



## Section 6

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

#### 6.22 Worn-out spaces

##### Why fixing a worn-out space matters

A much-loved outdoor space has value to children. This can be increased and broadened to make it better for all species, making it a healthier and safer place for all who have a right to be there.

Consider if you are truly meeting the range of needs of the children.

- Is there sufficient breadth and depth of outdoor experiences which are different and complementary to inside, making the most of the weather, seasons and natural features?
- Go through the GIRFEC wellbeing indicators and reflect on how these are being met outside. Broaden this to consider if the wellbeing needs of all species are being met.

Remember that 'untidy' in nature is different from 'un-cared for' in this context. Straggly grass, large bushes and neglected corners can support more biodiversity than a 'too-tidy' site.

If there are hazards that present a health and safety risk, then you must act immediately to reduce or manage the risk.

**“Don't wait till all the site is looking worn. Identify overuse and deal with it quickly. Do not be afraid to stop using part of a space until it regenerates or can be used differently. Cordon off areas and rotate use if you have space big enough. Explore protective surfaces (bark, matting etc).”**

It is worth identifying two sites so that the impact on each is less. You can gain permission for both, use one for occasional visits and the other for frequent use then then alternate them over time. Children will then have a better idea of their impact as they compare each site.”

(Anonymous ELC practitioner)

**“HSCS 5.22 I experience an environment that is well looked after with clean, tidy and well-maintained premises, furnishings and equipment.”**

#### Outdoor spaces can recover

A bare patch of ground can be restored. Whilst there may be some quick fixes, sometimes the restoration can take several months or longer. With your group, consider:

- Rethinking the design of a space. Are all the play areas situated in the best place?
- Any basic adaptations that need integrated into your outdoor space to make it more accessible, inclusive and welcoming. Think about the needs of your children, especially those with physical mobility or sensory impairments and seek advice from specialists where necessary.



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- Finding sustainable solutions that require less ongoing work for staff. For example, putting in place paths and surfaces that need only little or no gritting in frosty weather. Look at using local contractors and repurposed materials.
- Developing and integrating maintenance checks and work into your ongoing routines and intentional planning processes. See [Section 5 for practical illustrations](#).

#### Building upon prior learning

- Does your outdoor space match the values of your setting? This is a useful check.
- If describing your outdoor space, what 3 words would you use? Ask your children, parents and other visitors too. Use this as a quick baseline assessment and to help agree what changes are required. Repeat the 3 words exercise to test the impact once changes have been made.
- With your children, take photos of your outdoor space, for before and after comparisons. Taking photos from each corner is particularly useful for this.



#### Find out more

- [Stramash Puddle Patter video](#): Caring for our Field of Dreams
- Highland Council Psychological Service Outdoor Learning and Play section has [resources](#) to support inclusion outside
- [Learning through Landscapes Scotland](#) provide training and facilitators who can support grassroots restoration work. They can also signpost to local professionals and organisations

#### 6.23 Sharing spaces

The use of your outdoor places may impact neighbouring land or houses and you may need the goodwill of neighbours to make sessions run smoothly. There is also specific guidance in the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) about groups using the outdoors and enabling others to get on with their lives.

Putting time and effort in to develop good relationships can have benefits:

- Neighbours often notice out-of-hours events and visitors which can deter antisocial activity.
- Knowing locals may help in the event of an emergency.
- Your group may benefit from meeting and learning from local people.
- Learning through Landscapes and NatureScot have produced this helpful [video](#) on Site Selection and discussions with landowners.

Keep your neighbours on side by:

- Finding effective ways of sharing what your group are doing and seeking feedback and input in advance. This could be through email, social media or QR codes for example.
- Inviting neighbours to special events or celebrations as appropriate.
- Ensuring gates, roads and access routes to neighbouring land or housing are kept clear. Let parents know this too.
- Ensuring your gathering space is sufficiently far away from neighbouring property where possible.



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#### What's happening over the fence

Activities undertaken on neighbouring land can impact on where and how you play. Be aware of:

- Timber operations and tree maintenance or felling work, especially movement of vehicles.
- Spraying of crops as the wind can carry the chemicals or slurry into areas used by the group.
- Movement of livestock that impacts on the group's normal access.
- Hunting, shooting or similar estate work.
- Work or situations where a water supply used by the children for play becomes contaminated.
- Construction work.

#### The other groups using our greenspace do not look after it

- Have a conversation with the landowner. Find out if there are shared expectations about how the space is used.
- Get in touch with the other groups. The staff may be less experienced or not aware of the expectations of using the greenspace: support rather than challenge.
- Have shared meet ups from time to time. As well as good for professional learning, you could undertake shared tasks together such as litter picking, bulb or tree planting.
- Here are two videos to give ideas for **engaging** with your **community** connections.

#### The general public

Most people are very accepting of day care groups getting out and about, but be prepared for the unexpected such as:

- Having a range and choice of play spaces in any given outdoor place
- Ensuring your activity does not prevent members of the public using paths and public facilities such as toilets
- Following the **Scottish Outdoor Access Code** at all times
- Checking with your landowner/manager in advance about leaving play traces, such as chalk marks, and whether child-created structures and ephemeral artwork can remain

#### Reflective thoughts

- Are the actions and behaviour of our group causing distress to another user or group?
- Do we need to move our gathering place? Is there an alternative site?
- Do we need to engage in activities that develop the trust, build relationships and ensure positive communications with others?
- Are there traditions, beliefs and cultures within our community that we are unaware of around the use of this space?