

A Practitioner's Guide to OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING **OUTDOOR ELC: CAN'T DO IT OR WON'T?**

“Help – I know I should be outside, but I’m stuck”

We all know the benefits of spending quality time outdoors, as we move through Phase 3 of the route map out of Covid-19 restrictions the positive impact of physical and mental health for children and adults is everywhere we look. It's on social media, on the news, in curriculum and research documents, even on your newsfeed. We also know that as a result of the benefits, children spending time outdoors is non-negotiable, it is in the latest Care Inspectorate guidance:



[Health and Social Care Standards](#): 1.32 As a child, I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment.

It's also embedded in the latest national practice guidance:

[Realising the Ambition: Being Me](#) where the importance of being outdoors is mentioned no less than **42 times**.

On that basis alone, it is unlikely that you will continue your ELC career without being asked to go outdoors and engage in meaningful play-based experiences with children. However, there are some of us that simply haven't got the 'outdoors' bug, so what can you do about it?

Own the feeling

It's ok not to like something, most jobs have tasks that we don't enjoy. If going outdoors gives you that sinking feeling, it can be useful to find out what's causing it, and what you can do to resolve it.

Start by making a list, you can do this on your own at home or with your ELC colleagues in your setting, or in an online group. Don't hold back, get everything you don't like about going outdoors down on paper. It might look a bit like this:

- I don't like being cold
- I don't like being dirty
- I don't know how to set up
- I have no idea what to play
- I don't have the right gear and my workplace doesn't supply it/have enough/have stuff I like
- Our outdoor space is too small
- None of us likes going out so we just do a rota/take it in turns/time it for the minimum and come back in ASAP
- Only a few children want to go out, so ratios are too hard
- I am frightened of...bugs/birds/worms/accidents/runaways
- We don't have enough resources for it to be fun

Dig deeper and reflect

Use your list to help you to establish whether you are **willing and/or able**, OR **unwilling and/or unable**. Take a look at the chart below to work out where you are. You may already know the answer, maybe read on just for fun. This process can form part of your CPL, as you reflect on what is preventing you, and/or your team-mates from enjoying time outdoors at work.





Adapted by Deborah Grant 2020 using Willingness & Ability Model Ken Perlman 2019

Linking this to How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare

Did you know that this process of self-evaluation is evidence of good practice? (Even if you really don't like the outdoors!)

The extract below is lifted straight from the 'How Good' document and explains what a level 5 (blooming great!) example of 1.2 looks like from your point of view.

Impact of career-long professional learning

All practitioners take responsibility for their own CLPL and routinely engage in a broad range of professional learning activities to build on and sustain our practice

As individuals and as a team we reflect critically on our work. We are proactive in extending and deepening our knowledge and understanding of early learning pedagogy through research, current literature and policy sources to exemplify this very effectively in our practice.

We are improving our approaches to digital and our own professional learning. We maintain effective records of the impact of professional learning and development and create a clear professional learning action plan. Our professional learning complements and enhances our setting's improvement priorities. It is having a positive impact on high quality experiences for children, their progress and wider improvements in our setting.

Keeping a record

If you land in any of the 3 boxes **blue**, **green** or **orange** it might be worth writing your findings down (warts and all) as it will demonstrate clearly how you have engaged in self-evaluation, and will form meaningful evidence for you next Care Inspectorate inspection. Some practitioners keep their own CPD journal and some settings keep a staff development or 'Our Outdoor Journey' floorbook to show evidence of consultations, conversations, debates between staff (consultation with parents and children can of course be done in the same way, that's for a different set of tips!)

Quick tips to get to 'go'

Taking the first steps to learning about the outdoors can be a bit daunting. There are steps you can take both online and in person to get you going on your journey. We have listed some groups and organisations in the 'useful links' section to get you connected.



Useful Links

'Outdoor Learning' section:

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/a-summary-of-elc-resources/>

Outdoor Learning Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland:

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

My World Outdoors <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/how-we-support-improvement/care-inspectorate-programmes-and-publications/my-world-outdoors/>

'Out to Play'

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

WAG Model <https://culturesync.net/strategic-impatience-wag-model-for-talent-management/>

HGIOELC

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks_SelfEvaluation/FRWK1_NIHeditSelf-evaluationHGIELC/HGIOELC020316Revised.pdf

Outdoor Woodland Learning Scotland (OWL Network)

<https://www.owlscotland.org/>

National Network Outdoor Learning (Scotland)

<https://nnolscotland.blogspot.com/>

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