

Healthy Living

The Great Outdoors



Regular outdoor play is essential in promoting children's mental health and wellbeing. Providing children with plenty of physical and sensory opportunities outdoors reduces stress, supports their social interactions, creativity, and connection with nature. In recent years, there has been considerable research and evidence suggesting that time spent outdoors increases life expectancy, improves well-being, reduces symptoms of depression, and increases a child's ability to function in early childhood through to adulthood. In addition to this, time spent outdoors leads to better physical health, improved concentration, better ability to focus and learn, better behaviour and the fostering of more positive relationships between adults and children and amongst peer groups.

Task 1

Reflect on how you feel when you spend time outdoors, and think about the impact fresh air, space and nature has on your own mental health and wellbeing.

- How does it make you feel?
- What are the benefits? Make a list and discuss with your team.

Task 2

Daily walks provide children with a variety of health benefits and provides a vital role in promoting children's mental health and well-being. Just as it does for adults, research has proven that walking can improve children's mood and boost feelings of well-being.

Revisit Task 1 and complete the activity with the children. Be sure to share your feedback with the children about how being outside make you feel etc.

Ask them:

- How does being outside make you feel?
- What do you enjoy most?
- What can you hear, smell, see, feel?
- How does the different weather impact how you feel?
- Is there anything about being outside that you don't like?
- How do they like to spend their time outside? E.g., no coats, running around... in wellies splashing in puddles, in the sunshine playing with chinks etc.
- What changes do they notice in their body before and after being outside?

What else might you want to ask them?

Task 3

Next, click on the link and watch this short video: [Outdoor Play, Health and Wellbeing \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

With the video in mind, reflect on specific moments when you have observed children demonstrating joy and excitement whilst being outdoors – share with your team.

Consider the statements below, reflecting on your own practice, how often do you provide children to experience these opportunities and how can you improve?

- Being exposed to nature fosters children with mindfulness and being present in the moment.
- Outdoor adventures allow children to take risks, builds resilience and overcome challenges.
- Unstructured play in natural surroundings allows children to develop their creativity and imagination.
- The natural sounds of the outdoors, such as the wind blowing and birds singing provide the children with a sense of tranquillity and calm.
- Exploring the outdoors promotes social connections and positive peer interactions.

Useful links:

[The benefits of Sunshine and Fresh Air | Early Years Management | Teach Early Years](#)

[Playing outdoors | nidirect](#)

[The Physiological Benefits Of Walking With Children – KinderPod](#)

[Forest Schools: impact on young children in England and Wales - Forest Research](#)

[Reconnecting children with nature: the benefits of Forest School \(thetreehouseclub.co.uk\)](#)