

Guidance

Using hammocks in school grounds

This resource has been created to offer advice to schools and early years settings in the use of hammocks within school grounds. It has been made by collating the first hand experience of our delivery team in school settings and from conversations with different schools and practitioners. It is intended to support schools to use hammocks as a positive resource that can reinforce learning, play and emotional wellbeing.

Hammocks are a relatively cheap resource to purchase and are very easy to transport, store and erect. Using hammocks within your school grounds offers a range of benefits for all your children and can particularly help those who need support to regulate their emotions.



Emotional Regulation

Hammocks can offer a range of emotional regulation especially when incorporated into a calming sensory environment. A hammock offers a quiet retreat when overloaded with stimuli. The rocking of the hammock can also have a calming effect on the brain and therefore provide an opportunity to take respite from stressful situations and calm the nervous system.

Allowing use of hammocks in your school grounds can:

- help to improve focus and attention by regulating sensory input
- create a sense of safety and enclosure, promoting a feeling of calm
- support sensory integration by developing a better body awareness
- improve coordination
- allow pupils to self-regulate emotions and energy levels

Learning and Development

Cognitive development – Through playing on a hammock, pupils will learn to recognise that repeated actions lead to a particular effect (cause and effect).

Interaction – Taking turns in an interaction with a familiar person will develop relationships with adults/peers and encourage new vocabulary and meaning.

- Gaining confidence to get into the hammock
- Moving at different speeds- push, pull, higher, faster etc
- Balancing in a hammock in different positions
- Investigating movement of hammock and windchimes

Communication and Choices – Pupils can use hammocks to indicate preference in response to stimuli, objects, people and activities.

- Making sounds to request to stop!
- Singing rhymes in the hammock
- Blowing bubbles and watching them float and then burst
- Giving or responding to commands such as go, again or more.



Guidelines for putting up hammocks

There are a variety of hammocks available but the photos in this document and the following guidelines refer to the Scout Hammock. At LtL we recommend this type of hammock because the long length and material of the straps allow it to be tied like a shoelace creating friction to hold it in place. Some hammocks do not have straps attached but the benefits of the Scout Hammock include that you don't need to be good at tying knots, it packs down easily and dries quickly.

- Find two trees or posts approximately 2 metres (6-8ft) apart so your hammock is not too taught, nor too bowed.
- Each tree trunk or branch should be at least as wide as both of your forearms placed together. For man-made posts they should be secure and not strained or bent.
- Consider the surface around your hammock - make sure there are no rocks, stumps or other hazards underneath or hanging branches above.
- At one end of the hammock, take both straps and wrap around the trunk or post in opposite directions criss-crossing below and then above the lines going to the hammock.
- Tie in a double bow shoelace knot.
- Repeat this at the other end.
- Make sure you can get at least 2 or 3 wraps around the tree trunk and many more for a smooth post for a more secure placement.
- Position the hammock to avoid sitting on the ground but not above adult hip height to reduce the risk of injury in a fall.
- Tie the hammock bag to the straps so it doesn't get lost and make everyone aware of the straps, so they are not run into.
- An adult should always test the hammock first.
- To get into a hammock, stand with your back to it, pull the fabric under your knees and gently sit down. Swing your legs up and lean back to a prone position.
- Wrap the fabric around your shoulders and look up - it's a great sensory experience.



Maintenance

To keep your hammocks in the best condition, always ensure they are dry when putting it back in the bag and regularly inspect the hammock material and straps for any damage. When they are in use, it is also important to check the hammock placement for any damage or slippage. Hammock rocking is okay, but rapid swinging can damage and effect the hammock placement so monitor this closely.

Risk Benefit Assessments

Take time to put procedures in place for managing the risks of using hammocks in your school grounds and ensure these are detailed on a risk benefit assessment. This should include how you intend to minimise any possible dangers and explain the positive reasons why you are using them. Involve children in this process and ensure they understand why any rules are agreed and how they can be responsible for themselves and others.

Further Research

Different theories have been used to create this guidance and when thinking about the benefits of using hammocks.

Bruce Perry's theory of trauma therapy refers to the human need for “patterned, repetitive, rhythmic somatosensory activity” and how we need to exercise our bodies in a sensory way.

Ayres' theory of sensory integration shows us that sensory processing affects behaviour and learning and that children with underdeveloped senses will seek this kind of stimulation.

