

Outdoor Learning Environment Policy

Outdoor learning is an integral part of learning and development for all age groups and forms part of the Statutory Guidance of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile April 2017 (3.58) The outdoor area is a valuable learning environment and every effort should be made to enable the children to have supervised access to the outdoor provision. Bloom Day Nursery operates a free flow system for outside experiences and the details of those using the outdoor area will be recorded on the appropriate documentation.

The outdoor learning area should be an inviting and stimulating environment supporting learning across all areas and should offer a variety of different activities, for example a digging and growing area, equipment to develop skills such as climbing and balancing, space to play on wheeled toys and quiet spaces to pause for sharing books, drawing or creating patterns with natural materials and areas for communication.

Planning for outdoor learning should be an extension of the indoor learning environment. Planning should indicate specific continuous provision and more structured teach experiences. Many learning areas that are provided indoors could easily be set up in the outdoor environment when the weather permits, for example, sand and water play, a book area, a math's area and mark making etc.

Exploring the outdoor environment is an important part of development and covers all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework. Children will be offered experiences to meet all seven areas ensuring their individual learning and development is met. The statutory framework for the Early Years Foundations Stage requires all setting to provide access to an outdoor provision and have planned activities and/or experiences for all age ranges.

It is expected that staff have appropriate clothing for being outdoors with the children this is part of our daily provision and regardless of weather conditions unless deemed unsafe. Bloom Day Nursery Key Carer's can keep spare or appropriate clothing in their lockers.

Babies and non-mobile children should also have plenty of opportunities to experience the outdoors through playing on mats on the ground, watching leaves move, experience weather conditioners. Careful thought and preparation is required to ensure babies and non-mobile children have appropriate planned learning experiences outside.

Children need regular access to fresh air. It contains fewer germs than air inside because ultra-violet rays kill the germs and it contains oxygen which gives us energy and also stimulates exercise. Sunlight is required for the body to produce vitamin d, which is required for the growth of healthy bones and teeth. If the weather makes it impossible to play outside (for example heavy rain, fog) the indoor play areas **must** have open windows or be well ventilated in some other way in order for there to be a supply of fresh air.

Key Carers must ensure that all external and internal play areas are safe and secure. Outdoor and indoor play equipment should be checked regularly and removed if it is broken or dangerous. Fixed play equipment should also be checked regularly.

It is the responsibility of every key carer to ensure that the outdoor and indoor play spaces are safe and secure before allowing children into the area. Daily risk assessments are carried out for all areas and displayed within that area apart from the outdoor one which is kept in reception.

The outdoor environment is an extension of the children's room with the same ratios and the same need to make every effort to ensure the care and safety of the children at all times. Additionally, Key Carers should know how many children are in their care at all times, either indoor or out. However, with outdoor learning come some other considerations that do not present themselves within the children's room but must be considered at all times. All necessary documentation must be completed when going outside and when coming back into the nursery area.

Good early year's provision has always promoted a flow of play and learning between indoors and outdoors for a significant part of the day for all age groups. This is expected as the norm by regulatory bodies and needs careful thought and planning by the nursery team.

Learning environments that do not have immediate access to the outdoor learning space will need to schedule regular planned outdoor learning times throughout the day that is responsive and flexible to children's needs and interests. For example a learning environment may have a planned outdoor learning time from 10-11 however if it starts to snow at 9.30 and the children are clearly fascinated by this natural phenomena key carers need to respond by bringing the time forward so as to seize a 'teachable moment'.

Outdoor learning must always be viewed as a quality play and learning time that is planned and supported in the same way as indoor play and learning. It is not a time for children to 'let off steam' and Key Carer's and teachers to 'take a break', it is a time for exploring and investigating a different learning environment, whilst still allowing children to use and develop their own exploratory instincts.

All children will be supervised by sight and sound when in the outdoor area. If there are areas that are out of the sight line, Key Carer's should position themselves so that area is within their line of sight. If this is not possible, that area should be blocked from accessibility.

Key Carers should move according to where the children are at any given point in time while continuing to interact with the children. When a Key Carer is outdoors with children, they are to be aware of the children and the surroundings at all times. When children are playing on a piece of equipment, Key Carer should position themselves close enough to respond to a situation efficiently, always keeping the equipment within sight and sound.

Head counts of children should be taken regularly by practitioners and all children re-counted before heading back into the main nursery areas.

Note: practitioners should never undertake outdoor play and learning supervision sitting down unless sitting down is part of interaction with children or there is a medical reason. Neither should practitioners be huddled together talking amongst themselves. Outdoor learning is as important as indoor learning so the expectation is that practitioners interact with children by joining in child initiated play or planned learning activities. Each piece of equipment should have a limit on the number of children that can be safely accommodated. As with any area, too many children on a piece of equipment can lead to conflicts, which could result in injuries, or at the very least, upset children. Often the limit on the number of children is determined by the manufacturer. If you are not able to find this, together with your practitioners you should establish a reasonable number.

To avoid injuries help children find the safest route around play equipment, i.e., to walk away from swings and the front of slides. Even though most children enjoy climbing up to the top of a piece of equipment, it can sometimes be daunting to make their way down. Practitioners should be aware of those children at the top who have become frightened to make their way down or the child stalling at the slide with others behind him. Crowding can result in pushing, leading to conflicts and possible injuries.

Equipment for outdoor learning needs to be developmentally and age appropriate for the age group. If the outdoor space is shared across different age groups then practitioners are responsible for setting up for that age group and likewise for putting away before another younger or older age group comes out.

Being that the outdoor learning area is an extension of the children's indoor environment there may be times that additional materials and equipment occupy the outdoor space. For safety purposes it is critical that these materials remain in their specific areas. Pieces both large and small from other activities that make their way onto the bike paths, slides or even throughout the outdoor area can become hazards in these other areas. In addition, it is important to make certain that the children complete one activity before going to another or going to play on the equipment.

If water play or messy play of any kind has taken place outdoors, children should be dry and fully clothed, including appropriate footwear before resuming regular outdoor activities.

Date of Review: March 2018