



## Section 6

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

#### 6.5 Footfall and trampling

##### Why this matters

Footfall is the amount of people walking, running and exploring within an area. A space has to cope with children moving around as they play. The wear and tear includes:

- Trampling – the flattening and eventual loss of vegetation
- The creation of informal paths and trails
- The expansion of mud patches where access is needed
- Soil exposure, loss, compaction and erosion

##### Building upon prior learning

- Observe how your children move through their outdoor space. Be attentive to what they are doing with their feet. Note which pathways and features seem to attract their attention.
- Draw children's attention to any noticeable impact made by their activity, e.g., the leaving of footprints in fresh mud or sand, or their imprints on soft grass. Ask them about what happened here. Together, start noticing how we are leaving traces of our play.
- Link this to evidence that other species are also leaving traces of their existence too. For example, there may be bird droppings near bird feeders or lots of grain on the ground below them. There may be pawprints found on a soft surface.

- Talk about what is the same and different between our impact and other species. Try and frame this positively. Discuss why we may see more traces from humans, e.g., we're bigger, there's more of us in the space for a longer time.
- Whether our own and other species impact is okay and whether there's anything we need to do to lessen this impact. What traces are good to see? What traces are telling us that the ground isn't coping with how we are playing. Decide together what can be done to care for this – have a look at the suggestions over leaf.

##### Reflective thoughts

- Think about the site from a child's perspective. Take time to observe what they need from the time in this space.
- Think about the suitability of surfaces on which children play in your outdoor space. How robust are they, especially in places that have high footfall such as entrances and exits?
- In conjunction with your landowner, ensure you have a shared understanding of both the needs of your children and the need to ensure the site can adequately cope with your group's presence.



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#### Following children's curiosities

- Noticing the impact of other animals as well as ourselves can lead to a genuine interest in tracking. A local naturalist or countryside ranger could visit and help your group see clues to what's been happening in our space.
- Look at how the traces of ourselves and other animals change through time. For example, if you are at a beach, the movement of the water removes traces and shifts sand and pebbles. At other times, the presence may be long lasting, such as deer rubbings on trees.
- Footfall and trampling is cause and effect. Simple experiments such as pushing a small stone into different surfaces, can help children witness this as well as be the start of pattern work.

#### Making a positive difference

- With landowner permission, create paths and trails that match children's patterns of play where needed. Alternatively create paths that guide children's movement through the space, such as: Strim or mow paths through meadows, long grass and where lots of "inhibitor" plants such as brambles and nettles exist. This can be done in late spring or early summer.
- Make the path boundaries clear through the use of branches, brushings or logs as informal path sides. The branches rot down and add to the biodiversity. Think about what other path sides and entrances increase the affordance of the space – for other creatures as well as ourselves.
- Worn patches can be restored. For example, rubber tiles that are laid over the

prepared ground, with grass seed sown through the gaps.

- Consider the surfaces immediately around a shelter, shed or storage that is being created or put into an outdoor area so that these are robust and accessible. Budget for this.
- Think about any children with mobility issues or visual impairments. How will they move through your outdoor spaces in ways which foster independence?

#### Think about

- Rotating between several sites to enable each one to recover.
- Using a designated gathering place within a site if one exists, where the ground is compacted within a defined area. This could prevent areas with a wilder feel from being overused. It allows other species to get on with their lives at key times that matter.
- Encouraging wise use of natural materials: see **6.8: Gathering and using natural materials**
- Landowners sometimes receive grants for specific land management practices so check with them about "can-go" areas.

Be aware of how the weather and seasons can impact. Certain areas may be "no go":

- In late winter and spring to allow new herbaceous growth, including bulbs
- During specific weather conditions, e.g. avoiding damp areas if there's been a lot of rain
- If there are rare or sensitive plant species which could be at risk such as native bluebells
- Sticking to paths where your landowner requests that you do so



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#### When walking off-site, follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code advice

This includes getting to and from your local greenspace:

“Access rights apply off-path, but when you are close to houses or in fields of crops or in places where the environment is particularly vulnerable to damage, it may be sensible to follow paths and tracks where they exist. This can help to facilitate access and help safeguard the interests of land managers and the environment.”



#### Find out more

- **Paths for All** – Information and advice on everything to do with paths
- **The Conservation Volunteers** – practical advice on site management
- The Scottish **Outdoor Access Code** (SOAC)