

EYFS Essentials

— NurseryWorld —

A New Vision for Outdoors

by Julie Mountain



Resources Pack

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A Shared Vision and Values for Outdoor Play in the Early Years



Young children thrive and their minds and bodies develop best when they have **free access to stimulating outdoor environments** for learning through play and real experiences

All children have the right to experience and enjoy the essential and **special nature of being outdoors**



Knowledgeable and enthusiastic adults are crucial to unlocking the potential of outdoors

Ten core values

1. Young children should be outdoors as much as indoors and need a well-designed, well-organised, integrated indoor-outdoor environment, preferably with indoors and outdoors available simultaneously.
2. Play is the most important activity for young children outside.
3. Outdoor provision can, and must, offer young children experiences that have a lot of meaning to them and are led by the child.
4. Young children need all the adults around them to understand why outdoor play provision is essential for them, and adults who are committed and able to make its potential available to them.
5. The outdoor space and curriculum must harness the special nature of the outdoors, to offer children what the indoors cannot. This should be the focus for outdoor provision, complementing and extending provision indoors.
6. Outdoors should be a dynamic, flexible and versatile place where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play environment.
7. Young children must have a rich outdoor environment full of irresistible stimuli, contexts for play, exploration and talk, plenty of real experiences and contact with the natural world and with the community.
8. Young children should have long periods of time outside. They need to know that they can be outside every day, when they want to and that they can develop their ideas for play over time.
9. Young children need challenge and risk within a framework of security and safety. The outdoor environment lends itself to offering challenge, helping children learn how to be safe and to be aware of others.
10. Outdoor provision must support inclusion and meet the needs of individuals, offering a diverse range of play-based experiences. Young children should participate in decisions and actions affecting their outdoor play.

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The rationale

- 1. Young children should be outdoors as much as indoors and need a well-designed, well-organised, integrated indoor-outdoor environment, preferably with indoors and outdoors available simultaneously.**

Outdoor provision is an essential part of the child's daily environment and life, not an option or an extra. Each half of the indoor-outdoor environment offers significantly different, but complementary, experiences and ways of being to young children. They should be available simultaneously and be experienced in a joined-up way, with each given equal status and attention for their contribution to young children's well-being, health, stimulation and all areas of development. Outdoor space must be considered a necessary part of an early years environment, be well thought through and well organised to maximise its value and usability by children and adults, and design and planning must support developmentally appropriate practice, being driven by children's interests and needs.



- 2. Play is the most important activity for young children outside.**

Play is the means through which children find stimulation, well-being and happiness, and is the means through which they grow physically, intellectually and emotionally. Play is the most important thing for children to do outside and the most relevant way of offering learning outdoors. The outdoor environment is very well suited to meeting children's needs for all types of play, building upon first-hand experiences.

- 3. Outdoor provision can, and must, offer young children experiences that have a lot of meaning to them and are led by the child.**

Because of the freedom the outdoors offers to move on a large scale, to be active, noisy and messy and to use all their senses with their whole body, young children engage in the way they most need to explore, make sense of life and express their feeling and ideas. Many young children relate much more strongly to learning offered outdoors rather than indoors.

All areas of learning must be offered through a wide range of holistic experiences, both active and calm, which make the most of what the outdoors has to offer.

Outdoor provision needs to be organised so that children are stimulated, and able, to follow their own interests and needs through play-based activity, giving them independence, self-organisation, participation and empowerment. The adult role is crucial in achieving this effectively.



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4. Young children need all the adults around them to understand why outdoor play provision is essential for them, and adults who are committed and able to make its potential available to them.

Young children need practitioners who value and enjoy the outdoors themselves, see the potential and consequences it has for young children's well-being and development, and want to be outside with them. Attitude, understanding, commitment and positive thinking are important, as well as the skills to make the best use of what the outdoors has to offer and to effectively support child-led learning; the adult role outdoors must be as deeply considered as that indoors. Practitioners must be able to recognise, capture and share children's learning outdoors with parents and other people working with the child, so that they too become enthused. Cultural differences in attitude to the outdoors need to be understood and worked with sensitively to reach the best outcomes for children.



5. The outdoor space and curriculum must harness the special nature of outdoors, to offer children what the indoors cannot. This should be the focus for outdoor provision, complementing and extending provision indoors.

The outdoors offers young children essential experiences vital to their well-being, health and development in all areas. Children who miss these experiences are significantly deprived.

Outdoors, children can have the freedom to explore different ways of 'being', feeling, behaving and interacting; they have space -physical (up as well as sideways), mental and emotional; they have room and permission to be active, interactive, messy, noisy and work on a large scale; they may feel less controlled by adults.

The real contact with the elements, seasons and the natural world, the range of perspectives, sensations and environments - multi-dimensional and multi-sensory, and the daily change, uncertainty, surprise and excitement all contribute to the desire young children have to be outside. It cannot be the same indoors; a child cannot *be* the same indoors - outdoors is a vital, special and deeply engaging place for young children.

6. Outdoors should be a dynamic, flexible and versatile place where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play environment.

Outdoor provision can, and should, offer young children an endlessly versatile, changeable and responsive environment for all types of play where they can manipulate, create, control and modify. This offers a huge sense of freedom, which is not readily available indoors. It also underpins the development of creativity and the dispositions for learning. The space itself as well as resources, layout, planning and routines all need to be versatile, open-ended and flexible to maximise their value to the child.

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7. Young children must have a rich outdoor environment full of irresistible stimuli, contexts for play, exploration and talk, plenty of real experiences and contact with the natural world and with the community.

Through outdoor play, young children can learn the skills of social interaction and friendship, care for living things and their environment, be curious and fascinated, experience awe, wonder and joy and become 'lost in the experience'. They can satisfy their deep urge to explore, experiment and understand and become aware of their community and locality, thus developing a sense of connection to the physical, natural and human world.

A particular strength of outdoor provision is that it offers children many opportunities to experience the real world, have first-hand experiences, do real tasks and do what adults do, including being involved in the care of the outdoor space. Settings should make the most of this aspect, with connected play opportunities.

An aesthetic awareness of and emotional link to the non-constructed or controlled, multi-sensory and multi-dimensional natural world is a crucial component of human well-being, and increasingly absent in young children's lives. The richness of cultural diversity is an important part of our everyday world; this can and should be explored by children through outdoor experiences. Giving children a sense of belonging to something bigger than the immediate family or setting lays foundations for living as a community.



8. Young children should have long periods of time outside. They need to know that they can be outside every day, when they want to and that they can develop their ideas for play over time.

High quality play outdoors, where children are deeply involved, only emerges when they know they are not hurried. They need to have time to develop their use of spaces and resources and uninterrupted time to develop their play ideas, or to construct a place and then play in it or to get into problem-solving on a big scale. They need to be able to return to projects again and again until 'finished' with them.

Slow learning is good learning, giving time for assimilation. When children can move between indoors and outside, their play or explorations develop further still. Young children also need time (and places) to daydream, look on or simply relax outside.



9. Young children need challenge and risk within a framework of security and safety. The outdoor environment lends itself to offering challenge, helping children learn how to be safe and to be aware of others.

Children are seriously disadvantaged if they do not learn how to approach and manage physical and emotional risk. They can become either timid or reckless, or be unable to cope with consequences. Young children need to be able to set and meet their own challenges, become aware of their limits and push their abilities (at their own pace), be prepared to make mistakes, and experience the pleasure of feeling capable and competent. Challenge and its associated risk are vital for this. Young children also need to learn how to recognise and manage risk as life-skills, so as to become able to act safely, for themselves and others. Safety of young children outdoors is paramount and a culture of 'risk assessment to enable' that permeates every aspect of outdoor provision is vital for all settings. Young children also need to feel secure, nurtured and valued outdoors. This includes clear behavioural boundaries (using rules to enable freedom), nurturing places and times outside and respect for how individual children prefer to play and learn.



10. Outdoor provision must support inclusion and meet the needs of individuals, offering a diverse range of play-based experiences. Young children should participate in decisions and actions affecting their outdoor play.

Provision for learning outdoors is responsive to the needs of very active learners, those who need sensory or language stimulation and those who need space away from others – it makes provision more inclusive and is a vital learning environment. When children's learning



styles are valued, their self-image benefits. Boys, who tend to use active learning modes more than girls, and until they are older, are particularly disadvantaged by limited outdoor play.

All children need full access to provision outdoors and it is important to know and meet the needs and interests of each child as an individual. Young children react differently to the spaces and experiences available or created so awareness and flexibility are key to the adult role. Observation and assessment (formative and summative), and intervention for particular support, must be carried out outside. While it is important to ensure the safety of all children, it is equally important to ensure all are sufficiently challenged.

Young children should take an active part in decisions and actions for outdoor provision, big and small. Their perspectives and views are critical and must be sought, and they can take an active role in setting up, clearing away and caring for the outdoor space.

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About Play Learning Life

At Play Learning Life, we believe fundamentally in children and young people's right to experience the freedom, independence and value of outdoor play and learning. As a not-for-profit social enterprise, Play Learning Life helps schools, early years settings and families make the most of the opportunities outdoors affords for high quality learning and play as well as for children's health and happiness.

Our philosophy

The Play Learning Life philosophy recognises the essential and special nature of outdoors. For many children, taking learning and play outdoors addresses their most fundamental needs – for movement, fresh air, space and meaningful activity, rooted in real life experiences.

Our belief in children as skilled and informed agents of change and as competent risk assessors is core to our participative approach, and the value of outdoor learning and play, for all children and young people, whatever the weather informs all of our work.



Play Learning Life Directors Julie Mountain and Peter Carne OBE convened the original Vision and Values Partnership as part of their work with Learning through Landscapes.

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Who wrote the Vision and Values?

Led by the national school grounds charity, [Learning through Landscapes](#), the Vision and Values Partnership brought together leading thinkers, pedagogues and organisations from across the early years sector. The Partnership worked together to create a set of statements that would exemplify the importance they all placed on offering young children opportunities to learn and play outdoors, to connect with the natural world and to use outdoors as a context for developing strong relationships with adults and other children.

The Vision and Values document was first published by Nursery World magazine and it has since been reproduced across a wide range of media and through all of the Partnership members. It directly shapes Play Learning Life CIC's early years work.

The Vision and Values were developed and are endorsed by

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Bexley Council | Diane Rich, Rich Learning Opportunities |
| Early Childhood Forum | Early Education |
| ESTYN (HMI Education and Training in Wales) | ESIS (Wales) |
| Grounds for Learning | Helen Bilton, author and consultant |
| Integrated Inspection Scotland | Kent Council |
| Learning through Landscapes | Margaret Edgington, author and consultant |
| Marjorie Ouvry, author and consultant | Mindstretchers |
| Welsh Assembly Government (was the National Assembly) | National Day Nurseries Association |
| Neath Port Talbot Council | Nursery World magazine |
| Paddy Beels, Wingate Family Centre | Pre-school Learning Alliance |
| Sightlines Initiative | Stirling Council |
| Sue Humphries, author and consultant | Thomas Coram Institute |
| West Sussex Council | Play Learning Life CIC |
| Angela Anning, author, consultant, academic | Asquith Day Nurseries |
| Peter Carne OBE | The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom |
| Jenny Doyle, Forest Schools | Julian Grenier, academic and consultant |
| Gail Ryder Richardson, Outdoor Matters! | Play England |
| Surrey County Council | Helen Tovey, academic and author |
| Trio Childcare Connections | Jan White, author and consultant |

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Where are we now?

- What features do we have?
- How do we use the space?
 - How does it 'feel'?
- How do we move around it?

Where do we want to be?

- What are our aspirations?
- Where are the gaps in provision?
- What do we want to be able to DO?

How do we get there?

- Problem solving
- Who can help?
- What's practical and realistic?

Making changes

- Making changes to outdoors
- To the way we use outdoors
- To the way we manage and maintain outdoors

Children's needs
Maintenance
Inclusivity
Funding



Character building

In the first of a four-part series on planning your outdoor area, *Julie Mountain* introduces the ‘7Cs’ approach for enabling high-quality play

Successful, sustainable outdoor play spaces for young children are rarely the result of happy accident. In 20 years of visiting schools and settings in the UK and abroad, I have found that the most effective spaces exhibit a combination of high-quality (and generously provided) resources, knowledgeable and committed outdoor practitioners, and thoughtfully designed landscapes that provide

children with opportunities to manipulate and affect their environment.

Big budgets are rarely as influential as a setting’s careful, considerate and consistent commitment to outdoor play. Despite this, UK outdoor spaces for young children are still dominated by space- and budget-grabbing fixed-play equipment.

This series will explore a different methodology for the design, resourcing and management of early years outdoor spaces: the 7Cs approach,

devised by Canadian academics Susan Herrington and Chandra Lesmeister.

Their Outside Criteria research team at the University of British Columbia spent five years studying the physical features and usage patterns of 16 early childhood centres in Vancouver. Their research resulted in the publication of *7Cs: An Informational Guide to Young Children’s Outdoor Play Spaces*.

THE 7CS MODEL

The 7Cs model introduces new insights to outdoor space design and brings together several of the concepts landscape designers have long considered essential elements of the creation of outdoor spaces for schools and settings.

Outdoor Criteria’s 7Cs approach aims to complement current safety guidance and standards, providing fresh evidence about the factors that combine to generate high-quality outdoor play experiences.

The length of the 7Cs research programme enabled the team to delve deep into the personality and routine of the outdoor spaces. They discovered the following.

- Childcare centres that exceeded their densities (that ▶



At Grandpont in Oxfordshire, the outdoor space includes winding paths, varied surfaces and both natural and man-made materials

ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS OUTDOORS

is, insufficient 'free' space per child outdoors) experienced more aggression between children.

- Aggression between children increased when no manipulable material was provided outdoors.
- Centres with equipment purchased in the preceding six years had less space for 'non-equipment' play.
- Fixed play equipment (for example, a climbing structure) was unoccupied for 87 per cent of the time. Of the remaining 13 per cent of time, only three per cent was spent using the structure in the way the manufacturer had intended.
- Contact with living things increased developmental opportunities for children.
- There was no discernible relationship between the themes created by manufacturers or designers and children's own imaginative play.
- The materials the play space was made from influenced the 'soundscape', which in turn affected stress levels in children.
- Children want more soft spaces, indoors and outdoors.

WHAT ARE THE 7CS?

The 7Cs research is not intended as a 'tick list' for designers or practitioners. The Cs are all interconnected, with the character of a space significantly influenced by the other six Cs.

Character: the atmosphere, or 'feel' of the space; character is influenced by each of the following six Cs.



Context: how the immediate locality, external factors such as microclimate and the relationship between the building and the garden spaces affect the quality of the space.

Connectivity: the 'accessibility' of the space – how easily children are able to move around it, see through it and into it and how they understand the area as a coherent setting for play.

Change: the landscape should include open and private spaces, differently sized areas and places of varying levels and heights. The space should look different each day, each season, each year.

Chance: the opportunity for spontaneity and manipulation. Children should be able to affect their play space with open-ended resources and a landscape that lends itself to adaptation.

The materials of the play space influence the 'soundscape' (below); Grandpont in Oxford is designed to enable exploratory play (right)

Clarity: the 'legibility' of the space, which includes the scale of any fixed features and the perceptions children retain of 'their' space. Entrances and exits should be clear and the space should allow for free movement.

Challenge: this refers not just to physical challenges, but also to the intellectual and emotional risks the space enables children to take.

FACTORS AFFECTING QUALITY

The study involved 16 full daycare centres in Vancouver, chosen to represent a distinct cross-section of settings – urban, suburban and semi-rural; new, refurbished and adapted – and to represent the rich diversity of cultural and socio-economic groups resident in the greater Vancouver area.



The research comprised observations, photographic surveys, focused interviews and reflection on policies and standards that shape outdoor spaces for young children. The outcomes of other studies that documented the qualities of outdoor play spaces for young children were also included.

The research team identified five factors that influence the quality of outdoor play. They examined the prevalence of these in the 16 study settings and drew conclusions about the effect they had on children's well-being. The factors were as follows.

- The size of the space, and where children played within this space. It became clear that while the amount of space 'allocated' to each

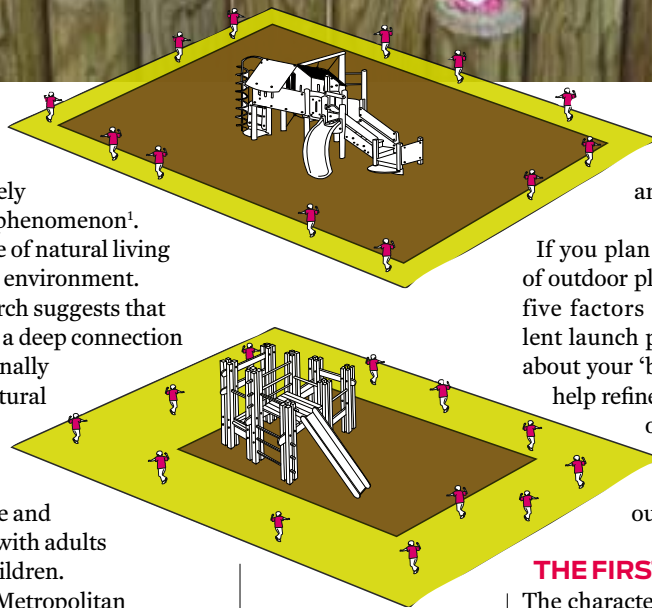


child had remained constant over the past 30 years, the quantity of space allocated to fixed play equipment (and its inevitable safer surfacing) had increased, meaning less 'free' space for children to engage in gross motor play. In tandem with this development, it became apparent that lack of gross motor play was contributing to worryingly high levels of childhood obesity.

- The relationship between types of play and the nature of the space the play was occurring in. *Nursery World* readers will be familiar with the taxonomy of play, but the 7Cs research also looked at the duration of play in different environments and noted where the play was child-initiated, adult-led or a combination of both.
- Children's and adults' perceptions of the space, both during the study period and the longer-term impressions gained by users over the lifetime of their connection with the setting. Research by educational charity Learning through Landscapes demonstrated that the quality of the environment had a direct impact on children's self-esteem and motivation

to learn and this is now a widely understood phenomenon¹.

- The presence of natural living things in the environment. Again, research suggests that children feel a deep connection with the eternally changing natural world and are keen to share what they see and understand with adults and other children. At Swansea Metropolitan University, Jane Waters found that 'natural landscapes afforded engagement with the environment and with the practitioners' and that 'children are drawn to particular features of the landscapes and are willing and eager to share their interests with staff and other children?'. 7Cs backed up this premise.
- The availability and quantity of materials children can control and manipulate, such as sand, water, gravel and mud. The desire to experiment and explore is innate in young children and the most successful spaces offered



Safety areas around equipment have increased since the 1980s (top diagram shows regulations now, with 1980s below)

Does your garden reflect the ethos and approach of your setting?

opportunities to dig, transport, spill, throw and collect.

If you plan to examine the quality of outdoor play at your setting, these five factors would make an excellent launch point. Detail and clarity about your 'baseline' conditions will help refine your improvement priorities. This in turn will justify the time and money spent on the outdoor space project.

THE FIRST 'C': CHARACTER

The character of the space describes its 'overall feel' and is very much a subjective judgement. The 7Cs team identified four distinct architectural types that also strongly influence the atmosphere outdoors.

- Modern – the design reflects the 'infrastructure and mechanisms of the landscape and building'.
- Organic – the space contains materials children can manipulate and is characterised by changing landscape features.
- Modular – whereby equipment dominates the space, leaving limited 'free' space for play.
- Re-use – where the space is adapted from some other



Nature is an important surrounding element of the spaces at Grandpont

purpose, not originally intended for play.

If you had to describe the character of your outdoor space in one (short-ish) sentence, what would you say? Does your garden reflect the ethos and approach of your setting, or the knowledge and experience of your staff? Do the features, resources and landscaping outdoors support children's developmental milestones?

Character is affected by a multitude of physical factors such as the size of the space, the number of children using it, the prevalence of natural materials and the location of fixed features. However, it is important to point out here that the adult role is vital in any early childhood environment, indoors or out. Adults have a pivotal effect on children's perceptions about the character of their space and where they have worked collaboratively to accurately identify needs of young children – and gaps in the provision of these – the character of the resulting play spaces is seen to be deeply engaging and compelling.

In her book, *Playing and Learning Outdoors* (2014), outdoor play advocate Jan White suggests that the adult role is 'critical' to the provision of high-quality outdoor play, and while the 7Cs guidance is very much focused on how the physical environment affects the quality of play, it clearly supports the widely held view that 'knowledgeable and enthusiastic adults are crucial to unlocking the potential of outdoors'³.

CASE STUDY: IN PRACTICE

While the building itself is undoubtedly modern, the 'character' of the outdoor spaces at Grandpont Nursery School and Children's Centre would be described by the 7Cs team as 'organic'. That definition states that 'the design highlights the changing outdoor environment and includes materials children can manipulate'.

Close to Oxford city centre and serving a richly diverse local population, Grandpont nevertheless benefits from open land on three sides, meaning that trees and shrubs border the outdoor spaces.

A small 'woodland', known as The Hundred Acre Wood, and the combination of built and natural features provides privacy for play, but also adds a much-valued natural landscape to the lives of the children and families using the centre.

When children are outdoors, the space feels 'busy' and 'purposeful', but not 'hectic' or 'cramped'. This is primarily because the available space isn't dominated by fixed play equipment. There are climbing structures, but the main one is tucked away towards the perimeter of the site and instead the focus of the three-to-fives area is a large, multi-level sandpit.

In the birth-to-threes area, the key features are a covered sand and gravel area and grassy mounds. Here, children have plenty of space to move freely and are able to manipulate and build, be noisy, be messy and be independent.



MORE INFORMATION

- Each article in this series is accompanied by a guidance note, aimed at helping settings apply the 7Cs principles to their own circumstances. Visit www.nurseryworld.co.uk for each article to download the corresponding guidance. The guidance for this feature focuses on helping you assess the character of your outdoor space.
- The 7Cs guide, by Susan Herrington, Chandra Lesmeister, Jamie Nicholls and Kate Stefiuk, can be downloaded at www.wstcoast.org/playspaces/outsidecriteria/7Cs.pdf

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Research includes *Special Places, Special People* by Wendy Titman (1996); *Childhood's Domain: Play and Place in Child Development* by Robin Moore (1986)
- 2 Research includes *Sowing the Seeds: Reconnecting London's Children with Nature* by Tim Gill (2011); *Learning in the Outdoor Environment: a missed opportunity?* by Jane Waters and Trisha Maynard (2006)
- 3 *Shared Vision and Values for Outdoor Play in the Early Years*, Vision and Values Partnership (2004),

Circulation around the space has been carefully considered and children are able to manoeuvre themselves, and any awkward or wheeled objects, into almost every nook and cranny – of which there are many. The space can be manipulated and changed by children and the 'character' of the outdoors speaks strongly of the child-centred, Reggio inspired philosophy that drives the work at Grandpont.

Annie Davy was early years lead for Oxfordshire County Council for many years and has worked extensively with the staff team at Grandpont. She notes that, 'A very respectful ethos is apparent there. Staff are respectful of children and of parents and it's clear that change is in response to children's needs.'

While loose parts resources abound outdoors at Grandpont, Ms Davy points out that 'staff choose high-quality resources and help children learn how to value and care for them.' Quality of resources is as important as quantity and has as great an impact on the 'character' of a space as its fixed features and landscaping do.

Staff have worked on their own attitudes to risk and challenge, recognising that they could offer more; there is an understanding that no space should remain static and that it should be possible to 're-invent' outdoor provision to meet the needs of changing cohorts of children.

These revisions and alterations are allowed for by the key features of the outdoor space at Grandpont: nature is present and changes daily, weekly, seasonally; there are elements that children will always want to experience – water, mud, prospect and seclusion; and there are fixed features around which other activities can take place – the sandpit, climbing frame, storage shed, mud kitchen and agility trail.

Headteacher Anna Gillespie explains, 'Our spacious garden is structured as larger open areas and smaller spaces and enables children's exploratory play. It is full of winding paths, a variety of surfaces and levels with natural and man-made materials. It is organised for open-ended play, with open-ended resources and a huge sandpit at the centre.'

The combination of abundant, high-quality resources, thoughtful landscape design and passionate outdoor practice characterises the outdoor space at Grandpont Nursery and Children's Centre. ■

7Cs Outdoor Playspace Audit Sheet I



The 7Cs were developed through a 5-year research partnership at the University of British Columbia, with the goal of helping designers and educators create outdoor playspaces that meet the needs of young children and integrate the unique qualities of outdoor play. This audit tool has been adapted from the 7Cs research, so before using the audit in your own setting, it would be helpful to read this [summary of the 7Cs research](#), to understand how you can apply the 7Cs to your setting.

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|--------------------------------------------|
| Name / location of audit area: | | Auditor: | |
| Date: | Time: | Weather: | |
| Approximate area (m ²) | Approximate shape | | No. children using the space |
| ABOUT THIS SPACE | | | |
| CONTEXT: Views within and from outside Is the play space attractive to look at? In what ways? | | | Quality (1-4) 1 = excellent 4 = poor |
| CONTEXT: Views out What can children see beyond the playspace boundaries? Can they interact with the neighbourhood? | | | Priority (1-4) 1 = urgent 4 = low |
| CONTEXT: Boundaries What are the boundaries made of? Are they attractive? In good condition? Fit for purpose? | | | |
| CONTEXT: Health and safety How does the space suffer from vandalism / animal incursion? | | | |

| ABOUT THIS SPACE | Quality (1-4) 1 = excellent 4 = poor | Priority (1-4) 1 = urgent 4 = low |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <p>CONNECTIVITY: Getting in and out of the space How easy it is to get outdoors from indoors? How secure is it?</p> | | |
| <p>CONNECTIVITY: Moving around the space Describe how paths, steps, bridges, gates etc. link the space. What are they made from?</p> | | |
| <p>CHANGE: Natural materials What natural materials are present? Include vegetation and surfaces.</p> | | |
| <p>CHANGE: Shade and shelter What kinds of shade and shelter are available?</p> | | |
| <p>CHANGE: Full use of the space Are there any parts of this space that don't get used? Describe why?</p> | | |
| <p>CHANGE: Features What features or fixtures have been added to this space?</p> | | |
| <p>CLARITY: Surfaces What different types of surface are present?</p> | | |

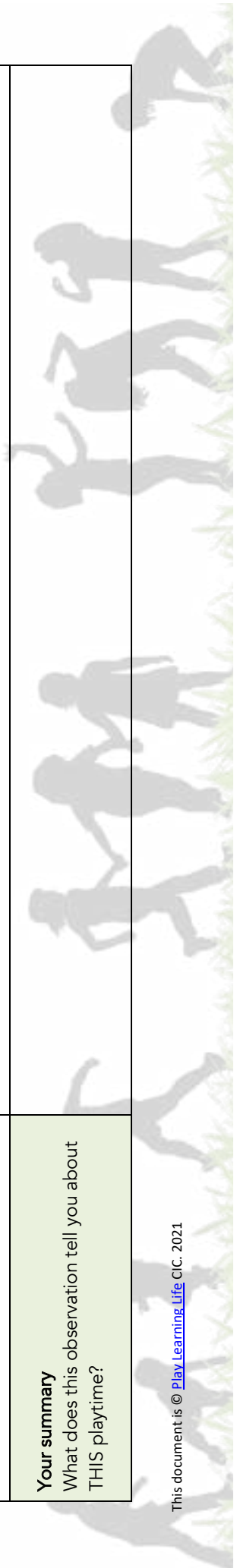
7Cs Outdoor Playspace Audit Sheet 3



| ABOUT THIS SPACE | Quality (1-4) 1 = excellent 4 = poor | Priority (1-4) 1 = urgent 4 = low |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <p>CLARITY: Build quality What condition is the space (including its features) in?</p> | | |
| <p>CLARITY: Seating Where can children sit (including informal seating)? It is appropriate?</p> | | |
| <p>CLARITY: Logistics How easy is to set up and pack away this space? Can children do it independently?</p> | | |
| <p>CHALLENGE: Risk and challenge How are children encouraged to take risks and challenge themselves in this space? Note any resources used.</p> | | |
| <p>CHALLENGE: Learning outcomes Which areas of learning are supported by this space? Briefly describe a few examples.</p> | | |
| <p>CHARACTER: Atmosphere What emotional response do YOU get from this space? What's the best thing about it?</p> | | |
| <p>CHARACTER: if you had to describe this space in one short sentence what would you say?</p> | | |

Outdoor Play Observation Record

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Your names: | | What is the weather like? |
| Date: | Time: | |
| Location and context: Where are you doing this observation? What is the 'character' of this space? | | |
| What are children doing? Describe the play you can see happening. | | |
| Who is playing? Are children playing alone, or in a group? Who is leading? Are adults involved? | | |
| What resources are children playing with? Are they using any equipment, materials, fixed features or other items in their play? | | |
| Are children fully engaged in this play? Are they fully engaged in what they are doing? How can you tell? | | |
| What are children saying? Record words and phrases you can hear in the playground. What other ways are children communicating? | | |
| Your summary What does this observation tell you about THIS playtime? | | |



CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.
2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, HSE makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.
3. HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well-managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential danger.
4. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.
5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks¹ and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.'

6. HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.
7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it

¹ The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance *does* mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

9. Striking the right balance *does not* mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.

10. Play providers² should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

² Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

If things go wrong

Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.

15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

September 2012

RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Learning and playing outdoors

WHAT IS RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT?

Risk Benefit Assessment (or sometimes, Analysis) is an approach to risk assessment that focuses not just on the *risks* of the activity, but on the *benefits* of the activity.

It is particularly valuable in the context of outdoor learning and play and as such as been adopted by Play England, the Health and Safety Executive and other leading education or play organisations as their preferred method of risk assessment.

Risk Benefit Assessment (RBA), starts with the principle that risk is an **essential element** in the development of children's physical, emotional and intellectual development. RBA helps decision makers ascertain whether the level of risk inherent in an activity is 'worth it' – in other words that the benefits children will gain from the activity outweigh the risks associated with it.

Using a RBA approach still means you need to consider how to mitigate risk and clarify how you will deal with risk. A helpful (and sometimes, amusing) way of examining risks is to imagine how children would miss out, if they weren't able to engage in the activity – almost like a 'reverse' risk assessment. For example,

What experiences would children miss out on, if they never learned to light and manage a fire?
What risks might they face in future, if they never learned these skills?

When expressed this way, it's easy to show how an activity provides important skills and therefore risk assess to ensure children are able to experience it. By tackling risks in a safe, managed environment and supported by caring, knowledgeable adults, children gain the skills and confidence to take on bigger risks as they grow older.

Risk isn't just about physical actions – for example climbing a tree or skateboarding. It's also about taking intellectual risks – trying anything for the first time, testing new ideas, accepting other people's opinions even (or especially) if you don't agree with them. Children will also encounter emotional risks throughout their lives, so by developing a culture of risk taking in your school or setting, you are helping children develop the resilience, clarity of thought and practical skills to manage tricky times ahead.

MORE INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION

- Managing Risk in Play Provision – Play Safety Forum / Play England: [Download the PDF](#).
- The Health and Safety Executive's High Level Statement on Children's Play: [Download the PDF](#).
- Play Safety Forum – have a look at their risk benefit booklet and form – [Download the PDF](#)
- Read about risk embracing school playgrounds in Berlin: [Download a PDF booklet](#)

www.plloutdoors.org.uk

enquiries@playlearninglife.org.uk

MAKING IT WORK IN YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

You should have a working knowledge of risk assessment already – you will have RAs in written form and you'll be risk assessing 'dynamically' at every session.

RBA invites you to think about how you can *enable* exciting activity, rather than *preventing* it. You'll need to look at the **hazards**, and decide whether, on balance, the hazard represents an **acceptable risk** or an **unacceptable risk**.

The outcome might be different for each child, depending on their own ability and confidence levels, as well as the context of the risk - that's where the mitigating factors, or 'precautions', come in.

Use the RBA template overleaf to risk benefit assess some of the activities you already do. Then, when you feel confident using it, ask children what else they'd like to be able to do outdoors, and work through the RBA table together to establish how, together, you can make it happen.



RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity:

Date:

Assessor:

Review date:

A good way of deciding on the benefits is to consider what children would MISS OUT ON if they were not able to participate in this activity – almost like a ‘reverse’ risk assessment!

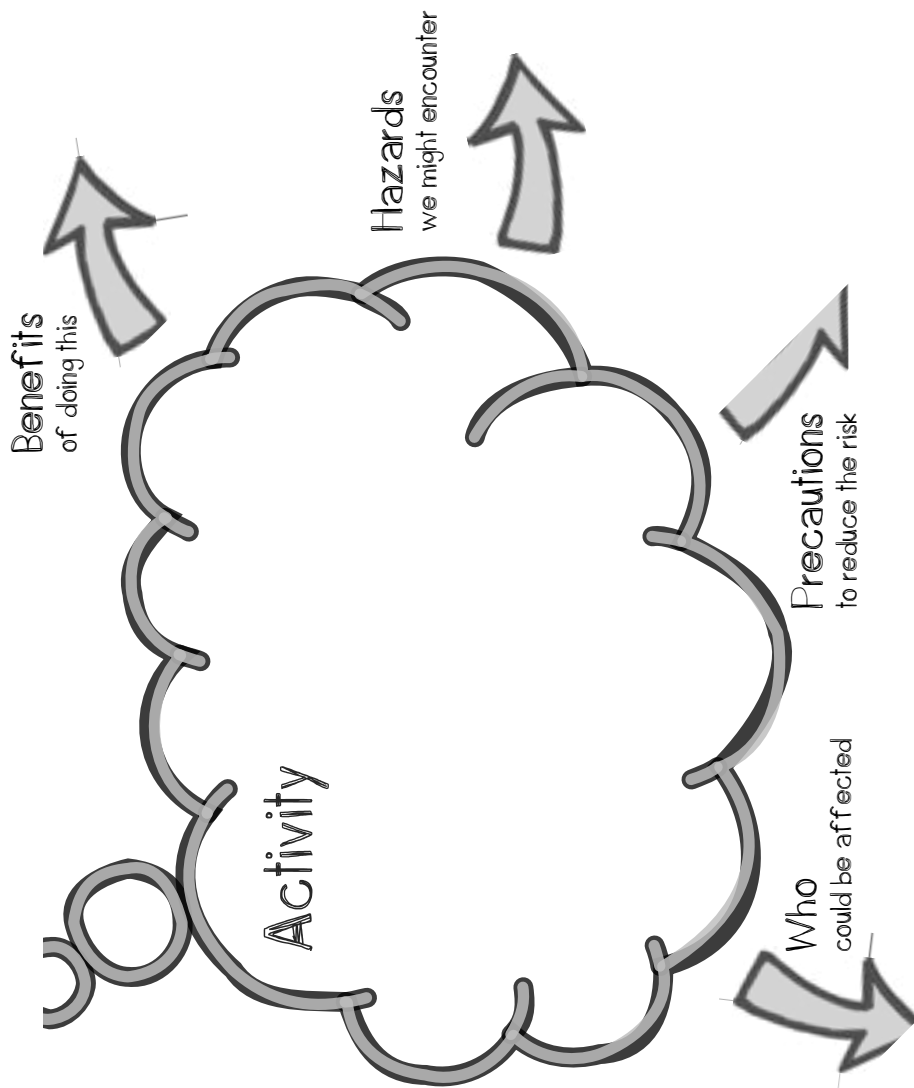
| ACTIVITY | How will children BENEFIT from this activity? | Local context | Possible hazards | Who is at risk? | PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury | Overall RATING: L/M/H |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
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If you are using this document in Microsoft Word format, the boxes in the table above will expand as you type into them.

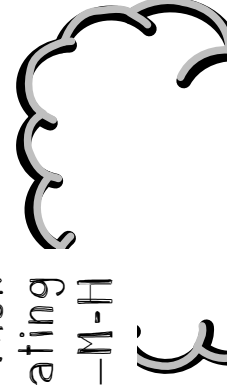
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Risk Rating L-M-H



Use this diagram to carry out 'dynamic' risk assessments – on the go. Jot down the most important issues to consider and apply.

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PRIORITIES + LOGISTICS

In order to carry out our plans, these are the key tasks, and the people or organisations we'll ask to help us implement our ideas:



ACTION PLAN
BETTER OUTDOOR PLAY, EVERY DAY
ABOUT OUR SETTING

enquiries@playlearninglife.org.uk



OUR VISION FOR OUTDOOR PLAY, EVERY DAY

www.piloutdoors.org.uk

WHAT WE DO WELL

Our playspace audit and play observations provided rich evidence about our practice and our space. We know that:



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OUR BUDGET AND HOW WE'LL ALLOCATE IT



OUR IMPROVEMENT FOCUS

We looked at what we wanted children to be able to DO outdoors, in order to fulfil our Vision. These are the key continuous provision and non-negotiables for outdoors at our setting:

THE CHANGES WE PLAN TO MAKE

In order for our children to be able to DO these things, we need to make changes to the way we use, design and resource, and manage outdoors. We propose:

CHANGES TO THE WAY WE USE OUTDOORS

CHANGES TO HOW OUTDOORS IS RESOURCED AND DESIGNED

CHANGES TO HOW WE MANAGE OUTDOORS