

Taking nature-based play home

Play beyond the school gates

Even the smallest spaces can provide opportunities for nature-based play at home. Spaces to play in do not need to be complicated or full of toys for play to be fun, engaging and creative. Nature-based play can take place in a garden or on a patio area or balcony. You can even bring nature inside if you cannot go outdoors.

This toolkit explores why outdoor play matters and provides guidance and activity ideas you can easily do at home with your family/carers.



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**Happy
By Nature**

A daily dose of nature for every child



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Why outdoor play matters:



Why outdoor play matters



Play is fun! It is what children do to understand and enjoy the world around them.

- Play is something they choose to do for its own sake and enjoyment.
- Children test themselves and their environment through play, learning about themselves and the others they play with.

Using outdoor spaces provides children with a dynamic, flexible area where they can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play environment.

- Being outside creates opportunities for greater movement, supporting physical development.
- Stress is reduced when children spend time in the natural world.



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Playing outdoors helps improve wellbeing and resilience.

- It can improve health through physical activity.
- It builds self-esteem and confidence as they meet a range of physical, mental and emotional challenges, risk assessing as they go.

Playing together outside is good for the whole family.

- Playing together can help children and adults relax together, building positive relationships.
- The natural world provides a range of free resources – from sticks and stones to the wind and rain. All the family can join in.

Learning to judge risk is an important skill that children develop through play.

- Every experience a child encounters has some risk; as they grow they need to be able to judge risks for themselves. Play including managed risk – such as jumping off a log or rolling over an uneven pathway – helps them develop these critical judgement skills.
- Providing risky play in a safe environment prepares them for more serious decisions later in life.

Playing in, with and alongside nature helps children develop a love of the world around them.

- Nature teaches, heals and nourishes as children play, connecting them with their surroundings and with natural materials.
- If children engage and connect with nature, they will want to take care of it and protect it as they grow up.



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Play beyond the school gates

Even the smallest spaces can provide opportunities for nature-based play at home.

- Nature-based play can take place in a garden or on a patio area or balcony. You can even bring nature inside if you cannot go outdoors.
- To add to your space and materials you have at home, collect a small selection of sticks, leaves and stones when you go for a walk.

Local spaces, which can be reached by a short walk, can also provide a variety of larger outdoor spaces in which to play.

- Look for spaces with grass, trees, bushes, flowers or sand, with hills to climb up and roll down. There may be places for children to swing, slide, run and jump, too.
- Consider meeting with friends – this will add to the fun for you, as well as your children.
- Make sure you encourage and support your children's play.
- Supervise and support but don't control. Let children explore, but do set boundaries to keep them safe, too.

When going out for a walk or to play outside of the home, a little planning can make everything go a lot more smoothly!

- Get to know your play space – learn about the local wildlife, terrain and potential environmental hazards.
- Check out where you are going – are there toilets, a café and shelter? These aren't always needed, but it is good to know if they will be available and accessible. This can help you to know how long you'll be able to stay at a place, and plan what to bring with you.

- Keep a “grab bag” of key pieces of kit always ready for going outside to play. This might include a small first-aid kit, something to wash hands with, a snack and a drink.

Do I need to bring equipment with me?

- Carrying as little play equipment as possible will make life easier.
- Some materials and equipment might add to the play opportunities, but why not have a go at using natural materials as much as you can?
- Some ideas for equipment to take along might include: a picnic blanket, a magnifying glass, binoculars, string, natural art tools and containers for collecting things in.

Thinking about a space to play in

Spaces to play in do not need to be complicated or full of toys for play to be fun, engaging and creative.

- Try and ensure there is space to run, dance, jump and skip.
- Leave room to be creative – such as making pictures and patterns with an old bunch of flowers or drawing lines on a tray of sand.
- Whenever you can, collect a few natural materials for children to play with, such as sticks, stones, leaves, pinecones, sand or seeds.

Make sure you are all safe in the environment you choose.

- Whether at home or in a public space, children need to feel safe from danger. This will encourage them to play and explore.
- However, there should be opportunities to take risks, try new things, be challenged, to succeed and sometimes to fail. Children need to stretch their limits and feel the joy of mastering a new skill.
- Unlike play equipment which has been designed and installed, nature is always changing. This means that there may be unexpected



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bumps or holes in the ground, sticks poking out in different directions and branches that suddenly seem to 'appear' in your pathway. Helping your children to be aware of the variations in an environment (and how to negotiate these safely!) is an important life lesson.

When using a public space do a quick check before you play:

- Look around for any sharp objects or hazards including animal waste or contaminated water. Keep looking as you move around within the area, or when you move to a new play space.
- Make sure everyone is wearing appropriate clothing – clothes which keep you warm and dry, and shoes that are suitable for running and climbing.
- Use suncream, wear sunhats and sunglasses and drink plenty of water when it is hot and sunny.
- Be aware of ticks, stings or poisonous plants. Have something in your first-aid kit to treat these.
- Wash hands before eating – or use hand sanitizer if facilities aren't available.

Leave no trace – this means tidying up after yourself, returning the space to how it looked when you arrived.

- When you leave a space, no-one should be able to tell that you have been there!
- Remember to take something to carry your rubbish home in.



Some ideas for playing at home (or in local spaces)

The best type of play comes from the imagination of children – they lead the way and you should support them with this. However, you can also encourage them if they are not sure how to get going. They might want to try something new or not be familiar with the space. If this is the case, they might need a way to get to know that space better. Here are some things you could try to get them started:



- Talk about “What can you see?”, “What can you hear?”, and “What can you smell?” These might be particularly useful if you are walking somewhere.
- Try a scavenger hunt and make a list of things to find: a stick covered in lichen or moss, something smooth, something pink etc.
- Go on a garden safari using the ‘SEEK’ app. Download the iNaturalist SEEK App and go exploring in the garden!
- Use nature to create art: create patterns and pictures made from natural materials, ‘paint’ made from mud, or use crayons to create bark rubbings.



- Go on a minibeast hunt – look under logs and stones to find bugs, beetles and worms.
- Build a den for yourselves, or for a doll or teddy bear.
- Make rhythms with sticks and stones – and dance or march to the beat.
- Create a tiny treasures nature bracelet. Stick a piece of masking tape around the child’s wrist with the sticky side facing outwards. They can collect ‘treasures’ that stick to the tape such as fallen flowers, leaves and seeds.



Always discuss with children what is safe and not safe to touch before you begin.

Children might want to return to the same activities time and time again and they may change the 'rules' each time they do so. Making activities their own is an important part of developing their creativity, understanding and imagination.



Top tips for taking nature-based play home

You don't need a large outside space for nature-based play at home, Here are some top tips to help you make the most of whatever space you can use.



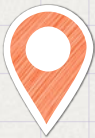
Spaces for nature-based play at home can be any size and very simple

- Add natural resources such as sticks and stones, water and sand



Discover local public spaces where you can play in nature such as parks and woods

- Check for safety, toilets and easy access then make this a regular destination



Take a simple pack of resources to help you when you travel beyond your home

- Take something to drink and a snack to eat, a small first aid kit is also a good idea,
- Check the weather forecast and dress accordingly



Leave no trace

- Make sure no-one can tell where you have been playing so that it is perfect for the next visitors, and for wildlife.



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