



## Section 6

### Embedding care for our outdoor spaces into our experiences

#### 6.19 Fire experiences

##### Why this matters

For thousands of years, humans have used fire within their lives for warmth, light, cooking, protection and as a focal point for social gatherings. These are important, nourishing activities. Simultaneously, we need to be mindful of the impact on wildlife and habitats as well as the air pollution caused by particulates and the release of carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere.

##### Building upon prior learning

Ensure you offer a range of fire experiences that start with children's interests and curiosities about fire.

- Find out how your children's families experience fire. Then you can ensure you take account of any sensitivities around fire and who has competence and experience of fire. This also includes staff.
- Consider how your planned fire explorations connect to wider society and culture; including empowering children and their families to know what to do should a fire start in their homes.

##### Before you begin

Thorough preparation is essential. The Outdoor and Woodland Learning Scotland **Fire Guidance** is a useful reference.

- Let your local fire service know when and where you're having a fire. You may have neighbours who need to know. Have a system for putting out the fire.
- Ensure you are competent to lead this activity and have undertaken a risk benefit assessment.
- Follow Scottish Outdoor Access Code (**SOAC**) guidance.

- Bring supplies of tinder, kindling and dry firewood onto the site if there is a scarcity of suitable wood which can be gathered.
- Avoid the use of deadwood which is a vital part of a healthy woodland habitat.
- Avoid the use of living wood: this means deliberately stripping trees of branches that are still growing.
- Learning through Landscapes and Outdoor and Woodland Learning have two short videos to share how **different settings** approach planning safe **fire experiences**.

##### Reflective thoughts

- Who wants to light a fire? Is this an adult-led desire or based upon genuine interest from our children?
- Do we have a clear rationale for fire play and other experiences that is based on the maturity of our children and their ability to make sense of what is happening?
- What are our children learning from how we facilitate fire experiences? What words are staff using? Are these controlling and prohibiting or enabling language during the conversations that happen?
- In what ways can older children be involved in the teaching of younger children about fire?
- In what ways are we changing our practice as our own and our children's competencies grow?



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#### The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) states:

- Wherever possible, use a stove rather than light an open fire.
- If you do wish to light an open fire, keep it small, under control and supervised – fires that get out of control can cause major damage, for which you might be liable.
- Never light an open fire during prolonged dry periods or in areas such as forests, woods, farmland, or on peaty ground or near to buildings or in cultural heritage sites where damage can be easily caused.
- Heed all advice at times of high risk.
- Remove all traces of an open fire before you leave.
- Seeking landowner permission, ensuring you follow local guidance and by-laws where they exist is a must, on or off-site.

#### The Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC)

##### Why not:

- Save making hot drinks over the fire as part of a special experience? You can bring warm drinks in flasks as part of your routine on a colder day.
- Use designated fire pits or barbecue sites where they exist. You may also wish to create one, where it's appropriate to do so.
- Seek out stoves that burn the minimum amount of fuel.
- Consider alternative explorations of fire as part of your overall approach, for example, cooking over a tealight.

- Find campfire recipes and snacks which are litter-free from start to finish – often they are likely to be more healthy options.
- Discover how fire was traditionally used in the past or within the range of cultures that exist in your group. Are there legends and folklore that can be shared?

“We only use dry seasoned wood supplied by a friendly tree surgeon for our fire. He also keeps us stocked with a pile of wood chip so that we can resurface our footpaths when they get too worn and to protect the ground a bit better.”

(Zoe Sills, Earthtime Forest School Nurseries)

#### Making a positive difference

Pick your site carefully to minimise impact, for example:

- No nearby animal dens, e.g., badger set, rabbit burrows. Fire can be frightening for other species too.
- No overhanging branches – a high tree or no tree canopy.
- Consider ground conditions: no exposed roots, enough space to move around the fire area and avoid peaty soil.
- Remove nearby dead wood, ground debris, leaves and flammable litter from the campfire area prior to lighting a fire.
- Use a fire bowl or other safe method of raising the fire above ground.
- Keep the fire away from other ongoing play activities. Use of temporary boundary markers if needed.



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- Ensure the area is sufficiently sheltered.
- Remove all ash, charcoal and burned wood from the site.
- Replace turf and ground cover as you found it.

#### Note

In some ELC settings, a fire pit may be a permanent much-loved feature and a constant visible presence that adds much learning and play value. It is the practice and ethos that matters.

“Many children aged 3-6 years old are developmentally ready and are fascinated by fire so we need to interact and extend their understanding appropriately. We would start with candles set in a tray of water, to understand the basics whilst interacting with a staff member. Then they could move on to using the fire bowl with small groups outside in the garden. This would start with teaching about materials, building the fire, fire safety and then the experience. This might include cooking small foil wrapped new potatoes or toast. Once it was linked to stories about the Great Fire of London. On another occasion it was linked to poetry and music about fire for a different creative approach. Finally linking to the celebration of various festivals which celebrate light in the late autumn months the whole setting could share in Diwali, Hanukkah and Guy Fawkes in a safe but engaging fashion.”

(Solly, 2019)



#### Find out more

- [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)
- [Out to Play, Section 6.4.6](#)
- Connecting nature with children – [fire building](#)
- [OWL Scotland Fire guidance](#)
- [Forest School Association – woodsmoke inhalation](#)

#### 6.20 Creating and constructing

##### Why it matters

On and off-site, children and practitioners enjoy creating temporary structures. These could be:

- Small world fantasy or imaginative play
- Den building
- Biodiversity features such as bird boxes, meadows and log piles
- A building project for a group that involves tool work or erecting rope structures and swings. See [Section 6.6 Trees and shrubs](#)

Such activities may require consideration of wildlife and the environment. Little changes to practice can make a difference to the ecological impact.

Creating and constructing may need a risk benefit assessment and dynamic risk assessment throughout the creative process. There can be hidden hazards which we can mitigate, such as fall heights, sufficient working space, the correct use of knots, structural stability and so on. Refer to the links in “Find out more” for advice.