



Section 3

The importance of values and sustainable outdoor practice

3.1 Valuing the outdoors

Scotland's national outcomes

"We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential"

"We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment"

"We are healthy and active"

Why do values matter?

"As practitioners, we need to value the essential and special nature of outdoors. Outdoor provision needs equal status, equal time and equal thinking to indoor provision."

(White & Edwards, 2018)

Our personal values, beliefs and motivations underpin our professional approach - that is what we do and why we do it. Every one of us plays our part in making our outdoor provision the best it can be and protecting it for our children and their future.

Our values support and guide us and underpin our practice. They need to be relevant to our provision and the community it serves and enable LfS to flow through our ethos. We help parents to understand why the outdoors and sustainability are so important to us. [Section 3.2](#) is all about LfS, what it is and why it matters.

"Values change as we are influenced by other people, experiences and environments. What children encounter in their early years will shape the framework of their values for life."

(Davy, 2019)

Values that support caring for our spaces

We cannot separate children from their environment so caring for children effectively requires caring for the spaces in which they play. This means adopting a range of inclusive approaches in sensitive ways which don't inhibit children's free play and builds upon their interests and curiosities.

Many laws that are in place to look after our land are based upon the values of respect and responsibility. Guidance is available to help us, such as the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#). With ensuring children's right to play outside comes the responsibility of looking after these places as an everyday part of what we do outdoors. This needs to be embedded into the routines, experiences and interactions with our children.

Reciprocal relationships are vital for our well-being. These involve mutual give and take and may require effort on our part to establish and maintain. Have a look at [Section 4.2 Developing reciprocity](#) to see why this matters when embedding values that support sustainability into our practice.

A pedagogy for sustainability

LfS needs to underpin our values and practice. This will differ for every provider as it is unique to our outdoor spaces and community. Enabling all children to have the time and space outside to respond to what matters personally to them is fundamental to their making sense of sustainability. Through doing this, new ways of thinking, imagining and creating possibilities also emerge.



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3.2 Learning for sustainability (Lfs)

What is Lfs?

“The term “Learning for Sustainability”, coined in Scotland, is now gaining traction in other countries as a cross curricular approach which enables learners, educators, learning settings and their wider community to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society; and as an effective whole-setting approach which weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development and outdoor learning to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences.”

(“Target 2030” A movement for people, planet and prosperity: Learning for Sustainability Action Plan 2023 – 2030)

Lfs weaves together three key themes; global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning, to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences. Particularly in the Early Years, outdoor learning is the gateway to understanding and appreciating each theme of Lfs, which continues to be developed throughout the rest of a child's years in education.

Being outside and being actively involved in creating and caring for our outdoor spaces, we can help our children make sense of the complex world in which we live through embracing all that Lfs entails.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

“These 17 interconnected goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. *The scale of the undertaking, to address the SDGs and particularly to ‘learn our way’ towards a sustainable future, is considerable and requires long-term, sustained commitment*”

(Vision 2030+, 2016)



Find out more

- Inspiring Scotland have outdoor play [videos](#) which include examples from Out of School Care Clubs and outdoor nurseries
- Holmes, T. et al (2011) [The Common Cause Handbook](#), Public Interest Research Centre. Free to download
- For more information on outdoor learning in the context of Lfs visit [Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub](#)



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- For examples of how settings consider the **sustainable management** of spaces that are regularly used for learning and play there are two **videos** from Learning through Landscapes and Outdoor Woodland Learning

Why does LfS matter?

In 2020, the Scottish Government commissioned, **The Educational Outcomes of Learning for Sustainability: A Brief Literature Review**. The following highlights from this report are particularly relevant to caring for outdoor places:

Outdoor learning and time spent outdoors are fundamental to embedding LfS.

Pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours are developed by effective LfS deliver.

LfS supports the development of critical thinking skills. It can help children to uncover and unpick complex interdisciplinary issues. It can also support creativity, allowing learners to imagine solutions to existing and emerging issues. This is an opportunity to develop and practice skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly fast-paced, uncertain world.

Fostering an emotional connection to nature through time spent outdoors is particularly important.

LfS can help children to explore, experience and come to know themselves, their connection to the world around them and the contributions they can make to society now and for the future.

LfS is an excellent context through which all aspects of Realising the Ambition and Curriculum for Excellence can flourish, especially the 'four capacities', that is: confident individuals, successful learners, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

The importance of appropriate real-world and outdoor learning environments.

That to make sense of the complexity of the world, we need to look at issues holistically and in terms of relationships.

LfS is more than an environmental agenda. It is also about social justice, children's rights and offers a range of ways to engage, challenge and progress issues of inequity, disadvantage, justice and community cohesion.



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In June 2023 the Scottish Government launched a refreshed **Learning for Sustainability Action Plan** which focuses on a bold new “Target 2030” Vision for every learning setting in Scotland (school and early learning setting) to be a Sustainable Learning Setting by 2030.

In order to ensure that children’s views were reflected in this Action Plan, the Children’s Parliament were commissioned to engage with children across Scotland on why Learning for Sustainability is important to them and what they would like to see improved or changed about the current offer.

The **calls to action** from the Children’s Parliament investigation are:

1. All children should have the chance to learn outdoors throughout the school year
2. Outdoor learning should be part of every school subject
3. Adults in school and adults who decide what we learn, need to learn about the climate emergency too
4. Children are passionate about climate change; their views, ideas and opinions should be included in how and what they learn about this subject
5. Scottish Government should take urgent action to protect and respect trees and the natural environment
6. Children and adults should have opportunities to work together on children’s rights, climate change and sustainability
7. Scottish schools should have links to other schools around the world.