

A Practitioner's Guide
to
OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING

Top 20 of 2020

The Top 20 Outdoor play hints, tips and activities of 2020



2020 was the year of many changes – the year we all had to adapt and pivot as challenges were thrown our way. But one thing that remained was the power of the outdoors- in those tough first few months of lockdown and restrictions the highlight for many was spending time outdoors. It was amazing to see how outdoor play and learning was fully embraced this year in spite of all the challenges. The common thread in all this is that we realised just how important the outdoors is- not just for our children but for the WHOLE family. As we face yet more restrictions at the start of the new year – let's remember how we got through it the first time -by embracing the outdoors! And with that we are sharing YOUR top 20 Outdoor Play tips of 2020.

1. Don't have too many 'resources' on offer - children will use the natural materials around them and you will be fascinated by their imaginations. Allow children time to take in the changes in the seasons and really appreciate their surroundings.

Craighead Country Nursery School

2. To ensure that children's choice is at the heart of decision making in the outdoors.

Castlemilk Day Nursery, Glasgow City Council

3. Divide children into groups and give them a section of a paint chart such as the ones that were available in B&Q. The idea being that each group is allocated a colour (which varied according to the season of course) and then was asked to find (for example) 10 things in nature that matched their section of the paint chart.

Sister Margaret Rose Bradley- Former Primary School teacher and Deputy Head

4. For our staff, which came from our stramash training, to have an agreed charter for rules and boundaries for the outdoors. This ensures consistent messages for children and encourages risk benefit play.

Castlemilk Day Nursery, Glasgow City Council

5. To foster a love for their environment from sensory play, being effective citizens in helping to look after the environment as part of developing a sustainable future. STEM experiences in the outdoors; making bird feeds, experiments, engineering fairy garden to name but a few.

Castlemilk Day Nursery, Glasgow City Council

6. To have fun, don't be afraid to get muddy and wet. Gather objects for loose parts and to encourage discussions about adventures that we have taken and are still to take.

Castlemilk Day Nursery, Glasgow City Council

7. Loose parts! Gather cardboard boxes, pallets, pipes, tyres... whatever you can 'reclaim' (or 'acquire'!)

Earthtime-Outdoor Nursery and Forest School

8. Walking in the woods collecting 'treasures'

Oscar -9 years

9. Playing in the mud kitchen and making 'potions'

Reuben -5 years

10. Loose Parts for sure! To us the fundamentals are critical in embracing outdoor play - appropriate clothing for the wee ones (and adults!) no one can learn & have fun otherwise & meaningful practitioner interactions which build relationships with 'outdoors' & each other.

Stramash

11. Going outdoors can inspire possibilities you would never have imagined. Use the space you have to your advantage and use its potential. In Out to Play workshops we create a Storytelling circle in a cosy space. The children then choose a space of their own to develop their own stories and share them with the rest of the class. Using this outdoors space, as opposed to indoors, allows children to be more free with their creativity. They can be louder as their

voices won't carry. They can move more as they have more space.

Ecodrama

12. In primary 2 we made venn diagrams and pupils sorted materials into rough, smooth and both. We went on a number hunt to find the correct number pairs to make 10, we ordered numbers to 100 and used sticks and stones to represent tens and units when partitioning 2 digit numbers.

Dunblane primary school

13. Winter snow activity -Tarp use: To make the job easier, set out a tarp to 'catch' the snow. A proven approach is to lay it out the night before a storm. Put weights on the edges so it doesn't blow away. Wake up in the morning and collect the snow. It's easy to pull the corners of the tarp to the center and then shovel the pristine snow into your form. You can sometimes drag the tarp close to your build site. A tarp also ensures that leaves don't end up in your snow tower.

Matthew Morris-Snowbank productions

14. Tool Use - incorporate wood tinkering into your loose parts to extend to model making and technologies. Having a boxed kit containing short, stubby hammers, nails, bottle tops & jam jar lids can make this easy to store and take out with wooden off cuts or pieces of plank.

Earthtime

15. Plan to plan in the moment is my advice! I often have a master plan; this could be a printed-out scavenger hunt for every animal, season, tree, or possible intention. Nine times out of ten, we either don't do it, or we start then get entirely waylaid by a stone, a hill, a leaf, or a puddle. Yet planning often comes into its

own if the weather isn't the best. It's easier to encourage the children (and yourself) to wander further if there is a reason or a goal.

Emma Smith- Childminder

16. Cold, wind and rain require layers. Master this and you will be comfortable in all weathers, forever. First off, DON'T WEAR COTTON. Your base layer should keep you warm and dry underneath the rest of your gear. Sweating and exposure to moisture in the air can cause your skin to become cold, so a first layer of wicking fabric is critical.

Thrive Outdoors Top tip

17. Go outside and start looking for and gathering sticks and twigs from the ground around you. Ask the children questions about their sticks and twigs. Some may be curious about the twigs – where did they come from, what tree and why are they on the ground – this opens up different play and learning opportunities. ' You can help scaffold their play by suggesting what shapes, patterns, or structures they could design or build. Let the children develop those ideas and join in if they invite you. These ideas can be built further and can lead to larger sticks and den building potential. Remember to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds when you go back indoors.

Thrive Outdoors Top tip

18. Play and spaces-What might a child or group of children do in this space? A good idea is to view your site through some differing perspectives, the child's is a good place to start. A particularly good perspective to look at next is through David Sobel's Nature design principles. Basically, Sobel has researched children's The addition of areas to rest, gather and go to the toilet allow play to flourish. (Stramash Outdoor Nursery Elgin) Practitioner's Guide

Series October 2020 OUTDOOR PLAY and found that no matter where and what the background children tend to play in the same themes. Identifying those themes (or reproducing them) in your space is a great idea. If you can identify the opportunity for a few of these 7 play motifs you are onto a winner: Adventure, Special Places, Fantasy and Imagination, Animal Allies, Miniature Worlds, Hunting and Gathering, Maps and Paths

Alastair Davidson

19. Get outdoors and just be – sometimes its best to not have any plans. What games can children come up with using just the materials at hand?

Thrive Outdoors Top tip

20. Seizing the opportunity to allow the children to lead the learning, following their train of thought and creating the support structure around them is easier in the outdoors, the constant changes present endless possibilities and opportunities. What experiences can you offer which allows nature to permeate the learning space? Where can you go that looks, smells, and feels different? Can you encourage the children to ask 'Why?' more

Natalie White- Outdoor Learning Development Officer and Principal Teacher for East Ayrshire Council

Enjoy this blog? Do you have top tips that you would like to share?

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or by email to amy@inspiringscotland.org.uk

Useful Links

Download our Loose Parts Play toolkit:

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/publication/loose-parts-play-toolkit/>

Our handy hints and tips on #outdoorplay

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/thrive/>

A huge thankyou to everyone who contributed this year to our guides and tips! If you have an idea for a blog next year and would like to feature as a guest blogger please email :

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