

Assessing Outdoor Hazards And Risks

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

If it is possible, one of the most important things you can do to minimise risk will be to undertake a site assessment of the place you are visiting PRIOR to taking students to the area to ensure the site is clear of hazards.

The following table suggests risks and hazards that may be present when taking students outdoors. You will see suggested actions to take in response to a range of risks or hazards.



Risk/hazard	Action
Sun	Advise students of risks of sunburn. Ensure students cover exposed skin by wearing hats and sunscreen. Keep sunscreen in outdoor learning spaces. Work in the shade where possible.
Low branches	Give students a verbal warning to take care of low branches (especially in the eyes). Encourage students to complete work in open areas where possible.
Prickly materials (natural e.g. plants)	Give students 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 area. Give students a verbal warning. Remind students of dangers, and if necessary show example of hazardous material.
Uneven ground, holes in the path, objects on the ground (such as stones or fallen branches)	Advise students to walk carefully. Encourage students to wear suitable footwear and plan a route appropriate to the weather if venturing into densely vegetated areas or along uneven paths.
Poisonous plants and fungi	Give students 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 students 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 students of the risks. Cover broken skin on hands with gloves. Seek medical assistance if infection suspected. Tuck trousers into socks if in a potential tick area.
Slippery surfaces	Advise students of the risks and encourage students to wear appropriate footwear in wet or icy weather.
Open water	Give students a verbal warning of the danger area. Advise students to keep clear of the water's edge. Have a throw line or lifejackets if working near fast flowing or dangerous water. When visiting beaches, rockpools or other coastal parks, always work facing the water to keep an eye on waves.
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.
Students going out of sight	Advise students on boundaries and remind them to stay within sight of their group or teacher. Ensure correct ratios of adults to students. Work with students to develop an appropriate 'missing person' procedure that everyone is aware of, and decide on a meeting point in emergency situation.
Dogs	Advise students of risks. Ask students to avoid contact with dogs and ask pet owners to control dogs. In the event of an aggressive dog, advise students to avoid looking at the dog and to turn sideways to the dog.
General public	Avoid contact with strangers and pets where possible. Advise students to be respectful of other people enjoying time in nature.
Vehicles/crossing roads	Advise students of risks.