



## **Guidance for Policy on Outdoor Play in Pre-school Services**

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## 1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide pre-school services with the regulatory requirements for the specific policy on Outdoor Play<sup>1</sup>, as set out by the [Child Care Act \(1991\) Early Years Service Regulations \(2016\)](#). This document sets out the core regulatory requirements for this policy as well as prompts and considerations that will support registered providers to ensure that their policy and procedures are fully developed and are reflected in the practices in their service.

The information in this document should be applied to the specific policy on Outdoor Play and the accompanying procedures of the pre-school service. This document should be read in conjunction with Tusla's [A Practical Guide to Developing Policies, Procedures and Statements in Early Years Services](#); the [Quality and Regulatory Framework](#); [The Roof is the Sky: Guidance for services operating outdoors](#); [Keeping children safe and comfortable indoors and outdoors in all weathers: guidance for early years services](#).

*This document is for reference only. It should not be assumed that the guidance provided is comprehensive or that it provides a definitive answer in every situation.*

Further resources are available in [Appendix 1](#).

### Regulatory Requirements of this Policy

#### **Child Care Act (1991) Early Years Service Regulations (2016), Schedule 5. 1 (m)**

A policy on outdoor play, in relation to a pre-school service, means a policy specifying;

- (a)** the manner in which and the times at which pre-school children attending the service have access to outdoor play, whether on the premises or in another location, and
- (b)** the manner in which the health and safety of the pre-school children attending the service while engaged in outdoor play is to be ensured.

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<sup>1</sup> Where such play is provided to children attending the service.

## 2.0 Core policy requirements

A Policy Statement is recommended for this policy alongside the core requirements as set out further in this document. The policy on outdoor play should describe outdoor play provision and should outline the service's commitment to ensure all children attending the service have daily access to outdoor play. The statement also outlines the service's commitment to implementing measures to ensure the health and safety of children while engaged in outdoor play activities.

### Requirement 1

The policy details the measures to facilitate outdoor play (on or off the premises).

#### **Prompts and considerations** (not an exhaustive list)

The policy specifies:

- a)** How children's outdoor play is supported so that all children attending (including babies and toddlers) can access outdoor play on a daily basis and as much as possible during each day.
- b)** If the outdoor space is off the premises, the procedures for children's safe and regular access to this location.
- c)** The frequency and length of time which pre-school children attending the service are afforded with play in the outdoors.
- d)** The measures and actions taken in the service to ensure that where appropriate, children's access to the outdoors is not impacted by the weather (e.g. provision of shelters, appropriate clothing)
- e)** How children with disabilities and specific health requirements will be accommodated so that they can participate fully in their outdoor environment.
- f)** The information and training needs of staff in relation to the provision of outdoor play, and how these needs will be met in the service.
- g)** The information provided to parents, guardians and children on the outdoor play opportunities afforded to children.

## Requirement 2

The policy on outdoor play describes the outdoor play opportunities available.

### **Prompts and considerations** (not an exhaustive list)

The policy specifies:

- a) The location(s) of outdoor play spaces and whether these are on the premises or in a different location.
- b) The description of play facilities in each outdoor play area, including but not limited to fixed and loose play equipment, natural environments, resources and materials, open spaces, sand and water areas.
- c) The play opportunities for all age groups of children attending, including specific information on locations, times and duration of outdoor play opportunities.
- d) That children have opportunities to explore a more natural environment and to learn about nature and sustainability through outdoor play and exploration.

## Requirement 3

The policy sets out how children are supervised during outdoor play.

### **Prompts and considerations** (not an exhaustive list)

The policy specifies:

- (a) That staff members will be vigilant in their supervision of the children when they are playing outdoors but will not place unnecessary restrictions on children's playful exploration and opportunities.
- (b) That adult: child ratios will be maintained in the outdoor play area at all times.
- (c) How staff communicate with each other when supervising children at play in the outdoor environment.
- (d) How staff supervise children by sight and sound, particularly when children are engaging in risky adventurous play, or when they are not in direct line of sight (example when in a den or tunnel).

#### Requirement 4

The policy sets out procedures for carrying out risk assessments related to outdoor play.

##### **Prompts and considerations** (not an exhaustive list)

The policy specifies:

- (a) The risk assessment and analysis procedures needed to ensure the outdoor area is safe and free from hazards (to include daily risk assessments before children access the area).
- (b) The risk benefit assessment procedures in place to ensure that activities or features with additional levels of risk or challenge in the outdoor environment can be fully assessed, and mitigations are in place to address any risks.
- (c) That, depending on the outcome of risk benefit assessments, adult child ratios may need to be increased (example, playing with tools, sharp objects, activities involving fire pits etc)

#### Requirement 5

The policy sets out the safety requirements of the outdoor play area.

##### **Prompts and considerations** (not an exhaustive list)

The policy specifies:

- (a) That safety is a priority at all times when children are playing outdoors.
- (b) That staff members are informed of and trained in safety requirements for outdoor play.
- (c) The measures to be taken to ensure children's safety in all weather conditions.
- (d) How staff can support children to learn how to follow safety rules in the outdoor environment.
- (e) The procedures on how staff will respond in the event of an accident to a child in the outdoor area.
- (f) That a first aid kit is easily accessible to the outdoor area.
- (g) That equipment will be installed, maintained and used as intended to ensure the children's safety and meets the safety standards required.

### 3.0 Best practice in developing and implementing an Outdoor Play Policy

In addition to the regulatory requirements for this policy as set out in this document, service providers can enhance the quality of practice in the implementation of the Outdoor Play Policy in the service. In this section, best practice in this policy area is outlined and further information is signposted where available.

- Implementation of this policy should reflect Siolta Standards, in particular Standard 6 [Play/Exploration](#).
- Ideally, indoor care rooms should be directly connected to the outdoor area, providing easy access to children during the day.
- If possible, consider offering an 'indoor outdoor' experience where children move between the indoor and outdoor environments without any barriers or obstacles.
- Welcome children's input in the layout of the outdoor area and in programme planning for outdoor play provision.
- Many activities that take place indoors can be moved outdoors easily- think about moving outside for story time, sensory or pretend play, music, group activities etc.
- Children can sleep and rest in the outdoors, think about ways that this can be accommodated once it is fully risk assessed and is in line with regulations and best practice guidance.
- Develop interest areas outdoors in the same way they are developed indoors. Outdoors environments should be well laid out, attractive, reflect the natural environment as much as possible and welcoming and inclusive for all children.
- Support staff to ensure they are fully aware of and engaged with the opportunities afforded by the outdoors.
- Make sure parents are fully informed of the significant benefits of outdoor play for children and reassure them that all precautions taken are sensible, evidence based, and child centred.

## 4.0 Appendix

### 4.1 Supporting Information

- Aistear Siolta: [Practice Guide](#)
- Aistear: [Supporting Risky Play Opportunities](#)
- Barnardos: [Outdoor Play Matters: The Benefits of Outdoor Play for Young Children](#)
- Early Childhood Ireland: [Growing up outdoors](#)
- Growing up in Ireland: [Neighbourhood Safety and Outdoor Play](#)
- LINC Programme: [Learning through real life experience in outdoor play](#)
- Longford Childcare Committee: [Enhancing Outdoor Play A practitioner's handbook.](#)
- OECD: [Education in the digital age: The importance of play](#)
- Scottish Government: [Out to Play resources.](#)
- Scottish Care Inspectorate: [My world outdoors.](#)

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