

# OUTDOOR LEARNING – RISKS/HAZARDS AND ACTIONS

Most outdoor learning experiences take place with very low levels of risk. However on occasion it may be necessary to expose children to slightly higher levels of risk. Naturally it is important to balance risks and opportunities in any outdoor learning experience to ensure that actions are proportionate and reasonable.

One of the most important steps in minimising risk will be to undertake a site assessment of the outdoor learning area PRIOR to taking children to this area to ensure the site is clear of hazards.



The following table suggests risks and hazards that may be occur with outdoor learning experiences. Included you will see suggested actions to take in addressing each of these risks or hazards. Use this table to assess your outside learning space, and to make your case for further outside time to other educators.

RISK/HAZARD	ACTION
Sun	Ensure children have exposed skin covered, wearing hats and sunscreen. Keep sunscreen in outdoor learning spaces. Work in the shade where possible.
Low branches	Give children a verbal warning to take care (especially the eyes). Encourage children to stay in open areas where possible.
Prickly materials (natural, e.g. plants)	Give children a verbal warning. Work together to identify plants with sharp or prickly parts for future reference.
Sharp or prickly materials (non-natural, e.g. waste, broken glass etc.)	Conduct a safety sweep before entering the area. Give children a verbal warning. Remind children of dangers, and if necessary show examples of hazardous material.
Uneven ground, holes in the path, objects on the ground (such as stones or fallen branches)	Advise children to walk carefully. Encourage parents to provide children with suitable footwear and plan a route appropriate to the weather if venturing into densely vegetated areas or along uneven paths.

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Poisonous plants and fungi	Give children verbal warning and advise to avoid putting unknown materials into their mouths or putting fingers in their mouths. Seek medical assistance if ingested. Carry water and wet-wipes/anti-bacterial gel if travelling far from hand-washing facilities. Work together to identify poisonous plants and fungi for future reference.
Insect bites, stings or allergies	Before heading outside be aware of any allergies (including insect stings, hay fever, nuts) or medical conditions (such as asthma) and ensure students have their medication (Ventolin or EpiPen etc) and can administer them. Advise all children of potential risks (don't touch bees, alert other students to dangers, etc). Carry a First Aid kit. Tuck trousers into socks if in a potential tick area.
Disease or infection (e.g. Toxocara canis [dog faeces], Tetanus [soil], Lyme Disease [ticks])	Advise children of the risks. Cover broken skin on hands with gloves. Seek medical assistance if infection is suspected. Tuck trousers into socks if in a potential tick area.
Slippery surfaces	Advise children of the risks and encourage parents to provide children with appropriate footwear in wet or icy weather.
Open water	Give children a verbal warning of the danger area. Advise children to keep clear of the water's edge. Have a throw line or lifejackets if working near fast flowing or dangerous water.
Thunderstorms, heavy rain or gale force winds	Check weather conditions before taking activities outside. Move some or all of the activity indoors if weather conditions are too severe.
Children going out of sight	Advise children of boundaries and remind them to stay within sight of their educators.

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Additional risks or hazards when leaving the school grounds can be assessed using the information on the following table:

RISK/HAZARD	ACTION
Children going out of sight	Ensure correct ratios of adults to children.
Dogs	Advise children of risks. Ask children to avoid contact with dogs and ask pet owners to control dogs. In the event of an aggressive dog, advise children to avoid looking at the dog and to turn sideways to the dog.
General public	Avoid contact with strangers and pets where possible. Advise children to be respectful of other people enjoying time in nature.
Vehicles/crossing roads	Advise children of risks and remind children of road safety procedures.

