



## Section 6

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

#### 6.21 Antisocial behaviours, including vandalism

##### Why this matters

Anti-social behaviour covers a range of activities that cause annoyance to, and disapproval from, others. A common example is using our immediate outdoor places for socialising out of hours. Whilst this may be a good use of available space, it may not be left as found. Not all 'anti-social behaviour' is intentional or malicious.

Vandalism is the deliberate destruction of, or damage to, public or private property. It's costly, unsightly and frustrating to have to deal with.

There are many reasons why vandalism or antisocial behaviour happens. Working out the source can be helpful to reduce the occurrence. Ongoing fly tipping is very different to a few cans being left in a gathering space.

Some behaviours may appear "bad" but may indicate a developmental need which can be addressed. For example, accessing roofs could indicate a desire climbing or seeking of heights, good views, a sense of space and adventure. Developing community partnerships beyond your setting can enable creative approaches to mitigating issues.

There is evidence that ELC groups *reduce antisocial behaviour by adding value to this place within the wider community* especially when they show care for their site. (Martin, 2021)

##### Building upon prior learning

Children may witness vandalism or the after-effects of anti-social behaviour in the places where they play.

- Children notice changes that have happened in their space or when out and about in their community. Make it part of your routines to tune in, e.g.,
  - 🗣️ What's changed since the last time we visited?
  - 🗣️ What do you notice?
- This can also help you see the space from their perspective.
- The above gives rise to comments and questions from children. Take your time to genuinely listen and help the group make sense of the situation, on their terms and in their way according to their levels of maturity and understanding. Deciding what needs to be done and doing this is also empowering. Use the flowchart in [Section 5.1 Children and practitioners caring for outdoor spaces together](#) as a guide.



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#### Reflective thoughts

- How do adults respond to antisocial behaviour and vandalism? Staff often do not live in the area they work. The children usually do.
- Some places are traditionally used by members of their family or their community who also see it as 'theirs'. Engaging with them alongside community police, rangers may help change behaviours.
- What feelings do we display to our children and what impact do these have?
- Do our own values and behaviours match? For example, if we allow a space to feel uncared for or unloved, does it matter if others show similar behaviours, albeit in a different form?

#### Group safety and antisocial behaviour

- Be alert to and aware of other users of the space. Never approach a person whose behaviour is causing a concern unless you are sure it is safe to do so – and do this with another adult.
- Be prepared to leave a site earlier than planned – have a safe space written into your emergency procedures or return to your setting and/or move your group inside if it is safer to do so.
- If your group witnesses any crimes, then these must be reported. If in doubt, consult your local community policy officer. See [Section 6.10 Animal allies](#), for reporting wildlife crimes.

- Work through any incidents that have happened that matter to a child or group and also their families.
- Learn from the experience, make changes and keep those who need to be informed updated.

#### Making a positive difference

A little forethought can help mitigate unwanted antisocial impacts:

- Creating DIY features that cost little or nothing and that can be secured out-of-hours. They can be more easily fixed if damaged.
- If children want to, create signs that remind visitors what to do.
- Avoid putting features or items in places that facilitate access, e.g., over a fence, onto a roof, etc.
- Being aware of, and following, any local guidance to minimise wilful fire-raising and arson prevention.
- Storing loose parts in safe places and/or having robust storage facilities.
- Involving older children in relevant ways to work with younger children on site improvements. This could include secondary-school age children too.
- Sharing and celebrating your outdoor place with your parents and community. Make the place a valued community asset. For example, arrange or join in community clean ups in the space or have a day where volunteers come to help garden.



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#### Remember

- Keep a record of incidents: dates, times, nature of the damage, etc. Take photos and note factual details.
- Log the incident with the police, but do not expect a follow-up visit when you do this. Look for patterns in your incidents as this can provide insights too.
- If you have a lot of antisocial behaviours or vandalism, evidenced from your record keeping, seek the advice of a local Crime Prevention Officer. They may offer practical suggestions around signage, lighting and so on. Implement their advice.
- Develop positive relationships with neighbours whose property overlooks your outdoor space.
- Be an extra pair of eyes and ears for your landowner. Report any damage promptly so that it can be managed.
- Let your landowner know immediately if your group causes inadvertent damage to your place.
- Clearing and fixing the damage promptly is important in terms of a “we care” message and to address any health and safety issues. Don’t leave a place looking unhappy.

#### Cultural heritages sites

Historical and archaeological sites and features may not be obvious, particularly to children when playing near or visiting. These sites can be of great value, so it is important to look after them. The **Scottish Outdoor Access Code** (SOAC) states:

Follow any agreed guidance aimed at preventing damage to a site.

Leave the site as you find it by:

- Not moving, disturbing, damaging or defacing any stones, walls, structures or other features
- Not digging or otherwise disturbing the ground surface
- Not taking anything away including loose stones and objects
- Not lighting fires, camping or using metal detectors there
- Not interfering with or entering any archaeological excavations



#### Find out more

- **“I don’t let vandalism get me down”. (251) Westpark Outdoor Space**