The Outdoors Rationale

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[www.plloutdoors.org.uk](http://www.plloutdoors.org.uk)

1. Young children should be outdoors as much as indoors, preferably with indoors and outdoors available simultaneously. Outdoor provision is an essential part of the child’s daily environment and life, not an option or an extra. Each half of the indoor-outdoor environment offers significantly different, but complementary, experiences and ways of being to young children. They should each given equal status and attention for their contribution to young children’s well-being, health, stimulation and all areas of development. Outdoor space must be considered a necessary part of an early years environment, be well thought through and well organised to maximise its value and usability by children and adults.

2. Play is the most important activity for young children outside and the most relevant way of offering learning outdoors. The outdoor environment is very well suited to meeting children’s needs for all types of play, building upon first hand experiences.

3. Outdoor provision can, and must, offer young children experiences that have a lot of meaning to them and are led by the child. Because of the freedom the outdoors offers to move on a large scale, to be active, noisy and messy and to use all their senses with their whole body, young children engage in the way they most need to explore, make sense of life and express their feeling and ideas.

4. Young children need all the adults around them to understand why outdoor play provision is essential for them, and adults who are committed and able to make its potential available to them. Practitioners must be able to recognise, capture and share children’s learning outdoors with parents and other people working with the child, so that they too become enthused.

5. The outdoor space and curriculum must harness the special nature of outdoors, to offer children what the indoors cannot. This should be the focus for outdoor provision, complementing and extending provision indoors. The outdoors offers young children essential experiences vital to their well-being, health and development in all areas. Children who miss these experiences are significantly deprived. Outdoors, children can have the freedom to explore different ways of ‘being’, feeling, behaving and interacting.

6. Outdoors should be a dynamic, flexible and versatile place where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play environment. The space itself as well as resources, layout, planning and routines all need to be versatile, open-ended and flexible to maximise their value to the child.

7. Through outdoor play, young children can learn the skills of social interaction and friendship, care for living things and their environment, be curious and fascinated, experience awe, wonder and joy and become ‘lost in the experience’. They can satisfy their deep urge to explore, experiment and understand and develop a sense of connection to the physical, natural and human world. A particular strength of outdoor provision is that it offers children many opportunities to experience the real world, have first-hand experiences, do real tasks and do what adults do, including being involved in the care of the outdoor space.

8. Young children should have long periods of time outside. They need to know that they can be outside every day, when they want to and that they can develop their ideas for play over time. High quality play outdoors, where children are deeply involved, only emerges when they know they are not hurried. They need to have time to develop their use of spaces and resources and uninterrupted time to develop their play ideas, or to construct a place and then play in it or to get into problem-solving on a big scale. Young children also need time (and places) to daydream, look on or simply relax outside.

9. Young children need challenge and risk within a framework of security and safety. The outdoor environment lends itself to offering challenge, helping children learn how to be safe and to be aware of others. Children are seriously disadvantaged if they do not learn how to approach and manage physical and emotional risk. They can become either timid or reckless, or be unable to cope with consequences. Young children need to be able to set and meet their own challenges, become aware of their limits and push their abilities (at their own pace), be prepared to make mistakes, and experience the pleasure of feeling capable and competent. Challenge and its associated risk are vital for this. Young children also need to learn how to recognise and manage risk as life-skills, so as to become able to act safely, for themselves and others. Safety of young children outdoors is paramount and a culture of ‘risk assessment to enable’ that permeates every aspect of outdoor provision is vital for all settings. Young children also need to feel secure, nurtured and valued outdoors. This includes clear behavioural boundaries (using rules to enable freedom), nurturing places and times outside and respect for how individual children prefer to play and learn.

10. Outdoor provision must support inclusion and meet the needs of individuals, offering a diverse range of play-based experiences. When children’s learning styles are valued, their self-image benefits. Boys, who tend to use active learning modes more than girls, and until they are older, are particularly disadvantaged by limited outdoor play. All children need full access to provision outdoors and it is important to know and meet the needs and interests of each child as an individual. Their perspectives and views are critical and must be sought, and they can take an active role in setting up, clearing away and caring for the outdoor space.