

OUT TO PLAY

INSPIRING SCOTLAND



SECTION 9: CHILDMINDING SETTINGS

Practical guidance for creating outdoor play experiences

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INTRODUCTION

Childminders make good use of the outdoors to enhance children's opportunities and experiences therefore many of the key areas described in the **Out to Play** guide are relevant for individual childminding settings. The aim of this section is to highlight how Out to Play can be used to strengthen outdoor play-based learning practices in your own childminding setting. In addition, we wanted to illustrate how some of the key areas within Out to Play are already being put into practice by childminders across Scotland.

All children in childminding settings, as outlined in the Health and Social Care standards, should have outdoor experiences on a daily basis. We recognise that childminders, in the main, do not have difficulty in accessing outdoor spaces as most have their own garden or access to local parks, beaches, woods, greenspace and other outdoor facilities in the local community. Being flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of children

means that being outside is very much part of the daily routine for many childminders. Whether it is simple activities like walking the dog, walking to and from school to drop off and pick up other children, or a trip to the woods, outdoor play-based learning activities can be throughout the day for childminding settings.

Childminders use the natural environment around them, as well as existing resources, to ensure outdoor experiences can be low or no cost. Being creative with loose parts play, gathering wood or sticks for building, or using tree trunks for balance and coordination, the world around us is waiting to be explored and we would encourage you to make use of the natural world at our fingertips.

As well as recognising that playing and learning outdoors is life-enhancing, this section also helps to support the Scottish Government's [Blueprint for 2020: the Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland](#). In particular, it links to the Quality Action Plan (action 10), namely to, "...promote greater use of outdoor learning and physical activity, finding access to suitable outdoor areas and making the most of the opportunities that these offer to promote children's development."

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USING OUT TO PLAY

Many childminders will already be making full use of the environment in their local community. **Out to Play** will help to expand the practice that is already provided by childminders and consolidate the play and learning which all ages of children enjoy together. You may already have a garden where children can choose to play either outdoors or indoors, or you may wish to further explore ideas for increasing access to the outdoors. When planning what you want to achieve, think about:

- How you can improve and increase outdoor play and learning experiences in your existing setting.
- How you can expand your existing service by using your existing outdoor space or by using outdoor space elsewhere.

To illustrate how **Out to Play** can be delivered in practice, we have shared examples from across Scotland, taken from childminder case studies. These examples might spark new ideas, or help to re-affirm an approach you have already taken in your own practice.

There are fantastic examples of how childminding offers quality outdoor play-based learning for children. Think about how you could further build on what you do to strengthen the quality and delivery of outdoor childminding experiences.

We have included **Things To Think About** after each of the examples to help you reflect on your own practice.



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FINDING THE RIGHT OUTDOOR SPACE

Case Study 1- Using your Natural Environment

Zoe is a childminder in a small coastal community in the Black Isle. She regularly uses the local beach in front of her home for play.

The beach is regularly scattered with rubbish which has been washed up, some of which Zoe and her minded children have put to good use using the [Loose Parts Play toolkit](#). At times, the school path also becomes strewn with sticks, mud, weeds and litter. On rainy days this makes it especially difficult to push buggies through and can be challenging for young children to negotiate.

Zoe has involved the children in community-based projects to clear up the beach and school path. The children loved working with each other and the sense of achievement everyone had after it was completed. The local community also benefited and were much appreciative of the time and hard work that had been

invested in the project. The children were praised for their efforts by the local Community Council.

Zoe turned her mud kitchen into a community garden bench, where local residents donated plants, pots and tools. The children had to replant and grow and maintain the garden bench which sits alongside the sea front for all to see and where they can sit and enjoy their efforts.

Most of Zoe's childminding activities are child-led, from den building in the woods, climbing up embankments and trees, to swimming in the sea. Zoe has been showing some younger children how to safely play in and out of the water. She purchased a wet suit to support this play year round. One child was initially scared of the water, but by the end of the summer they had started swimming lessons at the local pool. They are now much more confident and regularly swim in the sea with Zoe.

The children often collect natural resources off the beach (usually stones, shells and sticks) and make 'beach art' like shell mosaics or stick people. Sometimes the children opt to build a fort or a sea wall to fight the incoming tide.

Zoe teamed up with another local childminder to run a mock sports day where they held a sack race, egg and spoon and three-legged race – gifting the winners with medals made from shells from the beach.



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THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

This case study is focused on the beach, but there are ideas here that everyone can use and develop. Collecting natural resources and using for arts and crafts, climbing and den building can be done in almost any local area. Remember to take advantage of everyday opportunities such as walking to drop off and pick up children and think about taking different routes to allow you to explore nature - discuss the colour of the leaves on the trees, notice how many insects you see, count and name any birds, pick up and collect sticks etc.

Share ideas with others and plan ahead to develop your own outdoor play and learning activity programme.

Undertake a risk assessment to ensure you are considering all aspects of safety and minimising risk.



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BEING OUTDOORS IN TOWNS AND CITIES

Childminders operate in both rural and urban areas, so it's important to think about how to access the outdoors in environments where it is not so easy.

Many childminders have large gardens which they can enrich with simple resources such as loose parts play or growing spaces. Whereas others may have smaller gardens, or no outside spaces at all. In these cases you may need to think about how you can make use of public spaces.

There are green spaces all around in local communities, sometimes where you least expect them. Search your local maps, or better still, go exploring with children to find your own areas to visit. Joining and using local allotments can also be very rewarding - take the time to find out where these might be if you don't have a garden you could use. Have a look too at [Section 4.4 Gaining permission to use land - what to consider](#) and [Section 4.5 Getting to know your patch](#).



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Case Study 2 - Developing garden spaces

Heather, a childminder in an urban setting in North Lanarkshire, made adjustments to her garden so the children could be outdoors all or most of the day. This included setting up a hand washing station as well as focusing on growing an abundance of produce in wooden planters and a poly tunnel. Finding creative ways to use all available spaces, both outdoors and indoors, opened up a whole new range of activities for the children.

To support her understanding of the outdoors, Heather has accessed a range of CPL opportunities such as STEM in the Outdoors ([SCMA](#)) and Risk Benefit Webinars for Outdoor Play ([Learning Through Landscape](#)).

Not only has Heather made changes in her own garden, she has been able to access community resources through her local allotment group. The local allotment group in Whinhall, of which she is chairperson,

has been awarded a grant of £1000 from the Scottish Communities Fund to make an outdoor nature play/forest skills area in the allotment site behind her house. “This will have a log bridge, mud pit, tepee, mud kitchen area, fire pit/campfire area and much more”.



Heather’s minded children will initially have sole use of this area, before children from local nurseries, schools and the wider community are invited. The allotment group have already been gifted two sinks which will be installed beside the large water butts and Heather is looking at wipe clean boards made from recycled varnished wood. “This is really exciting for us and we can’t wait to make use of the new area and get very muddy.” These changes will provide continued access to outdoor activities in the future and act as a platform for other creative opportunities.

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BEING OUTDOORS IN TOWNS AND CITIES

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Low or no cost options. It can be daunting to think of purchasing expensive equipment such as gazebos, playhouses, swings and outdoor play equipment and this can be a challenge for many. Equipment may make being outdoors more comfortable or make it easier to complete activities, however there is no expectation to buy equipment and high quality experiences can be delivered without this.

For shelter think about different ways to be creative with tarpaulin, clothes poles and washing lines. Get the children involved in designing and building their own sheltered areas.

For furniture you could upcycle wooden pallets for chairs, tables or mud kitchens and old tyres make great obstacle courses or even a tree swing!

How many other ideas can you come up with?



These can all be obtained at low or no cost, so make sure you explore all the great alternatives which are there in our natural environment.

It's a good idea to link up with local community facilities, such as allotments, in towns and built-up areas where it can be more difficult to find suitable green spaces.

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MEETING UP WITH OTHERS

You don't have to be part of a group to undertake outdoor activities. However, group support can be a useful confidence boost if you are feeling unsure about getting outdoors or are venturing further afield.

Dunfermline and Rosyth Childminding group agreed their summer outing would be a litter pick on Limekilns beach. Before the outing they discussed safety including:

- risk assessing the beach
- risk assessing the litter pick activity, including having some sort of equipment for picking up the litter
- being fully supervised taking into account the ages of the children
- environmental issues about plastic etc. and how this could be introduced to the children.

Fife Council supplied litter pickers and bin bags and [KeepScotlandBeautiful.org](https://www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org) supplied bibs and stickers for the children. The Charlestown, Limekilns and Pattiesmuir Nature (CLP) Conservation Team and [KeepScotlandBeautiful.org](https://www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org) also showcased the children's activities on their social media channels and website.

Most children were extremely enthusiastic about the litter pick and were surprised by the amount of rubbish they collected, which in turn generated interest in keeping their environment clean and safe. As a result the group contacted the CLP Team, who run Wild Planet Explorers and The 3P Pledge, for advice on further activities for the children. This led to planned sessions concentrating on outdoor environmental topics.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

What local organisations are there in your area that promote environmental issues and would be good partners? The following websites have some great ideas and support for exploring the outdoors, where to go and additional useful information if you have to go a little further afield.

<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/contributing-healthier-scotland/our-natural-health-service>

<https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/>

If you work on your own, you could consider planning trips and activities with other childminders or joining a local childminding group.

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OUTDOOR CHILDMINDING GROUPS



Case Study 3 - Outdoor Groups

One option when thinking about how you can extend outdoor play and learning opportunities, is to consider joining up with other childminders to undertake activities as a group.

The Nature Play childminding group in West Lothian meet in different outdoor environments to investigate nature in and around the Armadale area. The group was set up by childminder Hayley when their weekly indoor meeting room was required for another group.

Hayley was keen to keep meeting her fellow childminders but also wanted to explore different settings and environments. She already enjoyed the outdoors and suggested to other group members that this was something they could try together. They have been having adventures for a few years now and the children love the diverse range of outdoor activities. Meeting every week as a group means they have much more experience

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and knowledge between them. The other bonus is there are more adults to help with risk/benefit assessments in addition to offering the opportunity for peer support as well as extended friendship groups for the children. It does require forward planning to accommodate things like ratios, pick up and drop off times, as well as meal and sleep schedules, but it is worth it as Hazel commented:

“Being outdoors changes children for the better, they have more freedom, are able to create their own games and use their imagination”.

Inspired by Hayley’s work at Nature Play, Debbie in South Lanarkshire was keen to set up an outdoor childminding group in her area. To help get her started she undertook SCMA’s Outdoor Learning CPL and completed a Forest School training course.

Debbie created a local outdoor childminders Facebook page to connect with other childminders in her area. The group meets twice a week with the aim of sharing practical ideas, connecting with nature and learning from each other.

Debbie has carried out practical research which has developed her understanding of how being in the natural environment can improve children’s resilience, as well as providing opportunities for learning that support the curriculum. This has given her more confidence in her own practice whilst enabling her to encourage and inspire the other members of the group. There is no ‘leader’ within the group at this time, but this may change as the group evolves.

Overcoming challenges has required some creative thinking. With winter weather came concerns from parents around the children potentially getting cold and wet. Overcoming these concerns required a phased approach from the childminders. Firstly, it was important to ensure the children had appropriate clothing for the

weather, to help prevent them getting cold or wet. To build resilience to spending more time outdoors, the childminders started with short periods, gradually increasing the amount of time spent outdoors. Once the children were more used to being outdoors, ideas such as bringing tarpaulins from home to sit on and explore the forest floor were simple but effective ways of getting them to engage with their surroundings. Debbie also invested in a portable potty and tent to use and a portable shower which is ideal for hand washing (for more advice see [Section 5.5 Handwashing](#) and [Section 5.6 Toileting](#)). In time, the group aims to add to their equipment, but for now, they are using items they can bring from home, for example potato peelers, wooden spoons, magnifying glasses, to explore and investigate.

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THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Start off small. You don't have to go out in a group but if you're unsure to begin with, you could perhaps go out with one other childminder to give each other support and help to structure regular outdoor weekly sessions.

Contact other outdoor childminding groups who will be happy to offer support to get you started.

Include parents in your plans so they are aware, involved and able to offer suggestions, which will ensure they feel more included and supportive as you progress.



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SUPPORTING THE CURRICULUM

Case Study 4

Helen has been using Out to Play to help her create outdoor experiences for her minded children. Her children range from 2-11 years old, so there is a broad spectrum of ages and stages to work with. She focuses on loose parts activities with the children, allowing them time to develop their creativity and problem solving collaboratively.

Helen has been able to incorporate all ages into the same or similar activities such as:

- Stick-lets – joining sticks together and building 3D shapes. This has also met home schooling guidance for Maths.
- Planting sunflowers and involving parents by ensuring every child received a plant to care for at home with measuring, recording, mark mapping etc. to complete.
- Planting lots of fruit and veg which will be enjoyed by everyone in the autumn.
- Building and constructing dens, playing with water, shadow making in the sunlight.

Providing a range of activities which cover different age groups with simple adjustments means that Helen can demonstrate how she supports the Curriculum for Excellence across all ages and stages. In addition, her activities facilitate learning across all STEM learning themes – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Make sure to think about how you can evidence where your outdoor learning supports curriculum requirements.

Collate this information so you can build your evidence and use it as part of your ongoing self-assessment and to demonstrate quality in your setting.



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SOURCES OF INFORMATION

There is further help available through the following resources and training links.

Loose Parts Play – A toolkit: <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf>

My World Outdoors https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3091/My_world_outdoors_-_early_years_good_practice_2016.pdf

My Childminding Experience <https://www.childminding.org/Media/Docs/Care%20Inspectorate/My%20childminding%20experience.pdf>

Health and Social Care Standards My Support, My Life <https://www.gov.scot/publications/health-social-care-standards-support-life/>

Realising the Ambition: Being Me <https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf>

STEM training module: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/training-modules-for-all-elc-practitioners/>



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