

# OUT TO PLAY

INSPIRING SCOTLAND



## SECTION 11 - PRACTITIONERS SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

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

 TheScottishGovernment

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# SECTION 11

## INTRODUCTION

This section builds on **Out to Play** with advice for supporting children with additional support needs in your setting. This section is not intended to stand alone, but should be read in conjunction with the main document.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), Childminding and Out of School Care (OOSC) practitioners respond to every child in unique and respectful ways to build strong relationships with them. We use knowledge of individual children's strengths, starting with what they can do rather than what they can't do, and build on all the steps of progress.

All settings can expect to include children with additional needs some, or all, of the time. Needs change not only as children grow and develop, but also through life events or changes in family circumstances, and additional support needs may or may not be diagnosed or labelled. Because of all these factors, we need to be prepared, adaptable and responsive.

Playing outside is important for all children and is equally important for children with additional support needs. This section provides more information to support the inclusion of children with additional support needs in your setting.

### Who is this section for?

This section complements Out to Play and aims to provide practical guidance for:

- people supporting children with additional support needs in their ELC or OOSC settings
- managers and teams planning and preparing their setting to be inclusive for children and families from the beginning of the placement.

Advice is offered at the level of 'universal support', which Education Scotland describes as starting with the ethos, climate and relationships within every learning environment, and in line with the Health and Social Care Standards:

- 1.2 My human rights are protected and promoted and I experience no discrimination.
- 1.6 I get the most out of life because the people and organisation who support and care for me have an enabling attitude and believe in my potential.

### What are the aims of the section?

This section aims to:

- provide practical guidance for creating inclusive outdoor playing and learning experiences
- enhance staff's, carers' and volunteers' confidence to include children with additional support needs in playing outside
- help children to get outside to play more.

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## INTRODUCTION

### What do we mean by outdoor space?

In this section we have used the term outdoor space to cover all outdoor environments in which you support children's playing and learning. We recognise this varies enormously including everything from a domestic back garden, the outdoor space of an early learning and childcare setting, a school playground to a park, a beach, a green space or a fully outdoors setting. Few spaces can claim to be completely natural, but this section assumes outdoor spaces for playing and learning have natural features for children to engage with.

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## SECTION 11

### INCLUSIVE APPROACHES TO OUTDOOR PLAYING AND LEARNING

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The Scottish 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).

Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) recognises that children have different experiences in their lives, but that all children and young people, including those with additional support needs, have the right to receive the appropriate level of support from adults to allow them to grow up feeling loved, safe and respected and to realise their full potential.

The GIRFEC approach is designed to be flexible enough to support all children and families whatever their need, whenever they need it. It is about responding in a meaningful, supportive way, working with parents and carers wherever possible (Education Scotland, 2020: 37).

This section aims to reflect that flexibility, to support opportunities and respond meaningfully to children's needs when playing and learning outdoors, and to value and trust the knowledge and skills of practitioners.

For some children natural, outdoor space has qualities that are particularly helpful to them:

- Outdoor spaces are freer of the things that can be difficult or distressing for some children indoors, such as artificial lighting, school bells, buzzers and tannoys, high-pitched hand dryers, banging doors and crowded corridors.
- Natural surroundings have been shown to have calming effects and may trigger fewer anxiety responses.
- Many children find it easier to regulate emotion, to concentrate and to relax outdoors than indoors.

#### **The commitment to a children's rights approach**

*Inclusive education and inclusive play are mutually reinforcing.* (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013: 10)

The Scottish Government is committed to recognising, respecting and promoting children's rights, as set out in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation)(Scotland) Bill was introduced to Parliament on 1 September 2020. Incorporation will ensure that children's rights are afforded the highest protection and respect possible within the powers of the Scottish Parliament. Outdoor play opportunities underpin and contribute to the realisation of children's rights through the CRC and the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

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These rights include:

- the right not to be discriminated against (CRC article 2)
- the right to be heard (CRC article 12)
- the rights of disabled children to be included and fully participate (CRC article 23 and CRPD articles 7, 9 and 30)
- the rights to education (CRC articles 28, 29)
- the right to play (CRC article 31).

### Communicating your values

Your values are communicated through everyday practice, relationships and interactions. A short inclusion statement can be a helpful way to establish a shared understanding and act as a reference point. Your inclusion statement might state how you want people to feel as soon as they arrive:

*The entrance should be 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.*  
(Scottish Government, 2018: 30)

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

How do you convey your vision, values and ethos to everyone who is part of the community of the setting?

Various user-friendly and accessible formats can be suitable for an inclusion statement, for example a simple word document or poster, a video of it being spoken aloud or signed, an easy-read version perhaps with symbols. Using more than one format also helps to demonstrate that everyone is welcome in your setting.

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## PLANNING FOR INCLUSION

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Right from the start, inclusion should be part of planning, reflective practice and reviews, allowing you to adapt and respond to the needs of individual children and families on an ongoing basis.

All children need support to help them learn and develop in environments that are caring, inclusive and fair. Planning for inclusion involves identifying and minimising barriers to playing and learning outdoors and promoting and sustaining high quality experiences for all children.

Out to Play provides detailed information on the key areas to think about when developing plans for outdoor play and learning. Below, we have highlighted further points to consider in relation to supporting children with additional support needs.

### Planning

- Is your planning rooted in the expectation that your setting will include children with additional support needs (some or all the time), and that children's needs aren't static?

- Have you identified organisations and partners from whom you can seek guidance on general matters of inclusion and on specific issues or ideas related to supporting a child or children with additional support needs? (See [Sources of information](#).)
- Have you considered the journey to, and arrival at, your site from the point of view of families and children with additional support needs? How do you know your setting is accessible, inclusive and welcoming for all visitors?

### Finding and creating the right outdoor space

- Have you tried to understand the site from the perspective of children, including children with additional support needs? This can include participatory activities such as sensory mapping and walkabouts, observations of children at play and including them in reflecting on their experience of the outdoor space. (See [Children's views, experience and ideas](#))

- Do your site plans (access, layout, infrastructure etc.) include consideration of children with additional support needs? (See [Creating your space](#).)
- Do your plans for monitoring and checking the site include consideration of specific needs, for example, accessibility and sensory needs? (See [Using your space](#).)
- Will you put in place systems to ensure that when barriers to outdoor play are identified, actions will be taken to address them? (Not all barriers can be entirely removed – creative solutions may be needed and bear in mind, children need varying levels of challenge to learn to manage them. Other barriers may relate to staff fears or concerns which should also be recognised and addressed) (See [Staffing and practice](#).)
- Who can help to ensure your site is as accessible and inclusive as possible? (See [Sources of information](#).)

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*If any child has a mobility or sight impairment, sensory considerations are crucial. You should plan thoughtfully so that everyone is included, rather than taking separate measures to meet the needs of an excluded group. You should consider accessible pathways and manageable gradients for your service's grounds. However, your areas need not be sterile – think about adding interest and sensory experience, with varying materials, for example. The public areas you visit should already be accessible but may pose challenges that need creative solutions.*

*(Care Inspectorate, 2016: 58)*

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### Using your space

- What playing and learning opportunities do you want your space to provide for children? (See [Creating your space](#).)
- Are there specific considerations to be made to meet the needs of a child or children with additional support needs? (For example, can they navigate the space, does it present challenges that are different from those for other children?) (See [Using your space](#).)
- Is information for children, parents, carers and other visitors in accessible formats, kept up-to-date, personalised and relevant to children's needs and interests? (See [Staffing and practice](#).)
- Will children with additional support needs be able to access a full range of play types and follow their own curiosity and interests, at their own pace? (See [Using your space](#).)

*For a child with a global developmental delay who can struggle with transition out of the nursery base, we use a colourful stick decorated like a rainbow to support understanding and ease anxiety. We collected and decorated this special stick in a specific location in the woodland and now the child has associated the rainbow stick with that area of the woodland. He recognises that if we have brought out this stick, we are going to that area again. We have made this a fun and exciting resource and now many of the children remind us to take the rainbow stick on our adventure to the woodland space.*

(Stramash Outdoor Nursery)

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### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Have you considered how your values, ethos and practice support inclusion?

Building on your values, have you considered:

suitability of the outdoor space, resources and location?

adaptability and flexibility of your systems and practice?

accessibility to and within the outdoor space?



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## CREATING YOUR SPACE

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The creation of a high-quality environment requires careful thought, combining elements to provide a nurturing space which is responsive to children's interests and needs.

Consideration of how to ensure all children's needs are met should be built into the overall development of the space from the very start, ensuring the space is as inclusive as it can be (Care Inspectorate, 2016: 58).

### What does the outdoor space offer?

Every outdoor space presents unique characteristics which influence how children perceive it, respond to it and use it. Children often surprise us in the ways they use outdoor spaces and the elements within them. Make adaptations as necessary, with the involvement of the children, to support their choice over how they fully access all the environment offers. For example:

- Identify alternative routes to the same location such as one with a gentle gradient as well as a scramble up a hillside.
- Construct a steady bridge over a ditch as well as a wobbly one.
- Create simple resting spaces such as a log seat or swing seat.
- Locate markers such as bells, symbols or flags on routes or in spaces, to help children understand where they are or how far along a route they have reached.

### Providing shelter

Shelter can provide a safe and comfortable space for children who feel overwhelmed by things like unpredictability, windy weather or a busy environment, allowing them to remove themselves from a space or situation. If possible, having more than one shelter provides children with choices.

Ready access to shelter is important for children who are less mobile or have conditions that make them susceptible to getting too cold or hot, or getting burnt in the sun.

If you are using a 'nomadic' style of provision, ensure children know where the shelter is and how to access it. If it is moved from place to place, try to keep some things familiar, especially for children who seek predictability. You can achieve this by, for example:

- flying an easily recognisable flag or banner from it
- having a sound signal such as a bell or windchime to help locate it
- keeping the same seating arrangement within it
- always having a favourite object or toy in the shelter.

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Shelter from the elements, distracting noises and sensory experiences offers space for children to sleep and rest. You may need to:

- ensure children feel secure enough to sleep and rest, and can relax enough to fall asleep, especially children who feel agitated or anxious
- think about temperature especially for children who get hot or cold easily.

Arrangements for sleeping and resting provide opportunities to offer choice to children and empower them to recognise and communicate their own wishes. It is important that children with additional support needs have opportunities to experience this level of everyday participation. See [Out to Play Section 5.7 Sleep and Rest](#) for more information.

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### Transitions

Some children find transition from one place or activity to another difficult. Support can be incorporated into these transitions.

For example, support for entering and leaving shelters may include:

- using the 'social story'<sup>1</sup> method to help children understand what to expect going in and coming out (Social stories are short descriptions of a situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why)
- looking at photos or drawings of the inside of the shelter before going in

- creating simple pathways that lead from outside to inside for example, a long ribbon, a line of pebbles or a length of matting (which would also help by creating a different texture underfoot)
- being conscious of the different sensory environment indoors and out – for example, help prepare children and give them time to adjust to changes from light and dark, noisy to quiet, outside-to-inside changes in temperatures and smells.

In the course of a day, there will be other transitions such as those between different spaces, stopping playing to have lunch, sleeping and resting, changing weather, the drop off and collection point of each day and changing clothes.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'social story' and 'social stories' are trademarked by their originator Carol Gray.

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Visual or behavioural cues can help children manage transitions. Provide verbal or visual information and instructions in the appropriate context ensuring that you allow children plenty of time to understand and respond. For example, it's helpful to suggest handwashing when in the handwashing area where there is soap and water and other children to follow. Sand timers, a clock or a verbal countdown to changes can all be useful.

*Preparing to go: we like to look together at photos from the park or outdoor space we are going to visit. It lets us talk about how we will get there.*  
(Play Midlothian)

Some children are particularly sensitive to the sensory environment including tactile sensations, smells and sounds, to the point of feeling pain. This may include feeling too hot or cold, or being affected by noise, quality of light, the feeling of wet clothes

or different textures against their skin. Some children are upset by being asked to wear borrowed spare clothes so should have their own supply of clothes they feel comfortable in. Be mindful too that some children may only feel comfortable in or be able to wear clothes that you think are unsuitable for the weather conditions. In these circumstances, consider how you might manage this, for example, limit the time spent outside but go out more often.

*We used to blow a whistle when we needed to catch the children's attention. One of the children is profoundly deaf so we decided to wave a flag at the same time. Because the other children looked up when the whistle was blown, he got that something was happening, saw the flag and knew what was expected. We now use the flag all the time rather than the whistle, not just on the days he is with us. It's gentler and less intrusive when children are immersed in playing and we only use the whistle occasionally.*  
(Stramash Outdoor Nursery)

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### Boundaries of the outdoor space

**Out to Play** provides examples of a range of ways to create and manage boundaries especially when the outdoor space in question is woodland, beach, park or other wild or open space.

How to help children safely understand and manage boundaries may present concerns for staff and anxiety for parents and carers. Make sure you have markers (for example eco-friendly spray paint, ribbons, tape, flags etc.) and photos of the site that clearly show where to stop. Another way to prepare children would be to give them the opportunity to walk through and explore the space in advance when there are no other children around. Parents and carers know if their child tends to wander or run off (for example from back gardens or play parks) so it's important to find out from them how they usually manage that. Risk assessments should be carried out and measures taken to reduce this.

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Starting with the advice from **Out to Play**, some things to consider are:

- think about the types of boundaries that are suitable for the location and the needs of the children
- think through how you can help children recognise and understand them
- involve the children in setting and marking boundaries (offering a sense of control and place-making)
- model what is expected and help the child to recognise how other children are managing the boundaries
- try walking the boundaries at the beginning of each session (offering the chance to 'feel' the boundary)
- reinforce what is expected with positive comments when things go well
- try to understand from a child's point of view what is happening when they don't recognise a boundary or cross boundaries
- consider what their intentions are so that you can respond appropriately.

It is worth taking the time to try out different approaches to see which option works best for the child. Some children might respond best to visual prompters or markers that indicate the boundary edge while others might respond more to cues within the environment, for example different textures underfoot, or markers within the environment such as a line of trees.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

What other transitions can you think of that children have to manage in the course of the day?

Could you adapt the suggestions here, or think of other ways to support transition points in the outdoor context?

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## USING YOUR SPACE

An outdoor setting should provide positive, fun, challenging, playful and enjoyable experiences for children, rooted in the interactions with people and place.

### **Opportunities for risk and challenge**

All children, including children with additional support needs, benefit from engaging in risk and challenge in their play.

Various factors contribute to the choices children make about the level of risk and challenge they wish to engage in, such as prior experience, natural disposition, the behaviour of other children and the conscious or unconscious signals from adults. It can be tempting to over-protect children with additional support needs however they have the same need as their peers to learn through trial and error, make mistakes and have the occasional mishap when they play.

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The principles of risk-benefit apply – balance the risks against the benefits and make children the main focus of the risk/benefit assessment process (Care Inspectorate, 2016). You can support children with additional needs in the same way, by recognising children’s patterns of play behaviour and preferences in play.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Use thoughtful observation to help you assess and manage access to risks and challenge suited to the abilities of the children.

Individualise your response in supporting children to recognise and weigh up possible risks, so that you can help both those who are hesitant and those who are drawn to risk and challenge.

- Use your knowledge of the child, knowledge of the site and conversations with parents/carers and key workers (who have experience of how the child behaves in different settings) to plan and respond to children who are inclined to seek out and take risks, sometimes impulsively or without warning.
- Find ways to provide opportunities that challenge those children, including children with additional support needs, who seek thrills and challenge.
- Remember that risk and challenge can be emotional, intellectual and social in nature as well as physical.
- Examine your own attitude to, and experience of risk and challenge to understand how it influences your practice. (Also a useful exercise for teams.)

### Interaction with outdoors space, living things and the elements

Outdoor space provides abundant opportunities for children to immerse themselves in playful interactions, learning about cycles of growth, life and death, understanding that not all living things experience feelings and sensations in the same way. They also discover that while nature holds great beauty, there can be some unpleasant things too.

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Not all children feel comfortable encountering insects and animals, being in the dark or hearing the wind whistling through the trees and some children are particularly sensitive to their surroundings.

Encountering new or unfamiliar experiences can result in some children feeling unable to cope, anxious or overwhelmed. This in turn can manifest as distressed behaviour. Supporting children through this process can help to develop resilience.

- Speak with the child and their parent or carer to build up a picture of any fears, phobias or aversions; find out if there are triggers and how they usually manage them.
- Build up a bank of approaches you can use to support children when they are afraid, anxious or overwhelmed, for example minimising verbal communication and maintaining a calm, open and positive demeanour.

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- Remember that all behaviour is a form of communication.
- Work with children to find ways they can communicate their feelings with you. This could include picture symbols, signing, body language and facial expressions as well as verbal communication.
- Consider whether a child's needs are best met with fact-based information (for example, looking things up in a nature book) or imaginative, creative approaches (for example, art and storytelling).
- Try to avoid confusing mixed messages, especially for children who take verbal communication very literally.
- Make time to talk to parents or carers about their experience outside the setting regarding changes and progress in how their child is coping and what they enjoy.

### Food and drink

- Some children are quite specific about how they like their food to be presented, the containers in which their food and drink are provided or eat a relatively limited range of items. Work closely with parents and carers to discuss how this should be approached and respect the wishes of the child.
- If providing an open snack time, allow the child to explore the different snacks on offer. Children might use their different senses to investigate what is available by touching, smelling or mouthing the food. Allow children to try new foods at their own pace.

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### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

How else might you support risk and challenge for children with additional support needs in your setting?

What other dimensions of interaction with the outdoors have you noticed creates playing and learning opportunities for children?

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High-quality settings have staff who are skilled and knowledgeable on the topic of child development, play and learning and whose practice is underpinned by reflective practice (Education Scotland, 2020: 84).

In addition to skills, qualifications, and experience, when employing staff take into account knowledge of the importance of the outdoors and of supporting children with additional support needs. You should also consider the following:

- What opportunities will staff have to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding?
- Even if certain staff have specific roles or skills in relation to supporting children with additional support needs, how will you ensure inclusion is everyone's responsibility?

- How will you develop and maintain a body of expertise in your team that allows your team to work collaboratively to support children including children with additional support needs?
- Who can you go to for help with developing your practice? This could be parents, your local authority, third sector groups and organisations like RNIB, deafscotland or Capability Scotland. (See [Sources of information](#))
- Do you have a clear plan to ensure children with additional support needs and their families feel welcomed and able to share their views and expectations?

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Supporting professional development and reflective practice in relation to supporting children with additional support needs can be done in many ways. Here are some examples.

- Create opportunities to come together to discuss and critically reflect upon the outdoor setting and how it meets the needs of the children.
- Ask the staff, parents or children to come up with discussion starters (written, verbal or visual) for reflective practice. These could be ideas, observations or mini-case studies. Discussion starters could include fears or concerns of staff to enable a problem-solving approach. Collectively looking for actions to address concerns and fears in relation to supporting children with additional support needs outdoors enables a problem-solving approach.
- Use the skills and knowledge within your setting and your local community to inform your practice.

- Make best use of staff with skills or roles which focus on additional support needs to develop the skills and confidence of their colleagues.
- Undertake pedagogical enquiries within the setting to explore questions arising from the team.

- Seek out training and support from local authorities and third sector groups and organisations.
- Arrange visits to other outdoor spaces to see how they use their space and to learn about how they maximise opportunities and experiences in their settings for children with additional support needs.

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### Settling in

When children with additional support needs access your outdoor space, a child-focussed, supportive and sensitive welcome will help families feel more confident and at ease.

A well thought out settling in process will be useful for this. The settling in period is an important step in allowing you to get to know the child and will give you the opportunity to see how the child responds to the outdoor space. Each child may require a different settling in period. Flexibility between staff and families will be required to ensure each child's needs are met during this process.

Here are some things that might help:

- Discuss with the child's family how your settling in process should be tailored to meet the needs of their child.
- Ensure they have had the opportunity to share any concerns and provide all the information they would like to.
- Ensure the family knows who they can get in touch with and what the roles of different members of staff are in your setting.
- Offer several visits to the outdoor space and an extended settling in period.
- Use these opportunities to observe how the child navigates the space, how they interact with others and the environment, their own ways of communicating and what interests them.

- Consider the sensory dimensions of the environment, both difficulties it may present and how you might make use of the sensory environment to improve a child's experience.
- Ask families how they wish to be kept informed and agree how views and ideas will be shared.

*Settling in: Bring a bag of familiar and well-loved play items or toys. Things like a favourite ball, bubbles or sensory materials can be pulled out to help make the outdoor space a bit more familiar. Packing this bag together is a chance to talk about where we are going and what we are going to do when we are there. It's helpful for reducing anxiety. (Play Midlothian)*

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### Inclusive communication

Inclusive communication means sharing information in a way that everybody can understand. As a service provider, it means making sure that you recognise that people understand and express themselves in different ways. For people who use services, it means getting information and being able to express themselves in ways that meet their needs. The [Inclusive Communication Hub](#) identifies six key principles which will guide you to make the communication in your setting more inclusive.

The six principles of inclusive communication are:

*Communication accessibility and physical accessibility are equally important*

*Every community or group will include people with different communication support needs*

*Communication is a two-way process of understanding others and expressing yourself*

*Be flexible in the way your service is provided*

*Effective user involvement will include the participation of people with different communication support needs*

*Keep trying.*

(Inclusive Communication Hub, 2017)

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A few things to keep in mind when working with children.

- Expression of experience, views and ideas is rarely only verbal.
- Communication is a two-way process and requires you to tune-in to children's way of expressing themselves.
- Children make their thoughts and feelings known in many ways, using their bodies or movement to express how they feel, using facial expressions, pushing things away, pointing and gestures. They might take your hand to an object or lead you to where they want to go.
- Some children use signing, symbols, word boards, communication boards and books or other aids.
- Some children get great pleasure from the repetition and sharing of sounds, words and gestures.
- Some children can be overwhelmed by too much information, in which case keep sentences short, leave pauses and be aware of the surroundings – are there distractions and competing information?

- Organisations such as the National Autistic Society and others provide useful advice about approaches to communication.



### Supporting exploration of the outdoor space

Some children may come to your setting with limited experience of being outdoors. If a child feels fearful or unsure of a space, they will be less likely to explore and take full advantage of all the outdoor space has to offer. Additional support can help children feel comfortable and secure in their surroundings with the aim of encouraging them to explore the outdoor space more.

Here are some examples of how you could do this.

- Create a social story illustrating what to expect at the setting. This could include pictures of both the setting and the staff who will be on site.
- Create a tailored support plan for the child. This should include input from the child, parents or carers and other professionals (as appropriate). This plan could detail the support the child might require to use the environment to their advantage as well as any other additional information relevant to their care.



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- Give children time and space to explore the outdoor setting in the ways they feel most comfortable for example, in a very small group, with an adult, using their senses or bodies.
- Learn to recognise behavioural cues to enable timely and appropriate interventions when needed. De-escalation, distraction and calming techniques can influence the outcome for many uncertain or challenging situations.
- Practice the skills involved in understanding when to step in and when to step back when supporting children's playing and learning. ([The Loose Parts Play Toolkit](#) has more information on this.)
- Facilitate children's play by allowing them to follow their own interests and in their own way. Some children need some encouragement or scaffolding to develop their play ideas or interests further.

- Allow children to engage in repetition. Children might repeat activities many times or have a routine they like to repeat each time they enter a space. Children learn through repetition and it can provide a way to manage anxiety and gain a sense of control.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

How else might staff be supported to provide high-quality experiences in your setting?

When supporting children's free play in the outdoor space, how would you define your role?

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# SECTION 11

## CHILDREN'S VIEWS, EXPERIENCE AND IDEAS

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Children's views, experiences and ideas should be at the heart of outdoor provision. Daily practice creates opportunities for all children to feed into and directly influence the setting.

You can support the active involvement of children in your setting by:

- taking plenty of time to get to know the children, allowing you to think through ways to support them
- noting children's communication needs and preferences
- keeping language at the appropriate level for them and avoid giving long or complicated instructions
- being flexible and creative with your approach and methods
- offering a range of ways for children to share their views, experiences and ideas.

There are many methods to explore and make known children's views, experiences and ideas. All methods should be carefully thought through to ensure they are as inclusive as possible from the outset. You might not get this right the first time, but the key is to try things out and adapt as necessary. Here are a few suggestions of different methods to try.

- Observations – much can be learned from being alert to how the children interact with the environment, engage with routines and access different types of play.
- Visual prompters – for example, using smiley and sad faces or thumbs up, thumbs down images to support children to show how they feel about a space or activity.
- Visual and interactive methods such as Makaton, Floorbooks<sup>2</sup>, Talking Mats, Mindmaps and annotated drawings.

- Digital technology – for example, giving children cameras to photograph images of 'things I like', or using tablets for mark-making.
- Walkabout – take a walk around your space guided by children. You could use pre-planned questions or be guided by the children's ideas to explore the space from their perspective. Be sure to note their responses (verbal and non-verbal).
- Sensory Mapping – create a map of the area you wish to focus on and explore it with the children using the senses. With the children, record feedback onto the map.
- Transient art – be alert to children's use of natural materials such as sticks, stones and mud to create models and representations of their ideas and experiences. Record these and use them as prompts for informal discussion and feedback.

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<sup>2</sup> Trademark Claire Warden (2006)

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## SECTION 11

### CHILDREN'S VIEWS, EXPERIENCE AND IDEAS

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*Key learning has been for adults to have confidence to experiment, to move things around and involve children in making decisions. For example, although the contained space at first seemed ideal, a more relaxed atmosphere was created by allowing pupils the choice to move between spaces. What seems like a boring space, can turn out to be full of potential through the eyes and bodies of children.*

(East Lothian Play Association)

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

What opportunities does your setting offer children to share their views, experiences and ideas?

How could you adapt methods you currently use to make them more inclusive for children with additional support needs?

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# SECTION 11

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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### Resources

Autism Toolbox <http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/>

Free to Play: A guide to creating accessible and inclusive public play spaces <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Free-to-Play-Guide-to-Accessible-and-Inclusive-Play-Spaces-Casey-Harbottle-2018.pdf>

Education Scotland, Support for All (website) <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/support-for-all/>

Inclusive Communication Hub <https://inclusivecommunication.scot/>

Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf>

Play Types Toolkit – bringing more play into the school day [https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Play-Scotland-Play-Types-Toolkit-bringing-more-play-into-the-school-day.pdf?plsctl\\_id=11593](https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Play-Scotland-Play-Types-Toolkit-bringing-more-play-into-the-school-day.pdf?plsctl_id=11593).

Sense Play Toolkits <https://www.sense.org.uk/get-support/support-for-children/play-toolkits/>

Social stories <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>

### Organisations

Capability Scotland <https://capability-scotland.org.uk/>

Communication Trust <http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/>

Deaf Scotland <https://deafscotland.org/>

Enquire <https://enquire.org.uk/>

Learning through Landscapes <https://www.ltl.org.uk/>

Mindstretchers <https://mindstretchers.academy/>

RNIB Education Professionals page <https://www.rnib.org.uk/services-we-offer-advice-professionals/education-professionals>

Sensory Trust <https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/>

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Source: <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1557/my-world-outdoors-sharing-good-practice-in-how-early-years-services-can.pdf>

Education Scotland. (2020). *Realising the ambition: Being Me. National practice guidance for early years in Scotland*. Livingston: Education Scotland.

Source: <https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf>

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Source: <https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/5034/out-play-practical-guidance-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-early-learning-childcare.pdf>

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Source: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/51ef9bcc4.html>

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