be they need more say in this and their behaviour is telling you about their interests.

If your site has fixed boundaries such as walls, gates, hedges or fences, you'll need to maintain them in good condition. Planting hedges can help increase biodiversity and act as a barrier to road traffic pollutants. As an intermediate barrier, you can create a brush barrier weaving branches and other long natural materials to form a temporary barrier which can encourage brambles or other wild plants.

Find out more at [Enter in Style at Highway Farm](#)

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5.5 Handwashing

You need to consider how to provide suitable hand hygiene facilities for both staff and children, including warm running water, liquid soap and disposable hand towels. The Health Protection Scotland (HPS) guidance (2018) requires warm water because that improves comfort which encourages better hand washing practice in children especially in cold weather. Children should be able to wash their hands independently. Your staff will need some method of keeping water warm or topping up with hot water when required and you should minimise the environmental impact of whatever arrangements you put in place including sourcing biodegradable liquid soaps and hand towels where possible and considering options for disposal. You should also consider access, the cost and staff comfort, particularly when staff need to bring water to the site.

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Section 6.7, provides further information about hand hygiene and infection control. You will also find some useful ideas on the [Creative STAR website](#).

You should make parents and carers fully aware of all infection control arrangements – toilets, nappy changing and handwashing – before their child starts attending your setting.

The **Health Protection Scotland's guidelines** are updated regularly and we recommend you check them regularly for updates. The guidelines describe good hand hygiene practice:

- Use warm water
- Never share water in a communal bowl when washing hands
- Use liquid soap (there is no need to use soaps advertised as antibacterial or antiseptic)
- Dry hands thoroughly using paper towels (childminders may use kitchen roll or a designated hand towel, which should be washed every day or more often if visibly dirty). A designated, lined bin that the children can operate easily should be provided for disposal of hand towels
- When away from the childcare facility, and if there is no running water available, hand wipes may be used (children and staff should wash their hands at the first available opportunity)
- All visible cuts and abrasions should be covered with a water proof dressing
- Alcohol hand rub should be available for use by staff (hands should be washed with liquid soap and water if visibly soiled).

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5.6 Toileting

When planning toilet provision, above all it is important to protect the privacy and dignity of children and adults and make sure that staff can manage the chosen approach. Consider how to minimise the environmental impact and cost.

Conventional standard flush toilets

If you have a building, does it have utilities? If so, you may already have or can install standard flushing toilets and hand wash basins. Check whether your site is on a septic tank system and what it needs to keep working well. (Or are there nearby public toilets you can use?)

Alternatives

If there are no utilities or local public toilets, you'll need to arrange other alternatives. No one-size-fits-all model exists. Common alternatives include compost toilets, chemical and portable toilets and wild toileting. (Handwashing is covered in [sections 5.5](#) above.)

In your planning, take into account the number of children, their ages and abilities and the number of staff and different sizes of toilets required. Also think about your site's unique characteristics and its location.

Consider all the pros and cons of different sustainable options in consultation with your landowner or manager, your local environmental health officer and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) for approval of discharges.

Training and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may be needed to ensure staff understand and can carry out what's required. Any extra work should be factored into your site maintenance schedules.

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“The design of sustainable toilets and drainage should ensure that waste and wastewater is recovered, treated or disposed of without endangering human health or harming the environment, and in particular without risk to water, air, soils, plants or animals. Toilets should not cause a nuisance through noise or odours and toilet buildings should integrate sympathetically with their surroundings.” Taken from **A Study into the Provision of Sustainable Toilets in Remote Rural Locations** – page 6.

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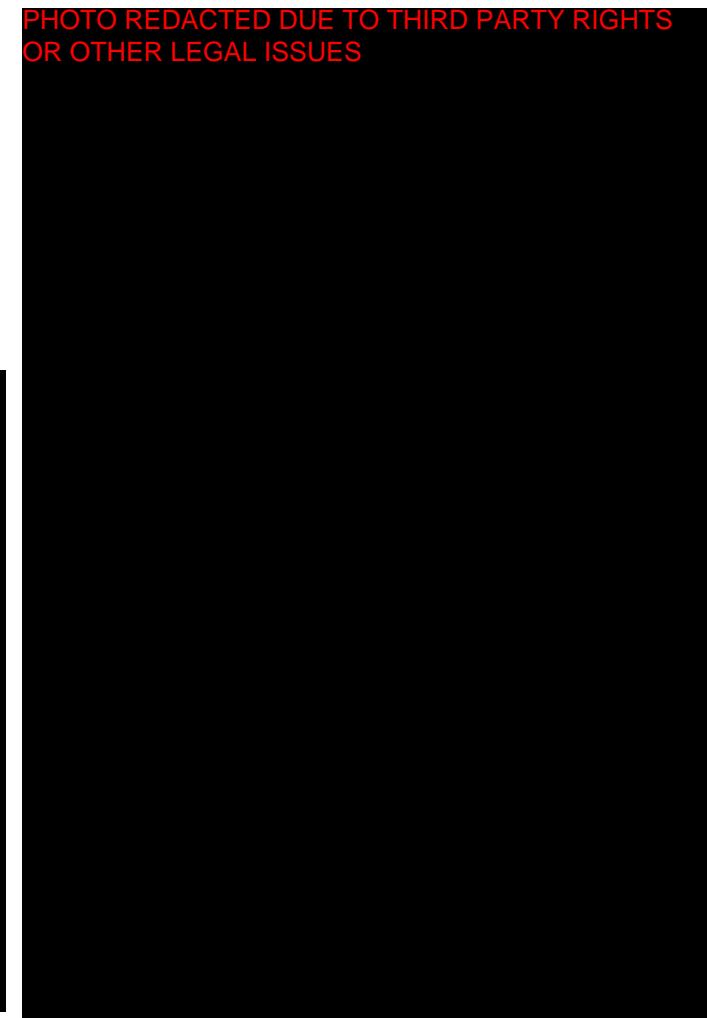
Fixed compost toilets

This will only work if you have systems in place to manage the waste processing from start to finish. Check whether secondary processing of accumulated solids is required and where this would be sited, including how the final compost is stored and used. It's important to ensure neither children nor visitors can access human waste compost during any stage. PPE must be worn by whoever works with the compost and risk assessments must be carried out.

Portable toilets

These are likely to be small-scale compost or environmentally-friendly chemical toilets. Portable compostable toilets can be based on a foldable toilet seat or toilet box with a biodegradable bag arrangement and sawdust sprinkled after each use. In either case, disposal of the contents needs to be considered:

- Who disposes the contents, when and how
- Anticipated amount of use
- How you will dispose of the contents and the associated environmental impact
- A toilet tent or visual screening, be this natural or man-made, is required to ensure the privacy and dignity of users



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3D Drumchapel coordinate a collaborative outdoor partnership with two local ELC settings where they run sessions in local woodland four days a week.

“The toilet we use comes flat pack in its own bag, we transport it to site on our trolley and it is easy to assemble. We make sure everyone has privacy with the toilet tent which covers the toilet and it is big and tall enough for an adult to stand up in. It is a pop-up tent so really easy to put up; although a bit of a knack to refold!

The toilet clicks together from the base and has a top piece which is the seat. Inside we use a toilet bag which contains chemicals to neutralise any odours. We also use sawdust to absorb the waste each time it is used, the toilet bag is easily disposed off in either the nappy bins back at one of the nurseries or at the community centre. All staff are used to changing nappies so have not had any bother with dealing with the portable toilet.”

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Wild toileting

The Scottish Access Code provides advice about wild toileting. It's not advisable as the main provision but it may be necessary from time to time. The dignity of the child is paramount, even during emergency wild toileting. Make sure you have an agreed approach for this ie agreement from parents, landowner, environmental health department and Care Inspectorate.

Nappy Changing

It's important to respect children's dignity, privacy and comfort for nappy changing where required with some form of screening and matting. Your staff will need to use a method in line with the [Health Protection Scotland](#) and [Care Inspectorate guidance](#) on changing nappies and ensure good practice for manual handling procedures.

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5.7 Sleep and Rest

You will need to think about where children can sleep or rest outdoors. The sleeping spot needs to be away from the hubbub of the main area but where staff can see or hear them, directly or through using a monitoring device.

Even children who do not nap as a routine sometimes need a short sleep. Remember to consider:

- Space – this should be as cosy and comfortable as possible
- Clothing – children need to be dressed in layers according to the weather. It is not good for a child to be too hot or too cold when sleeping. The neck of a child gives an indication of comfort levels when a child is clothed
- Insulation – children need to sleep on an insulated mat or mattress; sleeping bags or blankets should be available when needed
- Avoid the sun shining directly onto a child

- Protect the child from biting insects or disturbance from animals
- Provide a sheltered spot away from the wind, draughts and out of the rain
- If you are using bedding, ensure that it is washed at least weekly and when visibly dirty. Bedding should be allocated to a named child

If hammocks are used by children for napping then due consideration should be given to the height of the hammocks and the need for a soft surface underneath. Hammocks are not suitable for babies or toddlers so consider using camp beds or 'double-decker' beds.

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5.8 Clothing and kit

Whatever the weather or terrain, children and staff enjoy being outside in nature when they're wearing robust, appropriate outdoor clothing, footwear and accessories. The clothing will need to change according to the weather, seasons and type of learning and play taking place.

Consider how to manage clothing, accessories and footwear. Staff should be given clothing and footwear that is suitable for sustained periods outdoors in all weathers to ensure they are adequately protected and model good practice. You may decide to also provide kit, including backpacks and portable seats for children, building the costs into your business plan. As a general guide, outdoor facilities provide outer layers but not base layers. As employers, you should provide staff with the PPE they require – in most cases this means good outdoor jackets and waterproof trousers. You should also consider what footwear will be needed in your setting and whether you plan to provide it.

Providing clothing and kit has several benefits. Importantly, it 'poverty proofs' outdoor provision so you don't preclude children whose families can't afford outdoor clothing, kit and footwear suitable for sustained periods outdoors. It also gives you control over the quality and appropriateness of children's clothing while attending. You may need to consider storage of clothing.

If you expect families to provide and source their own clothing, kit and footwear, list what's needed and provide links to quality brands. As with staff, the minimum clothing likely to be needed is an outdoor jacker and waterproof trousers. Here are a couple of links to gear guides - [Stramash](#) and [Little Forest Folk](#).

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Variable factors include:

- If your practice is nomadic, will children need to carry their own spare clothing in their own backpack?
- Do you have enough accessories and spares so that, during inclement weather, children can easily stay warm and dry?
- Do you need a system for drying wet clothing during the day?
- If required, is there adequate storage space for each child's own clothing and spares, particularly on a fixed site?
- You'll also need to think about hot summer weather and whether children are wearing suitable clothes and footwear.

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5.9 Utilities

Electricity (and mobile phone reception, internet access)

Your electricity supply needs to be thought through. If your site is off-grid, explore alternative options bearing in mind the following factors.

- Whether the site is for sole use and secure, or in a more public, accessible location.
- Hours of darkness. How will the setting operate? Staff need to feel comfortable with the system to facilitate play, safety for all, and travelling to and from the site and drop-off and pick-ups. Contact your local crime prevention officer or architectural liaison officer for advice on a range of measures.
- Keeping any digital devices you may want to use such as laptops, tablets, digital cameras and mobile phones charged. This is particularly important for accessing records if they store personal data; a back-up may be needed and spare

batteries, portable mobile phone charger, solar charger etc.

- Communication to and from the site, both day-to-day and in an emergency. Mobile phone signals may be affected by hills, trees, adverse weather and even tides. Check which providers offer the best signal for your site. Staff should be aware of known blackspots and have plans in place regarding communication in these places.

Operating off-grid

If you don't have electricity, you can install solar lights as Summerlings Outdoor Nursery does to light paths and the toilets at the Sheiling Project near Beaulieu. You may also want to carry hand and head torches in winter when the days are shorter. You can get solar-powered water-heating bags which will keep water warm and are used by the satellite service based at Lauriston Castle in Edinburgh.

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Water management

If your site has no water mains connection, the process requires careful management and should be risk assessed and include water provision in your emergency procedures. Find out how to provide fresh water daily to meet everyone's consumption and hygiene needs (water butts and other grey water storage are not suitable for drinking or hygiene). Regular testing for quality must take place for private water or non-mains water supply.

If you are the landowner, you must liaise with your local Environmental Health Officer to ensure this is undertaken. If you rent land, check where the responsibility lies as part of agreeing your lease. The Scottish Government provides [guidance](#) on private water supplies including information about grants to improve or set up a private water supply, maintaining your water supply and ensuring the water is safe to drink through their website. The Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland has a useful [website](#).

Making the most of natural resources

As an outdoor setting, your learning resources are primarily loose parts, as defined in [Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit](#) (p5). This goes beyond recycled, junk, natural materials and random found objects to considering the interplay with the weather, seasons, climate and other phenomena. Observe, reflect and facilitate learning by using the guidelines within the [Curriculum for Excellence](#), [Building the Ambition](#) and other national and local early years guidance.

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Points to consider

How do the resources stimulate children's learning across all curriculum areas?

How does your provision facilitate all types of play? Play Scotland's website sets out the [different types of play](#).

How can you make the most of the nature play themes, as outlined in [Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit](#) (p5 and pp11-14), and foster attachment to nature and place? This is the foundation of Learning for Sustainability.

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How can you facilitate children playing in nature while balancing a minimal impact approach? Consider the Leave Less Trace Principles and caring for the place you use.

The type of context for your outdoor setting will affect your approach to resourcing:

- Do you have sole use and so can leave things out? If so, are there security considerations?
- Do you use a public park and need to pack up your kit at the end of every session? Where are essential items stored? If they are carried there, ensure staff and children can do this safely.

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5.10 Acquiring capital equipment

The equipment and resources you will need depends on the number of children and adults - and any additional support needs - and how portable or fixed you need everything to be.

Basic elements to think about:

- Hand washing equipment.
- Toilets and potential nappy-changing, if required.
- Providing a place to nap and rest.
- Shelter, warmth and respite from the elements.
- Snacks and meals.
- Tools for basic maintenance jobs and gardening for staff and children.
- Transport for materials eg old prams and buggies, shopping trolleys, suitcases, rucksacks, festival trolleys.
- Storage for equipment and resources including a warm, secure place to dry wet gear.

- Acquiring and managing clothing and accessories, including spares.
- First aid and emergency kit.
- Storage for medicine.
- Seating, such as insulated mats.
- Basic equipment to support nature play-based learning across all curriculum areas.
- GDPR-compliant recording and data storage.
- Flexible provision for children with additional support needs.
- Mobile phone and/or tablet and charging equipment/spare batteries

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5.11 Adverse weather and contingency planning

Our weather is constantly changing – the saying “Four seasons in one day” is well known! This affords endless opportunities for children to explore and expand their imaginations and learning. You should not shy away from being outside in most weather conditions but there are times when changes are needed. Planning for inclement weather is essential and you will need well-thought-through and articulated contingency arrangements which provide positive experiences for children and that have been discussed and agreed with parents.

You need to:

- have a good understanding of when it's necessary to move to an alternative site
- have a contingency plan (or plans if you have different ones for different circumstances)
- ensure the alternative location meets the requirements for providing a quality experience and be able to articulate the activities/experiences that will be on offer there.
- consider how you intend to access the alternative site location, consider how you will inform parents/carers about changes to location. This could be before the session or during
- assess the feasibility of your plans when the session has begun
- Assess what conditions are likely to cause issues for your site. This is likely to rely on weather forecasts so you may need to set out criteria for triggering the decision to move to an alternative location. Bear in mind, not all weather reports are accurate, so you may need to experiment until you find the one that's best for your location.

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The decision to move is specific to the needs of your setting, the nature of the site, ease of access and microclimatic variables. Agree as a staff team when to make the call on moving. This is particularly important when you're still learning about the unique characteristics of a new setting.

Consider, too, potential hazards for parents transporting their children to your setting. Whenever transport/police or other authorities have advised against travel, you **must** respect the safety of your children and staff by closing your service. Your landlord may advise that the site is not suitable in certain circumstances so you will need to consider how to keep in contact.

If your setting is in a remote location, you should put a system in place for providing your precise location to emergency services - beyond a postcode and online map directions. We would advise knowing 6-digit Ordnance Survey grid reference

for very remote locations. If there's an accident, it's essential that you and your staff know exactly how to provide a grid reference for wherever you are. You can use apps to provide this information, so long as you have Wi-Fi. You should also speak to your local fire services to discuss access to the site and to water, especially in a more remote area.

Working out clear directions will also help prospective parents and visitors find your setting.

Secret Garden in Fife has an excellent [description](#) on their website of how they responded to a recent storm - it covers what they did in advance, what they did on the day, how they monitored the changing weather and how they adapted as it changed.

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5.12 Risk/benefit assessment

Risk-taking and challenges in the outdoors are important for young children. Supporting children to repeat familiar activities and try out new skills will help them test their own confidence, boundaries and skills. This is important because children who can't measure risk and challenge for themselves may be unable to judge their own capabilities and boundaries.

Conversely, an outdoor environment that lacks stimulation may lead to poor behaviour and children making reckless decisions.

Use risk assessments to judge the benefits of an activity or feature. Then, rather than removing or not including this activity or feature, encourage children to use it safely.

If any parent/carer is concerned about the risk, invite them into your setting to talk about their child. You could consider holding an open day to demonstrate good practice and allay concerns. This way, you can explain the benefits of play-based learning in the outdoors – and gain important information about the children from those who know them best.

The site appraisal process outlined in **Section 4.4** will help you to work out the site-specific hazards and put in place measures to manage the risks. The Care Inspectorate produced a statement about risk in play and their expectations about your management. You can see examples of good practice in [My World Outdoors](#) (p16-23).

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Risk-benefit assessments may be needed for the following outdoor situations:

- On-site outdoors
- Off-site, including infection prevention and control
- Food-handling including campfire cooking
- Creating and maintaining semi-permanent play structures
- Playing near water
- Woodland play, including tree climbing
- Beaches, including rock pooling and paddling
- Woodwork, tinkering and tool use
- Gardening
- Use of rope, string and other long things
- Individual support for any identified child where the need arises
- Caring for animals
- Fire – including building a campfire
- Foraging – eg for brambles
- Contractors working onsite

Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach

Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. Such decisions are often based on misunderstandings about what the law requires. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has worked with the Play Safety Forum to produce a joint high-level statement that gives clear messages tackling these misunderstandings. HSE fully endorses the principles in this statement.

This statement makes clear that:

Play is important for children's wellbeing and development

When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits

Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork

Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion

Children's Play and Leisure: **promoting a balanced approach**

Further advice

The Health and Safety Executive have set out their statement on Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach. Further links are in **Appendix 4**.

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Learning to recognise and manage risk is essential for children's healthy development. Most services encourage children to take part in monitoring and risk-assessing their sites as a core routine. On entering a site, one nomadic service uses a 'Risky Business' approach with the children alerting staff to anything they feel is unsafe in the space – for example dog mess or broken glass.

Children are also involved in the setting of site boundaries with staff encouraging them to lay scarves or rope at a distance they feel is safe. Sometimes staff may need to explain why a boundary needs to be set at a specific point and this leads to greater understanding of why boundaries and rules are made. The boundaries around a site may grow and adapt as children gain confidence and/or seasons affect the environment.

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THINGS TO THINK ABOUT in this section

1. How will you support children to explore the natural environment in line with HSCS Standard 1.32? How will you enable children to choose to spend time alone (Standard 1.26)? How will you support learning (Standard 1.27)? **Section 6.1** advises on **integrating care play, fun and learning**.
2. **How will you help children not used to exploring outside to settle in?** How will you plan and how will you record? How will you enable children to make their own choices about play and space (Standard 2.27)? See **section 6.2** for **settling into the outdoors**.
3. How will you enable children to have enjoyable and unhurried experiences in snack and meal time (Standard 1.35)? What will you do to ensure children can make their own food and drink (Standard 1.38)? How will you ensure children have free access to drinking water at all times (Standard 1.39)? **Section 6.3** covers **food and drink**.
4. What **environmental factors** will you need to consider? How can you use the environment as part of play and learning? Advice on natural hazards including insects, water and fire are covered in **Section 6.4**.
5. Is the space safe to use or can it be made safe? Do you and your staff understand how to **balance risk and benefit**? Do you need to put together a myth buster? How will you enable children to learn to understand and take safe risks? **Section 6.5** helps you balance risk and benefits.
6. How will you help children be confident in the dark? What kit might you need for safety? Will it be dark at drop-off and pick-up points? **Section 6.6** looks at **building confidence in the dark**.
7. Do you know how germs spread? Do you know where to find out precautions beyond good hand hygiene and kitchen hygiene? **Section 6.7** provides a link to useful guidance on **infection control**.

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8. How will you store **medication** so that is out of reach and stored at the correct temperature? **Section 6.8** has some advice.
9. How will you ensure your site is maintained? How will the site be maintained and by whom? Does it have a special status e.g. a historic site, a National Nature Reserve (NNR), a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), or anything else where a nursery may have a significant environmental impact? Your site needs to be robust enough to cope with children playing there regularly and frequently. See **Section 6.9**.
10. Advice on **unforeseen incidents and emergencies** is in **Section 6.10**.
11. Are your **missing child procedures** up-to-date? Is your Safeguarding policy robust and appropriate for your setting and your children's personal plans? **Section 6.11** advises on missing child procedures.

A key part of creating an outdoor setting is using the site to provide positive, fun, challenging, playful and enjoyable experiences for children. When you apply to the Care Inspectorate for a new registration or a variation, as part of the assessment process, you'll be asked how you plan to do this.

Every decision about using your space will affect the children's opportunities and experiences. For example, many outdoor spaces afford wider and deeper play opportunities supporting greater learning and curiosity.

Outdoor settings often have a number of different areas for different functions. These different functions include areas to allow children to enjoy quiet times, a space to play alone, or with smaller or larger groups.

Some larger settings use separate base camps with low numbers in each base.

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Woodland Outdoor Kindergarten operate a fully outdoors nomadic service in two public parks in Glasgow. WOK are able to take up to 48 children per day at our south-side kindergarten and up to 24 children per day at our west end kindergarten. Children spend the day in groups of 12.

“When we arrive at the woodland site, the children break into smaller groups and lead the way to each camp carrying their own ruck sacks. At camp, the staff carry out a risk assessment to ensure the children’s safety—the children also have their own “risk assessment” that they use. We set up shelter (if required), our toilet and get camp just the way the children like it. The children are supervised as they play and engage with the environment in a way which they have chosen for themselves. Staff do not direct the learning activities – they stand back and watch to see what happens. Adult interventions and interactions are well measured to provide support if needed to ensure that children are empowered to be the motivators and directors of their own learning.”

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6.1 Integrating care, play, fun and learning

Outdoor settings offer an important provision in today's culture enabling children to explore the natural environment, climbing trees, building dens and engaging with natural materials. There are many government documents which provide useful information and background and support positive care, play-based learning opportunities and experiences for children:

- [Curriculum for Excellence](#)
- [Health and Social Care Standards](#)
- [Pre birth to three](#)
- [Building the Ambition](#)
- [GIRFEC](#)
- [Learning for Sustainability](#)

Providing a wide range of opportunities outdoors, exploring the natural environment, will make sure a child's individual learning needs are met in enjoyable ways.

In all settings, staff should use their professional judgement and choose the most suitable learning intention to ensure children are offered a rich, meaningful play-based learning experience. For a variety of reasons, it may be difficult for some children or parents to access the site or for children to be actively involved, such as when a child has particular needs. Staff should work closely with parents and children and liaise with any other relevant agencies to make this possible.

The outdoors provides many opportunities to improve literacy, numeracy and support STEM learning (science, technology, engineering and maths). [My World Outdoors](#) (Care Inspectorate 2016) has a wealth of good practice examples and suggestions for ways to support outdoor learning.

“Using the outdoor environment as the inspiration for play increases creativity as well as therapeutic potential”.
(Balanced and Barefoot , Angela J. Hanscom 2016).

Exploring the natural environment goes a long way in teaching sustainability if supported by skilled adults who have good environmental awareness and model behaviours on protecting and promoting good environmental stewardship. Beginning to appreciate, care and love the outdoors inspires children to care for that environment. Enjoying and learning about using their green space responsibly and safely, caring for animals and plants, experiencing seasonal change all help to encourage a connection to the way their world works and how they link to it and ultimately should encourage a young person to consider other users and future generations.

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How children perceive their environment is linked to the functionality of the features and availability and range or type of loose parts available. By frequently re-visiting the space, a child's connection is deepened because the child discovers and masters new skills and activities. In this process:

“the experiences become embodied as skills and understandings of the world that support ever-deepening feelings and relationships between child and surroundings.” (Moore 2014:24).

Children should be able to direct their own play from a wide range of suitable experiences and natural resources freely available to them outdoors. Staff should encourage children to be curious, imaginative and to be creative in their play-based learning using natural objects and loose part materials. Endless experimenting with [loose parts](#) has been shown to help children develop their sense of self-worth.

Consider whether or not to provide other non-natural resources and, if so, where these will be stored. For example, some core resources could include ropes and drawing materials including paint brushes and sheets, and child-friendly tools. You could also include a range of books, even compiling ‘bags’ of resources together to extend learning quickly. For example, bags for bird watching, bug hunting, literacy, numeracy and threading/sewing resources. You can use floor books to review and aid evaluation and reflection as illustrated by the approach used by [Mindstretchers](#) as a child-led methodology for planning and documentation.

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6.2 Settling into the outdoors

While many children will feel entirely at home and excited about exploring outdoor environments, your outdoor setting may be some children's first experience of playing freely outside. As with all children, staff should handle the settling-in process with sensitivity, giving them the time and space to adjust at their own pace. For some, it just takes time to build up their confidence to enjoy the freedom an outdoor setting provides, for others it's the confidence to take on some of the new challenges. With the right support and handling, most children will settle in a short space of time. It helps to work with the parents, letting them also spend time in the setting so they can see what their child will experience.

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Children and staff should plan opportunities together in a way that works for each setting. It's very important that children share their successes, achievements and progress.

'All planning must focus directly on enhancing the learning journey.'

Curriculum for Excellence; A Statement for Practitioners from HM Chief Inspector of Education

"Practitioners are responsible for gathering observations that are of high quality and significant to each individual child. It should include information on learning, development and may link to developmental milestones or schematic play (Patterns of repeated behaviour which can often be noticed in young children's play)"

Building the Ambition: National Practice Guidance on Early Learning and Childcare

Many settings record planning, observations and assessment for each child in a written format, while some do this electronically. Consider the best way to do this in your outdoor setting, ensuring the information is accessible when outdoors. Ensuring practice is responding

to child-initiated learning, planning in the moment is required; [Moment by Moment Planning](#) by Anna Ephgrave, an independent consultant, trainer and author specialising in early years, has some helpful information on this.

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6.3 Food and water

Section 6 Things to Think About asks some broad questions about how you will enable children to have enjoyable and unhurried food and drink experiences; enable children to make their own food and drink; and ensure children have free access to drinking water at all times.

You will need to consider in detail:

- How you will provide food
- How you will store food brought in by parents. And if parents don't take children directly to the site, how you will transport their food.
- How you will keep food at the appropriate temperature.
- If preparing or cooking food on site, how you will do this appropriately.
- If using outside caterers, how it will be delivered. Where and how you will store and serve food.
- How you will ensure children can access suitable drinking water at all times.

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- How you will make the environment suitable for eating.
- How you will enable children to eat when they want to.
- How staff will support children to eat.

Providing food

Providing food in an appropriate setting is an integral part of creating a caring learning environment. When children share a positive experience of eating and drinking, it helps develop a lifelong healthy relationship with food. They will see it as an enjoyable activity while developing an understanding of its role in long term health benefits within social and cultural contexts. Children should have a relaxed, quiet and peaceful space to enjoy food and drinks, where everyone can sit together. In an outdoor setting, this is likely to be outside or within your shelter; wherever it is, it should offer a relaxed and peaceful environment.

The Care Inspectorate Hub has a link to [Food Matters. Nurturing happy, healthy children](#) which contains some useful practical advice.

Opportunities should be available for children to help prepare and serve lunches and snacks. Many settings provide a 'snack bar' system or a 'rolling' snack that allows children to choose when to have a snack, and whether to have it on their own or with others.

Providing food can include food cooked or prepared on site, using outside caterers as well as where parents provide a packed lunch and snacks.

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Food safety

Bear in mind that when food is cooked or prepared on site, including snacks, your setting is likely to be considered a food business. This means that you need to follow and fulfil the Food Safety regulations for care settings from the local authority Environmental Health department. These are likely to be updated regularly so you should check with your local environmental health department regularly. The Food Standards Agency provides [guidance](#) on general food law and provides a [gateway](#) to councils.

Where food is brought to your setting or is being provided by you, there must be sufficient refrigerated storage to keep the food at a safe temperature and information is available in [Space to Grow](#). You can ask your Council's Environmental Health officers for advice on storage. Consider how to reduce the amount of litter and to dispose of it. Can you discourage parents from providing pre-packaged snacks and lunches perhaps listing alternatives?

Children should always have access to fresh drinking water to keep them hydrated.

If you're using a public facility, check that the drinking water is suitable. The Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland has a [Surveillance programme for Schools and Nurseries](#) which provides some advice.

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Options to consider:

- On site cooking and preparation - if using a campfire for cooking, check you are following the Scottish Outdoor Access Code [advice on lighting fires](#).
- Parents providing all food and drinks -
- Using outside caterers. A few points to consider - how will they deliver the food? Will it be hot? Will you need to heat up or keep hot/cold?
- Snack Bar or rolling snack. A few points to consider - how you will do that in a nomadic setting - fruit comes already packaged.
- Children having lunch/snacks together. Do you need to provide insulated mats for them to sit on when it's cold/damp?
- Involving children in food preparation?

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6.4 Environment

6.4.1 Encountering wildlife

Children are fascinated by wildlife. Chance encounters provide spontaneous moments to enjoy the presence of an animal or plant.

If children, staff, parents or carers express any worries or concerns, most can be mitigated with sensible measures, enabling everyone to respond not react. Often, fear turns into curiosity when a practitioner models a gentle, patient approach and shows genuine interest in the wildlife. It also helps to move beyond observing and naming creatures to a holistic approach where knowing and understanding a species involves the mind, body, emotion and spirit. Doing all this fosters a deeper appreciation of the need and contribution of every plant and animal within our world.

There are many different charities and organisations providing information and resources about our wildlife. Explore their virtual, online worlds to support real-life experiences using technology such as cameras, ipads etc.

6.4.2 Birds and animals

Look up the advice on caring for birds and mammals like hedgehogs and bats: feeding, nesting, how to avoid disturbing them and what to do in a range of incidents. The following organisations have plenty of advice:

- [RSPB](#)
- [Wildlife Trust](#)
- [Bats UK](#)
- [British Hedgehogs UK](#)
- [Scottish SPCA](#)

If you find an injured bird or animal, phone your local Scottish SPCA or the [animal helpline](#) for advice.

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The 2018 Care Inspectorate publication [Animal Magic](#) provides evidence, examples and case studies of the benefits to young children when they have frequent and regular opportunities to care for and interact with animals.

6.4.3 Protected species and wildlife crime

Certain species are protected by law. This means it can be illegal to kill, injure or capture birds or animals or to pick or damage certain wild plants. Before gaining permission to use land – even your own land – you must be aware of your legal responsibilities and follow any codes of practice. For more information, look at the [Scottish Natural Heritage page on protected species](#).

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Sadly, wildlife crimes are an ongoing concern. Your staff need to know how to report suspicious activity or the appearance of unfamiliar people. PAW Scotland have further advice online. You may want to invite your local police to come and talk to the children. Scottish Natural Heritage also provide information and links on [wildlife crime](#) and [what you can do](#).

6.4.4 Creepy crawlies

Midges, ticks, spiders and flies

These creatures have an important role to play in many ecosystems and habitats. Whilst getting a small bite may be irritating, it's an opportunity to learn about the 'biting beastie' and how to dress and protect ourselves during certain seasons and places.

Very occasionally, a person reacts to a bite in an adverse way. When this happens, follow your first aid procedures. As with sunscreen, you need parental permission before applying suitable insect repellent

for young children. If your setting is in a location where ticks are prevalent, discuss tick removal with parents and carers. They'll need to remember to check their child every day and to remove any ticks that are found using the correct technique. Further sources of advice including NHS Inform advice on ticks are in [Appendix 5](#).

Wasps and bees

Wasps are mainly omnivorous and help plants by eating greenfly and other pests. Bees are essential for pollinating plants. Understanding why and how wasps and bees live and the reason for their stings is part of the learning process. For advice about wasps and bees and what to do with a sting, visit the NHS website. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insect-bites-and-stings/>

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6.4.5 Dogs

Dogs may often be encountered both on and off a lead, particularly if your outdoor site is in an area popular with dog walkers. Children and staff should follow the [Blue Cross advice](#). Local authorities have animal or dog wardens for a variety of duties including enforcement and educating the public. They can advise and sometimes help on issues including dog fouling. For more information, look up the [National Association of Dog Wardens](#).

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6.4.6 Using fire

Fires are routinely used in many outdoor and traditional nurseries. Fire has many good uses within a nurturing outdoor setting:

- source of heat e.g. fire stones or a fire bowl outside or a woodburning stove in a shelter
- a way to cook, snack and enjoy freshly prepared food and warm drinks
- a space to sit around, stare into the flames and reflect, or gathering around for a story or song

When using any naked flames make sure:

- Staff are competent to undertake any proposed fire experience – this does not mean they have to have any specific qualification.
- The experience is a meaningful learning opportunity with a clear rationale.
- Children can practise the skills for keeping themselves safe and develop sustained, shared thinking around all that fire offers.

- Think through the appropriateness of a particular method or fire equipment for any group. One-off experiences are not sufficient for children to explore fire in a holistic way.
- Systems are in place to manage the risks, taking into account the children's levels (their understanding, physical ability and development), as well as the site and environmental factors.
- Follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code including:
 - gaining landowner's permission to have a small, supervised fire that's under control
 - adopting sustainable practices for gathering wood and using a stove rather than an open fire
 - observing fire bans
 - ensure you have appropriate and adequate insurance in place [see [section 4.7](#)]

Free download

Follow the [fire guidance](#) from the Outdoor and Woodland Learning Scotland website:

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6.4.7 Playing near water

Playing near water can provide a range of additional opportunities for learning and encouraging curiosity whether that's near the sea, a loch a river, a stream or a small pond. As with all spaces, it is important to ensure this is approached in a safe manner and that risks and benefits are assessed. If you are in close proximity to water, you should download and follow the guidance in [Group Safety at Water Margins](#).

6.4.8 Serious injuries

All nurseries whether indoors or outdoors must have a policy and practice in place for such emergencies and must communicate this to all parents. If you are in a remote location, you will need a system for providing your precise location to emergency services – if there's an accident, it's essential that you and your staff know how to provide a grid reference for wherever you are. You can use apps to provide this information, so long as you have Wi-Fi. Serious injuries are extremely rare. Where an injury requires more than

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basic first aid, emergency services should be called without delay.

6.4.9 Bites

On the rare occasion that a child or member of staff is bitten by an animal, standard first aid training should be applied; staff should ensure they have followed the procedures outlined in the most recent HPS [Infection Control and Prevention Guidelines in Day Care and Childminding Settings](#).

6.4.10 Controlling invasive species

You need to be able to identify non-native invasive species on your land as you have a legal obligation to avoid them spreading into the wild. There are various sources of advice on identification and tackling invasive non-native species – the [Scottish Government's Code of Practice](#) and Scottish Natural Heritage's (SNH) [relevant section](#) are both good sources. More detailed information is included in [Appendix 5](#).

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If you want to use the discovery of such species as a learning opportunity, the SNH website has some examples of using [citizen science outdoors to support teaching and learning](#) - although focused on schools, this might provide some ideas of how children can participate in scientific observation. Similarly, [Citizen Science](#) is a charity whose aim is to involve anyone interested in science. The [Open Air Laboratories \(OPAL\) Network](#) can be another good resource for engagement with nature.

6.4.11 Animal and plant diseases

Practitioners, and children, can keep any eye out for subtle changes in the flora and fauna that can indicate that something is amiss. Follow national reporting procedures and advice to minimise or prevent the spread of such diseases such as Ash Die Back. Contact Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland for these.

6.4.12 Foraging and fungi

Humans have foraged for thousands of years. Using plants for different purposes is a core part of being human. So teaching children to forage is an important part of our natural heritage and can help us identify with our ancestors and how they lived. Children need to see, feel, listen, smell and occasionally taste wild plants to connect with nature and learn that we are part of it.

Muddy Faces, a website supporting outdoor play based learning and Forest Schools, has a useful [section](#) on foraging, bushcraft and outdoor cooking.

From an early age, children can distinguish different types of plants and animals. They quickly learn that nettles are jaggy and brambles have thorns. Finding and eating food outside develops children's ability to recognise different plants, animals and fungi. It provides meaning and purpose to learning with, in, through and about nature. Staff need to ensure

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Parents and carers need to know that foraging takes place within your setting. Ensure they can ask questions and participate if they want to. Be aware of cultural differences towards foraging for food. If a child is prone to food allergies, you'll need to discuss and agree what is and isn't okay to eat, update the child's personal plan and the risk-benefit assessment for the activity with the agreed procedures and inform all staff.

Fungi grow all year round and can be prolific during autumn. Different types can be found everywhere: on playing fields, growing out of walls, living on rotting wood or developing brackets on certain trees. Feeling and smelling fungi are just as important as being able to see them.

Whilst it is not against the law to pick fungi, you should follow the [Scottish Wild Mushroom Code](#). It's important to gather sustainably, leaving plenty for wildlife, particularly insects. Ingesting fungi is when the harm is done. No one should eat a mushroom unless they are 100% sure it is edible, fresh and washed under running water to remove any debris. If in doubt, don't eat it, especially as some harmful varieties can resemble some edible mushrooms. Remember to wash your hands after touching fungi or use a stick, mirror and magnifying glass to gently explore a discovered mushroom or toadstool.

More details are available in [Appendix 5](#)

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6.4.13 Potentially harmful plants

What makes a plant harmful? It's an ambiguous label which can lead to confusion. It depends on a person or animal's tolerance to a toxic chemical, the strength and quantity (affected by the time of year or the plant's maturity), the level of harm caused by contact, ingestion or use, and the numbers of people affected each year.

A common sense approach includes:

- Teaching children not to eat anything outside unless a practitioner tells them it's safe. When gardening, use a visual label to segregate plants so that children know a plant is safe to taste.
- Try and identify the plants in your site or public space – you can ask the landowner or local ranger. Your staff may need to increase their own knowledge to do this.

- Do not assume all potentially harmful plants must be removed. They are an opportunity for children to learn how to be safe. Instead take simple measures such as:
 - Showing children and modelling how to accurately identify a plant
 - Telling stories and learning the folklore around plants including their benefit and need to exist
 - Strimming or mowing pathways through some areas to create access in the height of summer
 - Storing bulbs and seed packets out of reach of children
 - Wearing gloves when gardening
 - Always washing hands after gardening

Further links are included in [Appendix 5](#).

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6.5 Balancing risk

Play for children means taking risks, it's the opportunity to try, test and push themselves. Letting children learn through their experiences and setting those goals and challenges for themselves. It's the joy of learning that you can climb to the next branch on a tree or you can walk up the muddy slope or you have managed to move the water bucket.

Risk and learning through playful risk is key in developing resilience, and the learning and self-reliance that brings to a child in their formative years.

The Care Inspectorate supports a risk-benefit based approach.

'The Care Inspectorate supports care service providers taking a positive approach to risk in order to achieve the best outcomes for children. This means moving away from a traditional deficit model that takes a risk-averse approach, which can unnecessarily restrict children's experiences attending registered services, to a more holistic risk-benefit model. For example, we encourage services to use risk assessment to support children to enjoy potentially hazardous activities such as woodwork using real tools, exploring nature and playing in the mud and rain. We do not expect written risk assessments to be carried out for daily play activities.' (Care Inspectorate October 2015).

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There are many myths about acceptable risk for children – meaning that the benefits can often be overlooked. The best way to view this is to assess all outdoor areas for risk-benefit to ensure they are ‘as safe as necessary’ rather than as safe as possible. ROSPA provides [Advice on Outdoor Risks](#) which encourages balancing of risks and benefits.

‘It is the role of the provider and staff to work out the main physical and environmental risk and take steps to reduce them. You need to balance the risks against the benefits and make children the main focus of the risk-benefit assessment process.’ [My World Outdoors](#)

‘Managing risk is a balancing act between opportunities for learning and play, and safety – or put it another way, between risks and benefits’.

Balancing Risks and benefits in Outdoor Learning and Play – A briefing for teacher and practitioners working with children by Tim Gill.

Experiencing and learning how to assess risk helps children to grow in confidence, resilience and healthiness. It takes a knowledgeable member of staff to ensure a balanced approach to risk and managing children’s abilities, so it is important to support staff to grow in their skills. Creative Star’s [Fairies – A Risk Based Assessment](#) is a helpful tool for exploring risk and benefits as is Play Wales [Making health and safety ‘child’s play’](#). Children should also be encouraged to manage risk appropriately, assessing it for themselves and having the freedom to make mistakes. This develops greater independence and confidence in communicating and working with others – all essential skills.

Dr Mariana Brussoni, an expert on risk in play based in Canada has developed a [tool](#) to support adults, primarily parents and caregivers, to gain confidence in enabling their children to engage in outdoor play.

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6.6 Building confidence in the dark

During winter months, children are likely to be outdoors in the dark. This offers many exciting opportunities for storytelling, games and exploring the environment in different conditions. Becoming confident in the dark at a young age should mitigate children developing a fear of the dark. Although Scotland has short days in the winter, especially further north, there are many ways to ensure your site is light enough for comfort and safety and instils a sense of magic and adventure.

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Think about how to bring additional light into the space – torches, solar lamps, perhaps movement sensor lights, adding sparkly fairy lights to shelters. Consider how to help children feel safe, nurtured and supported as they manage any additional risks. Some children may need to build up their confidence and strategies should be discussed with parents and written into each child's personal plan but staff should encourage children to think of fading light, dusk and darkness as routines within the day which offer different experiences.

As it's more difficult to see others who may access the site in the dark, particularly for areas around the entrance, consider the safety of children, staff and parents. If there's a built premises, consider using this for drop-offs and pick ups in the dark.

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SECTION 06

USING YOUR SPACE

6.7 Infection control

As in all care settings good hand washing by practitioners and children is important as part of good infection control (see [Section 5.5](#)). Beyond ensuring good practice and suitable arrangements are in place for handwashing, you will need to ensure you follow the guidance for managing infection prevention and control - this is the same for indoor and outdoor settings. Your 'duty of care' to provide a safe environment for children at your setting includes infection prevention and control. This is extremely important for health, wellbeing and safety. Health Protection Scotland provides a resource document called [Infection Prevention and Control in Childcare Settings \(Day Care and Childminding Settings\)](#) which explains how infection spreads, describes infection control precautions beyond (and including) handwashing, food and kitchen hygiene and the early warning signs and symptoms of infection.

It is important that you have clear written procedures on infection control and understand the incubation and exclusion periods with various childhood illnesses.

6.8 Medication

Whether indoor or outdoor, children at your setting may need to take medicine. There are no different rules for this whether in an indoor or an outdoor setting although there may be some practical differences. You're required to have clear procedures in place for the administration and storage of medicine which you will need to consider within your outdoor setting. Parents need to give written consent before staff can administer medication to children and the consent needs to be stored somewhere secure but accessible to staff - electronic records may be most appropriate when outdoors as long as access can be guaranteed. Staff need to know when medication should be given and are required to record when it is given. While staff should access the

medicine, children should not - unless it's an inhaler or other appropriate medication.

If using cool boxes, food storage and medicine storage should be kept separate to maintain a steady temperature for medicine - regular opening of boxes to access food causes temperatures to fluctuate. Belt packs or bum bags may be a useful way for staff to carry items which do not need to be kept at specific temperatures. Storing first aid kits or other items which need to be kept out of children's reach can be done by hanging bags from higher branches.

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6.9 Integrating site maintenance into your plans

As with any setting, to manage your outdoor setting effectively, you will need to put a system of checks and procedures in place. This ensures all jobs will be planned and budgeted for, and that the site and childcare offered has taken due account of the health, safety and wellbeing of the children, staff and visitors. It's also easier to see which jobs can be undertaken with children as part of the ongoing life of the setting, and which require specialist input.

Make sure that supply staff and volunteers are thoroughly briefed about the routines and expectations they should follow, including principles and approaches to learning and play, and recording observations and information about the children. A list of possible tasks is included in [Appendix 5](#).

Natural play spaces need regular checking and maintenance. For the ongoing maintenance of a public space, partner with the landowner and volunteer groups to care for the space. Partnership working is crucial to a successful outdoor setting and giving generously of time to undertake shared tasks can be much appreciated by local authorities and a list of ideas for partnership working are included in [Appendix 5](#).

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6.10 Responding to unforeseen incidents and emergencies

The approach to this should be the same as in any setting. It is important to have swift evacuation plans, particularly when sharing a public space with other users. Follow the sensible advice and recommended procedures from many local authority outdoor education teams in [Going Out There - The National Framework for Off-site Visits](#).

6.11 Missing child procedures

As with incidents and emergencies, the approach here should be the same as in an indoor setting. All early learning and childcare providers must have missing child procedures in place and practise implementation whether indoors or outdoors. All early learning and childcare providers must have a robust Safeguarding policy appropriate to the individual setting and children's Personal Plans will reflect any specific needs or risks.

6.12 Written information and notifications

Again the approach should be the same as in an indoor setting. As you'd expect, there are a variety of formal procedures that you're required to undertake as you would in an indoor setting. Your setting must maintain relevant records and provide notifications to the Care Inspectorate and other organisations.

A personal plan for each child: this is required in all settings, indoor and outdoor. It needs to be regularly updated and reviewed. [The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland Order 2011 \(SSI 210/5\)](#) sets out the regulatory requirements.

Information about the children: this must be accessible to staff at all times. Some must be kept confidential and other notifications are required to be made immediately to the Care Inspectorate using the Care Inspectorate's eform system which you will have access to once your setting has been registered.

Insurance: insurance requirements are set out in [section 4.7](#). You will need to consider how to make your insurance certificate available to parents/carers/ other visitors

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Policies and procedures: these must be developed to support your practice. When you apply for registration to the Care Inspectorate, you will be advised which core policies and procedures you'll need to submit. Additional policies and procedures may be requested by the Care Inspectorate during the registration process. Policies and procedures will continue to be developed once the service operates. Guidance for applicants is available on the Care Inspectorate [website](#)

Evaluation: Systems should be put in place to continually evaluate the setting. Effective systems help ensure good outcomes for children and continuous improvement. [The Wellbeing SHANARRI indicators](#) provide a good model for assessing and reporting on the positive impact outdoor experiences have on the overall outcomes for children. The views of children, carers and other stakeholders should be part of the evaluation, and you can use a wide range of approaches to gather ideas and the views. For example,

using paper questionnaires may not be effective outdoors. The evaluation will inform your setting's development plan which should be available to parents and carers as well as local authorities.

Naturally, all providers must make sure that staff are confident and suitably qualified, skilled and experienced to work in the setting. ([The Social Care and Social Work Improvements Scotland \(Requirements for Care Services\) Regulations 2011 \(SSI 2011/210/9/15\)](#)).

As with all health and social care services, staff in Care Inspectorate registered settings are required to register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and are expected to have, or commit to get, a qualification recognised as appropriate to their role. See SSSC for [guidance](#).

For outdoor settings, this doesn't mean staff must have a specific outdoor qualification however, you must be assured of their competence to deliver a high-quality outdoor experience. You should put plans in place for staff to attend specific outdoor training where this is necessary. In most outdoor settings, it is unlikely that no staff will have relevant outdoor qualifications and/or experience.

SECTION 07

STAFFING

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT in this section

1. Ensuring new staff share your values and ethos. Do your staff embrace the outdoor ethos? Are they experienced in delivering outdoor play? Are they confident outdoors? How will you find out? See **Section 7.1**
2. What to look for at recruitment? Do staff come with both early learning and childcare/play experience and outdoors? What qualifications may be needed to meet SSSC registration requirements? See **Section 7.2**
3. What induction would help staff new to outdoor play and learning? Are there other staff with more experience who could be a buddy? Are they motivated and enthusiastic? **Section 7.3**
4. What training does each member of staff need when s/he starts? How many staff skilled and/or trained in outdoors do you need? Do they have appropriate training to provide children with a range of learning experiences outdoors? If not, what training and tools would be helpful? What ongoing training do they need? **Section 7.4**
5. Who can provide training? Is it something you could do by bringing trainers in? Do you need a bespoke package to suit your setting and/or your staff? Are your staff personally experienced and knowledgeable about spending time outdoors? **Section 7.5**

Children and parents, should have confidence in the people who support and care for them. If you have an existing staff team who are used to primarily working indoors they may not all be attracted to working outdoors at first. Giving them a broad understanding of what it means to work outdoors, and supporting with the right training, can dispel the myths and transform their confidence and enthusiasm.

SECTION 07

STAFFING

7.1 Values and ethos in an outdoor setting

Your staff need to understand the distinct value of playing and learning outdoors. They have to understand how to use and adapt the outdoors and the many rich opportunities for play-based learning. Staff need to be confident in their surroundings and know how to use what's present - instead of relying on a lot of equipment and toys outside with them - trusting children to be co-creators of their own learning and understanding when their role is to step back and observe and interpret the play. They also need to have a deeper understanding of the environment, not just as a fun place for play-based learning, but also of our responsibility to care and protect nature and the world around us.

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It is worth emphasising that the fun of outdoor play-based learning goes beyond the children; and practitioners who work outdoors also enjoy the benefits it provides. Our experience is that if staff are confident and trained, they really enjoy playing outdoors with children. We know of practitioners who, after many years of being indoors and despite early trepidation, have become great advocates of the joy and benefits of outdoor play-based learning.

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SECTION 07

STAFFING

7.2 Recruitment

If you are opening a brand-new service, or expanding your setting into the outdoors, you will need to think about how to undertake recruiting staff. As with any organisation, you will want staff who fit with the values and ethos of the service you will be providing. Clearly, for outdoor play-based learning you will need staff who embrace the concept of the outdoors as a high-quality learning environment. They must want to be outdoors themselves and have a desire to share nature's wonders with the children.

Some excellent outdoor practitioners come to the sector from alternative and diverse routes such as community learning and development, outdoor education, environmental sector, public health and so on. It may mean that there is an investment, involved in supporting such staff to gain the required childcare qualifications to register with the SSSC but this will reap rewards as acquiring enthusiastic, motivated staff who are

confident and competent in the outdoors and come with a range of skills to support children's learning is key to success.

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7.3 Induction

All staff must be given a clear, robust induction for the specific setting you're using and should be provided with continuous professional development opportunities (Section 7.4 below). ([The Social Care and Social Work Improvements Scotland \(Requirements for Care Services\) Regulations 2011 \(SSI 2011/210/9/15\)](#)).

Be aware that development requirements may vary considerably, depending on each person's training and experience. Some staff, for example, may have been trained in outdoor play-based learning at the start of their career but have never put it into practice, while at the opposite extreme, other staff may come from a role in forestry or the environment and need qualifications and training in childcare. Where you have staff experienced in outdoors, it may be helpful to set up a formal buddy system for those newer to this type of setting, especially those who might be nervous about working in an outdoor environment.

7.4 Finding training providers

Many training providers in Scotland support training and CPD for outdoor play, and some of these are verified by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and tracked against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Courses include:

- how to deliver loose part play outside
- dynamic risk assessment
- environmental awareness
- how to make shelters
- how to interpret the curriculum for excellence
- how to enable STEM-based outdoor play.

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SECTION 07

STAFFING

7.5 Developing personal skills and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

You will need to assess and consider how to address gaps in your staff's confidence levels, skills and experience.

- How many people need to be skilled in accessing and supporting outdoor play?
- Which training could support – CPD, PDA or other formal qualifications?
- Personality for coping with cold, wet and rainy days – are your staff as resilient as the children?

Continuous professional development should be available to all staff whether predominantly indoors or outdoors. (The Social Care and Social Work Improvements Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/15).

As with induction, CPD requirements will vary, depending on each member of staff's existing training and experience. Some will require or desire more intense ongoing outdoor training. As with all staff, individual needs should be assessed and discussed regularly.

The SSSC have developed the [Continuous Learning Framework](#) (CLF) which is a useful resource to support individual staff and organisations in planning personal and workforce development needs.

See [Section 4.5](#) for additional learning opportunities.

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SECTION 08

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the process of developing this guide, we have benefited from the support and input of many people and organisations for which we are very grateful. In particular, we want to thank Juliet Robertson, Creative Star, who has been incredibly generous with her time and made resources available to us. Others have also supported this work through advice on the text, notably Alison Motion, Grounds for Learning; Sally York, Forestry Commission; Sharon Cunningham, Scottish Natural Heritage; and Penny Martin, Scottish Natural Heritage.

We are grateful to those nurseries listed below that allowed us to use their settings to illustrate examples of good practice or for photographs to show outdoor play-based learning in action.

Auchlone Nature Kindergarten
Children's Woods
City of Edinburgh Council Forest Kindergarten
Evergreen Outdoor Nursery
Greenbank Woodland Play

Little Seeds Woodland Nursery
Muddy Buddies outdoor partnership
Parkhead Community Nursery
Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery
Stramash Outdoor Nurseries
Summerlings /Sheiling Project
Welly Wanderers outdoor partnership
Woodland Outdoor Kindergarten.

Photographs are by Malcolm Cochrane, Lynn Henni and Nick McGowan-Love.

We would also like to thank the local authorities working in partnership with Inspiring Scotland for their time in offering comment. These are:

Argyll & Bute Council
City of Edinburgh Council
Glasgow City Council
Highland Council
Midlothian Council
North Lanarkshire Council
South Ayrshire Council and
West Lothian Council.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Scotland's National Position Statement on Outdoor Play and Learning

Scotland's Outdoor Play & Learning Coalition Position Statement

Playing outdoors is fundamental...

All children and young people have the right to play and the right to learn as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Children.

Playing outdoors enhances learning and is fundamental for children and young people to thrive in health, wellbeing and development.

It is our shared responsibility to support and enable all of Scotland's children and young people to access our diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purposes of playing and learning. We commit to working together to meet these responsibilities.

Playing and learning outdoors is life-enhancing.

- It improves the physical health of children and young people by increasing physical activity¹⁴ and equipping them with the skills and attributes essential for living a healthy and active life, thereby contributing to reducing health inequalities¹⁵ and supporting the aims of national health policies.
- It promotes mental, social and emotional wellbeing¹⁶⁻¹⁸ by helping to reduce stress, increase self-esteem and confidence, develop emotional resilience¹⁹, and build children and young people's confidence in their own capabilities and ability to manage risks and deal with uncertainty²⁰.
- Importantly, it is fun! And through that fun, it promotes the development of essential social skills, helping children and young people to develop compassion and empathy and to build lasting and loving relationships²¹⁻²³.
- It supports wider learning by helping to boost creativity, imagination and understanding. These benefits are enhanced further when playing outdoors in diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes, particularly when the play is led by the child or young person. This provides multiple and enjoyable challenges and creates and enhances learning opportunities. It can also prepare children and young people for more structured learning, thereby supporting the aims of national education policies²⁴.
- It brings people together, connecting children and young people with their local areas and communities and helping to develop a sense of place and feeling of belonging and inclusion. It provides a wealth of opportunities for intergenerational activity, enhancing community cohesion, reducing social isolation, and helping to build inclusive, resilient communities²⁵.
- It is a powerful tool through which children and young people learn to understand the world around them and their place in it, creating a sense of ownership of all of Scotland's landscapes. Playing and learning outdoors is essential for our children and young people to understand, value, enjoy and protect our natural world. It connects them to their environment, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of its physical properties and diversity²⁶⁻²⁸.

We commit to life-enhancing outdoor play and learning for all of Scotland's children and young people by:

- Widening access to the high-quality, diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes that exist throughout all our communities to ensure that all children, young people and families have easy, local access to excellent outdoor play.
- Opening up more of our communal and publicly-managed spaces for playing and learning outdoors, ensuring that children and young people know they are entitled to access these spaces and feel safe and comfortable using them.
- Enhancing and enriching urban greenspace and built environments to be inviting, play-friendly places, offering easy access to the outdoors and nature close to home.
- Empowering every adult involved in the lives of our children and young people with the confidence, enthusiasm and skills to encourage and support them to play and learn outdoors.
- Generating and sharing knowledge and evidence-based research to promote better understanding of the benefits of playing and learning outdoors.

We will work together to embed playing and learning outdoors as an everyday activity and we will celebrate it as a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland.

Signatories

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Development Trusts Association Scotland
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Scottish Canals
Scottish Childminding Association
Scottish Land and Estates
Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Out of School Care Network
Scottish Social Services Council
Skills Development Scotland

Scotland's Outdoor Play & Learning Coalition Position Statement

Supporting Document

We are starting from a very positive position. Our policies and legislative framework in Scotland are very supportive of outdoor play and learning to the extent that other countries are beginning to look to us for advice on how to deliver outdoor play.

Scottish Government and Inspiring Scotland have been working together on the promotion, delivery and development of outdoor play for many years with a range of partners. As the significant benefits of play delivered outdoors to children's physical health and mental, social and emotional wellbeing have become clearer, dialogue has developed between a wide range of groups involved in outdoor play and learning; those in regulation and registration, in training, in the management of outdoor spaces, researchers and environmentalists.

Through this dialogue, it became clear that providing outdoor play and learning for children and young people supports the aims and objectives of public bodies and organisations across a number of sectors, including addressing pressing issues such as poor health outcomes and health inequalities and supporting national efforts to close the attainment gap in education. It became apparent to a growing number of people and organisations that enabling more playing and learning outdoors could go a long way to ensuring the best outcomes for Scotland's children and young people.

At the same time, discussions about how to achieve Scottish Government's commitment to deliver 1,140 hours of funded nursery hours to all 3 to 5-year-old and eligible 2-year-old children by August 2020 were taking place. That commitment will nearly double funded provision which brings huge benefits but will also require challenges to be overcome such as the limited suitable physical infrastructure to expand provision within existing nursery provision sufficiently. One way this can be addressed is by significantly increasing outdoor nursery provision.

The concurrence of these developments led to Inspiring Scotland and the Scottish Government convening a roundtable discussion co-hosted by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, and Celia Tennant, Chief Executive of Inspiring Scotland, and involving leading international experts in the fields of health, education, childcare and the environment.

That group recommended the establishment of a Coalition for Playing and Learning Outdoors in Scotland to bring together all those organisations involved in outdoor play and learning, those who can influence the development of public spaces and organisations whose work influences how children in Scotland grow up. 50 organisations came together in person in June to start the process of drafting a shared position statement. The text was further refined with input from those attendees and other organisations with 50 bodies signed up to the final position statement. This position statement represents a commitment from the signatories to work together to embed playing and learning outdoors in the way children and young people are raised in Scotland.

Beyond the commitment of the signatories, this statement is intended to give support and encouragement to those already involved in outdoor play and learning and to those who recognise its potential but have yet to make the first step. We also hope that this statement and the commitment of the signatories will serve as an inspiration to all those who are in a position to deliver or to enable outdoor play and learning but have not previously considered it.

There is already innovative practice taking place in Scotland and, whether in our major cities and towns or our coastal, island or rural communities, we want to build on that to make the opportunity to play and learn outdoors a universal part of growing up in Scotland.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Policy Framework in context

The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of quality outdoor learning experiences. There have been a number of Scottish Government policies and guidance over recent years which set out national expectations and continue to highlight outdoor learning experiences for children as being key to provision of high quality learning. The most relevant are Scotland's National Performance Framework (2018), Getting it Right for Every Child (2008), Curriculum for Excellence 3-18 (2008), Health and Social Care Standards (2017), the Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision (2013), the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, The STEM Education and Training Strategy for Scotland (2017) and the Mental Health Strategy (2017). The value of outdoor play to children and young people cannot be over-emphasised and the links across these frameworks demonstrates the wide ranging benefits for health and wellbeing.

Definitions

Playing and learning outdoors

The Position Statement uses the phrase "playing and learning outdoors" as a singular and broad-ranging term. We believe learning is an inherent quality of play and, therefore, use of this phrase is not intended to suggest playing and learning are separate and mutually exclusive activities. As such "playing and learning outdoors", as used in this statement, can refer to activities in which no specific learning outcome is intended. However, this statement also refers to outdoor play practice in which learning is a specific and intended outcome such as in a school, childcare or other educational setting. In every case covered by this statement, the playing and learning referred to must be outdoors.

Diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes

The Position Statement uses the phrase "diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes" to cover the wide range of place types available for playing and learning outdoors in Scotland. It is intended to be inclusive of but not limited to urban public parks, gardens, commons, open green areas, and play parks as well as natural, wild landscapes such as woodlands, forests, beaches and coastal areas, hillsides, meadows, moors and mountains held in the public gift or open to the public. Use of the phrase "greenspaces" is not intended to exclude the urban built environment but, reflecting the commitment in this statement to enhance and enrich the urban built environment, implies a preference for urban areas to include, as much as possible, the diverse flora of Scotland.

Children and young people

The Position Statement uses the phrase "children and young people" to mean anyone under the age of 18 years old, as well as any young people whose additional needs or circumstances mean they may benefit from playing and learning outdoors beyond the age of 18. "Young people" has been included in the statement, in favour of the United Nations definition of a child as anyone under 18 years old, to reflect our intention to demonstrate that playing and learning outdoors should not be limited to younger children but encouraged for all young people.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Position Statement supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Specifically, it refers to the rights conferred in Articles 31, 28 and 3:

Article 31 (1)

Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Article 28 (1)

Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.

Article 3 (1)

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

The Evidence

The claims made in the Position Statement are supported by robust evidence and research from around the world, some of which is listed below. Please note, this list is not exhaustive and was not compiled as comprehensive literature or evidence review and should not be taken as such.

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SITE APPRAISAL – Its suitability for use by your setting

(With thanks to Forestry Commission Scotland for permission to use and adapt)

When commenting, think about how easily changes could be made to improve an aspect.

ACCESS

CONSIDERATION	Comment
Is the site within walking distance or is it necessary to request that parents drop off and pick up children a designated place?	
Look for safe parking/drop-off and assembly points within or just out with the proposed site. Consider other access to the site too, e.g. by walking or by bicycle. Can you enter and leave the site easily? Are there any locked gates, etc. Can the site be easily accessed by contractors or emergency vehicles?	
Think about the network of paths – does this exist? If not, how easy is it to walk across and around the area, especially for pre-school children?	
Think about the ground cover – leaves, grass, needles, heather. Or is it very boggy, or have too many “inhibitor” plants such as brambles and nettles? Remember this will change with the seasons. Can it be thinned?	
Slope – ideally a mix of flat and sloped terrain. Think about its aspect (north or south facing) and when the sun reaches the slope or whether it is in shade during your session. This will also change with the season.	

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CONSIDERATION	Comment
<p>Boundaries – are there natural boundary features within the area you want to be, e.g. a line of trees, a hedge, path, etc?</p> <p>Do you need to put up a fence or similar to create a safe space?</p> <p>Will you need to use a marker system to begin with such as ribbons, so that the children will learn where they can explore?</p>	
<p>Think about a designated place of safety in the event of a serious incident. Is there a nearby facility?</p>	
<p>Is there a suitable gathering place or shelter? Will this be</p> <p>Temporary and easy to take up and put down</p> <p>Permanent, such as a building or mobile unit</p> <p>Natural features</p> <p>Dens and natural shelter created with children?</p>	
<p>Are there historical remains/evidence e.g., old walls and/or buildings, ditches, tracks etc. Are there any restrictions around these places?</p>	

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SITE CHARACTER - This is how the place feels. Ideally it should have a feeling of “wildness” about it. Do remember that even small places can feel wild and isolated for a young child.

CONSIDERATION	Comment
Traffic noise, including overhead if you are near an airport or a busy railway line	
Mix of trees young, mature, different species	
Presence of water, e.g. stream, river, loch, bog/wetland, ditches, mud	
Presence of stones, rock outcrops	
Multi-sensory variety: sights, sounds, smells, shapes, colours	
Dips and hollows	
A variety of places: enclosed, open, to hide, roll, sit, have physical challenge, be quiet, a good view, etc.	
Evidence of wildlife. Opportunities to watch wildlife.	

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VEGETATION – Remember that variety is the spice of life! Some characteristics that you might seek:

CONSIDERATION	Comment
Mature trees especially those with limbs suitable for low level tree climbing and for rope swings	
Young trees – for coppicing and shelter building	
Shrubs – for hiding, den building, hanging things on	
Fallen trees – for climbing on, walking along, etc.	
Availability of sticks on the ground	
Stumps – for standing on, using as a table, mixing potions in, etc.	
Open canopy and cover – glades of light	
Variety of plants and fungi	

Features Ensure any water features are protected. Washing lines should be at an appropriate height to avoid entanglement.

Storage Make sure equipment is stored/stacked as safely as possible and that staff are trained in handling and lifting large objects.

Routes and activity areas Make sure all routes are kept clear – ask adults and children to tidy as they go.

Night time visitors Daily checks of the grounds should be made for animal faeces, cigarette butts, bottles and cans, syringes and graffiti.

Air pollution Barrier planting may reduce traffic fumes. Make sure that children's asthma medication can be quickly accessed from outdoors.

Entrances and exits Make sure doorways are kept free from trip hazards – use signage, tape etc where necessary. Fit door furniture to reduce the risk of trapped fingers and ensure transition space has adequate seating and storage.

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POTENTIAL HAZARDS

Here the trick is to think about whether these are manageable and the level of risk posed. The risks may also be seasonal. Think about “heads, shoulders, knees and toes” when looking for hazards at different levels and bear in mind how children perceive the environment from their height and developmental age/ability.

CONSIDERATION	Comment
Litter - including drug paraphernalia and sharp objects or unidentifiable objects.	
Standing dead trees or dead wood in trees. Do you need an arboriculturalist to check your trees and provide advice? Check with your council or the landowner if they can advise - there are not many arboriculturalists around.	
Water - location, feature, ease of access. Will this require measures to prevent young children from accessing unsupervised?	
Steep drops.	
Animal encounters, e.g. excessive midges, ticks, livestock, dogs & dog mess, nesting birds, horses	
Quantity and type of potentially harmful plants - ask owner or environmental professional for advice here, if needed.	
Security of the area - think about whether structures and children's creations are likely to remain or be removed/destroyed. How important is this? Is it a safe place to access during hours of darkness - are there well-lit areas or will you need to install lighting?	

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CONSIDERATION	Comment
The amount and type of passers-by other users - who else uses this park and is it appropriate for children to be playing there degree of seclusion needed - consult your ALO (Architectural Liaison Officer in the Police Force) if necessary	
Toileting Flush toilets in a suitable building Availability of public toilets Alternative options: compost, chemical Where to take waste off-site Informal toileting options - amount of natural privacy, ability of the site to cope with waste	
Power lines and electricity substations: location and possible ease of access by children	
Site work by landowner e.g. tree felling, footpath improvement?	
Is there wifi and mobile phone coverage? Do you notice any blackspots?	
Where is the nearest GP surgery/hospital; staff need to know distance and contact details.	

Any other thought and comments? What action is needed, if any, to make your site suitable?

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POTENTIAL HAZARDS - BEACHES

Here the trick is to think about whether these are manageable and the level of risk posed. What can be done to enable visits to go ahead? Bear in mind the risks may also be seasonal.

CONSIDERATION	Comment
Litter - particularly broken bottles, sharp objects, unidentifiable objects washed up by the tide	
Tides - can you access the beach at high tide? Is there a risk of getting cut off?	
How much does the beach change after storms throughout the year - ask local experts. Is the intended area accessible all year round regardless of tides and storms?	
Water - evidence of rip tides and eddies. Is it possible to paddle, if so where?	
Steep drops - the presence of cliffs or large rock outcrops that are easily accessed by children, from above or below	
Potential animal nuisance - dogs and dog mess, nesting birds, jelly fish, crabs, etc.	
Quantity and type of potentially harmful plants (NB seaweeds are generally harmless)	
Security of the area - are there natural boundaries? What about exits from the beach?	
The amount and type of passers by. How much seclusion do you need?	
Toileting options - formal or informal. How will you provide privacy?	
Presence of a life guard and life rings.	



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Any other thoughts and comments:

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Owner:

Contact details of owner/site manager:

Consideration	Yes/No
Do you have permission to use the site from the owner/manager?	
Does the owner have insurance for enabling this to happen?	
Do you have a written agreement in place which clarifies remits and responsibilities? (Please attach and keep safe)	
Do you have you permission to: 1. Establish and maintain a toilet system, if no buildings or public facilities exist nearby 2. Lighting a controlled camp fire (NB even a disposable barbecue is a fire) 3. Cut branches and do small scale wood work	
Are there any “no go” areas e.g. because of <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safety• Wildlife protection• Private property• High risk of environmental impact• Cultural heritage or archaeological value	

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<p>Are there any seasonal or woodland management factors which may impact on the group using the woods? Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timber operations and tree maintenance or felling work.• Spraying of crops. The wind can carry the chemicals or slurry into areas used by the group.• Movement of livestock that impacts on the group's normal access.• Hunting, shooting or similar estate work.• Work or situations where a water supply used by the children for play becomes contaminated.• Archaeological excavations.	
<p>Any specific requests about behaviour of the group or management of the woods? For example, if you wanted to plant trees would this be possible?</p>	
<p>Is there any site management work needed before you can use the site? When will this happen?</p>	
<p>How robust is the site? Consider how often you will be using the site, the numbers of children and seasonality.</p> <p>You may need options to minimise the environmental impact of your group's use, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The creation of simple pathways to make the site more accessible• Regular checks of the trees in the main site• Use different areas in rotation or at different times of the year• Agreeing to abide by a "Leave Less Trace Nature Play Principles"	



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Leave Less Trace Nature Play Principles

(adapted from Matthew Browning's work¹)

Prepare to Play

- Play in small groups - avoid large numbers on a site or break into smaller groups.
- Wear sensible outdoor clothes.
- Avoid littering - go for litter-free snacks and take home all scraps of food waste.
- Go to the toilet in the designated space and follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Build and Dig with Care

- Build dens in places that aren't really fragile - for example, in sand, rock, gravel, grass, and snow.
- Build with sticks found on the ground - not on trees.
- Dig holes - but fill them in afterwards.
- Remember that trees are alive - hugs are great but cuts and breaks are painful!

Respect Things you Find in Nature

- Ask adults what's safe to handle.
- Start a small nature collection - bring a favourite object home and leave the rest. Not everything is okay to take.
- Build a large "virtual" collection - take photos of lots of objects!
- Climb trees branches bigger than your wrist

1 Browning, M; Marion, J; Gregoire, T. (2013) *Sustainably connecting children with nature - An exploratory study of nature play areas visitor impacts and their management*. Landscape and Urban Planning 119 (2013) 104-112



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- Find which trees are okay to climb. Some are more fragile than others.
- Let plants stay at home – avoid moving them and their seeds from one area to another.
- Try to only pick common wildflowers, berries and fungi. Only pick one or two even if there is a lot around.
- Find out if there are any invasive plant species which are safe to pick and play with.
- Find out if there's any plants you can help grow.

Be Nice to Animals

- Gently catch minibeasts, frogs and toads with hands or nets.
- Keep hands wet when handling toads and other amphibians.
- Return captured animals to where you found them.
- Remember that people food is not good for animals.
- Make homes for wildlife and then leave them in peace so the animals move in.

Remember You're Playing in A Special Place

- Treat others as you would like to be treated.
- Return rocks, logs, and moss to where you found them – they are plant and animal homes!
- Remove any mud clods from wellies before paddling in a stream.
- Use scarves other protection to minimise bark damage from use of ropes or hammocks.
- Agree the boundary of the main area to be used.

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Risk/benefit assessment – additional useful links

The Health and Safety Executive website includes:

- A specific HSE education website <http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/>
- Myth of the Month section which dispels assumptions made <http://www.hse.gov.uk/myth/>
- Five Steps to Risk Assessment – www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf
- A link to the paper *Outdoor Learning Activities and School Trips and Outdoor Learning Activities:Tackling the health and safety myths* <http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/school-trips.pdf>
- Children’s Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach. HSE advice about health and safety and working with children. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childs-play-statement.htm>
- Easy to follow leaflets for parents in the Child Accident Prevention Trust www.capt.org.uk
- A book examining some key issues, advocating resilience and striking a balance between protecting children from genuine threats and giving them rich, challenging opportunities. Gill, T., (2007) *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society* ISBN 978-1-903080-08-5 Free to download: <https://timrgill.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/no-fear-19-12-07.pdf>
- Useful reading for early years staff by Gill, T. <http://www.englishoutdoorcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Nothing-Ventured.pdf>
- Jennie Lindon (2003) *Too safe for their own good?* ISBN 1-900990-97-0
- Practical advice on different aspects of risky play. <http://www.londonplay.org.uk/>
- Play England (2012) *Managing Risk in Play Provision – Implementation Guide* The process of risk-benefit assessment and a balanced approach to children’s play spaces. <http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/172644/managing-risk-in-play-provision.pdf>
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents for sensible advice about health and safety. <http://www.rosopa.com/>
- Education Scotland resource to support managing risk in outdoor learning. <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/Managing%20Risk%20in%20Outdoor%20Learning>



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Environment – additional useful links

Insect bites

NHS Inform provides good advice on ticks and the particular techniques you need to know for dealing with their bites. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/outdoor-health/bugs-and-germs/avoiding-bugs-and-germs-outdoors>

Health Protection Scotland has created an infographic to share with parents. <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/resourcedocument.aspx?id=6668>

The Forestry Commission provides practical guidance. <https://www.owlsotland.org/resources/resource-library/ticks-and-tick-borne-diseases>

Lyme Disease Action provides advice. <https://www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk>

Controlling invasive species

As set out in section 6.2.8, by law, you must ensure that any non-native species growing or living on your land does not spread into the wild. This includes natural spread – e.g. by seed dispersal – and spread caused by dumping plant material or contaminated soil. You should also control invasive plants and animals on your land to prevent them causing a nuisance to others. As well as the links in the above section, you can also check the Royal Horticultural Society website which also provides guidance on and descriptions of non-native invasive species – and animals – on its website <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=530> You can also use the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat website to record non-native species which helps NNSS to track and understand the spread of such species. <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/index.cfm?sectionid=81>



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If in areas of invasive species where you risk spreading [pathogens](#) e.g. tree pathogens, consider whether boot/footwear disinfection is required using a broad spectrum disinfectant. Larch, oak and ash are particularly at risk from poor hygiene of footwear after being in an infected area.

Foraging

Staff need to ensure that gathering and harvesting wild food is undertaken safely and in doing so, they must follow the advice in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which is based on three key principles:

1. Respect the interests of other people.

Acting with courtesy, consideration and awareness is very important. If you are exercising access rights, make sure that you respect the privacy, safety and livelihoods of those living or working in the outdoors, and the needs of other people enjoying the outdoors. If you are a land manager, respect people's use of the outdoors and their need for a safe and enjoyable visit.

2. Care for the environment.

If you are exercising access rights, look after the places you visit and enjoy, and leave the land as you find it. If you are a land manager, help maintain the natural and cultural features which make the outdoors attractive to visit and enjoy.

3. Take responsibility for your own actions.

If you are exercising access rights, remember that the outdoors cannot be made risk-free and act with care at all times for your own safety and that of others. If you are a land manager, act with care at all times for people's safety.



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In addition

- There should be knowledgeable supervision, teaching children how to forage sustainably and ensuring that:
 - Other animals, birds and insects have plenty to eat. Some rely on very specific types of food at different times of the year.
 - Only common plants growing in abundance are collected, and even then, taking just a small percentage.
 - Wild food is gathered where pollutants and contamination is minimised, avoiding roadsides, near agricultural crops, away from easy access by dogs etc.
 - Food is washed and prepared in line with food hygiene standards.
 - Children can also plant the seeds or scatter them, increasing the habitat of foraged foods.
 - A child always checks first with the practitioner that a particular item is okay to eat.
- Encourage children to take time to stop and look at the whole plant for accurate identification. Location and the different parts of a plant are all evidence. Practitioners can model using an app or identification book to double check their field observations.
- Learning about life cycles and witnessing this in foraged plants can deepen children's understanding of how plants grow and give us food.
- Ensure children can grow food for harvesting and eating. They also need to visit shops so that connections can be made.



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Potentially harmful plants – links for more information

[Royal Horticultural Society](#)

Creative STAR Learning <http://www.creativestarning.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/POTENTIALLY-HARMFUL-PLANTS-.pdf> and <https://creativestarning.co.uk/developing-school-grounds-outdoor-spaces/do-you-have-a-poisonous-plant-in-your-school-garden/>

Integrating site maintenance into your calendar

Daily, weekly, monthly and yearly tasks might include:

- Daily site and equipment safety checks, including reporting, repairing or replacing broken items.
- Routine checks of specialist fire equipment.
- Fire drills and emergency procedures.
- A gardening calendar featuring which jobs need doing when. This can dovetail with ongoing learning and play that changes in line with the weather and seasons.
- Recycling including composting.
- Tree inspections.
- Invasive species control (where appropriate).
- Boundary checks and other security measures.
- Updating risk-benefit assessments.
- Checking on, cleaning and in some cases emptying alternative toileting.
- Cleaning routines as advised in the latest edition of HPS Infection and Control Guidelines in Childcare Settings



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Examples for partnership working:

- Plant bulbs and flowers to contribute to a Britain in Bloom display.
- Pick up litter - your local authority may provide free kits to groups for collecting non-hazardous litter.
- Report fly tipping, vandalism and other concerns.
- Do minor tree work such as removing long grass from the base of planted saplings

Get involved with improving biodiversity: make and put up nesting boxes, create log piles and habitat piles, report sightings of key animals such as bats or red squirrels.



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General safety considerations need good preparation and practice:

- Develop an ethos of mutual trust, respect and responsibility – including effective communication, looking out for each other and caring for oneself.
- Ensure children know the working boundaries. On large sites, this may involve closing some areas at certain times to ensure effective supervision.
- Ensure children understand and can gather when asked. If a child is unable to comply, create a system for ensuring the child's whereabouts and note it in their personal plan.
- All staff must know how many are in the group and take regular headcounts. Include adults in the headcount and know their whereabouts.
- Ensure children know what to do if they realise they are lost or no longer with their group. This requires careful teaching in line with the children's developmental understanding.
- Deploy adults. Make sure there's an adult on general site duty who is not preoccupied by a group activity who can informally do frequent headcounts while keeping an eye on specific children who may need this.
- Use tight protocols for collecting and dropping off children. Include a system ensuring the parents/carers' signatures are permanently recorded.
- You may want to consider whether providing a t shirt or another top of some sort for all children would be helpful for visibility depending on your environment.
- If you are walking children along roads, you will need to consider the Highway Code advice for groups walking near or on road and decide whether you need to provide high visibility jackets.
- All early learning and childcare providers must have missing child procedures in place and practise implementation.
- All early learning and childcare providers must have a robust Safeguarding policy appropriate to the individual setting and children's Personal Plans will reflect any specific needs or risks.



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