

This factsheet shows you how to use your outdoor learning site. This includes where to source suitable outdoor clothing, essential kit, how to plan, risk assess and evaluate your outdoor learning sessions.

USING YOUR SITE

Being outdoors in nature can be a calming and soothing environment for adults and children alike. Learning outdoors can also reawaken the joy of learning. It's important to remember that being outdoors can nurture as well as 'educate'. According to psychologist Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a healing approach outdoors can address the basic human needs of safety, physical comfort, and sense of belonging. Relationships can be established and learners can discover their own space. This is especially important for participants with additional support needs. They find out how they can be physically, emotionally, and mentally safe in the group and space.

In the early stages of outdoor learning it's important for educators to introduce the space and ask learners to mark out site boundaries with decorated flags, ribbons on canes or tied around trees. A mutual decision should be made on how to use the space. E.g. where shall we listen as a whole group? Where shall we work as a small group? Where shall we share our learning as a whole group? Where shall we relax? Learners can choose their sitting spot.

OUTDOOR CLOTHING



There is a saying "there's no such thing as bad weather only unsuitable clothing." To this end, it's important that learners and educators have the right outdoor clothing. This should include waterproof jacket and trousers as well as base layers (please no jeans!) at a minimum, along with a warm hat and pair of gloves. Wellies (with nice thick socks in winter) or waterproof walking shoes are the best options for outdoor footwear.

ESSENTIAL OUTDOOR KIT

The equipment taken by educators and their groups will vary according to the activity, its duration, the weather and season, and the age and ability of your learners.

As a minimum, leaders should carry:

- a mobile phone
- a suitable first-aid kit that matches levels of training, the environment and the advice of the school or local authority guidelines
- a list of participants (including any medical conditions/allergies)
- emergency contact details
- any prescription medication that might be needed urgently by a member of the group
- a collapsible trolley with a cover to move equipment to site easily
- sit mats, tarpaulin and rope
- clipboards and pens/pencils



Encourage participants to carry their own belongings, food, drink, portable seats and other relevant resources, which may include equipment for activities. A few rucksacks are a useful investment for your group if learners cannot supply their own. It's best to use open-ended equipment for activities, e.g. a piece of rope or some sticks which can be used for outdoor maths or artwork. These resources then rely on collaboration between the educator and learning group as this provides opportunities for bonding. Experiment and find out what is most useful for your setting. Some resources will be used time and time again during sessions.

It's important to remember that outdoor items will wear out much more quickly. The best resources are those which are cheap or free to replace, such as ex-household items and natural materials. This also then demonstrates a group commitment to sustainability and resource recycling. Outdoor resources need to be easily accessible from the trolley. Tools and fire lighting equipment should be stored in a locked box and participants should be encouraged to ask for them. If you are lucky enough to have a secure shed then tools could be stored there. Think about how wet resources will be managed and dried and how they will be cleaned and stored. Encourage independence amongst your group by allocating routine jobs around managing equipment and resources.



PLANNING SESSIONS

It's important to plan your sessions in advance so that you know what resources you will require, rough timings for each activity and any contingency ideas. Initially it's best to keep activities simple until you feel confident of your planning and know your participants. Future sessions can then be built on previous activities and develop into longer term projects.

Session plans should include: date, location, client group, ratio of leaders to participants, equipment list and activity timings.

RISK BENEFIT ANALYSIS

The aim here is to balance the benefits of an activity in your session plan with any inherent risk. This follows the Health and Safety Executive which encourages the use of risky activities provided that the risk is balanced with the benefit of undertaking the activity. The risk benefit analysis should have the following elements:-

- Daily risk assessment – factors which may change for each session e.g. weather, seasonality.
- Site risk benefit analysis – risk factors associated with your site e.g. uneven ground, site access.
- Activities and Experiences Risk Benefit Analysis – risk factors associated with your planned activities e.g. tool use, building structures.

SESSION EVALUATION

Immediately after each session it's important to reflect on how it went and write down some form of evaluation. This could be activities which worked well and how you could improve and build on activities for the next session. It can also show progress in participants and their skills. There are many ways to evaluate sessions and participants. One example which is used in schools is Getting It Right For Every Children (GIRFEC). Under this approach children and young people should feel Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included. Also referred to as SHANARRI, these are wellbeing indicators which can be used as a means of evaluation.

RESOURCES/LINKS

Outdoor Clothing:

<https://www.mudpieadventures.co.uk/links/>

<https://creativestartlearning.co.uk/support/outdoor-clothing-boxes/>

Activity Ideas:

<https://www.ltl.org.uk/free-resources/>

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/hwb24-ol-support.pdf>

Risk/Benefit templates: <https://www.ltl.org.uk/understanding-risk/>

GIRFEC, SHANARRI and Scottish Govt wellbeing policy:

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/wellbeing-indicators-shanarri/>