

Nature Play

Reflecting on experiences



Once the staff and children have enjoyed the example outdoor activities, use your experiences to reflect on the outcome in terms of success and areas for development.



Activities

Making use of natural materials for small world play. Making the most of the puddle that stays after the rain has stopped. Engaging the senses and exploring the outdoor area through a nature based scavenger hunt. Linking play to the seasons by using leaves or creating nests. The example activities provide an opportunity for staff and children to enjoy nature based play in any space, as well as providing opportunities to build on children's enquiries and interests. Research

enquiries and interests. Research highlights a difference between nature contact and nature connection, with the latter being more of a holistic experience based on regular and sustained access that leads to a more personal relationship with nature. Playing *with* nature in the early years helps build the foundation towards nature connection. Reflect on how children responded to the activities and how staff can ensure regular, meaningful nature based experiences.

"Experiment with little ideas and help them grow. Keep on dreaming and asking, "What if...?" or "How about...?" It makes for a much more interesting life and keeps your outdoor work creative."

Juliet Robertson – Education Consultant and Outdoor Play Specialist

Reflections on outdoor space and practice

Do children have access to natural loose materials, including smaller items like sticks, pinecones and leaves? If not, how can these be sourced, for example through a local nature walk, donated items from home gardens or a local tree surgeon. If adding trees to the space, consider species that offer year round interest and are a source of natural items like seed pods. Plants like Lavender offer sensory stimulation and are valuable for pollinating insects. Let the grass grow long. A range of other loose materials are also needed for activities like bridge building, nest building and puddle clearance.

Review your current provision in terms of the variety available and how children currently access. Do you have child friendly storage, and can the children self select the items they want? Review the wider space for nature play opportunities. If the space is small, make use of the vertical surface for planting and include features with more than one use (for example willow planting encourages biodiversity, supports small world play, creates screening, reduces wind blow and can be used for arts and craft activities).

Facilitate a whole staff conversation about supporting nature based play to ensure a consistent experience for all children. Focus on the difference between interaction and interference and allow time for children to enjoy and engage in focused nature play, or just simply to sit under a tree and observe, versus organisation, routine and adult led activities.

