



THE
IMPORTANCE
OF
OUTDOOR
PLAY
AT
PENKETH SOUTH
EYFS

The benefits

Playing in an outdoor environment has huge benefits for young children's learning and development. It is great for young children's physical development and, while playing outside, children also learn how to get on with others and manage their feelings. Children also tend to develop a more positive attitude to learning when they are outdoors. They are usually more active, absorbed and involved, and they see a purpose in what they are doing.

The outdoors gives children unique opportunities for:

- Experience with all their senses
- Physical activities
- Observations
- Art, science, mathematics, language
- Developing social skills
- Building and constructing with sand, water and mud
- Dramatic play

Research has shown that children these days are missing out on these kinds of opportunities. There are many reasons for this such as lack of time and safe spaces for play, a lack of awareness of the benefits for children of playing outdoors as well as negative attitudes about playing outside on the part of some adults. The number of hours children spend on screens – using tablets, phones, computer games and watching TV – has also grown significantly.



There are lots of benefits for young children when they are outside, children have the freedom to shout and make noise, the space to be more expansive in their physical movements, which sparks their imaginations, and more places to hide in and explore. Children can also be messier outdoors, which encourages them to be more creative and to try things out and experiment.

Children get lots of physical exercise outside through activities like running, climbing and digging. Spending a lot of time getting physical exercise outdoors when they are young helps children to develop positive lifestyle habits that are good for their health generally, and also helps to prevent obesity. Children also get lots of vitamin D from sunlight, which is vital for strong bones and teeth and a healthy immune system.

Research shows that movement and thinking skills are powerfully connected. Movement and activity encourages brain growth and improves children's attention and their memory.

Children's well-being and their ability to understand as well as to control their feelings and emotions also increases from being outdoors as they relax and feel calm.

'children who play outside are less likely to get sick, to be stressed or become aggressive and are more adaptable to life's unpredictable turns' Richard Louv



Pretend play

Being messy

Being noisy

Dealing with uneven surfaces and heights

Cooperating

Trying out new things

Digging and planting

Outdoor play can involve...

Fun and enjoyment

Getting dirty or wet

Lifting, carrying and pouring

Building and constructing

Running and jumping

Sometimes getting small cuts or bruises

The Value of Play

When your child is running around outside or making mud pies, you might worry that they are 'only playing' and not learning things they need to learn. It is important to remember that play is one of the very best ways that young children learn. Children learn through active, hands-on experience – playing, exploring, experimenting and discovering.

Children's right to play is so important that it is recognised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31).

Play is active learning that brings together the mind, body and spirit. Until at least the age of nine, children learn best when their whole self is involved. Their learning is holistic – they learn many different things at the same time and what they learn is connected to where, how and with whom they learn. Later learning builds on early learning, so young children's learning grows from birth, which means that their early learning impacts on what they can learn later. When they are playing, children can relax and this means that they are more open to learning. We know too that children use their play to work through and make sense of their everyday experiences and of important things in their lives that affect them strongly emotionally. Play also plays a vital role in children developing high-level skills like being flexible, making decisions and planning.



Outdoor play helps children to...

Develop their language and communication skills

Build their strength and resilience

Work out ways to get on with other children

Develop self-control

Become more independent

Get over some of their fears

Learn more about their bodies

Develop the ability to share, take turns, cooperate

Test their abilities

Learn about decision making and problem solving

Cope better with stress

Learn about the outdoors, the weather and the seasons

Use and develop their imagination

Make more sense of their world

Develop the ability to persist

Develop conceptual abilities - the ability to imagine an idea without actually seeing it in practice. This is a higher logic and mental exercise, and a really important foundation for maths and science

Experience adventure

Develop their immunity

Improve their self confidence and self esteem

Our outdoor play space:

- Provides a place full of meaning for children to gain understanding and skills
- Makes learning fun and enjoyable
- Encourages children to explore and discover together and on their own
- Allows children to add to what they know and are learning Allows children to practice skills
- Allows children to test how much they are able to do Encourages children to experiment and take risks.
- Supports young children to develop and nurture their sense of wonder and awe in natural environments.



Play and risk

'Children will fall and will get bruises because that is part of their learning.' Marjorie Ouvry, Education Consultant and Author

It is common for parents to worry about children playing outside, but exploring, solving problems and testing how far they can go is how children learn.

Children need to see or experience the consequences of not being careful. By engaging in exploration and adventure, taking risks and meeting challenges they can learn what they are able to do as well as the limits of their physical capabilities.

Children, therefore, need to be given the chance to 'have a go', to try new things, to test out their own ideas of what they can do and explore a range of outdoor activities. This, at times, may involve getting dirty, trips, falls and some minor cuts and bruises or some tears. However, it is these experiences that are an important part of learning and developing confidence.

Everyday life always involves a degree of risk and children need to learn how to cope with this from an early age. They need to learn how to take calculated risks. For this learning to happen, children must have opportunities for challenging and adventurous play and to move and act freely.

At Penketh South we follow the appropriate safety procedures and assess the risk involved but, as a parent, you need to accept that if your child takes part in outdoor activities, there is always going to be some element of risk.