

Forest Kindergarten

Group award code: GN62 47

**Support pack/guidance for trainers/assessors to deliver the
Forest Kindergarten training course**

Forest Kindergarten

Overview

Forest Kindergarten — Overview

This course has been put together to specifically meet the needs of early years practitioners who would like to set up a regular routine of off-site visits to a local wood or nearby greenspace for children in their setting.

It is becoming increasingly recognised that there are many benefits to allowing children to play freely in local woodlands on a frequent and regular basis. This includes increased physical activity, greater knowledge about nature and in the long term, a stronger likelihood that these children grow up to become adults who understand and demonstrate positive attitudes and actions towards caring for the environment.

Scottish government drivers — See SQA product development business case document

A survey conducted as part of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Forest Kindergarten Feasibility Study (2009, p8) highlighted the value respondents placed on accessing quality training:

'The responses highlight the need for professional development opportunities, and first hand experience for early years staff — building confidence and competence. In particular, developing understanding and skills relating to the process and the benefits Forest Kindergarten, and outdoor learning generally'

- ◆ *'Opportunities for outdoor learning are improving across all sectors...*
- ◆ *...Outstanding examples were noted in forest kindergartens.*
- ◆ *Staff would benefit from a clearer understanding of how outdoor learning allows children to experience more challenge through investigation and exploration of the natural world'*

Quality and Improvement in Scottish Education 2012

The Education Scotland document, outdoor learning: practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland (2011, p5) states:

'The place or context in which learning takes place is an integral part of the learning process. The relationships between the people involved, the activities undertaken and the place where the learning takes place require thought and consideration to maximise the learning opportunities and to meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people.'

This course recognises the value of woodlands as an integral part of the learning process for pre-school children. It has been carefully designed to equip practitioners with the knowledge, understanding and skills to enable children in their setting to play in local woods and other greenspace. It is based upon:

- ◆ Practice observed in Scotland and internationally in forest and nature kindergartens
- ◆ The advice contained in Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning (2010)

Furthermore, it provides an ideal stepping stone to other Continuing Professional Development opportunities including forest kindergarten supplementary skills training* in fire, ropes and tools as well as forest school leader training* and postgraduate degree courses which look at different aspects of learning outside and the need for children to have contact with nature.

*Please note: these training courses are currently non-accredited.

Forest Kindergarten (National Workplace Award) — Course breakdown

This support pack and course programme provides guidance to tutors, trainers and assessors who will be delivering the training course.

This award consists of one unit with three outcomes:

Outcome 1 — Forest kindergarten site (The place)

- ◆ Locating a suitable woodland and practical steps to ensure a setting can use it.

Outcome 2 — Planning and engaging with children and adults (The people)

- ◆ Suggestions to prepare, inform and educate staff, children and parents about the woodland visits.

Outcome 3 — Setting up and leading forest kindergarten sessions (The activities)

- ◆ Possible lines of development to extend children's experiences of playing in the woods.

Course aims

The aim of the course is to enable Early Years practitioners to organise, safely set up and facilitate forest kindergarten sessions. These sessions will be regular and routine off-site visits to a local woodland or nearby greenspace for children in their setting.

By the end of the course, participants will:

- ◆ understand the benefits of and be able to state ten or more benefits of frequent, regular visits to woods or nearby greenspace all year round.
- ◆ consider the woodland experience as a valuable opportunity to create a different context for play across all curriculum areas.
- ◆ be able to name at least ten different opportunities afforded by woodland experiences, which are not present in other contexts.
- ◆ receive advice and information about finding a wood and the preparations required.
- ◆ be able to name the steps required to find a wood, and outline the preparations required to set up a forest kindergarten.
- ◆ develop confidence and belief that practitioners have the skills and competencies to provide quality sessions.
- ◆ be able to name at least six of their personal skills and competencies which will enable them to provide quality play experiences within woodlands.
- ◆ know where to look for further advice and information.
- ◆ be able to provide valuable and fun play experiences in woods and other nearby greenspace.

Underlying principles

- ◆ That children will learn through positive play experiences and interactions with people and the places where they play about caring for nature and the world in which we live.
- ◆ The concept of sustainable development is best understood through experiential learning. This has to be outdoors in a natural setting for children to develop a connection with the natural world that will lead to long-term positive ecological thoughts and actions.
- ◆ The course and approach to woodland visits are underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular Articles 3, 4, 12, 28 and 31.
- ◆ Using local woodlands is an extension of outdoor play provision as outlined in the *Early Years Vision and Values Statement*.
 - Pre-birth to 3 National Guidance
 - Curriculum for Excellence — Outdoor Learning
 - Learning for Sustainability
 - The ‘rights and responsibilities’ approach advocated in Scottish Outdoor Access Code
 - GTCS — Standards for Professional Recognition
 - SSSC
 - Building the Ambition advice
 - GIRFEC

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

These are the specific Articles which the approach advocated in this approach to organising woodland visits. The wording has been taken from the Scottish Government (2008) *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child — A Guide for Children and Young People*.

Article 3: If any decision is being made by any organisation about a child’s well-being, then the child’s best interests must be considered.

In terms well-being there is sufficient evidence from research that suggests that children benefit from frequent regular time in a natural setting. Some of these research papers have been highlighted in ‘The Benefits of Woodlands Visits’ section of this guidance/support pack.

Article 4: The government has a responsibility to make sure your rights are protected and to create an environment where children can grow up safe.

A safe environment is more than addressing health and safety issues in relation to woodland visits. It’s about providing healthy and safe places to grow through play. A place that is free from the stresses and strains that some children experience in their lives. It helps children and their families perceive woodland environments as safe and healthy places to be which can be used for many purposes such as recreation, work and rest.

Article 12: Children have the right to speak up and have their opinions listened to and taken seriously by adults on things that affect them.

The children need to be consulted and involved in all aspects of the woodland visits from planning and preparation to the play activities in the woods. The course aims to encourage participants to ensure ongoing dialogue about the routines and practice as it becomes embedded in the life of the setting.

Article 28: Children have the right to an education.

The woodland visits are every bit as important as any other aspect of pre-school provision. All Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes can be covered through woodland visits. Participants are expected to observe, evaluate and extend children's learning through play.

Article 31: Children have a right to play.

Pre-school aged children learn best through opportunities to freely play. This is the main purpose and activity at the woodland sessions.

Values for early years outdoor play

The aim for all young children:

- ◆ All children have the right to experience and enjoy the essential and special nature of being outdoors.
- ◆ Young children thrive and their minds and bodies develop best when they have free access to stimulating outdoor environments for learning through play and real experiences.
- ◆ Knowledgeable and enthusiastic adults are crucial to unlocking the potential of outdoors.

Core values for high quality outdoor experiences for young children:

- 1 Young children should be outdoors as much as indoors and need a well-designed, well-organised, integrated indoor-outdoor environment, preferably with indoors and outdoors available simultaneously.
- 2 Play is the most important activity for young children outside.
- 3 Outdoor provision can, and must, offer young children experiences which have a lot of meaning to them and are led by the child.
- 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.
- 5 The outdoor space and curriculum must harness the special nature of the outdoors, to offer children what the indoors cannot. This should be the focus for outdoor provision, complementing and extending provision indoors.
- 6 Outdoors should be a dynamic, flexible and versatile place where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play environment.
- 7 Young children must have a rich outdoor environment full of irresistible stimuli, contexts for play, exploration and talk, plenty of real experiences and contact with the natural world and with the community.
- 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.

- 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.
- 10 Outdoor provision must support inclusion and meet the needs of individuals, offering a diverse range of play-based experiences. Young children should participate in decisions and actions affecting their outdoor play.

Key points

- 1 Children will learn through positive play experiences, interactions with people and the places where they learn outdoors.**

Highlight: That play is how children learn best.

- 2 Through play children will learn to cherish nature and the world in which we live.**

Highlight: That children and adults will only take action about something they care about. So we need to foster a care for nature, plants, animals and the wider world.

- 3 Children will develop a connection with the natural world that will lead to long-term environmentally sustainable thoughts and actions.**

Highlight: This is what we can do personally to play our part in making the world a better place, both now and for the future. This is our positive legacy and how we can make a difference — not just to children now but for their futures too.

Programme outline

Outcome 1 — Forest kindergarten site (The place)

Locating a suitable woodland and practical steps to ensure a setting can use it.

Definitions of woodland activity

There are lots of terms which describe children playing and learning in woods or other greenspace.

Woodland learning or play

'Woods for Learning' is the term used for any activity or learning experience, regardless of approach or number of sessions, which are led by a practitioner during school hours, within their local woodlands.

There are many examples of excellent outdoor learning taking place in woodlands.

Nature kindergarten

This is also a general term with different meanings.

Nature play

This is about giving children and young people of any age opportunities to have unstructured or free play in a natural habitat using natural materials. However, the term is also used to describe the play that takes place in artificial natural playgrounds mainly created from natural resources.

Forest school

To organise a visit to woodland or to create and run an outdoor project based in a wood does not require a forest school qualification

'This is a specific pedagogical approach to using woodland as a place for learning and play. It has been defined as 'an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adult's regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a woodland environment'

(O'Brien, L. and Murray, R. 2008)

To create and run forest school sessions, a practitioner must obtain a Level 3 OCN Forest School qualification from a recognised training company. Without a qualified forest school leader in attendance, a session or project is not regarded as 'forest school'.

Outcome 1.1(a) — Definition of a forest kindergarten

Forest kindergarten

This is the name given to using a forest school approach in the early years.

Forest kindergartens are unique, as they offer young children frequent, regular opportunities to learn through play. It involves repeated visit by the same group of children, usually weekly, to the same site, throughout the year, in all most all weathers. Forest kindergartens are child-centred and child-led.

This involves thinking about how to embed this into your setting: numbers of children; frequency of visits, etc.

Ask participants for their opinion. Is this what they thought forest kindergarten is? Has anyone been involved in this aspect of provision? If so, in what capacity?

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Define what a forest kindergarten is. ◆ Use key words to summarise the main criteria for a forest kindergarten. | Written assessment/questioning |

Outcome 1.1(b) — The benefits of woodland visits

What the research says

In recent years there has been a growing body of research which suggests that frequent regular time in a natural setting has positive long and short term effects on children’s well-being. In particular, the value of free play in woodlands should not be underestimated.

The collection of snippets below illustrates the potential impact of spending time in nature and the value of free play there. They have been taken from the Education Scotland publication:

Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland (2011, p7-12)

Practitioners may find using the snippets helpful when communicating with the wider school community to promote taking learning outdoors.

These snippets are a small selection of outdoor research. A comprehensive overview can be gained through further reading, reflection and professional discussion. This in turn can translate into changing or enhancing a practitioner’s understanding, confidence and motivation to take children to wild, natural habitats.

Short-sightedness in children affected by time spent outside

Australian government research suggests that myopia, or short sightedness, in children appears to be affected by the amount of time spent outside. The vision of six and seven-year-olds of Chinese ethnicity in Singapore and Australia was compared. Ten per cent of the Australian children were short sighted compared with thirty per cent of the Singaporean children. All the children spent a similar amount of time reading, watching TV and playing computer games. However the Australian children spent on average two hours a day outdoors which was ninety minutes more than the Singaporean children.

Nature is a buffer of life stress

Nearby levels of nature moderate the impact of stressful life events on the psychological well-being of children. The life stress impact is lower among children with high levels of nearby nature than among those with little nearby nature.

Being outside affects children's behaviour

A Swedish study was carried out at two day nurseries, one outdoor 'I Ur och Skur' kindergarten, and the other a traditional nursery in new, spacious premises. The research team studied children's behaviour as a whole: how they played, how often they were outside, their play routines, and also the development of motor function and powers of concentration during the course of a year.

'When it comes to concentration capacity, the children within I Ur och Skur pre-schools are more than twice as focused as children within a normal pre-school. Their motor skills are better; they are less frustrated, restless and sick.'

Tree density linked to asthma in young children

Lovasi et al (2008) examined the prevalence of asthma in 4-year old and 5-year old children, the density of trees growing in streets, pollution sources and census data. They concluded that street trees may help prevent early childhood asthma in urban areas but further research is needed.

Children who experience and bond with nature develop pro-environmental behaviour

Pro-environmental behaviour in children and adults was examined through a literature review. One key recommendation was that educators should make time for children to experience nature, individually and as a group, enabling them to develop bonds with nature.

Physical coordination is affected by landscape

Two groups of pre-school children attending the same nursery were studied during a nine-month period. One group had daily access to natural landscape for at least two hours, the other group only occasional access. Significant differences were found in balance skills, coordination and agility. The researchers concluded, 'Nature affords possibilities and challenges for the children to explore their own abilities. The children feel more comfortable being in the natural environment and their knowledge about nature increases.'

Natural settings help children focus and enhance cognitive abilities

Proximity to, views of, and daily exposure to natural settings increases children's ability to focus and enhances cognitive abilities.

Benefits of forest school

A longitudinal evaluation of three forest school programmes noted that for many children it takes many weeks or months for changes to occur. Thus long term and regular contact with a woodland environment is needed. However positive outcomes included greater self-confidence and self-belief and a better ability to work co-operatively with others. The children developed more sophisticated uses of spoken and written language. The children developed physical stamina and gross and fine motor skills. There was an increased respect for the environment and interest in natural surroundings. The practitioners gained a new perspective and understanding of the children. The children took their experience home and asked their parents to take them outdoors at the weekends or in the school holidays, helping change parental attitudes and interest in forest school.

'The games children play outside tend to be less gender stereotyped than the ones played inside since the material children use to play with in the forest is not as associated with a specific gender.'

Eva Änggård, Department of Didactic Science and Early Childhood Education, Stockholm University

The impact of time outside on ADD and ADHD

Results from a study of children with Attention Deficit Disorder indicate that children function better than usual after activities in green settings. The 'greener' a child's play area, the less severe his or her attention deficit symptoms.

Children with ADHD demonstrated improved concentration when completing a task, after a twenty-minute walk in a city park. The difference was comparable to what is achieved with standard ADHD medication. 'Doses of nature' might serve as a safe, inexpensive, widely accessible new tool in the tool kit for managing ADHD symptoms.

Adult mentors have a positive life-long impact on children and young people

Many adults who choose to take action to benefit the environment have had an adult mentor as children. The adult mentors demonstrated: care for the land as a limited resource essential for family identity and well-being; disapproval of destructive practice; a fascination with the details of other living things and elements of earth and sky and simple pleasure when being in nature.

Children who free play in wild natural environments are more likely to have pro-environmental behaviours and attitudes as adults

When children become truly engaged with the natural world at a young age, the experience is likely to stay with them in a powerful way shaping their subsequent environmental path. People who have had frequent childhood experiences in natural spaces are more likely to visit such places as adults.

'Domesticated' nature activities such as picking flowers or planting seeds while having a significant, positive effect, did not have as great an influence as that of 'wild' nature on environmental attitudes and had only a marginal effect on environmental behaviours.

Research about the health impact of the John Muir Trust Award found that '1 in 10 participants had never visited a wild place before their award involvement.' and that 'Those living in the poorest circumstances were over 6 times more likely to have had no previous experience of wild places.'

Being 'Nature Smart' is a recognised intelligence

Howard Gardner designated 'naturalist' or 'nature smart' as the eighth intelligence. This includes abilities such as noticing subtle differences and details about objects, having the capacity to use multiple senses, being able to identify and distinguish one species from another and being aware how to distinguish the diversity of organisms in their ecological niche.

Reflective thoughts:

How do frequent, regular visits to woodland or other nearby greenspace contribute to this vision and values statement?

What experiences can be offered which would be hard to replicate within a nursery setting, even outside?

What are the benefits of regular visits to woodlands & nearby greenspace for children?

- ◆ Identify top three reasons (tick)
- ◆ Circle the most important one

Be prepared to share your thoughts with other groups.

What is special about going to a wood or other greenspace?

Identify ten things that are special and that we should try to make best use of when we take children to woodlands. What can happen there which could not happen at your settings?

Discuss your ideas as a group.

What the research says?

Read the research snippets. As a group discuss:

- ◆ What snippet did you find most interesting and why?
- ◆ How can you take account of this research in your practice?
- ◆ Which two pieces most strongly resonate with the group?

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ List ten or more benefits of frequent, regular visits to woods or nearby greenspace all year round.◆ Explain five different opportunities provided by woodland experiences, which are not present in other learning contexts. | Written assessment/questioning |

Outcome 1.1(c) — Scottish outdoor access code: rights and responsibilities

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code

Stress the importance of referring to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code document — it outlines your rights and responsibilities whilst working outdoors.

The Code is based upon three key principles and these apply to both the public and to land managers:

- ◆ **Respect the interests of other people.** Acting with courtesy, consideration and awareness is very important. If you are exercising access rights, make sure that you respect the privacy, safety and livelihoods of those living or working in the outdoors, and the needs of other people enjoying the outdoors.
- ◆ **Care for the environment.** If you are exercising access rights, look after the places you visit and enjoy, and leave the land as you find it. Help maintain the natural and cultural features which make the outdoors attractive to visit and enjoy.
- ◆ **Take responsibility for your own actions.** If you are exercising access rights, remember that the outdoors cannot be made risk-free and act with care at all times for your own safety and that of others.

Remember that everyone only has access rights if they exercise them responsibly!

For more information about the Scottish Outdoor Access Code visit:

<http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/>

For primary schools, there is a free '*Know the Code before you go!*' activity guide

<http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/access/8-12%20activity%20guide.pdf>

Embedding the principles into woodland visits

Practitioners can model good practice and ensure that very young children enjoy the outdoors responsibly and safely. Think about ways of making sure the Scottish Outdoor Access Code summary below is part and parcel of how everyone must act when going off-site and into woods:

- 1 Take responsibility for our actions
 - ◆ Be aware of natural hazards
 - ◆ Recognise that many places outdoors are working environments
- 2 Respect people's privacy and peace of mind
 - ◆ Use paths or tracks when passing by houses or gardens
 - ◆ Keep a sensible distance from houses when there is no path or track
 - ◆ Take care not to act in ways which might annoy or alarm people living nearby, especially when it's dark

- 3 Help land managers and others to work safely and effectively:
 - ◆ Don't hinder operations, eg tree felling and harvesting. Keep a safe distance and follow advice/instructions from workers and avoid these areas
 - ◆ See if there's alternatives before entering a field of animals
 - ◆ Never feed farm animals
 - ◆ Avoid crop damage. Use paths or tracks, go round the margins of fields or use alternative route
 - ◆ Leave all gates as you find them
- 4 Care for your environment
 - ◆ Avoid intentionally or recklessly disturbing or destroying plants, birds and other animal or geological features
 - ◆ Following any voluntary agreements land managers and recreation bodies
 - ◆ Not damaging or disturbing cultural heritage sites
 - ◆ Not causing any pollution and taking all your litter away with you
- 5 Keep your dog under proper control
 - ◆ Don't let it worry or attack livestock
 - ◆ Never take it into a field with calves or lambs
 - ◆ Keep it on a short lead or under close control in fields where there's farm animals or during the breeding season (April to July) on moorland, in forests, grassland, loch shores and the seashore
 - ◆ Picking up and removing faeces from public open places
- 6 Take extra care if you are organising an event or running a business.
 - ◆ Contact land managers if planning an educational visit to a farm or estate
 - ◆ Obtain permission if you need facilities or services or if it will hinder others enjoying the outdoors or land management operations
 - ◆ Talking to the land managers who are responsible for places that you use regularly or intensively

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|---|--------------------------------|
| ◆ Summarise the three key areas of rights and responsibilities whilst outdoors. | Written assessment/questioning |

Outcomes 1.2 and 1.3 — Site appraisal, audit and survey

Site information and appraisal

When looking for suitable woodland to use on a regular basis, it can be useful to consider some of the criteria you think would be useful. There are no fixed recommendations and much of your assessment will be based on common sense.

Appraising the potential of a site:

Site appraisals are helpful in that they help us see the potential of a woodland and its use for play by very young children. By using the checklist, we can be reminded of the qualities of a woodland that make it suitable.

Working in pairs or trios, the participants have to explore the woods. Each group has to gather information in 3 parts.

Stage 1: What does the group notice about this area in terms of features?
Encourage everyone to provide feedback together.

Stage 2: What hazards can the group identify and why?
Encourage everyone to provide feedback together.

Stage 3: Find the play potential of this site. How could children use the site?
Encourage everyone to provide feedback together.

After this, look at the site appraisal form for the woodland site. Ask everyone to return to the gathering space to share their thoughts:

- ◆ How did they find the site appraisal form?
- ◆ What do they think about the woodland site having completed the appraisal?
- ◆ What would they change about the appraisal to make it more effective?

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Complete a site survey. ◆ Identify features, hazards and play potential. | Outdoors: Completion of a site survey form ensuring all aspects are considered. |

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Assess a site for its suitability to become a forest kindergarten site based on four characteristics — access, site character, vegetation and potential hazards. ◆ Justification for the rationale. | Outdoors: Completion of a site appraisal form ensuring all aspects are considered. |

Site appraisal — It's suitability for use by your setting

When commenting, you may wish to rank each consideration from 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent). Also think about how easily changes could be made to improve an aspect.

Access — In terms of access it is important that the group can enter and leave the site with relative ease. For example, if the ground is too tricky to negotiate then it may be necessary to look elsewhere.

| Consideration | Comment (1–10) |
|--|----------------|
| Is the site within walking distance or will it be necessary to request that parents drop off and pick up children from the woods? | |
| Look for safe parking/drop off and assembly points within or just out with the woods. Consider other access to the woods too, eg by walking or by bicycle. Are there any locked gates, etc. | |
| Think about the network of paths — does this exist? If not, how easy is it to walk across the area, especially for pre-school children? | |

| Consideration | Comment (1–10) |
|---|-----------------------|
| Think about the ground cover — leaves, grass, needles, heather. Or is it very boggy, or have too many ‘inhibitor’ plants such as brambles and nettles? | |
| Slope — ideally a mix of flat and sloped terrain. Think about its aspect (north or south facing) and when the sun reaches the slope or whether it is in shade during your session. | |
| Boundaries — are there natural boundary features within the area you want to be, eg a line of trees, a hedge, path, etc? | |
| Think about a designated place of safety in the event of a serious incident. Is this going to be your setting or another facility that is nearby? | |
| Is there a suitable gathering place or shelter , where equipment is put and snack is organised? | |

Site character — This is how the place feels. Ideally it should have a feeling of ‘wildness’ about it. Do remember that even small places can feel wild and isolated for a young child.

| Consideration | Comment (1–10) |
|---|-----------------------|
| Traffic noise. | |
| Mix of trees young, mature, different species. | |
| Presence of water, eg stream, river, loch, bog/wetland, ditches, mud. | |
| Presence of stones, rock out crops. | |
| Multi-sensory variety: sights, sounds, smells, shapes, colours. | |
| Dips and hollows. | |
| A variety of places: enclosed, open, to hide, roll, sit, have physical challenge, be quiet, a good view, etc. | |
| Evidence of wildlife. Opportunities to watch wildlife. | |

Vegetation — Remember that variety is the spice of life! Some characteristics that you might seek:

| Consideration | Comment (1–10) |
|--|-----------------------|
| Mature trees especially those with limbs suitable for low level tree climbing and for rope swings. | |
| Young trees — for coppicing and shelter building. | |
| Shrubs — for hiding, den building, hanging things on. | |
| Fallen trees — for climbing on, walking along, etc. | |
| Availability of sticks on the ground. | |
| Stumps — for standing on, using as a table, mixing potions in, etc. | |
| Open canopy and cover — glades of light. | |
| Variety of plants and fungi. | |

Potential hazards

Here the trick is to think about whether these are manageable and the level of risk posed. What can be done to enable visits to go ahead? Bear in mind the risks may also be seasonal. Think about 'heads, shoulders, knees and toes' when looking for hazards at different levels in the woodland canopy.

| Consideration | Comment (1–10) |
|---|----------------|
| Litter — including drug paraphernalia and sharp objects. | |
| Standing dead trees or dead wood in trees. | |
| Water. | |
| Steep drops. | |
| Animal nuisance, eg excessive midges, livestock, dogs and dog mess, nesting birds. | |
| Quantity and type of potentially harmful plants — ask owner or environmental professional for advice here, if needed. | |
| Security of the area — think about whether structures and children's creations are likely to remain or be removed/destroyed. How important is this? | |
| The amount and type of passers-by/other users and degree of seclusion needed — consult your ALO (Architectural Liaison Officer in the Police Force) if necessary. | |
| Informal toileting options — seclusion, ability of the site to cope with waste. | |
| Power lines and electricity substations. | |
| Timber operations and their aftermath. | |

Outcome 1.4 — Landowner's permission

The information from the site appraisal forms are the key points that need discussing with the owner or manager of the woodland site you wish to use.

Insurance

In terms of insurance, each local authority is different so check what your local authorities' policies and guidance is on insurance for outdoor/woodland activities. You will have to also ensure that you have all of your activity and site risk assessments in place as you will be asked about these when looking into insurance for your groups.

If you are using a privately owned site then you will have to negotiate a suitable site and give them information on what activities you will be doing and where. Along with copies of all of your risk assessment, there may be some restrictions from private land owners in terms of what you are and aren't allowed to do on site.

Site information checklist

Name of wood: _____ Grid reference: _____

Owner: _____ Postcode: _____

Contact details of owner/site manager: _____

Site management

| Consideration | Yes/No |
|--|--------|
| Do you have permission to use woods from the owner/manager? | |
| Does the owner have insurance for enabling this to happen? | |
| Do you have a written agreement in place which clarifies remits and responsibilities? (Please attach and keep safe) | |
| *Have you permission to: 1 Establish and maintain a toilet system, if no public facilities exist nearby? 2 Lighting a controlled camp fire (Even a disposable barbecue is a fire)? 3 Cut branches and do small scale wood work? | |
| Are there any 'no go' areas, eg because of safety, wildlife protection, private property, high risk of environmental impact? | |
| Any specific requests re behaviour of the group or management of the woods? For example, if you wanted to plant trees, would this be possible? | |
| Is there any site management work needed before your nursery can use the site? When will this happen? | |
| How robust is the site? Consider how often you will be using the site, the numbers of children and seasonality. You may need options of different areas to use in rotation. | |

**This course does not cover the fire lighting or using tools with children. However if you undertake bush craft or Forest School Leader training courses then you may wish to do these activities at some point in the future. These activities must be discussed and agreed with the woodland manager/owner.*

Action required (State by whom and expected date of completion)

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|---|-------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Explain how to gain landowner's permission and how you would provide evidence of it. ◆ Explain the correct insurances and policies that need to be in place. | Questioning |

Outcome 1.5 — Risk Benefit Assessments (RBA's)

Risk management when working with children involves balancing risks and benefits in a strategic way. Since the reason for providing an off-site is its benefit to children and young people, the starting point — and most important consideration for risk assessment and decision-making, should be an understanding of the benefits that the activity offers.

The Compensation Act 2006 emphasises the need for the courts to take into account the benefits of activities when considering duty of care. This act was introduced in response to concerns about fear of liability. There is no legal requirement to eliminate or minimise risk, even where children are concerned. Likewise, the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act requires that risks be reduced 'so far as is reasonably practical'.

Written risk benefit assessments do not need to be complicated. They should be a statement of agreed procedures and routines that reduce the risk as far as is reasonable and practical.

Do not rely on a generic risk benefit assessment and assume that is enough.

Every group and situation is different. Every woodland is different. The weather and seasons change. Thus time set aside to discuss amend RBA's is always required on a regular basis. This can become part of a staff meeting. Furthermore your RBA's need to be working documents. There are many ways of doing this:

- ◆ Keep the RBA's with the rest of the paperwork you have for your woodland visits. After each visit, encourage all staff and volunteers to add in any unforeseen hazards and ways of managing these. After all, the unexpected does happen and hazards can be seasonal, etc. Write on the RBA in pen, date it and then once a year or term up-date the document electronically.
- ◆ Share the RBA with other staff and parents and volunteers. Positive communication about expectations is really important. You may need to think about how the best way is to do this as RBA's can look very official and the language and presentation can be off-putting.
- ◆ Think about how you involve children in assessing their own risk taking. Be very careful about how you do this to avoid an over-emphasis on risk and safety when the focus should be on playing in the woods. See the 'Preparing the children' section of this handbook.

Below are some useful things to remember.

- ◆ Age of children — and the constraints on play, learning, retention, concentration, strength and skill.
- ◆ Health and physical condition — know who has hay fever, asthma, allergies, recent illness, etc.
- ◆ Remember adults — pregnant women, people with heart conditions, etc.
- ◆ Additional needs — Children with physical or learning disabilities may be more vulnerable to the weather, or slow down the pace of the group, etc.
- ◆ Adults and children who have English as an additional language, who might not understand safety instructions and emergency warnings.
- ◆ Code of behaviour — have procedures in place for the prevention of children running away, knowing what to do if they get lost, going to the toilet, etc.
- ◆ Emergency procedures — a missing child, a designated and named place of safety in the event of an emergency, a serious accident.
- ◆ Procedures for dealing with strangers, or unexpected visitors (inc. stray animals!) — especially if there is a child at known risk from abduction.

It is very important that children and adults at the centre are fully briefed about the benefits of the woodland visits, possible risks and the precautions, which can be taken by everyone. This should be included in the induction process for any new staff and children.

Your risk benefit assessments need to be working documents. There are many ways of doing this:

- ◆ Keep the RBA's with the rest of the paperwork you have for your woodland visits. After each visit, encourage all staff and volunteers to add in any unforeseen hazards and ways of managing these. After all, the unexpected does happen and hazards can be seasonal, etc. Write on the RBA in pen, date it and then once a year or term up-date the document electronically.
- ◆ Share the RBA with other staff and parents and volunteers. Positive communication about expectations is really important. You may need to think about how the best way is to do this as RBA's can look very official and the language and presentation can be off-putting.
- ◆ Think about how you involve children in assessing their own risk taking. Be very careful about how you do this to avoid an over-emphasis on risk and safety when the focus should be on playing in the woods. See the 'Preparing the children' section of this handbook.

Re-visit and update your RBA on an ongoing basis and sharing this with other adults coming along.

Health and safety outdoors

Playing outdoors is a fun and memorable experience for children. By taking time to plan carefully and consider the health and safety issues, you can relax and enjoy being outside more, knowing that you have prepared yourself, other adults and the children in your care adequately.

Being outside and undertaking play activities can initially create anxiety and uncertainty. No manual or document can answer every issue or cover every eventuality. Practical experience does make a difference for children and adults. The more time everyone spends outside, the more everyone becomes aware of the risks and measures needed to manage them. Lots of discussion is needed amongst staff in each centre to support each other and make sensible decisions around risk management and enabling children's play.

Hygiene outdoors

It is important that hygiene outdoors is given the same attention as indoors. Health Protection Scotland (HPS) advise that children wash their hands with soap and running water:

- ◆ After using the toilet/changing a nappy
- ◆ Before and after eating, drinking or preparing food
- ◆ After sneezing, nose blowing or coughing
- ◆ If hands are soiled/dirty

Wipes are only recommended as an alternative when hand washing facilities are not available. This should be included in your risk benefit assessment. It may also be sensible to let your parents know of this practice. If a parent requests that soap and water must be used, you may have to comply with this request for the individual child.

Carrying a bottle of water, a little soap and a few paper towels for hygiene purposes is a sensible precaution if your trip is some distance from a public toilet. Gels and hand sanitisers are only effective when used on hands that have no visual contamination.

Toilet matters

Many sites have toilets which can be used by your group. When a site does not have toilet facilities or you are too far away from a toilet, it is important to follow the Scottish Access Code guidelines (<http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/>) when going to the toilet outside:

- ◆ Wash your hands — use wet wipes if necessary but running water and soap wherever possible.

Child protection procedures apply outdoors as indoors. If you have to change nappies, children clothes or assist with toileting, follow your school or local authority procedures. For nappy changing, pop-up shelters or pods can be handy, along with a roll up changing mat. Always take spare clothes, pants and socks in case a child does have an accident.

Snacks and drinks

Keeping warm, well-fed and having access to water are basic necessities for all children and adults. Everyone in the group, including the adults, should drink and eat enough when away. Plan and provide opportunities for healthy snacking. Keeping blood sugars up, but not too high, is important for energy levels, good behaviour and positive outdoor learning experiences. Often everyone is hungrier when outside!

As with any food preparation and storage, the Food Standards Agency guidelines must be followed outside as well as in. It is worth brainstorming ideas for snacks that can be easily carried into the woods.

Group leaders should have a bottle of water with them for hygiene purposes. Children must not drink from ponds, streams or other sources.

If it is cold then provide flasks of warm drinks such as warm juice or soup.

Foraged food

Whilst it can be fun for children to pick and eat wild raspberries, brambles and blueberries, there are some berries growing wild (such as deadly nightshade) that are not suitable under any circumstances to be picked or eaten.

A few matters to consider:

- ◆ Staff must be able to clearly and accurately identify berries and other foraged food, before giving permission to children to gather or eat. You need to ensure that your children really know and understand which berries are safe to eat and which are not.
- ◆ Bear in mind the location of the berries and fruits. Roadsides or areas popular with dogs are best left alone.
- ◆ Food hygiene expectations still apply. You may need a system in place for washing the berries and fruit after gathering and ensuring children wash and dry their hands too.

- ◆ Let parents know that this is part of your practice. Be sensitive to cultural differences on this matter.
- ◆ The fruit and berries are an essential source of food for wildlife. The more we eat, the less they have.

Remember that this experience can always be left until the children are older to enjoy, if necessary.

To ensure that you or the children do not pick the wrong thing, the general rule of thumb with regards to berries and other foraged foods, is to not pick them as it is better to leave them alone and allow them to grow where they are.

Reflective thoughts

In line with reducing litter and unnecessary waste, have a think about how your setting could provide litter-free snack times which rely on re-usable containers and having only compostable litter left.

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|---|--------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Conduct a risk benefit assessment form. ◆ Explain what information needs to be included. | Written assessment |

Outcome 1.6 — Dynamic risk assessments

It is also worth remember the staff working with children may well be very experienced with an in-depth knowledge of the children in their care and who have a healthy dose of common sense. In most activities, this allows staff to be regarded as 'competent leaders'. Dynamic risk-benefit assessment refers to the minute-by-minute observations and potential interventions by these adults and this often makes a huge positive difference to managing risks on an outing.

Involve children in the risk benefit assessment process

There are a number of benefits to involving children in the planning process. These include increased responsibility, greater ownership of the trip and more understanding of the issues around going off-site

Learning how to be outdoors requires frequent practice over a period of time. It is easy when discussing safety matters to focus on the 'don'ts'. Instead focus on what children can do, the benefits of routines and expectations around behaviour.

This should not be laborious. However it may be worth considering these possibilities:

- ◆ A brief discussion or activity at the start of the outdoor session to remind children, eg 'Wet wood is slippery,' or 'Are there any trees which may not be safe to climb in this weather?'
- ◆ On-going observation and intervention. You may not see all the risks at the start of the session so appropriate reminders can help when a child is about to enter a risky situation. This is known as 'dynamic risk assessment'.
- ◆ Visual signs to help children remember rules and routines.
- ◆ Use small world props and equipment and tell a story around the routines and safety awareness needed.

Younger children often need to do rather than discuss. A 'Tell, Show, Do' approach works well, with an adult on hand to offer help by:

- ◆ Giving firm suggestions in simple, explicit and respectful ways.
- ◆ Offering words of encouragement and constructive feedback which acknowledges a child's efforts.
- ◆ Helping them to persevere.
- ◆ Using specific compliments to confirm things they have done well.

Preparing children to acquire new skills requires an awareness of what these skills involve. Be ready to break a task down into simple steps, and explain why you choose to work in a particular way. Be specific about safety rules:

- ◆ Tell the children what you are going to do.
- ◆ Let children watch you as you explain the safety aspects.
- ◆ Answer questions and show pictures or written instructions for the activity, sharing tips such as how to move around with equipment and how to cross uneven ground.
- ◆ Let them try the activity with your support in the outdoor area and school grounds.
- ◆ Gradually allow as much independence as the children can manage safely.
- ◆ If some activities are just for adults then give the children clear reasons for this.

For example, if children are not used to walking as a group, this can be practised prior to going on the trip, wearing a backpack and outdoor clothes:

- ◆ Practise putting on outdoor clothing including backpacks. These items can be in the dressing up box.
- ◆ Practise lining up in pairs and waiting.
- ◆ Children can walk in pairs around the school corridors.
- ◆ Practise keeping a distance from the pair in front to avoid crowding.
- ◆ Practice walking around the school grounds.
- ◆ Play the 'train game'.
- ◆ Extend this to walks in the neighbourhood. Start with a walk to a street or round a block. Give children lots of opportunities to look, listen, feel, smell and explore.

This practice gives the children a chance to see, hear and learn about the risks, which arise with the activity. Children will only learn about mud being slippery if they have a chance to play with it, and walk in it.

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|---|--------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Evaluate the site for potential hazards. ◆ Administer the necessary actions. | Outdoors: Observation |

Health and safety websites and useful books

- ◆ The Health and Safety Executive website www.hse.gov.uk is a huge source of information. It includes:
 - A specific HSE education website <http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/>
 - Myth of the Month section which dispels assumptions made <http://www.hse.gov.uk/myth/>
 - Five Steps to Risk Assessment – www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf
 - A link to the paper *Outdoor Learning Activities and School Trips and Outdoor Learning Activities: Tackling the health and safety myths* <http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/school-trips.pdf>
- ◆ London Play <http://www.londonplay.org.uk/> has huge amounts of practical advice on all aspects of risky play which is useful when developing outdoors spaces at pre-school, primary and secondary schools or centres.
- ◆ Play England (2008) *Managing Risk in Play Provision* This document looks at the process of risk benefit assessment and a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play spaces. <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=downloadoptions&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00942-2008&>
- ◆ The *Group Safety at Water Margins* advice provides useful advice when working with groups near water: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/doc/3820/Group%20Safety%20at%20Water%20Margins.pdf>
- ◆ Playlink <http://www.playlink.org/> This independent organisation has various guides and downloadable resources.
- ◆ Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents gives sensible and helpful advice about health and safety outdoors as well as indoors. <http://www.rospa.com/>
- ◆ The Child Accident Prevention Trust www.capt.org.uk
- ◆ Gill, T., (2007) *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society* Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation ISBN 978-1-903080-08-5 This little book examines some of key issues with regard to children's safety. It advocates a philosophy of resilience and how to strike a balance between protecting children from genuine threats and giving them rich, challenging opportunities through which to learn and grow.
- ◆ Gill, T. (2010) *Nothing Ventured: balancing risks and benefits outdoors* <http://www.englishoutdoorcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Nothing-Ventured.pdf> This is about outdoor adventure education but useful parallels exist with the play sector.
- ◆ Jennie Lindon (2003) *Too safe for their own good?* ISBN 1-900990-97-0 This is a small book with lots of great commentary about enabling children to take risks outside.

Reflective thoughts

Think about your own fears and concerns about taking children outside. Where did these stem from?

Often practitioners believe that their fears prevent them from taking children off-site. An alternative use for such fears is to use them as safety strengths. For example, if you are worried about children running onto a busy road, then what can you say or do to make a positive difference here?

Daily site check for _____ Wood/Forest

| Hazard | Date and checked by | Date and checked by | Date and checked by | Date and checked by | Date and checked by | Date and checked by |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Wind speed | | | | | | |
| Other weather | | | | | | |
| Ground conditions | | | | | | |
| Plants and trees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Low level ◆ Bush ◆ Canopy | | | | | | |
| Structures | | | | | | |
| Litter | | | | | | |
| Site users | | | | | | |
| Other | | | | | | |

| Comments including action taken to reduce risk | Date and initials |
|--|-------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Daily off-site register

(Remember to leave a copy at your setting and take this sheet with you)

Name and location of wood inc. grid reference _____

Nursery emergency contact _____ Phone number: _____

Nursery leaders and mobile contacts: _____

Date(s) _____

| Child | Name | | Medical/dietary information | Care plan | Permission forms: Consent, sunscreen, other.... |
|-----------------------|-------------|----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | |
| 12 | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Staff/ helpers | Name | PFA EFA | Medical/dietary information | Disclosed/ PVG | N/A |
| Nursery staff | | | | | |
| Nursery staff | | | | | |
| Staff/ helpers | | | | | |
| Staff/ helpers | | | | | |

Please attach any other relevant information.

Outcome 2 — Planning and engaging with children and adults (The people)

Suggestions to prepare, inform and educate staff, children and parents about the woodland visits.

Outcome 2.1 — Forest kindergarten leader's equipment

Equipment to take

Always take the following items with you:

- ◆ Mobile phone, with relevant phone numbers pre-loaded and fully-charged
- ◆ Suitable first aid kit which matches levels of training, the environment and the advice of your setting or local authority
- ◆ A list of participants, including any medical conditions and allergies (do they need medication and how will it be administered?)
- ◆ Emergency contact details and procedures
- ◆ Spare clothing
- ◆ Bottle of water, clean enough to drink
- ◆ Emergency snacks or food
- ◆ Hand wipes
- ◆ Tissues

Other useful supplies:

There are no rules here. Below is a list of common items that you may wish to take or trial:

- ◆ Sandwich sized plastic bags
- ◆ Bags for rubbish
- ◆ List of expectations that have been agreed and shared with everyone
- ◆ Toilet equipment – depends on approach to toileting as to what you will take
- ◆ A whistle (check children know the calling sound)
- ◆ A bright yellow vest (to help children see you)
- ◆ A mat to sit on or portable seat
- ◆ A few simple general resources, eg magnifiers, field guides, etc.
- ◆ Camera (fully charged and with spare batteries)

Adapted from the advice contained in Education Scotland document *Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland* (2011)

Equipment

Have your kit ready. It is also important to stress which equipment may vary according to season and children's interests and which are stock items.

Flag up: Prior to leaving for the session, the leader should ensure the administrator/manager at the centre has details of group including the adult's mobile phone numbers and the route travelled to and from the site. Have the handbook in an accessible place too.

Check the following equipment is ready as an example for participants:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Contact arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fully charged mobile phone for each staff member with relevant phone numbers. (check it gets reception on the site) ◆ Daily off-site register completed and details left with administrator/manager ◆ Daily site check form <p>Litter/dog mess management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Heavy duty bin liner bags ◆ Sturdy gloves for adults and children ◆ Plastic bags for small quantities of rubbish created by the group ◆ Dog mess bags ◆ Dog mess marking system ◆ Litter pickers <p>Children's backpacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Snack ◆ Drink ◆ Portable seat ◆ Spare hat, gloves, etc. <p>Snacks and drinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Warm flask of drink on cold days ◆ Spare 1 litre of water ◆ Extra snack | <p>Shelter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bothy bag — suitable size for your group ◆ Fleece blanket (for warmth) ◆ Space blanket (emergencies) <p>Hand hygiene bag — each practitioner can have their own portable one in a hip bag</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Plastic bag for rubbish ◆ Bottle/canister of fresh water, soap, paper towels ◆ Hand wipes for emergency use ◆ Tissues for noses <p>Toilet bag plus portable toilet/potty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Toilet paper in plastic bag ◆ Biological waste bags ◆ Travel potty <p>Miscellaneous items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Spare clothes ◆ First aid kit ◆ Sunscreen/insect repellent (in line with your settings policy) ◆ Camera ◆ Any necessary medication for a specific child – follow your local authority guidelines <p>Learning items</p> |
|---|--|

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|--------------------|
| ◆ List the resources and equipment required. | Written assessment |

Outcome 2.2 — Children's clothing and resources

The children need to be involved in the preparations and have every opportunity to develop confidence and independence. Each child can carry:

- ◆ Their own drink and snack*. The children should put any unwanted food, drink and litter back in their back pack or bag or put it in a bin. Avoid collecting rubbish as an adult but encourage each child to take responsibility.
- ◆ A portable seat.
- ◆ Extra clothes such as a hat, gloves, etc if these are not being worn.
- ◆ Their own treasures that they find.

Children could bring this from home on their visit to their wood so that the preparation begins at home and the parents have involvement.

Clothing

Children and adults need to be warm and comfortable when going to the woods. Generally woods provide shelter from the worst of weather and shade when it's hot and sunny.

Everyone, including children, has different thresholds of tolerance when it comes to feeling the cold. The more time you spend outside, the more adept you become at dressing properly for being out. The same applies to children.

General principles:

- ◆ Aim to keep temperatures even across the body.
- ◆ Ensure you are wearing layers of clothing. It's the air trapped in and between the layers that insulate and provide heat.
- ◆ Avoid wearing denim jeans which get cold and heavy when wet. Generally cotton is not a good base layer for this reason in winter.
- ◆ Proper wool jumpers or synthetic fleece work well underneath a durable wind and waterproof jacket and dungarees.
- ◆ Wear thick socks, gloves and hat. Mittens keep hands warmer than gloves with fingers.
- ◆ Wear waterproof boots such as wellies. These should be large enough to let a child wear thick socks and sole inserts to insulate. There should be wiggle room for the toes.

Good features to look for in outdoor clothing:

- ◆ Soft fleece collar with an adjustable hood on jackets
- ◆ Zip should have a flap on the inside to protect the child from being hurt when the zip is closed. Or show the child how to pull up a zip carefully!
- ◆ Jackets should cover the waistbands of trousers.
- ◆ Have a piece of elastic at the end of the trouser legs so it can close round a boot. This is important in terms of keeping heat within the trousers. The trousers should cover the boots, and have elastic at the legs so that water is not let in even if the child jumps in puddles.
- ◆ Detachable hood that will come off if it gets caught on something.
- ◆ Machine washable. Some outdoor clothes should not be put on a spin cycle.
- ◆ Wool socks are best as they absorb moisture and stay warm when damp
- ◆ Children's boots should be sturdy and have heels for a better grip.
- ◆ Wide-brimmed rain hats like sou'westers ensure that rain runs over the back of the collar.
- ◆ Wide-brimmed sunhats are needed for sunny days. Baseball caps are not ideal as the neck can get burned. Have ones with cloth that protects the neck.

High visibility helps.

Black, brown, green, grey and other earthy camouflage colours are not good for children from a safety standpoint. A child who is lost or has run away is very hard to spot in such colours. It also makes it easier for you to keep track of the child when outdoors. Have reflective tabs or reflectors that can be attached to the clothes.

Bring extra socks and plastic bags. If a child steps in a puddle, you can replace their socks and put a plastic bag between the sock and the wet shoe.

Finding or funding clothing:

- 1 Try before you buy. Generally children are more likely to want to wear clothing they like and have chosen. Have a project where you get a range of samples. Let the children try them on and see which ones they prefer based on factors such as:
 - Comfort — how they feel
 - Colour
 - Ease of putting on and taking off: how well do the zips work, can the straps adjust easily, does the hood work, etc.
- 2 Develop an outdoor dressing up box to help children practice putting on and taking off their clothes
- 3 Both of the above will generate interest from children and their parents. It is a good time to ask for donations of outgrown clothes. Remember, it can take a while before parents understand about the need for good quality outdoor clothing and passing on items to the nursery. Have reminders at the door, examples ready and ask at parents' evenings, PTA events, etc.
- 4 Have an Outdoor Ted at the entrance dressed in outdoor gear needed for the day. The children can look and check they have the gear in their bag or box.
- 5 Rent outdoor suits to a child's family for their time at nursery. The children hire a suit and if they outgrow it, then they bring it to nursery and get the next size up. This involves an initial outlay but the income can be used to replace worn out gear. The children bring it to nursery daily, wash it as needed and can use it out with nursery too. This can encourage family to go outside more often in all weathers.
- 6 Apply for external funding, eg awards for all or other grants.

Clothing suppliers:

- ◆ Ask your local outdoor shop and see what they can offer. Some will do discounts for schools and nurseries.
- ◆ Always check to see if clothing companies offer a discount for schools and nurseries.

What do children really need?

What resources and ideas are useful to facilitate children's play in a natural setting?

- ◆ Print off the activity cards from the pack
- ◆ The deep learning download from Muddy Faces
- ◆ Nature play cards
- ◆ An ID card
- ◆ Pair of binoculars
- ◆ Tubs
- ◆ Magnifying glasses in a bag with fabric
- ◆ A catapult
- ◆ Children's backpack

Resources for learning

As much as possible, advocate the use of nature and natural materials found within your woodland site. Nature is the main resource! It's important to emphasise this is a range of resources that children can choose from and put into their backpack to take on their visit. It needs to be the child's choice and responsibility.

| Item | Comment | In kit (tick) |
|--|---|---------------|
| Magnifying glasses | A variety of shapes and sizes is good. Children's eyes work in different ways. | |
| Fresnel lenses | These are A5 or A4 in size. They are plastic, flexible and let children easily observe large sections. | |
| Small plastic mirrors | Remind children never to observe the sun or to flash the sun's reflection at another child's face. Great for exploring and sensory activities outside. | |
| Pale or white squares of material | This can be an old cot sheet. Natural materials can be more easily seen on a pale background. Great for pattern work, games and activities. | |
| Bug boxes with lids | Great for observing bugs. Some have built in magnifiers. Simple pots with breathing holes in the lid work well too. Or even a plastic cup. | |
| Plastic cups | Useful for collecting objects, playing games or role play. | |
| Little plastic boxes with lids | Also helpful for collecting objects. Also on a journey or trip it can help limit the quantity of 'treasures' children find that they want to bring back to the classroom. | |
| Tarpaulin | Look for a robust version. Transparent or white tarp provides brighter light on dark days. | |
| Den building materials | High vis guy ropes, pegs, velcro, etc for use with tarps. | |
| String | Useful for various jobs and artwork. | |
| Dry bags | Useful for hanging up gear in wet weather. | |
| Nature Detectives | www.naturedetectives.org.uk Free downloads of identification charts. | |
| Lead stick | 1m with markings for measurement as well as leading. | |
| Soft toy or puppet | For songs, games, stories and role play — use Scottish wildlife or fantasy character if possible. | |
| Small clipboards (A5 or A6) | Use scraps of card or recycled notebooks for writing. They are more portable than standard A4 ones. | |
| Digital cameras or tablets | Teach children how to use them properly and let them take photos or use relevant apps suitable for use outdoors. | |
| Ropes | Think about the type of rope — ones which are suitable — visibility and suitable for taking the weight of children. | |
| Scarves or ribbons | For marking boundaries. Fleece scarves are useful to wrap around trees to prevent rope burn | |
| Hammock | These can be made with a tarp but a ready made hammock can provide a place to rest or sleep. | |

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|---|-------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Explain the clothing required for forest kindergarten sessions. ◆ List what should be included in their kit bag. | Questioning |

Outcome 2.3 — Engaging staff, parents and helpers

Preparing and involving parents and other volunteers

There may be some parents who are concerned about their child spending time outside throughout the year and in different weather conditions. Conversely, there will be parents who are concerned the other way too and want their child to experience more challenge, risk and active experiential learning. There will always be parents who have a strong opinion and want you to know about it. Remember to find out what all parents think, not just the vociferous ones.

- ◆ Discuss and share your ideas and plans for visits with parents.
- ◆ Invite parents to assist. Double check your setting or Council's Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) policy. It may be that provided a child or group of children is not left alone with an adult who is not Disclosure checked then the adult can still be involved and support a visit.
- ◆ Have lots of photos and positive images about the learning that goes on and the enjoyment that the children experience.
- ◆ Share the research about why it's important for children to be learning outside.
- ◆ Use quotes and positive feedback from the children and insert these into newsletters and on classroom and outdoor displays.

It is important that parents and carers have time to assimilate the information and ask questions in their own time. The value of informal conversations as children are dropped off or collected from your setting is invaluable. Also, many nurseries have found that grandparents have been particularly supportive.

Finding volunteers

If your setting struggles for extra adult help, it is worth seeing if there are other people who can assist. Examples include:

- ◆ Community groups which have an interest in outdoor activities, eg Over 50 walking groups
- ◆ Students looking for experience
- ◆ S5 and S6 (over 16 years old) completing their Duke of Edinburgh Award or wanting experience working with children for entering a degree course
- ◆ Adults wishing to work in the outdoor or environmental sector who need outdoor experiences
- ◆ Word of mouth
- ◆ Asking local agencies that work with community volunteers
- ◆ Local church or religious groups

Check your local authority policy on the use of volunteers and follow procedures accordingly. The Scottish Pre-school Play Association also has good advice for partner providers. Visit their website <http://www.sppa.org.uk/>

Briefing volunteers

If you have different people helping out, each week then having a short leaflet explaining the roles and expectations can be helpful. Also assign a member of staff to talk with new volunteers at the start of each woodland visit.

Example of guidance for helpers:

Notes for helpers

- ◆ Remember the fun you used to have when you were a child — that is the experience we want children to have!
- ◆ It's about each child being at one with their environment in his or her own way — please do not intrude or make assumptions if they are on their own — that's their choice.
- ◆ It is quite possible children will get stung by nettles or scratched by brambles — that happens when you play in the woods — help them deal with it without making a fuss.
- ◆ Support them to take risks where they want to — within safe limits!
- ◆ Leave them to pursue their own ideas rather than direct their play.
- ◆ Help us ensure children stay within a safe distance of the adults and respond to the word STOP.
- ◆ Try not to use the word 'DON'T' more than you have to — only in emergencies!
- ◆ They all go to the toilet before we leave nursery but if anyone other than your own child needs to go when we are out, a staff member will take them.
- ◆ Enjoy the peace and tranquillity yourself — take time to look, listen and rest!

Look out for:

- ◆ Dog poo — if you see some, point it out to children so they are aware of it and can try to avoid it.
- ◆ Help the children identify nettles and brambles so they learn to be aware of them.
- ◆ Small burn — keep them under supervision but, if it is not too deep or fast and they have boots on, it's OK to splash in it or jump over it, or make mud pies!

Thank you so much for helping — we couldn't get out to the woods without you.

A briefing workshop for parents

This section is designed to help you run a workshop for parents and carers about your woodland visits. You may decide to use parts of it when running induction sessions for parents and carers of new-entrants.

The Education Scotland publication *Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland*, has CPD activities at the end which can be adapted and used with parents and volunteers. The activities marked with an asterisk (*) have been adapted from this document.

Aims

- ◆ To share the benefits of woodland visits with parents
- ◆ To enable parents and carers to find out more and have the opportunity to ask questions, etc.

Key messages

- ◆ That children spending time playing in nature is essential to children's wellbeing and development

- ◆ Going to the woods offers 'added value' providing valuable experiences that cannot be replicated in the nursery
- ◆ That children really enjoy the experience

Activity 1: Reflecting on our childhood

Aim: To help participants connect their own memories of childhood with the experiences of children today

Ask participants to talk to the person sitting next to them about their positive childhood memories. Ask them to recall:

- ◆ Where were they?
- ◆ Who were they with?
- ◆ What were they doing?

Do the play experiences participants offer children match their expectations and desires? For risk, challenge, a place to be away from adults, outdoors in all weathers, with friends?

We want children to have fun outside, using their imagination and resources nearby.

Activity 2: What are open-ended materials?

Aim: To understand that objects have a closed or open ended play value

Resources: A toy car, an open-ended object such as a stick

Show participants a toy car and ask them to discuss the object with the person beside them. Next show the participants a stick and ask them to discuss the object with their partner.

Ask the participants to consider the uses of each object. The car is a 'closed' object which tends always to be a car in children's play. The stick an 'open' object and may have many different uses and purposes. For example it may be a fishing rod one day, a lightsaber the next, a horse the next, etc.

We want children to use sticks, stones and other natural materials because they encourage imaginative play

***The educational value of natural materials**

If you want to demonstrate why using natural materials for learning and play are effective from an education perspective:

Ask participants to build a tower with five pieces of Lego. This is a straightforward task. Hand out five stones and ask the participants to build a tower with these. This task is much more demanding. Ask the participants what skills were involved. Look for answers such as:

- ◆ Problem solving
- ◆ Higher order thinking skills (You have to think about the task. It's not as straightforward)
- ◆ Creativity and imagination (Every time you repeat this activity you will have to find a different way to complete the task as the stones are all different)
- ◆ Determination to succeed (Some will have had to try several times before a tower is built)

The stones are also multi-sensory; changing temperature with the weather, looking different when wet and has different sizes, weights and textures. This variety is hard to replicate.

Activity 3: What do you want children to be able to do when visiting the woods?

Aim: To encourage participants to consider the activities children can do during a woodland visit.

Resources: the cards in Table 1 photocopied, cut up and in an envelope for each group of about 3 or 4 participants.

In this activity, it is useful to get a discussion going about the experiences which are valued and appreciated.

There are no right or wrong ways of doing this. What is important is that the participants have the opportunity to think about the woodland visits you intend to offer.

- 1 For each group within your workshop, photocopy the table below and cut up. Keep the pieces in an envelope. **Feel free to change the words or play experiences mentioned.** The blank cards are for you to add extra words and/or to give to participants to add their own ideas.
- 2 Ask each group to think about which play experiences matter the most. The aim is to rank these in order from most to least important. The layout here does not matter.
- 3 Ask each group to feedback their decisions and briefly sum up the discussions around this.

Table 1: Cards for Activity 3

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Looking for wildlife | Climbing trees | Making mud pies | Having adventures |
| Fantasy play | Time to be quiet and reflect | Spur-of-the moment games | Building forts and dens |
| Caring for nature | Using their imagination | Climbing trees | Being free to choose what to do |
| Building dams in streams | Making maps and treasure hunts | Taking risks and learning about safety | Being with friends |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Forest Kindergarten Parental Consent Form

All information given here is strictly confidential and will only be used in the event of an emergency

| Child's personal details | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Name of child | |
| Date of birth | |
| Name of nursery | |

| Emergency and medical information | | | |
|--|---|------------|-----------|
| Contact name and relationship to child | | | |
| Contact numbers in case of emergency | Home: Work: Mobile: | | |
| Doctor's name & surgery name/address | | | |
| Doctor's telephone number | | | |
| Does your child suffer from any medical conditions or allergies? Eg: asthma, epilepsy, allergies to bee's/wasps, food/drink. | | | |
| If YES to any, please give details & medical instructions * | | | |
| Has your child had their tetanus vaccination? | <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">Yes</td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">No</td> </tr> </table> | Yes | No |
| Yes | No | | |
| Any medication your child needs must have medical administration permission forms completed with the nursery, to allow nursery staff to administer medicine. | | | |

Publicity

Photographs taken on forest kindergarten, of activities and events may be used for any of the following media purposes: local/national media, educational DVD's, publicity publications, funding reports, presentations or on FCS websites.

If you are happy for your child to be photographed for media purposes, please sign here:

Agreement — Please tick and sign

- ◆ As parent/guardian of the above named child, I have read, fully understood & I am satisfied with the detail supplied regarding forest kindergarten activities * I agree for my child to take part in them
- ◆ I have no medical reasons why he/she should not participate
- ◆ I give permission for accompanying staff to apply sunscreen to my child, if necessary and will put a sun hat on my child when it is sunny
- ◆ In the event of a minor accident, I agree for first aid to be administered by a qualified first aider

Signed _____ (Parent/guardian) Relation to child _____

Name (print) _____ Date _____

Staff preparation

As with anything that's new there is always a certain amount of apprehension. Plan well, address concerns, but most importantly remember that getting into the woods is worthwhile and benefits the children.

Frequency of woodland visits

Ideally, the children need regular and frequent visits over a period of time. Some nurseries take the whole class to the woods. Others take a group and have block of sessions that ensure all children get an opportunity to visit the woods during the course of the year.

Ratios

Follow your local authority guidelines here. Risk assess how many adults should accompany children keeping a balance between safety and too much adult presence to hamper the freedom that children need to become independent learners. A minimum of two staff members is strongly recommended regardless of group size.

Transport

If possible try and find woodland that is within walking distance of your setting. If this is not possible, then consider asking parents to drop children off at the site and pick them up from there.

In this situation, consider whether a staff car is needed for emergency purposes. If this is the case, check that the car insurance includes 'business purposes' and ensure the insurance company knows about the possibility that children may be transported. Appropriate car seats will also be required. Include these details in your risk benefit assessment.

The lead person

It can be helpful to have a lead person for each woodland visit. This staff member ensures the planning and preparations have been undertaken to make each visit run smoothly. If this job is rotated then put together a checklist of what needs to happen, eg:

- ◆ A rucksack or buggy with the essential (and other) equipment has been checked and is ready to go
- ◆ Daily risk benefit assessment completed
- ◆ Weather forecast checked and agreement from nursery manager that it's fine to go
- ◆ List of children and volunteers (see form)
- ◆ Provision for snacks has been made
- ◆ Volunteers have been welcomed and briefed
- ◆ Rules or expectations shared with children
- ◆ Site check undertaken
- ◆ Base established in woods
- ◆ Back at nursery; thank volunteers, follow up paperwork completed, discussions with group about what happened and what next take place.
- ◆ Check contents of the rucksack or buggy and replace.

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Explain three activities that can be carried out to inform and engage other members of staff, parents and volunteer helpers. | Questioning/written assessment |

Outcome 2.4 — Consulting children

Photo and map collections

Build up a collection of photos of the local woodland and the walk to get there. These can eventually become sequencing books or added to big book planners. Have sensory resources such as leaves, cones, etc. that children can feel as well as see. If you have any sound recordings this can help. There are lots of storybooks that are set in woods.

Small world activities

Using props and miniature equipment make up a story about going to the woods. Encourage the children to think about how they can look after themselves and take care. Again, let the children consider why such a visit might be exciting and something to look forward to.

Leave the props in part of the nursery and allow children to play with them and make up their own stories. This is a nice activity to leave out for children to continue after they have been on a trip.

Outdoor Ted or a puppet

Some children like having a soft toy or puppet come along to the woods. This is the approach taken in Sweden with 'Skogsmulle' who is a woodland creature with friends from other habitats. Stories, songs, rhymes and events happen with Skogsmulle.

Discuss and agree with the children some ground rules or expectations that everyone must follow when they are in the woods.

- ◆ Keep rules to a minimum
- ◆ Give children a briefing on appropriate behaviour before entering the woodland. Refer to the suggestions in the 'Getting Routines Going' section of this handbook
- ◆ Get the children to practise beforehand to ensure they know and understand the importance of listening and responding to the group leader's call or whistle
- ◆ When the children are ready move into the woodland area, remind them of the agreed rules
- ◆ End the session with circle time so that children can share their observations and experiences

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|--------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Prepare a plan for consulting and preparing children for their forest kindergarten sessions. | Written assessment |

Outcome 2.5 — Routines and safety games at the forest kindergarten site

Much of the routines around visiting a wood are based upon children learning to take responsibility for themselves outside at a developmentally appropriate level. However there is also the additional responsibility of learning to take care of the environment and to exercise our access rights sensitively.

The development of routines is based upon having fun, playing games, listening to stories, and talking about the issues that come up. By looking at this in the context of sustainable development, it is an ideal opportunity to demonstrate that we all can and must play our part in helping our society move towards sustainable living.

Getting ready to go

- ◆ Give children responsibility of carrying their own snack, drink and sit-upon mat in a bag or little backpack. Let the children practice wearing it before going to the woods.
- ◆ Talk about what's needed and how children can prepare (see this section of the handbook).
- ◆ Play the *train game* and other games for practice at keeping together.
- ◆ Have roads and crossings and other markings in the outdoor space so that children can practise crossing roads.
- ◆ Some settings have a special song which can be learned in advance of the first visit about going to the woods.

On the way

- ◆ Take your time and enjoy noticing the world around you. Look at street furniture, enjoy counting different things, play different ambulatory activities and whatever happens do NOT step on a crack in the pavement in case a bear comes up!
- ◆ Practice the *smile game* which helps children stay together rather than rushing off to greet people they know. This involves smiling at passers-by and see who smiles back. If the children see a known adult then they can wave and smile too. Tell the children that passing people will come over to the group if they have time. They do not rush over to them.
- ◆ A leading stick can be helpful for identifying who is at the front.
- ◆ If a child is prone to running off, then holding an adult's hand — or two — can help. As the child learns to be less impulsive, she can walk beside an adult without a hand, then just in front with a partner.

When you reach the woods or other greenspace

- ◆ Recap expectations about being in the woods. Or introduce if it's the first time. Often children are very good at reminding each other about these.
- ◆ Once you are away from roads, many children enjoy running on ahead to key features. In the beginning you may want an adult to go with the fast movers but generally children quickly learn where to stop. This lets excited children run off some steam. More importantly, it teaches children to look for key features in the landscape.
- ◆ Encourage children to talk about the key features. For example, a flat stone might be where a fairy lives. A fallen leaf nearby might be a letter she has left as a message to the passing children.

When you reach your destination

- ◆ Some practitioners like to begin by calling '1, 2, 3 Where are you?' which can be a call for children to gather round.
- ◆ Having a rope to hold works for some groups to make a circle. Other prefer 'Sticky Elbows', etc.
- ◆ Play a quick game or sing a song — take suggestions from the children
- ◆ Outline the options for play. Invite ideas from the children.
- ◆ Agree who does what between the adults. For example, one person might be assigned to setting up the snack area. It may be agreed that a shelter is needed too, if the weather is poor.

Allow plenty of time for collecting belongings and going back

- ◆ Have an agreement over what treasures can be gathered. This will depend on the woodland management. As a general rule, expect children to take their own treasures back in their rucksack or bag.
- ◆ Some nurseries have a song, story or a quick game before leaving. Review what children did and use this as preparation for back in nursery or the next woodland visit.
- ◆ Check the area to ensure no litter or disturbance to the site.
- ◆ Check everyone is present (do frequent head checks throughout the visit).
- ◆ Go back to the nursery.

Back at the nursery

- ◆ Encourage children to put their clothing and treasures away correctly. One nursery has a special treasures shelf which looks really attractive. This is where the children leave their treasure and then use them for a big book planning session the next day.
- ◆ Review session and use these and children's reflections as a basis for planning next visit and linking activities in the nursery based on children's interests and play in the woods.
- ◆ Follow up relevant matters as needed.
- ◆ Remember to dry any wet clothes before storing.

Safety games and activities

Gathering

- ◆ Have a call like *1, 2, 3 Where are you?*
- ◆ Have a sound that can be heard as an alternative.
- ◆ Have a sign such as beckoning arms so children can see the gathering request.
- ◆ Count and see how long it takes — encourage the making of quick circles.
- ◆ Use portable seats or a rope to mark the circle.

Identifying boundaries

- ◆ Have a rule that children may only play where they can see an adult.
- ◆ Walk the boundary and identify the key features. These can be marked with bright scarves, or tape. Encourage the children to do this on repeat visits.
- ◆ Play *Stop and Hop* game where children run up to the boundary and stop then hop or jump on the spot. Alternatively, let an adult walk backwards and the children tell him to stop when he reaches the boundary.

Getting lost

In theory this should not happen, given adequate supervision and frequent head counts. Wearing high visibility vests can also help. However, many children of all ages do fear getting lost, or being left behind. It is important to practise strategies such as:

- ◆ Being able to say their name and setting.
- ◆ Hugging a tree — so they do not wander.
- ◆ Ways of keeping warm.
- ◆ Ways of attracting attention.

Children must know and be reassured that adults will always come looking for them and will not stop looking for them until they are found.

There are games that can be played to practise these strategies. These are suitable for nursery through to P3. They have been adapted from the Swedish Civil Defence League manual, *Hug a Tree*, which teaches outdoor safety strategies for children.

The train game

Aim:

- ◆ To help children look out for other people stopping or wandering off during a walk or excursion.
- ◆ To encourage children to tell an adult leader.
- ◆ To work cooperatively and develop movement skills.

The goal is that the children should notice if any of the 'cars' drops off — in which case they should alert the 'engine'. No one must let go, and no one must wander off. The children are told that they're going out to ride a pretend train. They are also told that the train is going to a certain 'station'. The teacher opens a ticket window and sells all the children tickets. The children form a train together and 'drive' to the predetermined goal. If the train breaks up, the children must shout 'Stop Train' and reorganise themselves again. An adult can lead the train.

Tree swap

Aim:

- ◆ To demonstrate that trees are warm and huggable.
- ◆ To help children know trees can provide comfort and security when lost. A tree is a living thing that won't run away.

Each child stands at a tree. Mark the trees with a backpack, ribbon or something else clearly visible to identify the trees that are part of the game. One child or leader stands in the middle and blows a whistle, at which point everyone must change places. No one may stay at one tree twice in a row. The odd person out then stands in the middle and calls the next swap. A quieter option is to wave your arms to indicate a swap.

Optionally, the person in the middle can specify how to move — for instance, that you have to walk backwards, jump like a frog, hop on one leg or walk on all fours. The game can also be played in pairs, in which case the pairs must hold on to each other at all times.

At the start of the game, you can take turns studying the tree under a magnifying glass and describing it to each other. You can also have the children draw their trees after returning to preschool.

Bush spotting

Aim: To show that bushes and trees are easier to spot if something unusual is hung in them.

Mark a trail by hanging objects from your or the children's pockets on any trees, shrubs or bushes. Follow the trail and see how easy it is to spot those with something 'strange' on them.

Build a nest

Aim: To let children build nest that they can sit on that will keep them off the damp ground

Nest building is popular with children especially after reading stories about animals. Encourage children to start with bigger sticks, build up with small sticks on top. Moss holds water and should not be collected — there is a collection code about moss. The nest should be deep enough for a child to push their hand through and the sticks should reach their elbow.

Reflective thoughts

What other issues may arise and how can you help children learn positively about what to do using a story, game or activity?

Child centred activities

What really helps here is to think of child-centred activities that help children learn and understand these access rights and how to be in nature. Here are some examples:

Dogs

It is highly likely that your group will encounter a dog off their lead. In some instances it may be aggressive.

Who let the dogs out?

In this game, an adult is the dog inside the circle of standing children. Everyone says 'Who let the dogs out?' and the adult has to go up to a child and go 'Woof. Woof. Woof-Woof!' If the child carefully folds their arms, and turn away then it is their turn to be it and the activity is repeated.

Dogs on leads

After encountering a wandering dog, an adult can discover more 'dogs' without leads. Luckily you have a 'lead' in your pocket so you put it on the dog and take it for a walk. The dog is a small stick. The lead is a piece of string. Before you know it, there will be a dog show and all sorts of dog play happening. Some children want to be dogs too.

When walking to and from the wood as well as being in the woods, encourage children to point out dog mess to stop others from stepping in it. You will need to discuss and agree an approach towards managing dog mess. Every setting and woodland site is different. As a general rule, the adult on snack duty tends not to be the one allocated to dealing with dog mess.

Wasps and bees

Children can sometimes be very frightened of being stung and understandably so. Showing children how to behave around wasps and bees can lessen the fear and encourage responsible behaviour. Here are some activities to that work:

If a child is very frightened when a bee or wasp comes near, once the event is over and everyone is calmer, then use the gathering time at the end of a session to have a discussion about how to avoid being stung. What advice can the children give? This can be a good time to have a wasp drill.

Encourage children to watch what a wasp or bee is doing. They tend to move from flower to flower collecting nectar and pollen. Talk about the bee dance and how bees use dances to tell other bees about where to go to find pollen and flowers. Make up a dance to show others where to go, eg how to come and get snack!

Plant bee friendly flowers back in the outdoor space. Ensure these are not directly under windows. Taste some different types of honey as part of snack and have a vote on which is the favourite.

The Litter Lady (a Skogsmulle activity)

Everyone needs to be vigilant about taking litter back to the setting. As much as possible, encourage children to carry their own litter back and re-use or recycle it. Some settings encourage litter less snacks where only food in wrapping that can be re-used or recycled is brought along to the site.

The Litter Lady is a practitioner with a scarf on her head and a cross expression on her face. She is upset because the wood smells dreadful. There is not enough litter so she takes (clean) litter out of her bag and throws it everywhere.

Usually this creates quite a stir. Apparently one class ended up taking the Litter Lady to a recycling facility and eating their snack there they thought she would be much happier to be surrounded by rubbish, especially stuff that was going to be re-used.

Reflective thoughts

Go through the Scottish Outdoor Access Code summary. Think about:

- ◆ *Which practice can be modelled by adults*
- ◆ *What can be embedded through routines*
- ◆ *What advice needs a story, discussion, game or activity to help children understand*

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Describe the routine for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Getting ready, travelling to the forest kindergarten site and setting up. — Demonstrate safety games.* | Questioning and observation* (part outdoors) — requires suitable outdoor space at venue. |

Outcome 3 — Setting up and leading forest kindergarten sessions (The activities):

Setting up a site and possible lines of development to extend children's experiences of playing in the woods.

Outcome 3.1 — Set up and organise a forest kindergarten site

Woodland visits — A quick summary

- 1 Find a suitable wood that your setting can use on a regular and frequent basis. Complete the site appraisal form.
- 2 Seek permission to use it and get agreements in place about management and access.
- 3 Check that you and the owner/management have appropriate insurance in place.
- 4 Do a risk benefit assessment of the area you will be using.
- 5 Work out how the group will get to the woods: walking; parent drop-off; public transport or minibus.
- 6 Inform and involve parents. Find extra adults to assist with the sessions. Remember that 1-to-1 informal approaches often work well. Make sure they know what to expect.
- 7 Prepare the children.
- 8 Set up systems and routines for the woodland visits.
- 9 Ensure everyone knows their role. Have a designated lead person for each visit.
- 10 Do a site check prior to each visit and remember to dynamically risk assess throughout the session. Have cancellation procedures in place if forecast is particularly poor.
- 11 Go to the woods (see notes in box).
- 12 Follow up interests back in the nursery and vice versa.
- 13 Ensure on-going dialogue between staff and with children and parents to find out how the visits are going and to manage concerns raised.
- 14 Enjoy the experience and have fun 😊.

Once the group is in the woods

- 1 Keep a close eye on all children and their well-being and engagement.
- 2 Let the children have freedom to play, explore and discover independently. There is no need for structured activities unless it particularly fits with something the children have been interested in or there's a special event.
- 3 When it comes to risky activities, trust your children. They will rarely do anything beyond their ability if they have been given time and space to assess and consider what they can do. You know your children. You know the importance of free play and the value of meaningful, sensitive interactions with children.
- 4 Remember the more you visit the woods, the greater your own and everyone else's ability to read, assess the risks involved and respond appropriately to what's happening.
- 5 A good rule of thumb is to avoid putting a child into a risky situation such as helping them up a tree. Also have the expectation they can get themselves out of anything they get into! Sometimes help will be needed.
- 6 Occasionally accidents will happen, and this is an inevitable part of childhood. Ensure that you have policies and procedures to deal with this.

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|---|---|
| ◆ Demonstrable practice of setting up a forest kindergarten site. | Outdoors: Observation photographs/video |

Outcome 3.2 — Nature based activities

As woodland visits will be a frequent and regular part of your setting's routine, then it is important to remember that practically all the experiences, outcomes, approaches and other educational expectations can happen within this time.

In particular the health and well-being aspect of going to the woods and playing there is of big value. The Education Scotland document *Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland* cites many benefits of free play in natural settings in terms of children's well-being, meeting their needs and fostering creativity in addition to sustainable development education.

Rather than assuming that everything is being covered, it can be useful to undertake an audit through observations and evaluations of the woodland visits. Observations are essential to understand how learning is supported through child-initiated activity.

For example, one week keep an extra eye on mathematical skills being used by the children. See which experiences and outcomes are being covered and what practitioners can do to extend the children's mathematical knowledge, understanding, language and skills. The next visit, look at another aspect of the curriculum such as talking and listening.

This can complement and extend how you develop the visits back at your setting.

Below, the *Developing Imagination* extract highlights the added benefits of playing in a woodland environment, in terms of fostering creativity and helping children develop higher order thinking skills.

Developing Imagination

(Extracted from Education Scotland (2011) *Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland* p32)

Imagination is central to developing creative thinking whether it involves seeking a single solution or a number of alternatives. Developing a capacity to imagine the consequences of a particular action helps with innovation. The outside world provides experiences and events that feed the imagination and provide many settings for creative thought.

In 1971, the theory of loose parts was proposed by architect Simon Nicholson. He believed that loose parts in a play environment empower creativity. Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials. They can be natural or synthetic. In an outdoor environment, they could be stones, stumps, sand, gravel, twigs, wood, pallets, logs, stones, flowers, rope, tyres, shells, etc.

In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it. Having loose parts available allows children and young people to use these materials as they choose.

Nicholson suggested that children playing with loose parts are using more creativity and imagination and developing more skill and competence than they would playing with most fixed resources.

When children play or learn in a space or with an object, they experience it in a unique way. They view it in terms of 'affordances', rather than its common use. The 'affordances' of an object or space are all the things it has the potential to do or be. For example, a stick may be a fishing rod, walking stick or many other things. It has a high affordance. A toy car is mostly used as a car. Thus it has a lower affordance.

Natural materials such as stones, sticks and shells are of particular value because they are not uniform.

When carefully used within and across different subject areas, natural materials encourage problem solving, high-order thinking and communication. For example, if a Primary 2 class are asked to find out how many unifix cubes are needed to make one metre, the answer is fixed. If stones are used, the challenge becomes open-ended because each stone is a slightly different size. This gives rise to more discussion and further challenge, such as requesting that all groups use the same number of stones to complete the task.

In natural environments such as woodlands and beaches, the opportunities for using natural materials as loose parts as part of a learning and teaching approach are further enhanced as the scale and quantity of materials available greatly increases. Material should be gathered responsibly.

As practitioners, when working outside, we need to ask:

- ◆ Can the materials or environment we offer be used in many ways?
- ◆ Can they be used in combination with other materials to support imagination and develop creativity?
- ◆ Are the materials freely accessible?
- ◆ Am I allowing pupils to make connections in the learning environment?

Nature design principles

According to Sobel (2008) there are seven play themes, common to children anywhere: any country, any background, any climate or culture, when children have safe free time in nature. These are:

- 1 **Making forts and dens:** These are special places to hide away. Children create a home from home in nature. It is a bridge to the wider world and a place to bond with the natural world, allowing children to feel comfortable in the landscape, connected to it and eventually committed to acting as stewards for it.
- 2 **Playing hunting and gathering games:** This includes: fishing, capturing animals, collecting treasures, scouting, climbing, throwing activities, capture the flag, kick the can, hide 'n' seek, bushcraft skills, etc. A lot of this is about developing practical skills in a social context.
- 3 **Shaping small worlds:** Children like creating miniature worlds, etc. This helps lead onto understanding sustainability. As impact can be monitored, miniature worlds makes the abstract more concrete, eg climate change. Also it allows children to work through and explore these issues at their level and in their own way.
- 4 **Developing friendships with animals:** Many children have an innate fascination for animals. They are keen to pick them up, hold them close, care for them and even pretend to be them: Having animal costumes available, masks, and provide opportunities to stumble across and find life.
- 5 **Constructing adventures:** Most children love following streams, exploring the world, and taking self-imposed risks.
- 6 **Descending into fantasies:** This is about activities such as having an imaginary friend (or several), acting out scenarios with play figures or through becoming these people/creatures. It involves role play and children may use stories, computer games or films to inspire.
- 7 **Map making, following paths:** Being an explorer and undertaking way finding activities, figuring out short cuts, developing an awareness of place and one's existence in the world! These are all types of play that come into this category.

These themes do not act in isolation. Sometimes children can be playing a game or doing something that covers a multitude of themes. However, when working with children of all ages, it can be useful to consider these themes to provide develop child-centred experiences both in woodlands and back in the nursery.

By using these nature play themes, a bottom up approach that builds upon children's interests happens. For example, think about what children do with and in trees: climb them, build houses in them, read in them, hug, them, make nests with their leaves, ride on their branches, play with dolls in their shade, gaze at the sky through the leaves, smell them, become friends with them.

Nature play is more about the relationships that can be cultivated between children and trees in their own backyards as a precursor to saving the rainforest as they get older, when they can actually do something about it. Talking to trees and hiding in trees precedes saving trees.

This approach is more effective than an adult imposed top-down mind set, eg rainforests are disappearing, so let's teach children about the rainforests so they will save them.

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Nature P.L.O.D.S — Nature-based Possible Lines Of Development

The time spent in your local woodland is a valuable part of any child's pre-school experience. This section contains suggestions about how learning and play can be extended, following children's interests and the experiences they may encounter whilst playing in the woods. Many of the activities can be undertaken in your outdoor spaces providing a flow of learning between the woods and nursery. Some can be undertaken en route to and from the woodland or other greenspace.

Stories, songs and rhymes — oral literacy

Spend a bit of time putting together songs, stories, fairy tales, poems and rhymes ready to be used when an interest is sparked. These don't all need to be taken with you but can be used to follow up a session in the woods or to take along to the next session. Often children enjoy a song to sing at the start and end of a session. Also build up songs, stories, rhymes and poems that suit specific places within the woods. For example, if you let children run to the 'spider tree' the children who arrive there first can look for spiders on the tree. Then once everyone's arrived, you can all sing 'Incy Wincy Spider' or another song. The repetition of rhymes linked to places is very powerful.

Develop simple stories associated with key features. These can be based upon folklore or relate to how a feature looks. For example, a big boulder might be nicknamed the 'shelter stone' by the children. You can make up a simple story about two children who got lost one day and took shelter there until their mum found them. The children can help create these stories. At a bridge, the theme might be looking for evidence of the troll that lives underneath it. You may never see the troll but it might leave messages on leaves, or marks in the mud. It's going to be a friendly troll of course!

Games

Many children like and enjoy playing games in the woods. It's worth building up a selection that work well and develop a range of skills. Often the well-known games can be tweaked, such as 'Grandmother's Footsteps' which has a different feel when played in a wood. Do not force a child to play a game against their will. Some children like to see how a game works first before joining in. Try and avoid games where some children lose and have to wait passively. Keep all the children active all of the time.

Plant and animal identification

Do not feel you have to know the names of all the plants and animals in the wood. A flexible approach is best where you discover, search and experience together with the children. Generally, you know when children are ready to experiment and look for knowledge when they ask, 'What's that?'

- ◆ Build up simple identification books for children to use based upon the common plants and animals seen in your woodland. These can be laminated and taken with you. Keep them simple, eg spider, worm, slug, blue tit. Over time, everyone's knowledge and ability to observe the surroundings increases.

- ◆ Children also enjoy looking at the illustrations in guide books or the field study council sheets. Take these with you to the woods.
- ◆ Every now and then, preferably in different seasons, invite a ranger or naturalist to accompany the group and capitalise on their skills and knowledge.
- ◆ Many parents and grandparents may know local names for plants and animals too and can be wonderful source of inside knowledge about sighting wildlife.
- ◆ Take a camera and let children photograph the flora and fauna they are interested in.
- ◆ Often it's the stories and history of our plants and animals that make them interesting and relevant. It's worth learning little snippets of information for this purpose.
- ◆ Try and avoid plunging in, being a 'fountain of knowledge' and naming everything when a child asks. It's better simply to use the names of plants and animals you know as part of your normal everyday conversation.
- ◆ Don't expect or ask a child to constantly follow up identification. Follow the child's lead. If they are really interested and want to know more, then go for it. However it can be off-putting if an adult's response is constantly 'I don't know, let's find out.'
- ◆ If you are allowed to bring back natural materials from the woods (this depends on the management of the woods) then use this as an opportunity to extend the play back at your setting. For example, leaves can be added to big book planners, etc. Remember to follow the Code and gather sustainably in accordance with local advice.

In the remainder of this section there are suggestions for developing and extending children's interests. These activities and ideas are not prescriptive and should not be used as forward planning for a programme. Instead, when children's interests and themes have been observed, these ideas can be used to extend the learning.

Possible lines of development: Sticks

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| <p>Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 'The Stick Man' by Julia Donaldson ◆ 'Not a Stick' by Antoinette Portis ◆ 'One, two, buckle my shoe' nursery rhyme ◆ Use sticks for mark making | <p>Maths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Using sticks to measure length ◆ Making measuring sticks ◆ The stick ordering game ◆ Use of sticks when making shapes and patterns |
| <p>Sciences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Knowing what a stick is and where it comes from. Finding out if all sticks have the same properties | <p>Expressive arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Sticks for rhythm making and keeping a beat ◆ Making a rainstick ◆ Making sculptures and pictures with sticks |
| <p>Technologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Invent a game that uses sticks ◆ Build things with sticks ◆ Challenge children to build a tower as high as themselves with sticks | <p>Social subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The lead stick — the person is the way finder ◆ X marks the spot! The use of sticks to make symbols and signs |

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| <p>RME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Life and death. When does a branch or twig die and how do we know? | <p>H&W</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Pick up sticks game ◆ Think about how we can use sticks safely ◆ The talking stick at Circle Time |
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Possible lines of development: Stones

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| <p>Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ ‘On my beach there are many pebbles’ by Leo Lionni ◆ ‘Everybody needs a rock’ by Byrd Baylor. Follow the instructions for finding your perfect rock ◆ Mark marking with and on stones | <p>Maths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Comparative work on weight, size, colour, texture. How will you decide to sort, classify and order stones? |
| <p>Sciences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exploring the properties of stones. Using a magnifier to look ◆ What questions can we ask about stones? What is the smallest prettiest stone you can find? | <p>Expressive arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Stones in tins and boxes to make shakers ◆ Stones as treasure or special objects in role play (using the environment as a resource and stimulus) |
| <p>Technologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Creating stone stacks, miniature houses and other structures from stones | <p>Social subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Looking at walls, and other stonework on the way to and from the woods. How do we use stones? ◆ Traditional games with stones — compare with those from other countries, eg noughts and crosses, nine-mens’s morris, chuckies |
| <p>RME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Stones as symbols and markers. Useful for discussions about what changes and what doesn’t ◆ The use of stones as way markers, eg Inuksuks, cairns, etc ◆ The story of St. Peter | <p>H&W</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ How can we use stones safely? ◆ Moving and transporting stones of all shapes and sizes |

Possible lines of development: Weeds
(Common wild flowers that are fine to pick)

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| <p>Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 'The Flower Fairy stories' by Cicely Mary Barker ◆ 'Daisy, daisy, give me your answer do' song | <p>Maths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Estimate the number of flowers growing under a tree ◆ 'She loves me, she loves me not' — pick the petals off a daisy ◆ Tell the time using a dandelion clock |
| <p>Sciences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Have a look at a weed and learn the names of all its parts: roots, leaves, stem, and petals ◆ Go on a flower hunt for the brightest flowers and the ones which are hardest to see | <p>Expressive arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Make dandelion tattoos ◆ Press flowers to dry them and make pictures |
| <p>Technologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Make a recipe for flower perfume. Tell it to someone else and see if they can make the same perfume too ◆ Make daisy chains or dandelion crowns | <p>Social subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Create a trail using a weed flowers for another person to follow. Which sort of flowers would work best and why? |
| <p>RME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The Daffodil principle. How can we do something for others to enjoy? | <p>H&W</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Find out who likes butter in the group. How can this be done with a buttercup? |

Possible lines of development: Stumps

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| <p>Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 'The Giving Tree' by Shel Silverstein ◆ 'I'm the king of the castle' rhyme ◆ Sitting on stumps as a place to meet and chat ◆ Drawing or mark making on stumps | <p>Maths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Working out how old a tree was from the number of rings on its stump ◆ How many children can stand on a stump together? Will this always be the same number? |
| <p>Sciences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Working out the type of tree. Pine stumps develop points. Spruce stumps develop holes ◆ Looking for interesting cracks and crevices as the stump degrades — biological weathering | <p>Expressive arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Look at the textures of stumps through rubbings. What can the patterns become? ◆ Inventing sounds by adding things into a stump holes and mixing with a stick. How can you describe the noises made? |

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| <p>Technologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Making potions in stump holes. What ingredients make the smelliest potion? | <p>Social subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Creating miniature worlds on stumps ◆ Standing on stumps to get a different perspective of the ground |
| <p>RME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Stumped for words? What things leave you feeling stumped and why? ◆ Learning that stumps are left when trees fall or are cut down. The stump is dying yet new life grows out of the stump. Can we find other things growing from things that are dying? ◆ Read 'The Tenth Good Thing about Barney' by Judith Viorst | <p>H&W</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Stumps for climbing on and jumping off ◆ Can you jump off a stump in different ways? |

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| <p>Assessment criteria</p> | <p>Assessment method</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide a range of nature based activities. | <p>Outdoors: Observation</p> |

Outcome 3.3 — Curriculum for excellence through woodland visits

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| <p>Assessment criteria</p> | <p>Assessment method</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Identify the Curriculum for Excellence at the early level experiences and outcomes and cross curricular areas that relate to each activity. | <p>Outdoors: Observation</p> |

Outcome 3.4 — Forest kindergarten observation visit — Checklist

Observing a forest kindergarten session — Participant briefing

The visit to a forest kindergarten session is a powerful learning experience for most participants. To see children playing in the woods and have the opportunity to ask the Early Years educators and volunteers about the sessions is often the highlight of the forest kindergarten training.

The purpose of the forest kindergarten visit

It is for you to see a session in action: how it is organised, what the children do, what the adults do, routines and procedures in place.

It is an opportunity to ask questions, take notes and reflect upon what you will need to do in your setting to set up and manage forest kindergarten sessions.

It can be unsettling for children to have a large number of visitors descend upon their session. It is therefore important that you:

- 1 Respect the requests made by the staff before, during and after the session.
- 2 Be mindful that the children's needs come first. So if a child comes up to an adult you are talking with, stop and let them engage.
- 3 Do not interfere with the running of the session.
- 4 Be polite and considerate at all times. You are representing yourself, your setting, your local authority and the Forestry Commission Scotland when you are there.
- 5 Be respectful of the photo protocols in place.
- 6 Think carefully about the comments and questions you have.
- 7 Remember that there is no such thing as a perfect or ideal FK session. We are not there to inspect practice but to use the opportunity wisely to help us reflect.

After the visit, time is made to reflect upon what everyone observed.

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|---|-------------------|
| ◆ Ability to relay positive aspects of a forest kindergarten session. | Questioning |

Recognition of prior learning for existing forest kindergarten leaders in order for them to gain the accredited course certificate.

(On placement/at early years setting)

- ◆ Produce evidence of gaining landowner's permission
- ◆ Show updated policies and procedures to include off-site visits for forest kindergarten sessions.

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|-----------------------|
| ◆ Provide evidence of landowner's permission. ◆ Show updated policies and procedures. | Evidence of documents |

- ◆ Show floor books/observation logs/quotes from the children, staff, parents, helpers
- ◆ Produce reflective practice statement and self-evaluation statement
- ◆ Provide witness testimony

| Assessment criteria | Assessment method |
|--|---|
| ◆ Evidence gathering through observations, children's quotes, interest and creating forest kindergarten floor books. | Reflective practice and self-evaluation statement Witness testimony/peer info Evidence: Floor books/observation logs/quotes |