



Section 6

Embedding care for our outdoor spaces into our experiences

- 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.



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This section does not include installations or items fixed in place with concrete and other more permanent approaches. Those structures would require landowner discussions and permission.

Building upon prior learning

Observing children find material – be this natural or man-made – in their environment and using it in their play is the starting point. Children like to shape and manipulate their environment. In doing so, a space takes on personal meaning and fosters attachments between a child and the place.

It may take several sessions, but it is worth observing what is being created, by whom and where:

- Where are children finding the materials for building?
- What is the impact of our building work on the surrounding area?
- Do our structures create conflict? For example, are there rules which hurt our feelings and if so, in what ways?
- Is the building work happening in places which disrupt other's use of the space, including the needs of wildlife?
- How do we enjoy playing with or using what we create?
- What other animals are also building and creating structures? Can you find nests, holes or other evidence of their activity?

If children are building special places such as dens, be courteous and check the rules of use. For example, no adults may be allowed inside.

Reflective thoughts

- What access do our children have to a broad range of constructing and creating opportunities, such as rope structures, tool use and woodworking?
- How do we look after the places where building structures happens? Do we replenish natural materials used and give spaces time to recover, where needed?
- How much time do children have to experiment, build structures and to play in them – what needs are being met when this happens?
- In what ways do we view what is happening from a child's perspective?

“HSCS 2.27 As a child, I can direct my own play and activities in the way that I choose, and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable for my age and stage, which stimulate my natural curiosity, learning and creativity.”

“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)



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Should it stay or should it go?

- In some spaces, it's okay to leave creations in place from day to day. In others, you may have to dismantle these and return the area to its original state.
- This management of the space, the nature of the structures created and how other visitors perceive and are able to access the constructions will impact on your decisions. Common sense and consulting your landowner is essential.
 - 💬 How can we remember what our site looks like when we arrived?
 - 💬 What do we need to do to ensure it looks the same before we leave?
 - 💬 I wonder what the plants and animals who live here would find most helpful?
- If your children are proud of their creations, support them to photograph, draw or capture their constructions so that the next time they visit, it is possible for them to recreate what they have made.
- Why not photograph your work and we can add this to your journal with advice about how you created it?

Stay local

In your immediate outdoor space, you may need collections of materials to support children to construct and create. Often arboriculturists, tree surgeons and local authority tree services have spare branches, wooden disks or other natural wood items that you can have for free or a small charge. Whilst these will need replenished from time to time, it keeps the acquisition of materials local reducing transport and environmental costs of buying from afar. Do any of our parents, families or friends have materials we could use for constructing? How could we find out?

Help your group work out how and where is okay to create and construct:


- Some ground is too fragile and could be damaged by the increased trampling and footfall; other surfaces can cope better. See Section **6.5 Footfall and trampling**.
- Blocking paths and access routes may not be okay:
 - 💬 I'm worried about using this area to build a rope bridge. It's crossing a path that other people will need to use. Let's find a better place to do this.




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- Thinking about how items are attached or held in place. For example, avoid damaging tree bark by rubbing rope or nailing items to it. Children are often unaware of the importance of bark to a living tree.
- The visibility of structures needs consideration particularly for young children, those with mobility needs or sensory impairments. For example, using high visibility guy ropes can reduce trip hazards.
- Being aware of how natural loose parts are being used in greenspace sites as part of the building and creative processes. Refer to **Section 6.8 Gathering and using natural materials**:

 I wonder how this tree feels about its growing branches being cut off its trunk?

 Is there something else we can use instead?

“Safety should always be a consideration when you’re building, but don’t lose sight of progression and the adventure in what you are doing.”

(Cameron Sprague, Stramash Fort William Outdoor Nursery)



Find out more

- See the section on tool use and creating semi-permanent play structures in Casey, T. and Robertson, J. (2019) **Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit. Loose Parts Play Toolkit 2019 edition - Inspiring Scotland**
- Muddy Faces have a useful downloads about den building **den building - Activities Category**
- **Play Wales**: information and advice
- **Play Scotland**