

Frequently Asked Questions about Outdoor Play and Learning

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COVID-related

Please see this [webinar link](#)/PDF Quick reference package ([English](#), [French](#)) about reopening Forest Schools during COVID-19. In it you will find concrete examples of how outdoor learning programs have adapted at this time.

- Do kids need to physically distance?
 - Please consult with your local public health authority and be sure to follow their guidelines. Their advice will be specific to the risk level in your region, and will likely be different for indoor and outdoor spaces.
- Do I/my staff need PPE?
 - You may be required to wear masks, face shields, eye coverings, and/or protective gowns when working with/screening children. Please consult regularly with your local and provincial health authorities, and follow their guidelines.
- Is it safe to use loose parts/toys? How are we supposed to keep them clean?
 - Please consult with your local and provincial health authorities and be sure to follow the guidelines that apply.
 - One way to manage cleanliness and safety for loose parts is to limit and/or reduce them to a specific cohort/group of children. In the webinar linked above, several program operators describe creating “bubble bags” or personal loose parts kits for each child/cohort in their program.
 - If you decide to use loose parts, develop and document your protocol for wiping them regularly with disinfectant. Health Canada offers [a list of disinfectants](#) effective for COVID-19 sanitization.
 - Consider using loose parts that are easy to clean, i.e., pots, pans, markers, etc.
- Are there COVID-related best practices for outdoor play and learning?
 - Please see the webinar/PDF
- What ratio of staff to children should we have?
 - This would depend on what COVID-19 protocols your region has in place for child care centres, recreation programs, and/or school programs. For a list of protocols and guidelines, consult with your local public health authority and Ministry of Education.
- For further information, please refer to the recorded [COVID-19 Webinar](#) on YouTube and PDF packages containing key points from the discussion and sample informed consent and risk management documents for your reference ([English](#), [French](#)).

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HYGIENE and BATHROOMING

- What if a kid needs to use the bathroom when we're outside?
 - Prevention: develop a routine during which all children are encouraged to use the bathroom before you head outside
 - If someone needs to use the bathroom when outside, here are some options:
 - Are you close enough to a bathroom and is the child old enough that they can go alone and check in with you upon their return?
 - If not, is there another adult who can accompany them?
 - If not, have you asked for and received informed consent from the child's caregiver that they can pee outside?
 - Is there a place the child can go pee privately and safely, and are they capable of doing this without getting wet?
 - If not, do you have a "[luggable loo](#)"? If not, you'll have to head back in!
 - If they need to poo: Do you have informed consent for them to do so safely outside? Are you in an environment where they can do so safely/environmentally safely outside? Are you able to follow [leave no trace bathrooming](#) procedures? Do you have a luggable loo? If yes to all of these, great, if no, you'll have to head back.
 - Bathroom logistics are a great reason to have multiple adults with a group of children, so that one adult can accompany a child to the bathroom, and the rest of the group does not have to be disrupted.
- How do we practice safe hand hygiene outside?
 - There are several ways to practice hand sanitizing/washing outside. The simplest form is to use hand sanitizer and then to develop a routine for everyone to safely wash hands with soap and water upon your return inside.
 - Otherwise, you could bring an eco-safe soap (i.e. Dr. Bronners) and a [dromedary bag](#), which, once hung up in a tree and the valve opened, can serve as a tap. For drying hands, you could bring paper towels and safely dispose of them, or have children air dry their hands.
 - You could also build a "[tippy tap](#)" if that was a better fit for your program - it could even be an authentic and powerful learning project for your students!
 - Be sure to establish a routine to wash/sanitize hands before and after eating.

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PLAY

- How do I engage students who would rather be on devices?
 - Setting up ‘provocations’ to engage students and appeal to their interests is one way to encourage play (that is not on devices). Provocations could be (and are not limited to)...
 - Wooden planks (these have many possible uses! Teeter-totters, shelters, obstacle courses, etc.)
 - Swings
 - Art/craft supplies, i.e., markers, pencil crayons, paper, clipboards, clay, blocks, twine & yarn, the list goes on and on...
 - Games, i.e., chess, Goblet, Uno, etc.
 - Shelter building set-ups (tarps, burlap, long branches, etc.)
 - Books and guides
 - Shovels (especially in winter! Shovels are an excellent provocation!)
 - Various loose parts (pots, pans, utensils, baskets, etc.)
 - You could also implement a guideline that states ‘Leave electronic devices at home’, or something of that nature. Devices outdoors do not always work out - they can get damaged or lost, or initiate conflict between children, etc. Having a guideline of leaving devices at home would eliminate that worry
 - OR, if it feels right, for older students, devices could serve as a tool for flora/fauna identification and further/deeper exploration. It is up to you and your team if and how you would or would not include electronics in your program.
- What about kids who “don’t know how to play” or “don’t know what to do”?
 - There is often a period of time - usually at the beginning of the year or of a session - of discomfort and/or uncertainty. Sometimes this takes the form of a feeling of complete chaos! Other times it shows up as children feeling very unsure of what to do, and maybe clinging to their adult - parent, teacher, or caregiver. This has less to do with “not knowing how to play” and more being so accustomed to adult direction and instruction that when offered the opportunity to lead their own play and learning, children are at a loss. This will ease once children feel safe. Some ways you might support them are:
 - Allow them time to be unsure! Try to let go of the need to “fix it”. Allow them to be with you as you walk around chatting with other children. Narrate what you see them doing.
 - Model entering into play: “What are you doing, V.? Oh you’re trying to balance on that log? Can I try?!”
 - Begin playing yourself! Without even using words, maybe you pick up a crayon and begin to draw, and make space beside you for the child to do the same. Or maybe you take out a book and begin to read, make space for the child to sit beside you and look on. Maybe you start looking under

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rocks for bugs. I've yet to meet a child who doesn't get engaged in looking for creatures!

- How do I encourage independent play in very young children?
 - Sometimes it can feel like children can't play without us, and this is frustrating for everyone involved! Both children and adults can get used to interacting in a way that makes children passive and dependent on adults to lead play. It can be helpful to think of independent play as a skill that is built incrementally, and that will require us to potentially break some of the habits that entrench the codependency. 7 ideas to support independent play:
 - Get out of the way! Actually move a little further away!
 - Wait (try counting to 30!) before getting involved or solving a problem.
 - Wait before speaking!
 - If you're constantly being asked to play (or entertain!), say no regularly. Think of their independent play muscle getting stronger!
 - Resist the urge to "fix it" - whether it's boredom, or something "not working".
 - Acknowledge those feelings: "You're bored, eh?" "Are you frustrated? It's not working how you thought it would, hey?"
 - Observe, be curious. What are they interested in? Are there books or tools or other loose parts (rope, etc.) you could make available in their play space that would help them get/stay engaged?
- How do I convince parents/colleagues/administrators of the value of play?
 - See our pitch deck! (COMING SOON!)
- How do I support learning through play?
 - Play is learning. Our job as caring adults and educators is to learn how to see it. When a child is climbing onto a rock and jumping off again and again, ask yourself: what are they already learning? Could I extend that learning? Do I need to, or is it enough as it is?
 - If you feel you may want to extend or expand upon that learning, language can be a great tool to facilitate/support play. A helpful list of things you could say when observing play (to help foster awareness and problem solving) is:
 - What do you notice? What do you wonder?
 - Can you hear...the wind in the trees, the singing birds, the rushing water?
 - Do you feel...comfortable on that branch, the heat from the fire?
 - Try using your...hands, feet, arms.
 - Are you feeling...tired, safe, scared, excited?
 - What's your plan...if you build this shelter? Climb that rock?
 - What can you use...to make your shelter secure? Stable? Safe?
 - How will you...get down, get across, go up?
 - Who will...go with you? help you if?

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- What are loose parts?
 - The “Loose Parts Theory” was first advanced by Simon Nicholson in the 70s. It has since been applied to play, and the idea is that anything that can be used in multiple ways is a loose part. A helicopter that makes noise at the press of a button and spins its propeller is not a loose part because it can really only ever be a helicopter, it’s use and meaning are “fixed”. Whereas a stick can be a guitar, a fishing rod, a sword, etc., etc., etc., so it is a loose part. A pot can also be a loose part because it can be a pot or it can be a hat, for example.
 - “Natural loose parts” are made of natural materials - wood, rattan, etc. - and many natural found items can become loose parts as they’re used in different ways in play, like a pine cone that becomes a boat that becomes a pen, for example.
 - Not all loose parts are made of natural materials.
- How do I support children with disabilities/exceptionalities outside?
 - The goal is to ensure that children feel safe and comfortable outside - that opens up the possibilities to joy, care, and learning! Here are some ways to support children with disabilities/exceptionalities outside:
 - Learning outside can look many different ways, and starting small may even mean start with smaller groups to build up confidence
 - Try first moving your indoor routines or materials outside, and build up to seeing the unique possibilities in the outdoors as a learning space
 - Focus on your successes! Just getting outside for free exploration is valuable!
 - Find partners and allies in your colleagues and parents - this is tough to do alone
 - Be willing to dialogue with parents and caregivers - what’s the value of outdoor play and learning? Show them how you’ve thought it through. Build trust. Allow them to express their fears and concerns, and to explore and experience the outdoor learning space with their children - there’s power of letting them witness.
 - Using their experiences and expertise
 - Use your teams, support staff, even on a consultative basis
 - Find volunteers - lots of steps to this, especially with COVID - but do what you can to bring in the extra people that you need to make it happen
 - Important things to remember...
 - ALWAYS visit the site where you will be playing first. Conduct a risk/benefit assessment (specific to what you think the students will be interested in and their needs) and develop a safety plan
 - Check out the free [Canadian Risk Benefit Assessment Toolkit](#). Adapt and apply the templates for your learners and your setting.
 - Think about and move through the terrain with your students in mind. What accessibility challenges does it present, and how could you work around them?

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- Know your students and the specific considerations for specific diagnoses, disabilities, and exceptionalities
- Ensure you have the proper ratios of staff to child when you are outdoors
- Different students will get different things out of the same experience, will learn different things or accomplish different goals, and some of what they take from the experience may surprise you!
- Don't plan the outcomes so fully that it closes off that possibility for surprise! The depth of the learning and the possibilities may surprise you!
- Look for the learning
 - Reframe for yourself transitions periods as opportunities for real learning
 - Reframe for yourself your outdoor space - even a parking lot presents learning opportunities! Try to see it in a new lens, and from the perspective of your students.
 - Offer students a focus point - telling a story inside, about wind, for example, which inspired the children to look for things that were in the story, and stimulated students to meet their communication goals - bridged from inside to outside
 - Ask open-ended questions :”why is it so hot here and so much cooler here?”
 - Use the natural space/built environment as the doorway into your curriculum vs. pre planning an agenda that you can't deviate from
 - Be comfortable and familiar enough with your goals/curriculum, and have a willingness to see where the environment will take you
- For further listening on how to support children with disabilities/exceptionalities outside, check out this [podcast](#).

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- How can I meet my math curriculum outside?
 - Math is everywhere, especially in outdoor spaces! From constructing a shelter made out of branches and sticks, to counting and collecting rocks and other forest treasures, math exists and is used in all sorts of ways outside.
 - Be sure to document conversations between children, take photos and videos of projects that children work on, and ask open-ended questions like, “Wow, what is your plan here?” “How will you create ...?” “What is it that helped you come to this idea?”. By asking open-ended questions, you leave room and allow space for the child's creativity, interests, inquiry, and imagination. What you find out may surprise you!
 - Some examples of provocations as offered by Bloom et al. (1956) are questions that are...
 - Thought-provoking
 - Clear and brief

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- Followed by wait time (at least 15-20 seconds of silence after the question)
- Purposeful
- The connections to the math curriculum are emergent and stem from the child's interest, therefore encourage deep and meaningful time and energy into certain projects. For example, I once spent the whole morning with a child (let's call them A.) who wanted to build a sled. A. said to me, "this hill is covered in snow and would be perfect for a sled! I want to build one and I am going to collect materials around the forest, would you help me put it together?" A. then explored the forest, looking for pieces that would work for their project. A. came back to me with a plank of wood, two large sticks, and a stone. A. then asked if I could get some yarn/twine for them to put everything together. I gathered the yarn, and watched as they problem-solved their way through building a sled for the hill. I recorded the conversations between them and the other children - about their plan, about what could go wrong, about what to fix if/when it did go wrong. The thoughts they had were complete with facets of algebra, measurement, simple machines. The way in which they approached this project involved questioning, exploring, observing, planning, and reflecting - investigation skills, communication skills, and so much more. This sled project met many math expectations from the curriculum, as well as expectations from the literacy and science curriculums.
- For further reading, be sure to check out this [blog post](#) about finding the curriculum in children's interests.
- And for more information, visit Diane Kashin's article called [Messy Maths](#).
- More math resources will be available on Thrive Outside.
- How can I meet my literacy curriculum outside?
 - Language and communication are prominent pieces of play outdoors, literacy is involved in every aspect of play! Chatting with peers, planning a shelter design, noticing and talking about flora/fauna, reading books and field guides, co-assessing risk, walking through the steps to climbing a tree...the list goes on and on!
 - Check out [The Flower of Love](#) blog post for more ways in which to connect learning outdoors with the literacy curriculum, and finding curriculum in play. Also, visit this resource for more ideas!
 - For further reading, see [this blog post](#) where Diane Kashin explores literacy and learning outdoors.
 - More literacy resources will be available on Thrive Outside.
- How can I meet my _____ curriculum outside?
 - Many curriculum connections that you aim to meet occur naturally in play! It takes practice, but through regular careful observation, documentation, and reflection, you can begin to see the learning and the curriculum connections arising authentically in the play.

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- Play involves strong, trusting relationships and the freedom (time and space) to sink in, get messy, dig deep, and wonder. Find inspiration, and go from there! Sounds whimsical? You bet it is!
- Some helpful tips for asking questions to inspire, provoke, expand, and deepen learning (and perhaps make curriculum expectations more visible) can include:
 - “What do you think happened?”
 - “Why do you think that is?”
- Something to explore is “Backwards Planning” - or lesson planning with “Backwards Design” in mind. This process involves lesson planning from whatever interest and learning emerges from the children, and continuing from there! If you begin with a child’s interest, the motivation, genuine care, and subsequent learning comes about organically.
- Curious about what this can look like? Check out this blog post: [uncovering the curriculum through outdoor play](#).
- Do you have outdoor learning lesson plans?
 - A big part of why learning can emerge through play and outside in natural spaces is due to the reflection, preparation, and provocations established by the educator/teacher/parent team (in addition to the magic that already exists outside).
 - It takes a lot of preparation and intention to foster learning outdoors. Outdoor learning involves listening and trusting the children and your team. Fostering that trust allows each day to be complete with learning and connection to each other and the land.
 - Be open to change! Plans change, and things can shift, and that is totally okay! And sometimes, it is encouraged.
 - We do follow a ‘rhythm of the day’ which unfolds differently each day, depending on a variety of factors (group dynamics, interests, the season, weather, etc.). For more information and further reading, here is a [guideline](#) for what a ‘rhythm’ could look like.
- How can I assess outdoor play?
 - The forest school approach is child-centred, interest-led, inquiry-driven, educator-supported learning and connecting through play on the land. You might be thinking, how can I assess that?
 - With outdoor, play-based learning, you might need to make a bit of a mindset shift from assessing output/products (i.e. written work, math problems, worksheets, etc.) to assessing student activity, including what they do/try to do, and what they say.
 - However, you don’t need to reinvent the wheel!
 - Think about what assessment techniques work well for you inside, and ask yourself how they might work outside? Will they work as is, or will you need to tweak them?
 - For example, you use the following techniques outside and inside:

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- Observation, recording/documentation (running records, anecdotal notes, audio/video recordings, photos, etc.)
- Ask questions, listen, document responses - either in group settings or one on one
- One way of adapting “portfolio” style assessment is to equip each student with a notebook or journal, and they can write/draw/keep special findings, etc. all in that one notebook
- This is by no means an exhaustive list of ways to assess. Get creative! Find what feels good and fits well for you and your team.
- Assessment questions you may ask include, but are not limited to:
 - What was really happening there?
 - What was being learned/mastered/struggled with?”
 - What skills are they developing?
 - What concepts are they explicitly or implicitly wondering about or wrestling with?
 - What kind of change in the child’s’ experience/understanding of the world took place?
- Know your curriculum! The more familiar you are with the expectations, the more easily you will be able to see them coming up in play. This is also a confidence and practice issue, so start small (maybe focus on one curricular area you feel most confident in) and go from there!
- Hopefully, the pieces you gather from assessment lead to further growth and meaningful learning! Think in terms of both assessment FOR learning - how could you build on this? How could this be a pathway into the curriculum you have to cover? - and assessment OF learning.
- How can I document learning in outdoor play?
 - Pedagogical documentation comes in many forms. A great method for documenting learning is StoryPark, a platform to showcase stories of growth, challenge, resilience, and reflection through photos, videos, and words. StoryPark is an application that allows educators/caregivers to share stories and experiences from the day with parents, families, and friends in a secure way. It is just one option, explore what is out there and research a documentation tool that works for you!
 - A meaningful way to document learning in outdoor play is through videos/audio clips from conversations surrounding play that happens throughout the day. Capturing moments of innovation and inquiry are meaningful forms of pedagogical documentation.
 - Another possible way to document learning is in written form. At the end of each day, review and reflect with your education team about what happened in the day. What learning did you notice? What can we build upon for next time? What was challenging (believe me, there are challenges!)? What did we love about the day? WRITE THINGS DOWN! Have a record of what occurred during the day so that you can grow from that learning. Reflective practice is a beautiful way to honour and strengthen learning.

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- For further reading, check out Diane Kashin's work on [Pedagogical Documentation](#) in nature-based education.
- For more, also explore Reggio-inspired educator [Carlina Rinaldi](#), the Tracy Sims and Cheryl Yoworski Kindergarten team for [Passionately Curious Kindergarten](#), and the Ontario Government's document: [How Does Learning Happen?](#)
- "How do I change outdoor time from free play/recess to more purposeful outdoor time?"
 - Play is purposeful, and intentional. More free/unstructured play opens the door for learning and growth. Through play outdoors, children develop connections to the land, their peers, and themselves. They have time and space to build social relationships, process and make sense of the world around them, release energy, move their bodies, and express their feelings and emotions in imaginative ways.

SAFETY

- What about ticks?
 - Please consult with your local public health authority for their most current recommendations and protocols. And, here is what the Ottawa Forest and Nature School recommends: <https://childnature.ca/what-can-we-do-about-ticks/>
- What about hazardous animals and insects, or poison ivy and other hazardous plants?
 - The hazardous animals and insects we need to be aware of vary from region to region. Please check with local municipal/provincial authorities, for example: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/prevent-conflicts-wildlife>
 - In your First Aid Kit, ensure you have bug repellent (deet-free, or low-deet concentration) for prevention of insect bites and [Technu cleanser](#) to attempt to remove poison ivy oils. If Technu is not available, blue Dawn dish soap also works well!
- What about mushrooms?
 - We recommend encouraging children to only touch mushrooms with sticks to avoid physical contact with any hazardous mushrooms.
- What if there are no physical boundaries/barriers like a fence in the area we are going to explore?
 - Always visit the site you will be taking children to BEFORE going there with children. Establish for yourself what you want to be the physical boundaries of their play. You could then choose to visually mark those boundaries (i.e. with rope or flagging tape) or you could walk the boundaries with the children upon arrival, or you could ask children to stay within sight of a centrally-located bright object (i.e. a bright first aid backpack hung up in a central tree).

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- What if kids run away?
 - Have a protocol in place for this in advance, know your space and have the number of who you can call for help saved in your phone. Prevent running by practicing your stopping mechanism (i.e. a wolf howl) - make it a game - and prioritize getting to know your children and building relationships with them before venturing too far afield. This will mean you know who to stay close to, and who may be reaching their trigger point where they'll feel they need to run. If you see stress behaviour mounting, prevent the running by deescalating the tension before it reaches that breaking point.

SUPPORTING RISK-TAKING in PLAY

- How do I convince parents/colleagues/administrators of the value of risky play?
 - Meet people where they're at! We are all at different points on the risk aversion/risk embracing spectrum, and that's ok. Ask what folks are worried about and why. Ask if they'd be willing to let you try x/y/z. Share your risk/benefit assessment process.
 - For example, "I can see that you're really uncomfortable with R. climbing up the slide. Would you be willing to share why?" "Right, you're worried they might fall, I get that! Would you be willing to watch R. climb up the slide? I'll move closer to spot them, and I think you might be reassured when you see how capable they are." "I really value the sense of accomplishment R. feels when they get to the top - see that? And they're exhilarated because it was challenging but they did it themselves! I love that."

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS

- How do I manage difficult behaviour outside?
 - This really depends on what the difficult behaviour is, but in general, we recommend setting up for success and preventing difficult behaviour before it even arises. This means anticipating what kinds of play you may want to redirect and thinking through how you'll afford children opportunities to channel their energy constructively. It means keeping an eye and an ear out for energy levels and as tension starts to build, redirecting: maybe voices are starting to be raised, or some physical jostling is ramping up. Is it time for a snack? Water break? A story? A change of scenery, or a new game?
 - And this speaks to the other fundamental behaviour management principle we recommend: look for the underlying cause of challenging behaviours. Usually

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there is an unmet need driving the difficult behaviour. If we look to address that as opposed to addressing the behaviour itself, the behaviour tends to resolve itself. For example, T and P are fighting over a stick, the tug of war is getting strong, as are the voices, and you're worried the stick is going to fly out of someone's hands and into someone's face! Move closer. Put your hand on the stick to stabilize it. Use a calm voice: "what's going on, friends?" Allow each voice to be heard - that's a need in itself, and usually lets some of the pressure out of the situation. Then you can help problem-solve: "let's go get another stick together? Oh but it needs to be THIS BIG - ok, let's go look, I think I saw a good one over here."

- In some scenarios, when behaviours are challenging, a useful, go-to phrase is asking the child(ren), "Is it safe? Is it kind?" and then following through. This often slows down whatever momentum was picking up and allows for all voices and feelings to be heard. It also serves as a much needed "pause". If the behaviour was not safe or kind, then ask "Oh, I see. What can we do to make it safe? kind?"

CHALLENGING SETTINGS

- What if I don't have access to a forest? What if I don't have access to nature? My schoolyard is just grass/tarmac - how can we learn in this environment?
 - That's ok! Children will find opportunities for rich play and learning just about everywhere! Think of taking a toddler on a walk - no pebble is left unturned! Look at your space from the perspective of a child. Literally crouch down and get your eyes to their level. What will they see? What's there that will catch their interest? What isn't there? Why? We once did a "forest school pop in" in a grassy yard, and a child said, "there's nothing here!" I said, "huh. What did you think would be here? What should be here?" "Ants!" she said. "There are no ants!" "Oh!" I said. "Let's take a closer look." We got some magnifying glasses - see our "what's in our kit" for more information about what you could bring to enrich your outdoor space - and looked more closely at the grass. Indeed, no ants. "You're right! There are no ants here! Where could they be?" Over the course of the next 40 minutes, we hypothesized about where the ants were - at home? Oh, where do ants live? - and what they were doing - finding food? Oh, what do ants eat? Suddenly we're finding the science curriculum!
 - If you need to broaden your radius, what is within the children's comfortable walking radius? Even the smallest cluster of trees or field of wildflowers can hold magic for children. Repeat the process: What's here? What's not here? Why? What can I add to enrich this space?
- There's no shade on my schoolyard. How do I prevent dehydration, sun/heat stroke?
 - See "Weather" section of FAQ about dehydration and extreme heat!

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- Being prepared with extra water is vital. Any vessel you can fill with water would work - a water bladder, [a dromedary bag](#) and/or a portable jug. The more water the better! If it is possible to bring 2 or 3 vessels with you to the yard, do so!
- Spray bottles filled with water go a long way to keep bodies cool. The mist from the bottles is refreshing and fun for both children and grown-ups!
- Hats are crucial to preventing sun/heat stroke.
- Hang a tarp if possible (from a fence/soccer posts/etc.), as it would provide shade and shelter during inclement weather. You can find durable and lightweight tarps of all sizes at shops like [Canadian Tire](#) or [Lowe's](#).
- Our outdoor space is a windtunnel - we can't go out there without sand getting in everyone's eyes!
 - Is there a space near-by that could provide more shelter? If not, that's okay! Time to get creative!
 - Put up tarps in a formation that could slow the speed of wind/sand entering a playspace.
 - Check the wind speed/direction before heading out to play. Adjust your plans/tarp set-up accordingly. The speed/direction could determine if it is safe or not to go outside.
 - Conduct a risk/benefit assessment of the site. Is it only windy sometimes? Perhaps there are certain times of the day/certain seasons that would be appropriate for play! Take a look at this free [Risk-Benefit Assessment Toolkit](#) for more information.
- What about frostbite and hypothermia?
 - Cold temperature is a common occurrence in Canada, and therefore frostbite and hypothermia are very real possibilities when playing outside with children. Prevention of frostbite and hypothermia involves wearing layers of clothing, and covering as much skin as possible to limit exposure. Clothing materials such as synthetics and wool are best for wicking away sweat while keeping your body warm. Wool/synthetic socks are especially good at keeping toes warm!
 - Layering clothing is also a helpful way to stay warm in extreme temperatures. You can refer to [this guide from MEC](#) which outlines strategies for layering outdoor gear in an effective way.
 - Bring *EXTRA* gear out with you (mittens, socks, neck warmers, etc.) to provide warmth when needed. If a child's gear is wet, swap it out for dry gear/clothing as soon as possible.
 - Keep track of the amount of time you have been outside, and monitor exposed skin areas for early signs of frostbite (i.e., small white patches on cheeks, nose, and ears, as well as extremely cold fingers/toes).
 - It is important to take breaks in a warm area, to give the skin a rest. If it is extremely cold, play and hike closer to a warm shelter.
 - The Canadian Red Cross also has a list of [strategies](#) to stay warm and safe during Canadian winters.

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- What if the families I work with cannot properly equip their children to be outside safely in challenging conditions?
 - Having a back-up supply of extra gear is super helpful. Put feelers out in your community for donations of gear from families/businesses! Folks are usually going through clothes/gear that they no longer need, so asking for donations could result in a plentiful supply.
 - Shifting to the needs of the children and families is so important. If the weather conditions to play in are challenging, offer ways in which to play closer to shelter or even indoors. Bringing outdoor learning indoors is definitely an option! Sometimes it is tricky to balance when conditions are challenging, trust your “gut” to make the right call.

WEATHER

- How are we going to play and learn outside when it's -40?
 - Playing and learning happens in all weather conditions! Self-regulation (listening to your heart, body, and mind to what feels good and what feels right) is a skill that is developed when experiencing different weather conditions.
 - Safety and wellness of the children (and the adults) is crucial, and -40 degree temperatures are definitely a possibility in Canadian winters. Here are some tips to stay safe in extreme cold...
 - Prevention of frostbite and hypothermia involves wearing layers of clothing, and covering as much skin as possible to limit exposure. Clothing materials such as synthetics and wool are best for wicking away sweat while keeping your body warm. Wool/synthetic socks are especially good at keeping toes warm!
 - Layering clothing is also a helpful way to stay warm in extreme temperatures. You can refer to [this guide from MEC](#) which outlines strategies for layering outdoor gear in an effective way.
 - Bring *EXTRA* gear out with you (mittens, socks, neck warmers, etc.) to provide warmth when needed. If a child's gear is wet, swap it out for dry gear/clothing as soon as possible.
 - A helpful tip, if it is available to you, is packing hand warmers and feet warmers. They are useful as a quick and instant source of warmth! They can often be found at dollar stores or Wal-Mart during the colder months.
 - Keep track of the amount of time you have been outside, and monitor exposed skin areas for early signs of frostbite (i.e., small white patches on cheeks, nose, and ears, as well as extremely cold fingers/toes).
 - Moving and playing are great ways to maintain body heat - so encourage lots of big body movement, such as shelter building, running games, etc.
 - It is important to TAKE BREAKS in a warm area, to give the skin a rest. If it is extremely cold, play and hike closer to a warm shelter.

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- The Canadian Red Cross also has a list of [strategies](#) to stay warm and safe during Canadian winters.
- How can we stay safe in extreme heat?
 - Strategies to stay safe in extreme heat involve preparation, prevention and monitoring the children and yourself (changes in energy, mood, wellness, etc.).
 - STAY HYDRATED! Some things to have prepared in advance are access to water sources (jugs, [dromedary bags](#), extra water bottles, and spray bottles) as drinking cool liquids is crucial to prevent heat-related illnesses.
 - An additional large jug with water for refilling children's personal water bottles is important to stay safe. Consider having extra clean water bottles as well, in case a child arrives without one.
 - Prevention is key. Something fun we like to do at Ottawa Forest and Nature School is a collective "forest school cheers", wherein the children all get out their personal water bottles, and together, thank something, and then take big sips of water. For example, one child will shout out "Thank you snakes, for visiting us today", and the whole group takes a sip of water, then another friend will offer a 'cheers' - "Thank you sandwich, for filling me up", everyone takes another sip, and so on and so forth. The "forest school cheers" is a great way to ensure everyone is staying hydrated, and encourages the children to pause, slow down, and take a break.
 - More fun ways to cool down include spray bottles (for misting the children, and education team), and/or watering cans (for 'watering can showers' - pouring water on your head/neck area).
 - Seeking out shade, and avoiding sunny/extra hot spaces during the hottest parts of the day is helpful in preventing any heat-related illness.
 - Always ensure the children are wearing a hat, that goes for grown-ups too! Lead by example! Light, loose-fitting clothing are also key to staying cool.
 - Continually monitor the children for signs and symptoms of dehydration, heat exhaustion, and other forms of heat related sickness. Checking in with the children, encouraging them to listen to their bodies, and using language to help them name what they are feeling is so important.
 - TAKE BREAKS! In shady, cool areas! No need to play and move fast all day long. Taking pauses is so important to staying safe in the heat.
 - The Canadian Red Cross also has [suggestions](#) to stay safe, cool, and hydrated during the heat of Canadian summers.
- When is it too hot or too cold to go outside?
 - That is up to you and your team, and the regulations or procedures that are in place for inclement/extreme weather.

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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/STEWARDSHIP

- How do we cultivate care for the environment in our students?
 - There are so many ways to do this! Embracing play outdoors is perhaps one of the most important steps to cultivate care for the environment.
 - Regular and repeated access to natural spaces is a large part of developing connection and cultivating care for the environment. Natural spaces can be anywhere and look like anything! From forests, to grassy fields, to schoolyards with lots of sandy patches and chain-link fences. Learning and connecting through play on the land emerges in whatever environment.
 - The children connect deeply and care for that natural space by BEING there and playing there, therefore subconsciously contributing to environmental stewardship. Fostering and cultivating that love occurs all the time! Through play that is intrinsically motivated and freely chosen.
 - Slowing down and holding space is another way to build and deepen relationships with the land. Check out [this blog post](#) about carving out time/space and trying to slow down.
 - Something to help foster a love for place is a mindfulness practice called 'Sit Spots'. Sit spots ask us to pause, to connect in stillness, to breathe a little deeper, and to notice the beauty around us. Sit spots are a gentle and meaningful way to connect with the land. How can you initiate sit spots? Some things you could ask to spark interest are...
 - "We are going to take time now to go find a space on our own that calls to our hearts, bodies, and minds..."
 - "While sitting in your space, notice what is around you! What do you notice? What do you wonder? What makes your heart feel joy? What makes your brain curious? How do you feel?"
 - "Remember to take deep breaths"
 - "Stay in sight of the orange (or whatever colour) backpack!"
 - "You can lay down or sit up. You can close your eyes, or leave them open. It is up to you! Make sure you are comfortable!"
 - Over time, with patience and practice, sit spots become more natural and fluid. Try them out sometime! See what works for you and the children you work with! Remember, there is no right way to do a sit spot.
 - Maybe it makes sense to ask questions with the group after the sit spot, to stimulate a conversation. What did you see or feel or wonder about? What will you remember? What was magical about your sit spot? Or, maybe it feels best to let feelings linger independently. Each participant gets to decide whether to share or to pass, and keep the experience to themselves.

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- Similarly to sit spots, you could try going for sound walks - for when it feels like sitting for a long period of time may be hard. Sound walks allow for the same noticing and wondering as sit spots, only moving!
- Things to consider when fostering awareness of the land is to minimize the ecological impact and maximize the learning and love...
 - Exploring flora with “only our eyes” is a way to mitigate touching, trampling, and/or picking plants/flowers/mushrooms.
 - For safety, touch mushrooms/unknown flora with sticks only.
 - ‘Leave only footprints’ or ‘leave no trace’ are great philosophies to follow. “We are visitors to a space, and the natural findings stay where we found them”.
 - Conduct and revisit ecological assessments to ensure your program or group are developing and reinforcing environmental care and stewardship.
- Storytelling is another extraordinary way to learn from and connect with the land. Not only stories from the grown-ups, but the children too! Children weave tales about the land they play on. For further reading, check out [this blog post about “listening to the forest”](#).
- What if they just destroy things like tree branches and plants when we get outside?
 - Sometimes children benefit from a constructive release. This can be helpful to de-escalate challenging behaviour in certain situations, while ensuring the safety of that particular child and the children around them. Sometimes it can be called ‘healthy destruction’.
 - Digging into/breaking apart old, dead branches and logs also offers opportunities to learn about the critters that live inside those spaces! Neat!
 - For navigating breaking living tree branches...
 - Try redirecting the child to break “only dead things” or things that are not alive. For example, branches that are attached to a fallen tree, rocks in a pile, pine needles or small twigs (not living).
 - Encouraging children to notice what is alive and what is not fosters an awareness and care for the land and beings that live within that land.
 - Maybe it feels right to establish a safe zone with lots of space for the breaking/smashing to take place, to ensure the safety of the child, others, and yourself. We often say, “Sticks need space!”, so allocate a zone dedicated to breaking dead branches.
 - “When in doubt, talk it out!” Talk through feelings together, and talk through the potential impact breaking branches has on the land/habitats for creatures.
 - Encountering tricky and challenging moments outside is an important part of learning and growth, for everyone involved. We learn to recognize when we are mad/scared/frustrated, name feelings, self-regulate, and take care of each other.

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- Should I let my students handle creatures?
 - Discuss with your team how you feel about handling creatures. There is no simple answer for this. It is quite complex and depends on your feelings, and the feelings of the folks you work with.
 - Consent is something we talk about when curiosity peaks about handling/holding creatures. We can think about what is kind and safe for the creature. What is the creature feeling when we hold it? Is it scared? Confused? Nervous? We recognize that the creature is not able to tell us how it feels, and that we cannot ask, “Can I pick you up?”. We can notice the body language of the creature, what does it mean when it is shaking? Jumping? Super still? Listening to the body language and respecting the creature is so important. How can we admire the creature while being safe and kind?
 - Perhaps looking “with our eyes only” is something you want to incorporate into your program, or perhaps your feelings will shift and adapt to changing situations.
 - Weaving stories about creatures and consent in the forest and outdoor spaces is a beautiful way to spark empathy for living beings. In stories where snakes or frogs or worms share how they feel, children potentially become more aware and connected to the feelings of that being.
 - Something you can say is, “We are grateful to be visitors to these spaces. The creatures live here always, this is their home. Thank you for letting us visit”.
 - It is true, the desire to touch creatures and love them in that way is very real - for children and adults alike! This can lead to further interest and stewardship. We want to respect creatures of the forest and the space. Critter handling can look like many different things:
 - Covering your hands with mud before picking up a frog
 - Only pick up a frog once!
 - Making a space that reflects the habitat of an insect (with sticks, leaves, mud, etc.)
 - Establish some guidelines for holding - how long, holding the creature low to the ground (in case it wants to jump out), etc.
 - Great learning and care comes from ‘collecting’ or ‘making homes for’ creatures. If you can find a way to do this without injuring or completely destroying the creature’s habitat, please do so!
 - One example that often occurs is the collection of caterpillars/insects. Often, children will want to collect caterpillars and put them inside lunch containers - with some twigs, leaves, soil, perhaps things commonly found in caterpillar habitats to make them comfortable. As an alternative to a container space, suggest creating a ‘natural boundary’ for a habitat. “Let’s set up some sticks and rocks and arrange them in a square, so we can observe these caterpillar friends” therein, allowing for observation and admiration of the critters, while simultaneously reducing contact to the caterpillar/insect.

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- Things to ponder when handling creatures/critters include, “How can we be thoughtful - thoughtful with each other, with creatures, and with the land we get to play on?” “How can we do this in a kind, safe, way?”
- Continually talk, assess, share feelings, and pause. Check in on the creature, the children, and yourself. What feels good about this? What deep learning is emerging? What feels icky or uncomfortable? Let’s talk about why it might feel that way.
- Consider minimizing the ecological impact on a place and the beings that live there, while simultaneously nurturing a love and care for the land and its creatures.

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES

- How can I incorporate Indigenous perspectives respectfully?
 - Understand and recognize that the process of incorporating Indigenous perspectives respectfully is a lifelong journey that requires time, effort, patience, and great care.
 - Understand and recognize your own positionality and privilege.
 - Connect with local Indigenous friendship centres or Indigenous Student Centres. They can often guide you through developing relationships. After completing your own research & reading about your community, perhaps reach out to Knowledge Holders, Elders, and/or Education liaisons (public schools often have an individual/department you can contact!).
 - LISTEN! Reach out to the Indigenous community(ies) in your area in unimposing ways. Develop and build authentic, caring, open, and kind relationships.
 - Allow for time and space to nurture trust, and follow through with actionable steps.
 - Recognize your/your program’s role in dismantling colonialism. Produce concrete steps that fit for you and your team in regards to decolonization, reconciliation and healing. Hold yourselves accountable. Make time for revisiting steps. Hold space for reflective practice.
 - Continue to be inspired by Indigenous history and presence on the land, and acknowledge where/what unceded territory you would be walking and playing on.
 - Here is a map to distinguish Indigenous communities, languages and treaties: <https://native-land.ca/>
 - The organization suggests contacting the nations directly “to learn more about how they want to be acknowledged and any other nations or peoples in the area.” (<https://native-land.ca/territory-acknowledgement/>)
 - “All settlers, including recent arrivants, have a responsibility to consider what it means to acknowledge the history and legacy of colonialism. What

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are some of the privileges settlers enjoy today because of colonialism? How can individuals develop relationships with peoples whose territory they are living on in the contemporary Canadian geopolitical landscape? What are you, or your organization, doing beyond acknowledging the territory where you live, work, or hold your events? What might you be doing that perpetuates settler colonial futurity rather than considering alternative ways forward for Canada? Do you have an understanding of the on-going violence and the trauma that is part of the structure of colonialism?" (<https://native-land.ca/territory-acknowledgement/>).

- Chelsea Vowel, Métis, shares in *Beyond Territorial Acknowledgements* (2016) the importance of the work that needs to be done in addition to land acknowledgements:
 - “If we think of territorial acknowledgments as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure. I believe this is true as long as these acknowledgments discomfit both those speaking and hearing the words. The fact of Indigenous presence should force non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands”.
- For further reading, see [What is the Significance of acknowledging the Indigenous land we stand on?](#)
- Find meaningful ways to educate your students and support Indigenous communities.
- Find/seek out stories, songs, and books by Indigenous authors, artists and musicians. The inclusion of Indigenous authors and artists provides the opportunity to learn about Indigenous communities in your area and around the world. It can open and strengthen relationships. Here are some options to get you started:
 - Muskrat Magazine, [Must Read Indigenous Children’s Books List](#)
 - CBC, [14 inspiring children’s books from Indigenous writers](#)
 - CBC, [10 Beautiful Indigenous children’s books to add to your library](#)
 - Little Feminist, [10 Children’s Books featuring Indigenous peoples](#)
 - Todays Parent, [39 Indigenous stories to read and share with your kids](#)
 - How can you use these materials respectfully and sensitively? [Decolonizing Teaching Indigenizing Learning](#) offers suggestions on how to incorporate Indigenous literature into your educational setting.
- Some resources to help you along the way can include (and are not limited to...)
 - The resource mentioned above based out of Vancouver, [The Land You Live On, Native-land.ca](#). Members have compiled a [teacher’s guide](#) which includes the importance of land acknowledgements, the land as a way of knowing, stories of the land, and more.
 - [First Nations Child and Family Caring Society](#), specifically the [Indigenous Knowledge Portal](#), is full of educational resources for all ages! It is complete with literature reviews, reports, films, stories, and more. These resources educate on Indigenous history and culture, aim to broaden perspectives, and encourage critical thinking.

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They also include collaborative projects, such as [Shannen's Dream](#) for safe and comfy schools.

- [Towards Braiding - Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures](#). This is a collaborative, ongoing project that involves asking/addressing/facilitating important “compass questions”.
- [150 Acts of Reconciliation](#), through Active History.ca
- The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, offers [teaching and educational resources](#) for all ages.
- University of Alberta offers a free 12-lesson course called [Indigenous Canada](#). It explores Indigenous histories and contemporary issues in Canada. From an Indigenous perspective, this course explores key issues facing Indigenous peoples today from a historical and critical perspective highlighting national and local Indigenous-settler relations. Here is the link for the course: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada>
- [Chelsea Vowel's blog, apihtawikosisan.com](#), is a fantastic resource! Chelsea is Métis from manitow-sâkahikan (Lac Ste. Anne) Alberta, residing in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton). Mother to six girls, she has a BEd and LLB, and is currently a graduate student and Cree language instructor at the Faculty of Native studies at the University of Alberta.
- [Click](#) for some general resources compiled by the team at [Indigenous Storybooks](#). From Indigenous Storybooks (a project of [Little Cree Books](#) in Alberta), see this [video](#) of Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald (Q'um Q'um Xiem; Sto:lo Nation) discussing Indigenous stories and their framework, and how educators can incorporate stories into their work, in a respectful way.
- The University of British Columbia has compiled a curated [curriculum bundle of resources](#) for Decolonizing Teaching Indigenous Learning. The bundle includes decolonizing and antiracist resources, Residential School resources, french resources, and more.
- United Nations [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). The Government of Canada also has [a link](#) with additional information pertaining to Canada.
- [Natural Curiosity](#) has education resources and professional development available. This inquiry resource has come out with a [second edition](#) which more thoroughly integrates an Indigenous perspective into environmental inquiry.

We want to acknowledge and emphasize that the practice of decolonization is an ONGOING journey, it is not simply a box to check off. We encourage you to make genuine connections, take the time and effort to build relationships, and respect the wishes, boundaries, and feelings of the Indigenous communities you engage with.