

# OUT TO PLAY

INSPIRING SCOTLAND



## SECTION 10 - OUT OF SCHOOL CARE PROVIDERS

Practical guidance for creating outdoor play experiences

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# SECTION 10

## INTRODUCTION

This section has been designed for Out of School Care practitioners and should be used in conjunction with the main Out to Play document. You can also find more information in [Space to Grow](#).

Being outdoors offers children the opportunity to explore the natural environment. It provides a sense of freedom and offers exciting opportunities for new challenges, as well as risk taking.

Having the freedom to go outdoors should be a positive experience for children outside of the classroom.

“As a child, I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment”  
(Health and Social Care Standards 1.32).



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Start thinking about the outdoor space attached to your setting, e.g. a garden or school playground:

- How do you currently use this space?
- Are you making the most of it?
- How could you improve your adjacent outdoor space?
- Is it an inviting space where the children would enjoy playing?

Involving the children in your evaluation of the space is a great way to really understand their needs. What would they like space to do outdoors? What shouldn't be there but is, or what isn't there but should be? Supporting children through the design process of any new spaces will help it to be used and cared for in the future.

Also consider the walk from the school to your setting:

- Do you have to go inside first?
- Could you go straight to an outdoor space instead?

Most services will use the safest and most direct route to walk from school to the out of school care service.

However, there may be the opportunity to take a more 'scenic' route, or one that passes green spaces that would offer an outdoor play opportunity prior to arriving at your setting.

Once you are using your setting's outdoor space more, you could look further afield:

- Do you use outdoor space in your local surrounding area?
- Is there a space outdoors that you can make your own?
- Could you use local parks or woodlands?

See Section 4.1 Identifying your space for more guidance on finding new sites. [Scotland's Outdoor Learning Directory](#) has a searchable map to help you find outdoor spaces near you.

Although parks usually have explicit invitations to play, woodlands have more natural affordances that may not be as obvious to children who have rarely visited them. As a result, it might be a good idea to take some resources with you to act as invitations to play in these natural spaces – in effect an outdoor kit bag. This could include things like rope, tarpaulins, mini spades, and bug hunting kits.



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### Case Study 1 - Using Private Land

When faced with issues using a community woodland area, Auchinairn Afterschool Care looked further afield and identified an area of private woodland that they thought would be ideal.

By engaging with the local landowner and farmer, they managed to secure permission to use the woodland, and were also able to improve access to it and space for parking.

Using the woodland benefited the local community as well as the children. Fly tipping, which had previously been an issue, was no longer a problem.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT if you go further afield:

Collection – would parents/carers be happy to pick up from this location or would you need to return to your setting?

Clothing – can children change their clothes to keep their school clothes clean? (See **Clothing and Kit** later in this section for more information)

Consider exploring and planning for a range of suitable spaces in your local area. As a team, carry out risk assessments in order that practitioners feel confident in using these spaces. For example, local parks; a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), (often found within school grounds) which may be suitable for group activities and ball games. It can be valuable for children to feel ownership of the play space and take some responsibility for the environment.



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#### Case Study 2 – Using a variety of outdoor spaces

Broxburn Family Centre use their own playground as well as a local park and a Multi User Games Area (MUGA) near one of the schools that they collect children from. They also have access to a woodland area during the Easter and summer holidays, which is 20 minutes away by minibus. A local farmer has given them permission to use this space.

If you go further afield, make sure you take account of children's safety and have proper risk assessments and insurance in place.

You should also consider how travel time to and from the outdoor area might impact on the time spent outdoors. If you require parents or carers to collect their children from the site, how will this impact travel time?

These issues shouldn't be seen as barriers, but as practical considerations which can be addressed through consultation with staff, children and parents.

For more information, see [Appendix 4](#) of Out to Play and also [Scottish Out of School Care Network \(SOSCN\)](#).



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One of the main factors when thinking about your outdoor area is what opportunities and experiences will the space offer the children. Children's opportunities and experiences outdoors should be different to and complement indoor experiences.

How do you as a playworker create a high-quality environment? [Section 5](#) [Creating your space](#) provides guidance on creating a high quality environment and below we have outlined some areas you may want to give particular consideration to.

#### Get the children involved

If you are thinking about using play spaces other than your own outdoor space, involve the children and encourage them to carry out site visits, play audits as well as risk/benefit analyses of these spaces (see [Appendix 4](#)). Give children ownership of their play spaces in a range of ways. For example, they could clean and clear the play space of any litter, grow plants, fruit



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or vegetables in their play space, or build structures.

Let them create the boundaries, co-create rules, and involve them in developing hygiene and toileting routines.

You can include children in outdoor training too, such as fire building or den making. Involve them in the planning of these sessions by making lists and delegating responsibilities.

#### Providing shelter

Consider where the nearest shelter is. You do not need to provide this unless you are a satellite or outdoor setting (see [Section 5.3 Providing shelter](#)) but you should make sure you know where it is in case of sudden extreme weather. You could also provide or make temporary shelters with tarpaulin, pop-up tents, branches etc. Children can be encouraged to participate in the construction of shelters.

#### Toileting

If you are not using your own outdoor space, make sure you know where the nearest toilet is. If you plan to stop at a green space en route from the school to your service's premises, encourage children to use the toilets before leaving the school.

#### Clothing and kit

Ensure that children have the correct clothing such as waterproof jackets. Do children have a change of clothes? Do you have spare wellies if children need them? The best option is to have a spare set of dry clothes that they can change into at the end of their play session outdoors (make sure you consider how you will afford children privacy and dignity to change). Can you provide appropriate outdoor clothing for children if needed to ensure equality of access to the outdoors?

Have outdoor bags with suitable resources (for example balls, magnifying glasses, paper, pencils, pens, pegs, ropes, slacklines, spades, string, tarps) packed and ready to grab and go. For more information and ideas, have a look at the [Loose Parts Play toolkit](#).



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Off Grid Kids highlight the need to be prepared! Not all indoor activities will translate well to outdoors and you may have to adapt, improvise and change direction quickly. This is where thinking and planning ahead is really important.

If you're going further afield, consider what play resources would work best in the outdoor space you're using, what games could you adapt or invent. Think about creating an activity booklet (laminated to protect against the elements) that children can have a look through when they're feeling a little lost about what to do next. This can also be a great diversion when you quickly need to redirect children who're being a bit boisterous.

Keep an eye on the weather forecast too. 'Bad' weather doesn't have to stop play but you do need to make sure that children (and staff) have the right clothing to enable them to have fun outdoors.

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

Most out of school care services will have a range of ages attending. Consider outdoor play opportunities which are accessible and interesting for all ages.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

What interests do the children have? Can these interests be used to get the children outdoors? Is it their choice, can children take control? How do you win over the children who are reluctant to buy into the outdoors ethos? Some children just do not like going outdoors! Often, the best thing to do is to use a child's interest to encourage them outdoors – in other words, take the things they like to do indoors outdoors:

*One child... would try every excuse not to go outdoors. When inside she loved playing with the LOL toys. One of the playworkers was chatting to her and asked what she would like to do when at the outdoor site that would make it fun for her. At the entrance to the outdoor site, there is an old tree and she suggested making a fairy garden that all the fairies could live in when we are not there. She was so excited making things to take to the fairy garden, collecting resources and got many of the other children involved too. The end result was fantastic, and she couldn't wait to get there now and check that everything was okay with the garden.  
(Broxburn Family Centre)*

### Encouraging children to go outdoors

Some children may be unused to or unsure about going outdoors. Think about how you might overcome barriers and highlight the positive aspects of being outdoors.

Auchinairn Afterschool Care have recognised the importance of communication and getting parents/carers on board. They run an induction session for parents/carers where they emphasise the ethos and principles behind what they're doing as well as underlining the health and wellbeing benefits of outdoor play. This gives parents/carers the chance to ask questions and also allays any potential concerns they may have around security, toileting, dark etc. By doing this at the start, it means that parents are on board from the beginning and children are less likely to be reluctant about going outside.

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#### Habit

Technology such as phones, tablets, and game consoles has led to an increase in the amount of time children may want to spend indoors. And some children may simply have become used to staying inside, particularly if the weather is 'bad'.

To tackle this, think about starting small. If children prefer to remain indoors, most 'indoor' activities can be taken outside, even digital devices. Small, initial steps can support children's transition from indoor to outdoor activities. Often children who prefer indoor activities are unfamiliar with the outdoors so need some form of comfort to ease them into new activities. Again, involving the children in the design of the outdoor space can help get them outside. Getting children outside is step one and step two is children choosing to participate in new activities and experiences outdoors. Step one is the most important and step two will come when children themselves decide they are ready.

#### Fear of getting dirty

If they are used to staying inside, some children might be afraid they'll get into trouble if they get dirty playing outside. Communication is key to overcoming this. Make sure that the aims of your setting are clear to all. Think about the information you give out to potential parents/carers:

- Is it obvious that the children will be spending time outdoors?
- Does it include photos of children playing outdoors in different weather?
- Does it show children playing with different things outdoors, for example water, mud and paint?
- Could you create a display at your setting, for both children and parents/carers, that reflects these images and highlights the play opportunities available to children?



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Consider too how you might address the problem of children getting dirty. Could parents/carers supply a change of clothes for children, a set of 'play' clothes? Some settings have offered free washing tablets to parents to go along with their display. However, you should be mindful that a lack of time, spare clothing or washing facilities may prevent children from being able to play outside. In these cases settings may wish to provide spare clothing for outdoor play. Help parents and the school to get involved with your collection by asking for donations of clothing and waterproofs which can be used by the setting as spares.

#### What their friends are doing

Friendship and peer groups are hugely important to school-aged children. If asked, children usually say that the best thing about coming to a setting is playing with friends. When encouraging children to play outdoors it is important to bear in mind that peers can influence choice of activity. This is where playworkers can build relationships and use peer influence to positive effect.



*One child who attended out of school care had a lot of energy and was always looking to play rough and tumble with any of the other children...but his energy and enthusiasm often led to others being hurt. Outdoors in the woods, there were no walls for him to bounce off, his boundless energy and enthusiasm became a real asset, involving other children in going exploring, playing various games in the woods, encouraging other children to try new and often challenging experiences. He would really get other children to step out of their comfort zone and try new experiences, his peers started to look up to him and seek him out to play with when they were outdoors in the woods. His fearless, let's give it a go attitude spread to other children and helped others to conquer fears and create lifelong memories.  
(Broxburn Family Centre)*

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## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Learning for Sustainability (LfS) <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/LearningforSustainability-Vision2030ActionPlan.pdf>

Scottish Wildlife Trust – 30 days wild packs <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/things-to-do/30-days-wild/>

### References

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

Play Types Toolkit <https://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/Play-Scotland-Play-Types-Toolkit-bringing-more-play-into-the-school-day.pdf>





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