



Section 2

About this guide

2.1 Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is written primarily for all professionals working with children in ELC or at early level in schools. This includes ELC practitioners, childminders, teachers working at Early Level, playworkers and practitioners who work in school aged childcare (SACC) for young children. Throughout the guidance, the term 'practitioner' is used to collectively represent the workforce.

While the guide is primarily aimed at early primary and ELC settings, much of it is relevant for others providing play experiences in an outdoor environment. It will also be of interest to decision makers with responsibilities for developing outdoor play and learning and/or sustainable cultures and approaches.

2.2 Aims of this guidance

- To support practitioners to critically reflect upon their own understanding, perceptions and values about outdoor and indoor places. In doing so we may need to reframe and rethink our everyday practice, relationships and interactions.
- To use inclusive and sustainable approaches that value children and our own need to feel a sense of attachment and belonging to our communities, which includes the natural world.
- To ensure the rights of a child are a core part of our sustainable approach. This includes observing how they play in a space, listening to and then acting upon their suggestions, followed by critical reflection – a 'child-led' approach.
- To provide practical advice about caring for our outdoor spaces. It is about the "what" of maintaining a site and also the "how" this happens.

Every child has a right to play outside and belong to their local places and community. Additional Support for Learning and the importance of equality and diversity are considered throughout the text and are integral to how children are perceived, involved and empowered in their outdoor spaces. **Out to Play Section 11: Practitioners Supporting Children with Additional Support Needs** provides useful practical advice for practitioners.

"It is essential that we regularly evaluate how children are using the spaces within the environment and make changes and additions when required. Children should be involved in developing and caring for their environment. By involving children fully in planning their learning they will begin to understand the importance of caring for their environment and resources."

([Realising the Ambition](#), 2020, p54)

"Where we spend our time has an important effect on our lives and our wellbeing. Improving the quality of places and the opportunities we have access to can help to tackle inequalities."

(The [Place Standard tool](#))



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2.3 Using this guidance

The guidance has been designed to be dipped into rather than read from cover to cover. It takes time to develop an ethic of care and understanding of places, so practitioners are encouraged to use this guidance to take small steps, and gradually build their experience and understanding. Practitioners do not need to be experts in the outdoors to care for our places and practitioners of all levels can be part of developing a pedagogy of sustainability. Throughout Scotland there are local authority early years teams, outdoor education professionals and a range of partner organisations who can provide a variety of support and advice to practitioners about playing and learning outside.

Of course the range of ELC provision throughout Scotland varies hugely and reflects the diversity of place and its landscape, location and cultures. Therefore, not every aspect of this guidance will be relevant for every childcare setting. For example, the sections on beaches, sand dunes and rockpools will primarily be used by those based within easy reach of a seashore.

2.4 Terms used in this guidance

We use the following terms throughout this guidance.

- **'Outdoor space'** encompasses all the outdoor environments which children access. This varies enormously and includes everything from a domestic back garden, the outdoor space of a setting (asphalt or naturalised), a school playground, a park, a beach, allotment, field, patch of scrub, reclaimed land, botanical garden, special areas like a nature reserve or national park or other urban or rural greenspace in various states of use and care. All settings will have access to outdoor space and use for this guidance.
- **'Landowner'** encompasses the organisation or individual that owns the outdoor space. Often the landowner, such as a local authority, estate or private organisation will have a representative that we liaise with who has management responsibilities for the site. For example, this could be a countryside ranger team. In school-based ELC settings, the outdoor space is normally managed on a day-to-day basis by the head teacher and/or the janitor. Some aspects of maintenance are devolved to the setting, other elements are the responsibility of the local authority. As practitioners we need to understand our specific processes and know who we can turn to for advice and permissions about our outdoor spaces.
- **'Sustainable'** to describe our practice which purposefully creates and cares for the spaces that we play for the benefit of all species that live there or visit at the present and in the future.



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2.5 Considering risk

Throughout the guidance there are examples of practice that contain elements of risk and a sensible and proportionate approach to risk is needed when applying the guidance. As practitioners:

- We have an ongoing and developing awareness of our own competences and confidence to manage these identified risks and ensure the routines, resources and environment are as safe as necessary.
- We work with each other, the wider community and our children to ensure everyone takes personal responsibility, communicates effectively and looks out for each other when concerns emerge.
- We know our children, their developmental ages and needs and take this into account.
- We are also able to undertake risk-benefit assessments for any situation we feel demands this. The Scottish Government (2018) **Out to Play** has a suggested list along with links, guidance and advice about health and safety which applies when Caring for our Outdoor Places too.
- Watch these short **videos** for more on dynamic **risk-benefit assessments** in practice.
- The Care Inspectorate have a set of helpful practice notes around keeping children safe – these can be accessed here: **practice-notes**.
- This includes information on the Care Inspectorate's **SIMOA** campaign keep children safe by raising awareness of how, and why, they could leave a childcare setting without a responsible adult.