

Healthy Body, Happy Me 2022

Thrive Outside Thursday





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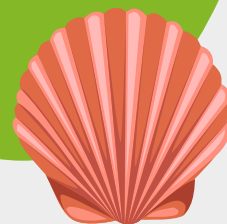
Simply being outdoors opens up a whole new dimension of learning for children.

Not only can they connect with the natural world and their surroundings, but they also have more opportunities to explore the environment using their gross motor skills, can learn to manage risks in play and will have different sensory experiences.

In addition to the health benefits, the National Literacy Trust (2021) produced an article highlighting the improvements in speech and language, cognitive development and confidence when children engaged in 'hands-on' learning in the outdoor environment. Time in the great outdoors can build on children's independence skills and has been linked to good mental and physical health. The Chief Medical Officer for the UK (2019) states that children under the age of five years should engage in around 180 minutes a day of active play, with one hour of this being moderate to vigorous play. With this in mind, early years settings play a huge role in ensuring children's physical health needs are met through their indoor and outdoor provision.

Early years settings recognise the importance of outdoor play for the children in their care and are skilled in providing great outdoor environments that support children's physical development needs. Practitioners often use outdoor play to allow children the opportunity to exercise, engage in larger scale play and simply to let off steam. Our Thrive Outside Thursday guide has lots of ideas and activities to extend children's learning and allow them the chance to experiment, explore and try new things using natural resources. In today's guide, there are activities to support many different areas of learning and the great thing is that many of these activities can be brought inside to continue the learning, if appropriate.





Activity 1 Outdoor explorers beach play

Although many settings have sand trays as part of their continuous provision, being able to sit in the sand and feel it on your feet is a whole new experience. When children can feel the sand between their toes, it provides different sensations and play can become much more immersive. For children who have never experienced the beach, or even those who do on a regular basis, searching for natural objects in the sand and using them to create structures gives children an understanding of the natural world around them. This activity will also support children's characteristics of life-long learning. Adding water adds a whole new dimension to sand play and supports children's learning in the area of science and maths. With so many learning opportunities from one activity, this is a great one to try with children of all ages.

Learning opportunities include:

- Communication and language skills
- Developing fine and gross motor skills
- Understanding of the world around them
- Exploring and identifying changes in materials, such as sand
- Problem solving skills, such as understanding that their actions can affect the natural world around them.



Resources

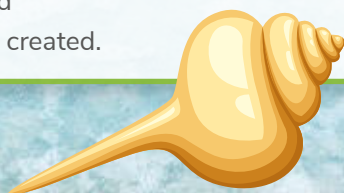
- Sand
- Water jug
- Pebbles, shells, mini spades, dried seaweed
- A low sided tuff spot (big enough for children to sit in)
- Natural moulds such as large shells, small stones and sticks for building.



Outdoor explorers beach play

Activity outline

- Fill a tuff spot or large low sided container with sand
- Encourage children to sit in the pit and dig using different sized tools
- Hide items that you might find at the beach in there, such as pebbles shells and dried seaweed. Supply natural moulds (large shells), small stones and sticks for children to use to build their own sand structures
- Talk to the children about these resources and encourage them to add water to the sand and look at the changes this makes to the sand. Encourage children to mould and shape the sand into different structures and to also recognise the change that adding certain amounts of water makes to the sand
- Support older children to experiment with the stones and sticks by create pictures and models in the sand
- Talk to children about what they have created.



Ideas for different ages

This idea can be used with children of all ages. However, practitioners need to risk assess the size of the stones and pebbles etc. that they put in the pit. Take care to ensure there are no choking hazards for younger children during this activity.



Extension idea

Consider adding water wheels to this activity and introducing the idea of dams to the children. Support children to build dams and model how to make streams in the sand. Children will have great fun building dams to try and stop the flow of the water.

Activity 2 Dandelion water play

Learning through contact with the natural world is a good way for children to try new things and test their ideas. Dandelions are an ideal plant to add to water play as they are colourful, soft and readily available through the spring and summer months.

Children love water play and this activity can also help them to develop their communication and language. Practitioners can support this by introducing new vocabulary to children, describing the feel, smell and physical features of the dandelions when they are dry and when they are wet. Alongside this, it gives children the opportunity to work together, filling containers, using utensils and creating potions that ignite their imaginations.

Dandelion water play

Activity outline

- Collect lots of heads of dandelions (or other plants - check for safety)
- Place in a large water tray
- Give children containers to scoop and ladles and wooden spoons to explore with
- Talk to children about the changes in flowers, noticing the smell and feel too
- Introduce new vocabulary to the children. Take care to allow them to explore their own ideas
- Set the children dandelion race challenges. Practise blowing the dandelion heads to move them from one end of the water tray to the other.

Extension ideas

Dandelion head races could be extended by using straws to blow and introducing timers for older children to time one another. Consider adding books to both your indoor and outdoor environment that relate to different flowers with information about dandelions and their different parts.

Ideas for different ages

This activity is suitable for all ages. Younger children will enjoy the sensory aspect of the dandelions and water. Model filling, emptying and pouring the water, encouraging children to feel the dandelions and splash in the water.



Resources

- Grass
- Water tray
- Warm water
- Dandelion heads
- Scoops, ladles, wooden spoons, plastic containers such as empty bottles and buckets.



Learning opportunities include:

- Fine and gross motor skills
- Communication and language
- Understanding of the world around them
- Exploration of natural materials and changes in those materials
- Mathematics, developing an understanding of volume, measure, shape and space.



Activity 3 Drawing tree

Fresh air and nature can really get children's creative juices flowing. Sometimes, outdoor play can be more about burning off energy and practising gross motor skills, and while that's great, providing opportunities for children to express themselves creatively outdoors can be equally as beneficial for their mental and emotional well-being.

The drawing tree activity can support children's fine motor skills and use different media to help them to express themselves. Displaying children's creations outdoors will also give them an increased feeling of belonging in the setting and can act as a talking point during outdoor play.

Drawing tree

Activity outline

- Explain to children you are going to make a drawing tree
- Give them the cards to decorate using crayons, glitter, stickers and paint
- Encourage children to be as creative as possible
- Talk to the children about their creations and the materials they decided to use
- Laminate the postcards for durability. Leave a clear section of laminate at the side of the card to punch your hole in so the rain doesn't get in
- Using a hole punch, put a hole in the top of the card and thread the string through the hole
- If your setting doesn't have any trees, hang a long piece of rope or string as a washing line
- Children can peg their drawings from the line at different heights. Ensure the line is hung at a safe height so that anything hanging from it and the string does not pose a danger to children
- Children can keep adding their designs to the tree over time.



Resources

- Tree (or makeshift washing line)
- Paints, pens, crayons, glitter, glue, crepe paper
- Blank non-folded cards of different shapes
- Laminator and laminating pouches
- String or ribbon.

Learning opportunities include:

- Fine and gross motor skills
- Using different types of media to make marks, and assign meaning to those marks
- Explore their own ideas and create artwork to communicate these ideas to others.



Get creative

Activity 3 Continued...

Extension ideas

Encourage children to use crayons and thick paper to take bark rubbings from the tree. Place the paper against the tree and lightly colour with the crayon to create a print of the trunk. Talk to the children about what they can see on their rubbing and then display the creations inside, or hang them from the drawing tree, so that children can look at them during outdoor play.



Create a bark rubbing



Ideas for different ages

This activity is suitable for all children of all ages. Babies and younger children can make marks and enjoy the sensory aspect of finger and hand painting to create their postcards. Adults can then hang these at a lower level so that even non-mobile babies can see the pictures hanging down from the tree.



Activity 4 Outdoor aerobics

Children in the early years are constantly developing their gross motor skills. They need plenty of space and the opportunity to practise moving their bodies in a variety of ways. Being outdoors gives children the space to be able to move safely and also provides a different experience than exercising indoors.

Outdoor aerobics is an activity that can be led by adults, or something that children can enjoy independently. It develops children's balance, coordination and agility, which will help them in other areas of their lives. It also provides them with the cardio-vascular exercise that they need to be healthy.

Outdoor aerobics

Activity outline

- Introduce the activity to the children
- Talk to children about the impact exercise has on their bodies and minds. Discuss the changes children might feel in their bodies as they exercise, such as sweating, increased heart rate and breaths
- Talk to children about some of the different movements they may already know such as star jumps, hopping, running on the spot
- Show children the cards with the images or demonstrate the different exercises to children
- Have a go at doing each of the exercises
- Ask the children to decide how many repetitions of each exercise they will do
- Ensure children are stood in a safe space
- Play the music
- Lead the aerobics session or support children to lead their own session, taking it in turns
- Afterwards, talk to the children about how they feel and whether this is something they could do in their gardens at home.



Resources

- Printed exercise cards with images (continue reading for our ideas)
- Plenty of water to drink
- Cushions to rest on
- Mats (if needed)
- Music
- Space.

Learning opportunities include:

- Developing number skills, such as counting repetitions
- Learning about the effects of exercise on their bodies
- Gross motor skills.



Stretch it out

Activity 4 Continued...



Try it at home

Extension ideas

To extend this activity further, children could devise their own 'aerobics class' for the adults in their setting. This could become a regular part of your provision with a weekly group outdoor workout that the children plan. Support children to challenge themselves, increasing the number of repetitions of each exercise or the length of the workout in total. This is a great activity to share with parents and carers too. Encourage them to do the workouts at home with their children and share photos and videos with you in the setting.

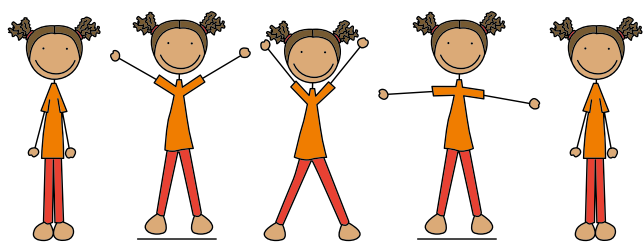
Ideas for different ages

Babies need lots of opportunities to be active and practise their gross motor skills. Placing cushions and mats outside with babies' preferred resources and toys can encourage younger children to explore outdoors and move around the environment safely. For older babies, music and movement sessions outdoors will give babies opportunities to move their bodies to the music and also benefit from being outdoors with more space and fresh air. Providing children with additional resources, such as shakers, pom poms, ribbons and scarves, encourages them to explore and move their bodies in different ways.

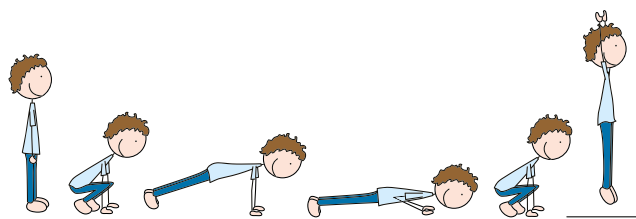


Exercise cards

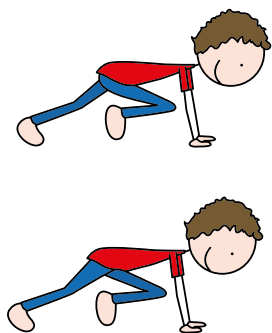
Use these to lead an outdoor aerobics session



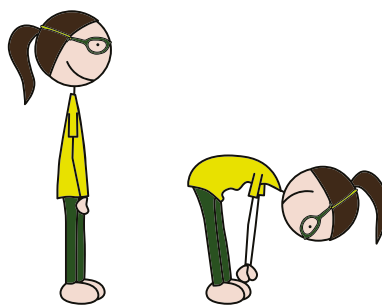
Star jumps



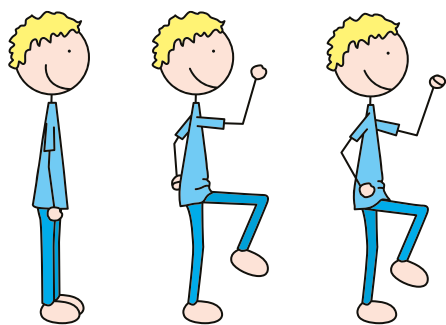
Burpees



Bear crawls



Toe touches



High knees



Hopping on the spot

Further resources, links and stories:

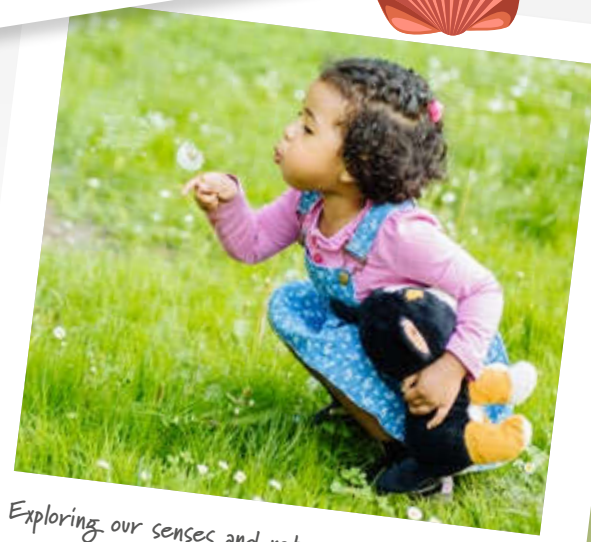
The benefits of outdoor learning in early years (Literacy Trust)

<https://bit.ly/33RmxtS>

'Barry the Fish with Fingers' by Sue Hendra

'Who's Hiding at the Seaside?' by Katherine McEwen

'Little Explorers: Bugs' by Little Bee Bugs



National Day Nurseries Association

At NDNA, we don't just provide nursery membership, lobby government and offer training, we are dedicated to making a difference. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours. We enhance, support, nurture, cherish and challenge.

Every year we run an annual Healthy Body, Happy Me campaign to encourage better health and happiness by giving nurseries FREE resources for play, learning and fun.

Get involved with our 2022 campaign and help keep your children happy and healthy.

Important: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies. Children should always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials should always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.



National Day Nurseries Association

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