

A photograph of four children in a forest setting, engaged in outdoor play. They are surrounded by various metal pots and pans on the ground. One child is wearing a blue hat and a light blue hoodie, another is in a dark hoodie, and a third is in a green and black striped shirt. The scene is set in a wooded area with trees and sunlight filtering through the leaves.

Implementing Outdoor Play

Protocols and procedures for outdoor play

Transitioning to an outdoor curriculum requires change...



- The staff's experience
- The child's experience
- The parents experience

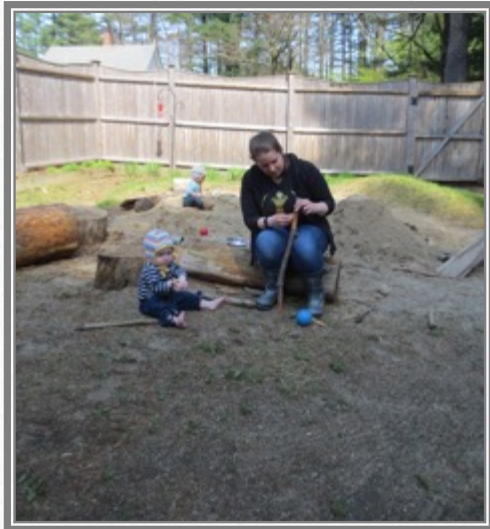


Change....

- Change can be felt as a loss or a gain
- It is a process....its not the event of change that matters, its what occurs between the 'events'
- We must engage in the letting go process in order to create and innovate
- The caregivers have faced a lot of change this year, shifting towards outdoor learning is one.

The staff's experience

This shift to outdoor curriculum may not feel right to staff, it takes time, listening, sharing, and effort.



- Identity: being a teacher may not have included being an ‘outdoors’ person. This shift in focus from “teaching lessons” to extending children’s learning outdoors is a huge shift in identity and experience.
- Comfort: Offering a list of clothes that will offer comfort, how to layer clothes, and strategies for keeping warm will support their participation in outdoor play and mitigate uncertainty.
- Knowledge: Scaffolding their learning from an indoor-focused curriculum to an outdoor-focused experience through on-going team meetings, observations, modeling, and responsiveness to curriculum needs will bring change.
- Offer structure and information about what their work looks like outdoors while they are with children, bridge frustration around finding engagement when playing with children.

The child's experience

- Finding their way in a world that is in their control, resonates with them in a meaningful way, offers new opportunities for their understanding of the world.
- Children may have limited experiences spending time outdoors especially in inclement weather. They may find that they need time and flexibility as they build an appetite for this.
- We do this by scaffolding their learning around being outside, finding investigations and exploration opportunities, and understanding that this is a new way of spending time.
- Being “seen” by a trusted adult and having their needs acknowledged can lead to greater cooperation in the process.

The parents' experience

- Begin with communication about their child's experience outdoors,
- Share guidance, resources, and ideas about choices for outdoor clothing,
- Support their concerns around dirt, wet, and the management of outdoor gear, and
- Hear and address concerns about safety and learning.



Regulatory Agencies & Standards

- Recognizing a partnership with regulatory agencies....or not
- Regulations and standards are meant to keep everyone safe and cared for and so they are important. They can also be seen as a barrier at times.
- Regulations can be a starting point for rich dialogue and problem solving
- Process of setting a goal, reading regulations and thinking critically about where the two shall meet.



One step at a time

Identifying your program's needs and abilities in the initial phases of moving toward this curriculum.



Making sure children are warm and dry....

- Assess the weather and the season (rain in the summer is different from rain in the winter)
- In cooler weather: layering with long underwear, shirt, sweater, pants, sock, and then adding jackets, snow suits, another pair of socks, mittens and hat.
- In the colder weather make sure that their shirts are tucked into pants, hoods are up over hats to cover the neck, and hands are warm.
- Colder weather with rain should include a rain suit over a snow suit and waterproof mittens.



.... And cool and comfortable

- In warmer weather make sure that they have a sun hat, cotton top for sun protection and sunscreen that is reapplied throughout the day.
- In warm rainy weather offer rain suits with bare feet in order to appreciate the feeling of puddles and mud.
- In hot weather be sure that children's clothing is breathable and offers them a chance to keep cool. Once their clothes are wet, be sure to change them as play is finishing so that they are comfortable as they go on to the next thing.



Gear List

Recommendations

Helping Parents manage outdoor clothing:

Best fabrics for dressing a child are wool, silk, fleece... not cotton.

Expect the child to get dirty and wet so send them in things that can get both.

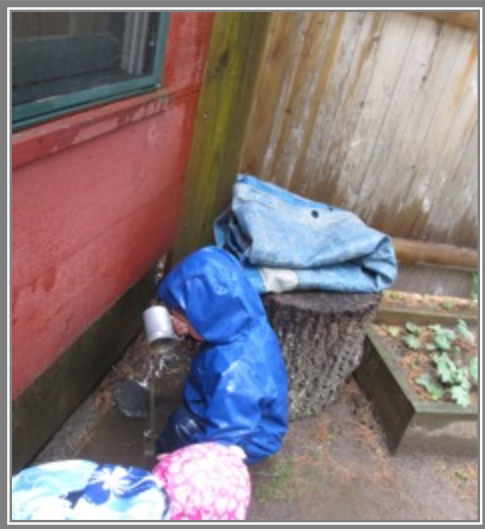
Label **all** clothes (www.namebubbles.com)

Have extra clothes – two outfits available: (underwear, wool socks, leggings, warm shirt, pants, fleece/wool hat, insulated mittens)

Outdoor Gear

- Base Layers that aren't cotton (top and bottom)
- Mid Layer: fleece pant, fleece/wool sweater
- Outer Layer: Water resistant winter coat
- Water resistant, bib-style snow pants
- Wool socks (two- three pairs) – not cotton
- Waterproof winter mittens (two pairs) – not gloves
- Wool mittens to fit under waterproof mittens
- Wool or fleece hat – balaclava/hoodie
- Neck warmer (not scarves)
- Waterproof boots with removeable liners
- Waterproof rainboots – insulated for fall/spring
- Rain boots for warm weather
- Rubberized rain gear – top and bottom/rain suit
- Sun hat

Dressing and undressing: it's curriculum



- This is a time-consuming activity and is one that we need to be available for in our day. Whether we are dressing two infants or twenty preschoolers, we need to plan for the time and energy it will take to dress each child.
- Making a well-thought out plan for where children are as they wait to be dressed or after they are dressed begins to sculpt how the energy will flow.
- The children who are waiting to get dressed can make their way to their cubbies to find their things, begin to dress themselves or sit with another staff person who is reading a story...
- Having the first caregiver to dress three or four children take that small group outside means that there is someone outside waiting for more children to arrive. This establishes the first flow outside and can be reversed for the journey back in.

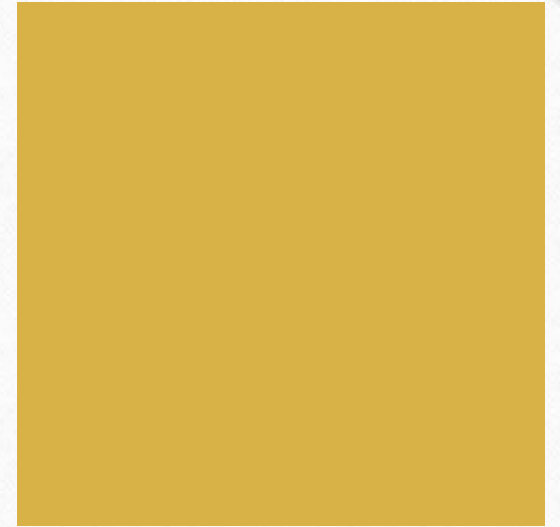


Dressing the child

- Each child must be “dressed” for the outdoors by a caregiver. While they can build the skills to put on boots, find mittens, get their hat, and flip their jacket on....
- They also need to have someone tuck them in, share the burden of dressing and undressing, make sure that their socks are dry and pulled up, place a sweater over a base layer, zip their jacket, and tuck their hood over their hat.
- This time also offers a wonderful chance for one on one conversations and focus on the child as well as building curriculum.

Access to and time in the outdoor space

- Recognize how accessing your space may be a hurdle as you plan your schedule,
- Identify if there are time restrictions for sharing the outdoor space,
- Address how being outside may include play, walks, and other play yard spaces.





When can we go out to play?

Forming guidelines for determining the
weather protocols

Considerations

- We built our guidelines on a few different criteria:
- Age of the child and their movement,
- Type of weather,
- Length of time outside, and
- The warmth of hands and back of the neck as we check them at play.
- We assume in each category that children are well dressed and ready for the weather.





Weather board

- The weather board is set daily for the staff to refer to so that they know the parameters for outside play: the temperature for the morning and afternoon and the length of time outside for each time of day.

Weather conditions: /dressing and Outdoor play guidelines

When it is:	What to wear:	How long to be outside:	What to consider:
above 70 degrees and sunny	sun hats/light shirts/pants or SPF of 30+	the usual timing for play	hydration: water offered routinely throughout the day, sunscreen reapplication, water play and coverage from the sun
between 50 - 70 degrees and sunny	sun hats/light shirts/pants or SPF of 30+ (sweaters for children who are infant/YT as needed)	the usual timing for play	hydration: water offered routinely throughout the day, sunscreen reapplication, water play and coverage from the sun
32 - 40 degrees and sunny /not wet	base layers, sweaters, thick socks, outdoor shoes, hats, mittens, jackets (rain gear doesn't count as a second layer)	up to an hour unless the children are playing comfortable (then extend the time)	If children are warm, they can take off mittens and jackets depending on the layering (hats stay on as they are a solid way to keep warm)
above 70 degrees and rainy	rain gear/or clothing that can be changed out of easily	as long as children are comfortable (up to an hour)	make sure that children are moving, playing, and comfortable. If a child is still, not happy, and asking to go inside then check in with them to return them to a comfortable state
between 50 - 70 degrees and rainy	rain gear/an extra shirt and socks worn with rain boots as a layer of warmth/or clothing that can be changed out of easily	as long as children are comfortable (up to an hour)	make sure that children are moving, playing and comfortable. If a child is still, not happy, and asking to go inside then check in on how to return them to a comfortable state. Make sure to change their socks and pants as you return inside so they are dry.
32 - 40 degrees and rainy	rain gear with a base layer, sweater or jacket under the rain gear. Thick socks in rain boots as a layer of warmth/hats and mittens that can be kept dry with rain gear or can be changed as needed.	Children under 10 months:15 - 20 min; 10 -24 months: 30 min; 24 months- PS up to 60 min use the shed, make tea ofr the water bottles for outside time, make sure that children are moving around.	extra mittens that are windproof are a must, children may need to have hoods over hats, scarves can be worn inside their jackets
25 - 32 degrees and sunny (with wind chill included)	cold weather gear: base layers, shirt, sweater, pants and think socks with boot, snow suit, hat, mittens, and neck covering	Children under 10 months:15 - 20 min; 10 -24 months: 30 min; 24 months- PS up to 60 min use the shed, make tea ofr the water bottles for outside time, make sure that children are moving around.	extra mittens that are windproof are a must, children may need to have hoods over hats, scarves can be worn inside their jackets
10 - 25 degrees (with wind chill included)	cold weather gear: base layers, shirt, sweater, pants and think socks with boot, snow suit, hat, mittens, and neck covering	Not children under 10 months; 10 -24 months: upto 30 min; 24 months- PS up to 30 min use the shed, make tea ofr the water bottles for outside time, make sure that children are moving around.	extra mittens that are windproof are a must, children may need to have hoods over hats, scarves can be worn inside their jackets
5 - 10 degrees (with wind chill included)	cold weather gear: base layers, shirt, sweater, pants and think socks with boot, snow suit, hat, mittens, and neck covering	Not children under 10 months; 10 -24 months: up to 15 min; 24 months- PS up to 30 min use the shed, make tea for the water bottles for outside time, make sure that children are moving around.	

What natural materials do you have available?





Identifying Materials

- Take inventory of your play space and identify what your resources are for natural materials.
- Review the other materials that could be considered “loose parts”: cloth, rope, tree limbs, tree stumps.
- Finally, inventory your bought materials: brooms, large shovels, buckets and shovels, spoons, bowls, old cooking tins, pallets, planks of wood, and other items that can be used easily by young children.
- When purchasing new materials consider having them blend in with the natural environment.

Removing Materials

- Experiment by removing the things that children struggle to share like trucks, cars, bikes, etc...
- Assess what happens in their absence. What do you observe?
- Identify toys that only have one purpose or need supervision to be used safely: ball and bat or bikes and put them away for a while.



Partnering with staff and parents during these transition years



- Engage in meetings and conversations so staff and parents can ask questions, share concerns, and offer frustrations.
- Continue offering technical assistance to staff on creating curriculum, dressing children, and being comfortable.
- Follow through with practices and protocols that have been established at the center (keeping to curriculum plans, following schedules, considering individual needs)
- Recognize frustrating moments as natural in the process of change, not all partnerships will occur easily and naturally but all of them have something to teach us.

Communicating and respecting the change process



- Pace communication with families by offering resources: slide shows, articles, books, and daily notes build parent's understanding of their child's experience.
- Partner with families as they care for muddy clothes, gather wet things, bring clean clothes back the next day, and lose mittens.
- Share the process, stumbling points, and progress with parent committees in order to build the strong foundation for outdoor curriculum.
- Allow staff to share their thoughts, problem solve with them about schedules, moving children in and out, dressing and undressing, finding extra clothes, and managing the daily work this takes.



Moving ahead

- This type of programming may not be for everyone. Staff may choose to leave the program and parents may wonder if the center is the right choice.
- By staying in direct communication and actively participating in the decision making you will help build your vision.
- This may not be a curriculum everyone understands but it is a sound practice for children.