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Learning Ltd

Packaway Outdoor Play



50+ Ideas to Make this Doable for
"Skinted Not Minted" Nurseries

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About Juliet

COVID 19 UPDATE

This document was created prior to COVID-19 pandemic. The fast-changing changes to local and national guidance means that you will need to double check at your own setting, local and national level what is okay and not okay to do or have outside. Much of what is suggested can be easily adapted with a little bit of creativity and imagination. Also many things can be mitigated by handwashing before and after an activity such as water play.

Introduction

Many ELC settings are in situations where the outdoor space has to be set up from scratch on a daily basis. This could be for several reasons:

- You share your outdoor space with other users, because you are based in a community centre, church hall or similar.
- Your outdoor space may have other uses at other times.
- You are in temporary accommodation whilst building work is happening or changes to your outdoor space.
- You may believe it is not possible to leave items outside in your outdoor space.

Whilst this is not ideal, it is possible to create high quality outdoor play experiences that support children to investigate, explore, be creative, physically active, connect with the natural world and learn in ways which are simply not possible inside.

Like many aspects of early childhood practice, packaway outdoor play requires ongoing attention to keep it fresh, interesting and to meet the educational and care needs of your children. This handout gives you a few pointers to get going along with some signposting to further information and suggestions.

The other aim of this handout is to demonstrate that your outdoor play provision does not have to be a huge financial investment. Most of the suggestions are simple, low cost or free.



Section 1: Rights of every child

For more information about each right, the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland is a useful starting point <https://www.cypcs.org.uk>

A right to work, rest and play outdoors

In every nursery there is a core group of children who almost always prefer to play outside, given the opportunity. They have a right to learn in a way and in the place that best suits their needs and disposition. This means there is an onus on ELC staff to ensure all aspects of the curriculum are available outside and that this should be a high quality offering.

A right to be healthy

Being outside is a healthy approach to early learning and childcare. Without plentiful opportunity to engage in outdoor play, it is unlikely that a child will meet their minimum daily target of three hours physical activity, as advised by the British Medical Council and the World Health Organisation:

<http://bit.ly/38SCoES>

The UNCRC Article 6 states that children and young people should be able to grow up in conditions that don't impact negatively on their physical and mental wellbeing¹. Thus, we must ensure that physical activity and access to nature are also embedded into our provision.

A right to a future

The Scottish Government recognises and accepts that there is a climate emergency. As adults who work with young children, we need to consider our approaches to resourcing that ensures we are mindful about what and how we acquire stuff for use with our children. It is a visual indicator of our beliefs and values. We have a responsibility to ensure our practice is truly sustainable.

A right to be listened to and taken seriously

Your packaway outdoor provision needs to be a participative approach that fully involves children in the development process. This is regardless of the age, stage and developmental ability of your children.

Useful further reading

- Jan White and Liz Edwards (2017) *Valuing the Outdoors* Muddy Faces <http://bit.ly/2Znqxuz>
- Jan White and Liz Edwards (2018) *Putting the Values into Practice* Muddy Faces <http://bit.ly/2IKhuxh>
- Going Outside with Fred the Ted <http://bit.ly/2qUV1Z3> This is a **free** collection of ideas about consulting children about their outdoor provision.

¹ <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrcarticles/article-6>

Section 2: Responsibilities of staff

Idea 2.1 Before you begin

Undertake a baseline audit of where you are before you begin to make any changes to practice. This involves your staff, children, their parents and carers and any other stakeholders. Any approach to baselining practice ideally needs to be:

- Worthwhile and help you work out where you are
- A mosaic of options for involving children and others, so you can build up a more complete picture. Two books worth reading are *The Mosaic Approach* by Alison Clark (2017) and *Listening to Young Children in Early Years Settings: A Practical Guide* by Sonia Mainstone-Cotton (2019).
- Doable within the hours of the job.
- Repeatable at the end of the changes so that you can do a before/after comparison.

Idea 2.2 Taking photos of your outdoor space

Children can also do this job. If you ask them to photograph their favourite parts of the outdoor space or what they like to do, the photos that they take can reveal insights into their perception of the outdoor space and its function. Practitioners need to take photos from each corner and key sight lines so that "after" photos can be taken for comparative purposes.

Idea 2.3 Time lapse photography

Take a photo from the same place, every hour, e.g. 9am, 10am, 11am. Do this over 3 days. Look at the photos and note who is there. and what they are doing. If no-one is there, this is also very telling. Is it a lack of opportunity or interest or both?

Idea 2.4 Taking a teddy outside

- Teddy has never been outside.
- Ask a child or small group to take teddy to their favourite place outside. In a group, children can take turns.
- Ask the child for advice about what teddy could do there.
- Remember to take notes and photos.
- Afterwards make up a wee story book about Teddy's adventures or use a story-making app as you go.

Idea 2.5 Observing babies and their non-verbal communication

- Take a baby outside.
- Go around each area slowly, showing the baby and responding to their actions, expressions and sounds.
- Look for the child's reaction: interested, not, engaged, etc.
- Make brief written observations.
- Repeat several times to see the consistencies and to build up a picture.
- If you have non-verbal children who can crawl or walk, let them wander and see where they like to go. What provocations can be provided to help them explore other parts of the outdoor space?



Idea 2.6 Using photos with children to find out their preferences

- Always try and do in the relevant place, e.g. outside.
- Avoid overwhelming the children with too many photos. Adapt the number to the ages of your children.
- Stick down with masking tape or similar if windy.
- Have sensory experience that children can explore alongside the photos, e.g. a bowl of mud beside the mud photos.
- Be ready to listen to their thoughts and observe what they are doing and their preferences for different photos.
- You can use different coloured pens for boys and girls if you want to check if gender preferences exist.
- When developing different areas outside, e.g. a mud area, then making the same photos available for parents and families to see and comment on, can also be really helpful. Then you can troubleshoot or manage any concerns that arise, e.g. mess and dirt. Provide sticky dots to put on photos of images that appeal to them (e.g. 3 per adult), and post-it notes for written comments.



Idea 2.7 Involving older children

If you are a school-based ELC setting then involving older children can be a valuable approach to seeking younger children's perspectives. They can help observe children playing, ask them for their thoughts and help with a broader perspective. Have a look at the Middleton Park video as an example:

<https://vimeo.com/277312669>

Practical considerations when improving your packaway outdoor play

Idea 2.8 Embedding the nature play principles into your practice

There appear to be patterns to children's play which emerge almost regardless of climate, culture, class, gender, developmental level or age. They link to how humans grow and their need for identity, attachment and a sense of connectedness to place and people. In our rapidly changing world, children need opportunities to develop this sense of belonging and being with nature. Casey & Robertson (2019, p13)²

Look at the nature play principles. This provide a planning framework for your packaway outdoor provision that meets children's innate play needs. Keep asking yourself if your outdoor provision supports all these play themes. If not, what do you need to do or change so that these experiences and behaviours can emerge?

Idea 2.9 Backlinking to the curriculum

Once you have your basic routines and resources in place, spend time backlinking this to the CfE experiences and outcomes. Then you can see where the strength and weaknesses are in terms of the breadth of coverage. *The Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit*, p63 and p64 have examples mainly from the Health and Wellbeing Experiences and Outcomes. After this, you can specifically address the gaps in your provision.

² Casey, T. & Robertson, J. (2019) *Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit, 2nd Edition* Edinburgh: Inspiring Scotland
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Idea 2.10 Embedding literacy into your packaway outdoor play

This needs to be consistently provided. You do not need lots of materials but an ongoing opportunity for children to experience texts outside.

- **Talking and listening:** if you have sufficient abundance and diversity of loose parts then this is a significant step. On top of this, use the skills and strategies you apply as a qualified early years practitioner to support children to further develop their confidence to communicate verbally. Remember to sing and share rhymes outside too.
- **Reading texts:** Be mindful of the weather and children's interests. They could choose which books need to go outside each day and where they should go. For example, you may have a reading den. On top of this, you may need seasonal ID charts for nature observations, sequencing books for specific jobs, pictorial timelines and other functional texts. In addition to this provide outdoor home-school bags and stories which encourage you to read on the go. Story washing lines work very well outside: <http://bit.ly/2kK5C5V>
- **Mark making and pre-handwriting:**
 - Look at the range of **surfaces** that could be used for different forms of mark making. Add in **portable surfaces** to complement these, e.g. little whiteboards, blackboards, acrylic mirrors, pieces of cardboard, DIY clipboards, CDs, etc.
 - Look at **materials** to support mark making: chinks, pens, plants – charcoal, etc.
 - Look at the **physical opportunities** within your outdoor space to support specific motor skills associated with emerging literacy
 - Be prepared to **role model the process** of mark making, scribing stories, and so on



Idea 2.11 Embedding maths into your packaway outdoor provision

This needs to be consistently provided. You do not need lots of materials but an ongoing opportunity for children to develop confidence, knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of maths. This mainly relies on practitioners being skilled at integrated maths into their everyday conversations with children and making the maths visible in their children's play. For more ideas, look at Juliet's book, *Messy Maths: A Playful Outdoor Approach for Early Years*.

Idea 2.12 Digital technology

Tablets and iPads are handy packaway items. They can be used by children to capture, record and remember their play outside.

- Use photos from the day or week before to create a slideshow that is playing when children arrive. This can help them and their parents see, remember and value the play that happens outside.
- Use photos to create stories of what happens outside. Print some of these out. Children need to be able to look at books about themselves which are paper-based.
- Have specific apps available that encourage children to explore the outdoor space and the world beyond. Have a look at this blog post for ideas: <http://bit.ly/33a9iPu>

Idea 2.13 The circle of life

All the elements below are essential for life on earth. Have you provided opportunities for children to experience and explore:

- **Earth:** mud, sand, rocks, pebbles, metals
- **Air:** wind, gravity, movement
- **Water:** rain, snow, ice, water vapour (steam), flow of water
- **Sun:** shadows, play in the dark as well as the light, exploration of colour, translucence and opaqueness, explorations of fire
- **Plants:** growing, picking, playing, eating, observing, stories and culture around plants
- **Animals:** caring for, building homes and habitats, looking for evidence of animal presence, listening, watching
- **Death, decay, recycling** and life cycles?

This is a useful checklist for consideration and to help you further develop your outdoor provision. For example, if you think about plants, do your children have an opportunity to:

- Grow plants and see the life cycles of plants
- Play with plants: learning traditional games and inventing their own
- Study plants closely and use them in a range of expressive ways
- Care for plants
- Harvest and eat plants
- Experience plants for their provision of shade, shelter and greenery.
- Learn about the names, folklore, and culture associations of plants including the breadth of plant species and the wonders of the plants in our world.



Section 3: Setting up a space: re-imagining the possibilities

When you have an outdoor space that is far from ideal, there is a need to be more creative. You will have to put more effort into making your packaway provision of a high quality. It will not happen by magic. It will require ongoing experimentation until your systems and approach is workable. The staff have to truly value outdoor play and want to make it happen really well.

Idea 3.1 Deciding upon areas or zones

It can be helpful for young children if your outdoor space is zoned to help them perceive the range of possibilities that exist for playing outside. There are no hard and fast rules about zones other than they need to be open-ended, flexible play spaces. For example, a mud kitchen zone arguably confines mud play to role play. A mud area enables children to dig, construct, build, role play and explore mud in any way they wish.

Thus, open-ended possibilities could include:

- Natural spaces: mud, sand, water, stones, e.g. pea gravel
- Gardening and greenery
- Places for calm, quiet times
- Provision for shelter
- Open spaces and active areas



Idea 3.2 The magic of microclimates

Spend time with your children collecting information about your outdoor space. This can help you work out the natural zones that exist, e.g.

- Where do puddles always form? (Water play)
- Are there one or two spaces that are consistently muddy? (Mud play)
- Are there a slight incline (slope) and where does it lead to? (Water, construction, physical play)
- Are there any nooks and crannies which could be safely used with a little work, e.g. behind a shed, under a small tree with overhanging branches, inside or behind a shed? (Small world, social spaces, quiet areas)
- Any spots that are mainly in the shade all day, all year round? (Mud play, wildlife habitat)
- Any bright spots or sunny corners? (Sand play, construction)
- Open spaces (physical play, so long as it doesn't dominate the outdoor space)

Idea 3.3 Nooks, crannies and shelter

Be creative in your approach. It can be a place out of the wind, around a corner, behind a bush, etc. A large box can be a great place for a child to hide. Look for places where den building can happen. Other forms of shelter can be temporary such as popup tents or tipis for larger groups. They all work well as spaces for quieter activities such as reading or small world play.

Further reading: Shelter blog posts: <https://bit.ly/2AU2bP7>

Den building: Muddy Faces <https://bit.ly/2Qcd9Eo>

Idea 3.4 Transition area

This is both the area immediately inside your nursery and the area immediately outside. It conveys a strong message to children about what to expect in the outdoor space and the routines around its access. If your children aren't choosing or wanting to go out, then this is a key space to focus on. Ideally creating a freeflow system between your indoor and outdoor spaces is best for enabling children to make connections in their play and have choice over where it suits them best to learn.

Further reading: Kate Greenaway School blog post: <https://bit.ly/2DiBTY8>

Idea 3.5 Physical area

This includes space to climb, move, dance, run around, etc. Think about the development of big motor skills and spatial awareness. If your outdoor space is small, it may be the area beyond this, in the school grounds or a nearby park. Wheeled toys may be part of this physical area. In outdoor spaces that are poorly developed, often physical play will dominate and progression of experiences and learning is not visible.

Further reading: Design ideas for bikes and trikes: <https://bit.ly/2Fy2vHf>

Maths bike play: <https://bit.ly/2U3hxbc>

Every Child a Mover by Jan White <https://bit.ly/2ORkavy>

Idea 3.6 Mud

This area can be little or large. It is significantly more than a mud kitchen. There will be space for digging, small world play and larger experiences of mud. Child have the opportunity to experience messy play.

Further reading: Making a Mud Kitchen by Jan White <https://bit.ly/2RUvDOZ>

Idea 3.7 Biodiversity

This ensures that your outdoor space is a place for wildlife as well as learning and play. It includes spaces for gardening, creating habitats (homes) for birds, minibeasts and a range of plants. If you set up from scratch daily, consider plants that can come in and out with you – a portable garden. Or undertake gardening projects where the plants go home to be cared for. You could also look for an allotment or somewhere outwith your space where children can experience growing and nature.

Further reading: Gardening and biodiversity section of the Creative STAR blog: <https://bit.ly/2T1mocz>

Idea 3.8 Sand

This provides a sensory material that children can sculpt, dig, transport, manipulate and use in multiple ways. As a general rule, the bigger the sandpit the better. If you set up from scratch daily or have a tiny outdoor space, then you can put a bag of sand on a tarp. Try and ensure your children get to visit a beach too. Look for play parks to visit occasionally that have sandpits or look at options for visiting other local nurseries where there is good provision for sand play.

Further reading: Sandpits outside – challenging myths and misconceptions <https://bit.ly/2T3JL5o>

Highway Farm sandpit: <https://bit.ly/2RUwi2t>

Tyre sandpit: <https://bit.ly/2T1S1Tx>

Community Playthings literature: <https://bit.ly/2U1FXBA>

Idea 3.9 Water

This comes in a variety of forms outside: rain, snow, ice, puddles, steams, ponds and so on. The water experiences do not all need to be clumped together. When creating this area, look for where puddles form and the drainage of your outdoor space so that you don't inadvertently flood your cloakroom or create a major stream down an access path.

Further reading: Water play blog posts: <https://bit.ly/2CxbG6M>

Community Playthings literature: <https://bit.ly/2U1FXBA>

Idea 3.10 Our outdoor space is tiny

If your outdoor space is tiny, it could be that you have only one or two zones and that these evolve and change in line with the children's interests. For example, for a few weeks the play may be all about construction and building but eventually the use of water grows within this so, the set up moves into water play and investigations. From here, the children may enjoy the play with waterproof fabrics and water and this moves the play into den building.

It is also helpful to make the most of larger space nearby. For example, if your setting is part of a school, then use the school grounds as much as possible. Remember to make the most of nearby woodlands, parks, beaches and other green space.

Idea 3.11 When there is nothing natural in our outdoor space

Getting off-site to explore the local community and greenspace is highly beneficial to children. They need to develop a connection with nature and develop a sense of belonging both to nature and their community. Thus developing off-site provision is an essential part of your weekly or even daily offerings. Have a look at *Out to Play* national guidance to get going with this aspect of your provision.

Idea 3.12 Make the most of the affordance of your outdoor space for play

When children play in a space or play with an object, they experience it in a unique way. Rather than its intended purpose, they may view it in terms of its 'affordances'. American psychologist James J. Gibson (1979) suggested that environments and objects within them have values and meanings that are unique to the person perceiving them.

The 'affordances' of an object or space are all the things it has the potential to do or be. For example, a brick wall may be built to make a clear boundary between a pavement and a garden but for many children it would offer something to sit on, walk along, balance on, hide behind or jump off.

The concepts of variables and affordances come to life outside. The interplay between children and the loose parts, landscape, elements and seasons creates an ever-changing, growing, evolving play space, especially in natural environments that are loved and cared for. Furthermore, children experience a sense of freedom, space and autonomy that connects them to the land in an intimate way. Casey & Robertson (2019), p7.

Use the concept of affordance, to respond to your children's interests, perception of and use of the outdoor space.

Idea 3.13 Apply Tom Bedard's Elements to your set up.

Tom Bedard is a retired American early years educator who writes a weekly blog³ about children's explorations at the sand and water table in his room. He uses a set of elements which help him plan and make best use of the space in ways that respond to the needs of his children to manipulate, transport and investigate the available materials. These are discussed in detail in the *Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit* (2nd Edition) p42. This means planning for the space to be used at different levels, different positions and that children will move themselves and other items through the space.

The use of Tom's Elements can also be to progress and develop the learning that happens. By changing the height, level, surface, mode of transport, use of holes and flaps, the set up becomes more dynamic. It means you can observe your children and respond accordingly through tweaking and changing the elements.

Good blog posts that illustrate these elements are:

- The "sensori" water play station <http://bit.ly/38NwGUZ>
- What makes a brilliant mud kitchen? <http://bit.ly/2GMzaHd>

Idea 3.14 Pimp your play equipment

If you have a fixed piece of play equipment, then this can be given two-minute makeover to lift the learning possibilities. For example why not experiment with:

- Adding some fabric and leave plenty nearby to create the world's biggest den-making area
- Providing some resources that facilitate exploration of sound and music. This could be hanging up old instruments, attaching bells, creating drumming spaces, etc.
- Turning it into a water world. Have a look at this blog post for inspiration: <http://bit.ly/38NwGUZ>
- Making into a giant car park and small world play space for cars or a Jurassic Park Island for dinosaurs, etc.



Idea 3.15 Store your stuff ready-to-go

Experiment with:

- Little bags children that children can carry outside. Why not let them choose what to put inside these?
- Old suitcases: perfect for storing fabrics, small world play, etc. Children usually love to transport this.

³ Sand and Water Tables <http://tomsensori.blogspot.com>

- Shopping bags on wheels: they are more wobbly and need attaching to something to ensure they stay upright. These work well for gutting, pipes, etc.
- Inside out shopping bags. Look for ones with a plain inside. Turn the bags inside out so you can draw and write what is being carried. Have Velcro or karabiners or other bits that can attach these bags to a fence or daisy chain to stop them blowing away.

Idea 3.16 Create grab 'n' go tarp spaces

Add snap 'n' tap eyelets to an old small tarp. Using an in-and-out pattern, thread paracord or similar bright cord through the new eyelets. Use this to store favourite outdoor items. Outside, undo the cord, open up on the ground and you have a ready-to-go play space. Just don't over fill!



Idea 3.17 Set up your outdoor space with intent

To help children work out what is available and to create invitations to play, then you need to think about the presentation of your resources and where they are put in your outdoor space. Remember though, any resource should be able to be used almost anywhere. For example a hose is great for:

- Water flowing through it in a water play area.
- Talking to a friend between homemade dens.
- Role play around plumbing in a house
- Using as a musical instrument or for sound exploration anywhere.

Idea 3.18 Aim for 5-minute set-ups

Get all the team involved. Then everyone knows what is available and what is happening outside so that connections can be made between in the learning and play inside, outside and your local greenspace and community.

Idea 3.19 Create DIY daisy chains

Mark a cheap rope at 1-metre intervals. Tie loops at these intervals. Add additional ones between the loops. Put an old karabiner at either end for quick clipping to fence or lampposts. Add little bags of useful butts that can stay on the daisy chain.



Section 4: Routines and good habits

Idea 4.1 Observing, reflecting and responding to your children

In order to ensure your children have a high quality play experience, take the time to review how children are using the outdoor space and the resources that are available:

- Are some items more popular than others? If so which ones and why might this be? Reflect on what items encourage children to explore and investigate independently and which ones need modelled by an adult as a springboard to their use.
- Look at how and where your children interact with and use the space. Is there a particular place such as a wall or bench that is very popular and if so why? Are there places which are ignored and underused? What do your children think? Take photos, videos and discuss with the children.
- How do staff feel about the quality of the outdoor provision? Are their values and beliefs positively or negatively impacting on what happens there and how do you know? It may be worth sitting down together and reflecting using the reflective questions in this blog post: <http://bit.ly/2WeaAZc>

Idea 4.2 Tweak to transform

The theory of loose parts⁴ proposed by Simon Nicholson is all about children becoming designers and creators of space. When adults develop a space, Nicholson suggested that they have had all the fun, and therefore children have been cheated of a valuable creative experience. So, it is important that children have the freedom to change the set ups and have a genuine input into deciding what goes where, and also being free to manipulate and make changes.

As practitioners, our job is also to keep the play going. Making small ongoing changes and tweaks such as changing the incline of a ramp, investigating what happens and modelling the use of the space also matters. At times we may stand back and observe but at other times we may need to model a job, routine, the use of a space and be ready to intervene and join in the play where invited to do so.



Look how the addition of a few sticks onto the tarp changes the shadow pattern below.

Idea 4.3 Daily checklist of the outdoor space

This is useful so that general health and safety measures are in place *prior* to the children using it. Also, if you have part time or bank staff, it means they know what to do. Have a look at the example in this document: <http://bit.ly/2QgfUYb>.

Idea 4.4 Develop the setting up routines

If you are able to set up your outdoor space before your children arrive, then consider:

- Adding the expectations to the daily checklist so that new or bank staff also know what to do.
- Getting all staff involved. They all need to know and be familiar with what is happening outside to help children make connections in their learning.
- Allocating an equal amount of time to setting up outside as indoors.

⁴ Nicholson, S. (1971) *The Theory of Loose Parts: How Not to Cheat Children*, Landscape Architecture, p30-34
<https://media.kaboom.org/docs/documents/pdf/ip/Imagination-Playground-Theory-of-Loose-Parts-Simon-Nicholson.pdf>

Idea 4.5 Create a list of jobs and routines that need doing on a regular basis

Very often staff simply do not know what needs to be done outside. Have a look at the example in this document and adapt it for your outdoor space: <http://bit.ly/2QgfUYb>

Idea 4.6 Taking a toolkit outside

This is really useful for ongoing jobs or fixing broken items and can save you time and money. Almost all of the jobs can be undertaken with children as part of a drop-in planned routine task. You need to have the toolkit available at all times, in a place you can easily access but out of reach of children (not stuck in cupboard inside). This is what Juliet has in her toolbox, but you may have different and better ideas:

- **Scissors:** cutting card, snipping tape, Velcro, etc.
- **Wire cutters:** cutting wire (no kidding)!
- **Secateurs:** pruning shrubs and trees
- **Files/rasps:** for rounding off and filing down corners and edges of wood, guttering, etc. Muddy Faces stock ones for wood work
- **Sand paper:** for smoothing splintery wood and rough edges. A cork block or sticking a piece to some wood can also help.
- **Parcel tape, duct tape, masking tape, electrical tape, etc:** for a range of sticking jobs
- **Cutting knife:** the old-fashioned Stanley knife with changeable blades – adult use only.
- **Small power screwdriver:** easy insertion of screws.
- **Hammer:** child-sized ones are useful for most jobs.



Do your children and staff know what to do if an item gets broken? See p29 *Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit*, (2nd Ed). Get your record keeping up and running around the checks needed.

Idea 4.7 Starting every session every day outside

This is not radical stuff. It helps ensure you have a balance between indoor and outdoor experiences. It also means that all staff get to know what is happening outside and how connections can be made with any indoor provision. Children can arrive ready in their outdoor gear for playing outside or parents can help them get dressed into outdoor gear. For more information have a look at this blog post:

<http://bit.ly/37KpnNz>

Likewise, the opposite can happen. Finish every session outside. It means parents can see the fun and the learning that has happened.

Idea 4.8 Having snack outside weekly or more often

This helps children learn how to manage the skills of snack in different contexts. Keep the snack provision simple, such as a piece of fruit and a rice cake. If you are competent at campfire cooking, this can become part of your outdoor snack offering in due course.

Idea 4.9 Setting up a portable handwashing station outside

There are many options here which can be viewed on this blog post: <http://bit.ly/2SHfsCh> or this Pinterest board: <http://bit.ly/3d3bq0v>

Spa taps are particularly useful as children generally like them. They use very little water and children quickly learn how to use them independently. If children want to play with the spa tap, then set up another in a water play area so they learn that the handwashing station is for washing hands. Remember you may need a bucket to catch the grey water underneath the spa tap to dispose of it later. If you wrap the water bottle with bubblewrap or other insulation, the water will stay warmer for longer.



Idea 4.10 Setting up a portable toilet

This is essential if your toilet is inside and inaccessible without adult supervision. Children often love the portable toilet as it is easier for them too - they can get back to playing more quickly. The toilet is simply the equivalent of a potty so follow the *HPS Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines for Childcare Settings* guidance to keep this spotlessly clean and have handwashing facilities outside.

Remember to practice putting away a pop up toilet tent prior to using as it is an artform, if you are using one. Have a look at the *Out to Play* national guidance <http://bit.ly/2WXuYKJ> and this blog post for more information: <http://bit.ly/2SKfaKF> and this Pinterest post: <http://bit.ly/2WgPRUy>

Idea 4.11 Napping

A napping area can be set up using pop up tents and carry mats or raised beds. Alternatively, hammocks work well for many 3-5yr olds. Remember to follow *HPS Infection Prevention and Control in Childcare* guidelines around the bedding arrangements and check out the napping advice in *Out to Play* national guidance.

With hammocks, go for systems where the hammock can be quickly set up using toggles or clips. This can be a lot quicker if you are unsure of your knots. Always have soft surfacing underneath with no protrusions and shade and shelter from the elements – this may be as simple as putting up a soft tarp above the hammock.

Idea 4.12 Drying stuff before storing

This is one of the few golden rules. Wet resources can quickly degrade, rot and get really smelly. It is worth having systems in place to ensure you can dry wet resources after a rainy outdoor session.

Idea 4.13 Sequencing booklets

Many routines around outdoor play can be photographed and turned into simple instruction booklets or stories. This is functional literacy that children like especially if they are featured. They can provide the instructions for you to type or scribe too.

Idea 4.14 Singing songs

Singing songs to develop routines with children help them develop their language, mathematical and musical skills and confidence. The reason you are encouraged to sing a song when washing your hands is because it's a non-standard unit of time. You can also add in actions too!



Managing the mud and mess

Idea 4.15 Setting up a scrub-down station

Mud and mess is great outside but is best left there. Set up a simple scrubbing down station so children learn to remove the worst of the mud from their clothing and footwear. The children should do this whilst wearing their outdoor clothing and footwear. This may include:

- A range of scrubbers: go for a variety, ideally natural or donated items that children have to hold using a variety of grips and tensions to develop their fine motor skills.
- Biodegradable soap
- Warm water
- Tubs and buckets to hold water for this purpose – and a drain to dispose the water after use

To make it even more fun, setting up a spa tap and having a pump-action hose, such as a Mud Daddy (www.muddaddy.com) available will make this aspect of outdoor play, irresistible to many children.

Idea 4.16 Cleaning and washing resources.

The outdoor resources need to be attractive for children to use. Having a place set up outside where resources can be washed and dried as part of the outdoor fun for children. You will need:

- A range of scrubbers: go for a variety, ideally natural or donated items that children have to hold using a variety of grips and tensions to develop their fine motor skills.
- Biodegradable soap
- Warm water
- Tubs and buckets to hold water for this purpose. Individual ones can work as well as trays
- Possibly a brightly coloured washing line you can put up at child height and a range of clothes pegs.

Remember to develop a repertoire of good songs and use the time to chat with children. It should be a fun social activity rather than a chore. You will need to model how to wash things and hang them up. Do not expect children to stay for long session – so a little and often helps.

Idea 4.17 Outdoor clothing

This is the key investment for outdoor play. It is also the key limiting factor to preventing children access to outdoor play, either because they have no outdoor clothes or they are inappropriate, e.g. thin socks and wellies on a winter's day or no gloves. Do not scrimp on this aspect of provision, especially if parent won't or can't provide suitable clothing and accessories. Have a look at the following links to help you and your staff understand what is needed:

Skinted options

- Become best friends with local charity shops and ask them nicely if they will consider setting aside an outdoor clothing and accessories for your setting. Do fund raisers for them in return and flag up their donations in newsletters and social media.
- Have an annual outdoor clothing amnesty. Parents bring clothing and accessories their children have outgrown and pick up larger sizes. It works well at the end of each school year. Any unwanted gear can be donated to a local charity shop.
- Signpost parents to low cost local options. Aldi and Lidl at certain times of the year have sets of summer and winter waterproof clothing and footwear including winter boots and summer wellies.



If you do purchase clothing...

Involve children in decision-making. Let them trial samples. Be gender aware. Consider the environmental impact of your purchases and the ethics of the clothing supplier. Buy a range of sizes. Often children like variety and choice, so take account of their advice and preferences.

Remember outdoor clothing should be washed only occasionally otherwise they will lose their waterproof qualities if machine-washed lots. Get children used to scrubbing themselves down.

Section 5: Resources

Idea 5.1 Buyerarchy of Needs (with thanks to ©Sarah Lazarovic <http://longliveirony.com>)

This poster is a helpful guide to making decisions about acquiring resources. Putting it simply, buying is a last resort rather than a first resort.

- *Use what you have:* raid lost cupboards, find resources that may be suitable for outdoor play. If you have broken resources, examine them carefully and assign ones that can be taken apart to the tinkering table.
- *Borrow:* look at signing up to local toy libraries. Set up a sharing network within your local group of ELC settings or with childminding groups where resources are moved on every few months. So you buy less but share more.
- *Swap:* offer what you don't need to other ELC settings and vice versa. It could be a good professional opportunity to meet up and share experiences and outdoor practice too.
- *Thrift:* think about what you don't need and use and pass these on to other ELC Settings or to charity shops. What resources could be composted or recycled. Try and make putting them to a dump the last resort.
- *Make:* create simple, packaway structures such as DIY water walls, musical instruments, etc. – have a look at the ideas below.
- *Buy:* put in place a protocol for buying locally-made, natural materials in the first instance. Also consider the worker's conditions and pay, the environmental values of the organisation and other ethical considerations.



Idea 5.2 Think diversity and abundance

Rather than go for packs or sets of items that are all the same, e.g. a set of plastic or wooden clothes pegs, go for a variety of sizes, shapes, densities, colours and so on. There are a number of advantages to doing this:

- Every time a child goes to use an item, they have to make a decision: is it fit for purpose? Is it the item I'm looking for? Problem solving and decision making happen naturally.
- The variety you get helps with language development – the children will learn the descriptive language. This is also learning about the attributes or properties of the different items. This helps with mathematical vocabulary and comparing and contrasting. It also helps with learning about technology and the function and purpose of different materials, designs and so on.
- You can put a call out for donations from family, friends, local businesses and staff.
- It can help children make a connection between the stuff they have at home and how it can be re-used for play purposes.

Idea 5.3 Have your little bits in bags and introduce them one at a time

Do this slowly, step-by-step children so they learn how to use the bits and where to put them back. Useful bits and bobs could include:

- Velcro straps: <http://bit.ly/2HRWMNk>
- Washing line (wire free)
- High vis guy ropes, nylon braid of different widths, paracord
- Shock cord: loose, bungee cord karabiners, ball bungees and shockcord ties, wide knicker elastic
- Karabiners of different sizes: local climbers may have some they no longer use, great for connecting and clipping together.
- Pegs: clothes pegs, tent pegs, etc.
- Little pulleys



Idea 5.4 Build up collections of natural materials

There are lots of natural materials which can be collected for free. You need to ensure you follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and any other collection codes or by-laws that exist. It may also be necessary to see landowner permission. You need to collect sustainably, taking only a few items at a time to ensure the ecological impact of collecting is minimal. Useful natural materials include: stones, sticks, leaves, cones and shells.

You can ask families to help you do this. For example, you could ask parents and children to find up to 10 sticks no bigger than their wrist to their elbow to bring into nursery. Have a look at these nature play ideas for starters to invite children to play with materials in different ways: <http://bit.ly/3aWXnrz>

As much as possible, display or present these resources in natural containers. So if you need to use bags – calico cotton ones work well.

Idea 5.5 Quick drying fabrics

When putting a call out for fabrics, request quick drying items. Build up a diversity of sizes, textures, colours and so on. This facilitates conversations, decision making and problem solving.

- Fleece provides extra warmth during cold months as do child-sized sleeping bags
- Organza and netting enables children to be seen but provides a feeling of privacy.
- Ripstop nylon useful for kite making and all-round good fun.
- Any lengths of stretchy material have additional play value such as lycra
- Smaller pieces good for capes and dressing up

- Wrap around hoops, and pine cones for floaty experiences – strange but true
- Use to make flags!
- Freebie flags are surprisingly useful
- Any donated old sheets can always be used for art activities
- Scarves and small pieces of material also of use to accessorise when dressing up.



Idea 5.6 Water play

Water play work well in lots of spaces. It provides a sensory experience all year round and the learning happens across all curriculum areas. Make the most of naturally forming puddles, nearby gentle streams and other water forms that are suitable for your children to access. The above photo shows many water features that are straightforward to create that provide hours of fun.

Idea 5.7 Providing sufficient water when you don't have an outside tap or water butt

- 10-litre canisters with a tap at the bottom are a good way to provide water. The trick is to hang them on a fence or secure them to a bench using super strong Velcro. This prevents them being moved and emptied. Many children enjoy learning how to control the flow of water and want to help fill them up in the morning.
- Larger canisters can be too heavy to lift and hang up.
- Warm water is more pleasant on cold days.
- Always have a bucket or container underneath the canister so that water is captured for re-use.

Idea 5.8 Pop up water walls

Children can make this with support from an adult. It is an ideal opportunity for them to use a mallet. In addition to the 1.2 x 1.8m tarp you need:

- 20 (or more) large snap 'n' tap eyelets <http://bit.ly/2U79POV>
- A lightweight mallet
- Pair of scissors
- Several black ball bungees <http://bit.ly/33gsQCt>

Each child decides where they wish to place their eyelet. The flat part goes under the tarp. The curved part goes on top of the tarp and match up. Make a cross in the tarp with the scissors. The child then taps the eyelet until it clicks together. Trim the edges of the hole.

Once you have twenty holes, the ball bungees can be threaded through some of the holes. These can be moved about as needed. Attach the tarp to a fence or between two posts and pop in some guttering, pipes and hoses into the ball bungees. Remember to put buckets or planters below the guttering to catch the water for re-use.

Idea 5.9 Splash pools

This is a quick approach to creating miniature pools for water play at ground levels using tarp and tyres. You can make single splash pools or put several together. They are generally quite challenging to tip over, so the water tends to stay put – unless it is pumped out. Have a look at this blog post for more information: <http://bit.ly/39R19CL>

Idea 5.10 Water pumps and holders

Children enjoy the cause and effect of water pumps and this one is particularly efficient. The children have to work hard to get the water out, but it is immensely satisfying for them once they have got the hang of using one: <http://bit.ly/33iwwU9> . Another cheap resource that also helps young children explore water flow is a bucket water holder: <http://bit.ly/2qN1UeQ>

Idea 5.11 Water ramps and inclines

Guttering, hoses and pipes are well known approaches. Exploring different types of ramps and inclines adds to the variety and keeps the play going. Experiment with the following:

- Corrugated PVC plastic – both vertically and horizontally
- Waterproof materials including tarps – transparent ones are particularly interesting
- Putting a 10-litre water canister at the top of a slide – ensure that children can't slide down that it's more for blocking the water and whooshing other objects down.
- Rolling up a camping or yoga mat vertically and securing with Velcro to make a flexible large tube.
- Adding bubblewrap of different sizes to the above.

Idea 5.12 Homemade sprinklers and water fountains

Plastic soda/water bottles are useful for water play. With care, heat the sharp end of a needle. And poke it through the bottle top. Do this several times in each bottle top. Fill up with water and enjoy the squeazy water play. These bottles can also be inserted upside down into pot plants so they can be watered during the holidays.

Idea 5.13 Pulleys

Pulleys are useful for transporting items in a different way, be this vertically, horizontally or on an incline. They also encourage children to stretch, use their shoulder and upper body muscles. Pulleys come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

- Baskets and buckets can be attached.
- They are easy to pack away and put up. Go for smaller ones known as swivel pulleys as they will turn around and so do not get so easily twisted.
- To attach pulleys, Velcro is quick and can be left in pulley when packed away. If you find a particularly good spot outside, cut the rope to size and leave this within the pulley set up too.
- When setting up a horizontal line, be aware that some children will try and swing on the line. Either put it sufficiently high that this can't happen, or too low. Put it over a soft surface such as grass. Check there's nothing protruding that children could fall onto or holes or other trip hazards.
- Use brightly coloured rope so that you and your children can see it. High vis guy rope is fluorescent and reflective in the dark too.
- Remember to include this in a risk benefit assessment for rope, string and long things.



Idea 5.14 Tarding up your old tarps

When your have a tarp is showing signs of wear and tear you could breathe a new lease of life into the sheet. For example:

- Replace the worn eyelets with snap 'n' tap ones which are a bit more robust. Alternatively pop a cork or a cone into the corner of the tarp. Wrap it there and hold it in place with a piece of cord. You can now continue to use the tarp. Shockcord elastic has a bit more give, and so is less likely to result in your tarp being ripped to shreds on a windy day around the eyelets.
- If you have holes in your tarp, create mathematical tarps with interesting shapes. This blog post gives you instructions: <http://bit.ly/2UaU3Ft>
- You could also add simple shapes. These are held in place by clear duct tape.
- If you get a heap of bubblewrap or similar packaging, then stick it onto a tarp and observe the play that happens. If lots of the bubbles are popped, peg it at an incline and add a trickle of coloured water from a 10 litre canister hung above it.



- Transparent tarps have a high play value and are worth the extra cost. Stick coloured cellophane from sweet wrappers using clear duct tape and enjoy exploring the different colours of light.
- Little children are often happy with small tarps. Big ones can be harder to handle, especially on windy days.
- For more tarp ideas, have a look at these blog posts: <http://bit.ly/2vUFHyb>



Idea 5.15 Creating, making and exploring sound and music outside

Music and sound exploration lend themselves nicely to packaway outdoor play. Think about how sounds are created. This happens when objects or instruments are used in several ways such as:

- Tapping, flicking or banging a surface
- Shaking an object
- Scraping slowly or quickly along or over a surface
- Plucking or pulling such as the wire on a fence
- Pressing or pushing such as doorbells
- Blowing through, in or across something such as putting a blade of grass between our thumbs or creating a dandelion trumpet <https://youtu.be/Ckr2NpVwnaY>
- Snapping something such as our fingers or maybe the sound of breaking a stick

Go around your outdoor space looking for possibilities that exist for practising these skills. Then look at your packaway resources – many of these will afford additional opportunities. This goes way beyond the bish-bong-bang of a few saucepans and lids.

Idea 5.16 DIY musical instruments

Homemade instruments created from household junk and other free and found materials are a useful way of helping children explore sound. The photo below illustrates some particularly quick and simple examples:

1. Sticks: These are natural beaters. The ones in the photo can double up as claves if held correctly <https://youtu.be/HaMcOwWUNWI> These have been made from green hazel wood, which means they were cut live from a hazel tree.

2. Tiny tyre drum: Parcel tape is useful for creating drums with free and found resources. This has been wrapped both sides of the hollow. It works best when held between the knees.

3. Ball in see-through tube: This is a very simple visual rattle that can be useful for very young children to watch as well as hear and feel. You may need to seal the ends.

4. Guttering drum: This one is made from masking tape covered with clear duct tape. In theory this is not a good choice of skin, but in reality this is a tough drum that has lasted years!

5. Coconut shells: A good reason to eat coconuts are to get the shells afterwards – double check that no child has an allergy. These have a limited shell life but are great for clippety-clop sounds.

6. Bottle tops in bags: This is wonderful for a metallic shaker. I used a silicone lunch bag but a small, good quality plastic bag would work equally well. Children can hammer bottle tops flat and holes can be drilled in them to further the range of bottle top instruments.

7. Castanets: These have been made from wood cookie tied together with an elastic band. A simple knot separates the cookies to provide the tension needed.

8. Water canister drum: Use a beater with an empty canister. These can be a range of sizes. It's a good use for a leaky canister that is beyond repair.

9. Sticky shell box: This has been made with clear sticky tape over a food container. The tiny shells stick to the tape and have to be flicked off. As this happens a lovely noise is made. This is great for children who like cause and effect.

10. Tiny tube rattles: Small plastic tubes – these ones were for storing vitamins can be useful for children to make their own. You may need to seal the ends with glue or tape if you wish the contents to remain inside.

11. Plastic shaker: This is an old plastic container with a screw top lid. It enables children to see what is making the noise which can be helpful for many children to make this connection.

12. Elastic 'guitar': This is a biscuit tin with three different thicknesses of elastic band. Pluck and play on both sides.

13. Toilet tube rattles: Seal the end of a toilet tube with masking tape. Pop in an object and seal the other end in a way that is perpendicular to the other. This creates space for the object to move. Children enjoy making these for each other to work out what is inside.



Finally

Within this website and during any of my training sessions you will find lots of ideas and accompanying photos that contain elements of risk. It is important that you consider all the suggestions on a case-by-case basis to determine whether they are appropriate for the developmental age and learning needs of your children.

You also need to ensure that you are suitably competent and confident to ensure the routines, resources and environment are as safe as necessary. Remember to undertake a risk-benefit assessment for anything you feel needs it, be this using tools and ropes, experiencing fire, climbing trees and other experiences involving heights, moving heavy objects, working off-site, near water and so-on. Creative STAR Learning is all about enabling great outdoor practice but every educator and establishment needs to undertake this within a framework of safety.

Likewise it is important that wherever you are working you follow the land access laws of your country . Being respectful of others, leaving no trace of your presence and considering the impact of your practice on the environment are all part of your responsibilities as educators.

About Juliet

Juliet is an educational consultant who specialises in outdoor learning and play. Previously, she was the head teacher of three schools ranging in size from 6 to 277 pupils. Juliet has worked at a national level since 2008 writing case studies, documents and doing behind the scenes work to help shape strategy and support for schools and ELC establishments. This includes heading up the team that wrote the Education Scotland document, *Outdoor Learning: A Practical Guide for Scottish Teachers and Practitioners* (2011), co-authoring *Loose Parts Play – A Toolkit* (2016 & 2019) and being part of the Scottish Government strategy group that created *A Play Strategy for Scotland* (2013). Most recently, Juliet contributed to *Out to Play* (2018), a Scottish early years document supporting practitioners to develop off-site provision in local greenspace.



Juliet is in heavy demand world-wide for her practical training. Since 2008, she has been one of the key people behind the scenes that has worked with Scottish Forestry staff to develop the SQA Forest Kindergarten award.

She is the author of two award-winning and best-selling books: *Dirty Teaching: A Beginner's Guide to Learning Outdoors* (2014) and *Messy Maths: An Outdoor, Playful Approach for Early Years* (2017). Her website, Creative STAR Learning is a source of information and support with more than one million visitors in the past four years. Juliet continues to work directly with staff and children in many ELC settings in the North-East of Scotland looking at practical ways to achieve excellent outdoor practice.

Please get in touch if you wish to know more about the training and support she offers to ELC settings and primary schools. Email: info@creativestarlarning.co.uk

See you on the outside! - Juliet@CreativeSTAR