



CONSIDERATIONS FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING

The following considerations are designed to keep the students safe and comfortable while allowing them the freedom to explore and interact with the environment around them.

The Outdoor Learning Environment

Get to Know Your School Ground and Community

- Take walks through the grounds at different times of the day, while students are at play and when the grounds are quiet. Carefully consider the physical characteristics and educational potentials of the school grounds. Take note of constructive ideas and concerns.
- Consider creating formal gathering places on school grounds to support the use of outdoor classroom teaching. It is a good idea to locate your gathering spaces close to the school for easy access to supplies, materials and assistance from other teachers and staff.
- Consider the learning potential in the natural and built community beyond the school grounds. Walking field trips in the community provide additional opportunities to enrich classroom learning.

Sun Protection

The peak sun hours of 10am to 3pm fall within the normal school day. It is important to incorporate precautions for sun safety in your plans for outdoor activities. Here are some suggestions:

- Plan activities in the shade when possible. If there are no shade trees on your school ground, consider enhancing the shade on your school ground.
- Schedule outdoor learning sessions outside of peak sun hours, for example first thing in the morning when students are already dressed for the outdoors.
- Encourage students to wear protective clothing and sunscreen.
- Provide education programs to inform students, parents/guardians and staff about sun exposure.

Communication with Parents

It is important to communicate with parents/guardians about the role of outdoor learning in your classroom or school, and how they can help by sending students prepared to learn in the outdoors throughout the year.

- Send a letter home to parents about expectations and dressing their children for outdoor learning (see *Sample Letter to Parents*). For primary students, let the parents know that the students may be getting dirty.
- Send home a Walking Field Trip permission form if you plan to take students on walking field trips. A multi-use permission form at the beginning of the year can establish permission for students to participate in walking field trips within the school community, during the school day and throughout the year.

Warmth and Comfort

Students must come prepared with weather-appropriate outdoor gear for every day they will be learning outside. Children who are not adequately dressed will not be comfortable.

Layers: Wearing layers of clothing allows children to make adjustments as needed according to changes in weather/microclimate and activity levels.

Footwear: Boots or sturdy waterproof shoes with good grips on the bottom are recommended. Even when it is not raining, children may play in water or mud. Footwear should be closed-toed (no sandals).

Extra Supplies

Collect extra clothing, including rain coats, snow pants, winter jackets, mittens, hats and boots. Try second hand clothing stores or unclaimed items in the lost and found to keep costs down. Clean these supplies and keep them in a storage bin so that students who are not prepared have something appropriate to wear.



When it is rainy, wear:

- Inner/base layer. The fabric should wick moisture away from the skin and provide a warm, breathable layer (e.g., merino wool, silk, and synthetic polyester blends which may include a blend of polypropylene, nylon, spandex, lycra, rayon and/or polyester)
- Middle layer of insulation made of wool or fleece.
- Outer shell of waterproof, windproof clothing, including a rain jacket and rain pants.
- Rain boots or winter boot for the feet. Waterproof rain boots should be large enough to wear thick wool socks in cold weather (wool is particularly effective as it stays warm when damp).
- Warm, waterproof hat that covers the ears.

When it is cold, wear:

- Long underwear. Again choosing a fabric that will wick moisture away from the skin and provide a warm, breathable layer.
- Warm and waterproof gloves or mittens that slip on and off easily.
- Warm, waterproof hat that covers the ears.
- Warm and waterproof winter jacket and snow pants.
- Wool socks and warm, waterproof winter boots.

When it is warm, wear:

- A long-sleeved light-weight and breathable shirt (e.g., cotton, silk or hemp).
- Durable pants.
- A sun hat.
- Running or hiking shoes (note that children may still play in water and mud. Footwear should be waterproof wherever possible).
- Sun protection.

Everyone requires a waterproof backpack (child-sized for younger students) that should contain:

- Water in a spill-proof bottle and a small unbreakable cup for warm drinks.
- A healthy, high-energy snack in a reusable container.
- A damp bagged towel or hand sanitizer and towel to clean their hands before snack time.
- Extra socks, gloves and a hat.

Safety and Risk Management

- Survey the site daily for potential hazards. Continue to assess risk as conditions change (dynamic risk assessment), while you are in the outdoors.
- If the site as a whole is deemed too risky due to extreme weather such as high winds or a thunderstorm, postpone your outdoor activities to another day/time.
- Let the office know when you are going outside. Write a note on your board letting people know where you are.
- Take along a cell phone or walkie talkie that gives you instant communication with the office.
- Clearly indicate boundaries and safety guidelines before beginning your activities.
- Each time the group transitions from one place to another, do a head count to ensure that all of the students are accounted for. (See Classroom Management handout for more tips).
- Observe the students' interactions with each other and with nature. Gently guide the children in managing their behaviour, any risks, and interactions with nature as required.



- Explain to students that if they find anything that may be dangerous or pose a health risk (broken glass, needle, dead animal, etc.) they should leave it and immediately inform you.
- Review with students not to talk to community members they don't know, especially in busier urban areas. If a stranger attempts to engage students in conversation, they should leave the area (as a group) and inform the teacher.
- Schedule cool-down breaks (in the shade) or warm-up breaks as needed. Be aware of signs of heat stress and hypothermia.
- Be aware of allergies and other special needs.
- Discuss the appropriate responses to mosquitos, bees and wasps, and other insects.
- Discuss using senses appropriately (don't put things in your mouth, look for stinging insects before smelling flowers).



Acknowledgements

Adapted from *Schoolyard Enhanced Learning* by Herbert Broda and the *Fresh Air Learning Safety Handbook*.

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