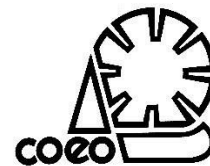


# Outdoor Learning Tips

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Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario

<https://www.coeo.org/>

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This document is meant to support teachers to safely and confidently bring their students outside to teach and learn together. During this difficult Covid time, outdoor spaces can optimize physical distancing. We encourage collaboration with colleagues; to share what worked and what didn't, and encourage each other to get outside with your students!

## 1. Managing Risks and Procedures

- **Planning Ahead:** send home parent letter (see [Sample Letter to Parents](#) example from Evergreen), fill out consent forms (see Principal), know your site (daily site checks, etc)
  - **Emergency plan** - have cell or radio communication, first aid plan, etc
  - **Thinking ahead** - risk/benefit, washroom access (have students go before heading outside), safety routines, setting kids up for success with appropriate clothing choices
  - **Know your students** - what will and won't work outside? Set up parameters and rules before heading out.
  - **A day ahead:** be prepared with lesson, first aid kit, class list, weather, materials, preface to kids, make sure kids have appropriate clothing
  - **Before leaving:** tell office where you're going and with how many students, check the weather, class count, routine (washroom, water, snack), safety routines, bring incident report forms
  - **During:** co-evaluating risks with students, dynamic risk assessments, set boundaries clearly, set up hand washing/ sanitizing station and make sure you're following new protocols that are COVID-related (physical distancing and reduced sharing/disinfecting of materials)
  - **After:** Reflection, Complete forms, contact parents if needed



## 2. Materials for Outdoor Programs

- **Whiteboards** (lightest, cheapest way: laminate a white piece of paper per kid)
- **Clip boards** (attach pencil/pen to string so always have writing tool)
- **'Sit-upons'** (Canadian tire blue foam pads cut into small pieces for each kid to sit on)
- **Book box/bag** to keep duotangs, writing materials, books, etc. Can be brought indoors/outdoors. Each child is responsible for their own!
- **Blanket/Tarp for whole class:** Having something to sit on as a group can make students feel more comfortable

### 3. Developing Routines Outdoors

- **Attention grabbers:** 1. You yell a coyote (or bird) call, they call back to you, and listen. 2. When it's time to pack up, try a fun nature-themed call and respond e.g. You: "Time to scoot!" Them: "Little Newt!" 3. Time to line up - You: "Get in line!" Them: "Porcupine!"
- **Sit Spots:** bring students to the same place daily to sit for 5-20 min to appreciate nature. They can journal, reflect, read, count bird calls, observe flower, insect or tree identification, etc)
- **Circles:** Sitting in circles helps with learning because everyone is on the same level, can see and hear one another clearly, and can pass a talking stick around to reflect on a topic or share their learning. Use sit-upons or blankets/tarps! Introduce the idea of a 'talking stick' - only the person with the stick gets to share, and everyone else listens respectfully.
- **Journaling:** students write (or draw) about different topics: reflections on the day's learnings, answer questions you've given them, natural findings around them, etc. Click to see a neat resource on [Nature Journaling](#).
- **Nature Names:** Give your students the opportunity to come up with a nature name for themselves. When they're learning outside, this can be what you and their peers call them. It can be something they identify with in the outdoors. Examples: a tree ('Maple'), an animal ('Coyote'), a bird ('Cardinal'), a plant ('Basil') etc.



### 4. Outdoor Learning vs. Recess - How to Differentiate



- **Walk and Talks:** Walk around the school green space as a group. Often a great way to have students engage with each other and debrief their weekend/night or specific topics. You can give parameters like 1) Walk and talk with someone who is wearing the same coloured shirt as you 2) Walk with a partner and find out 3 new facts you never knew about them 3) Walk with a partner and come up with 5 species of trees/plants/birds you recognize on our walk, etc. **AND** you can also link this to **academic material review**.... 4) Walk with a partner and discuss how to write a persuasive paragraph/discuss about animal adaptations, (insert topic of your current unit) etc.
- **Preface with serious academic talk** - While inside, discuss the nature of outdoor learning time being very distinct from recess because you will be engaging in the same learning you would normally do inside. Recess is free play while outdoor learning is structured, facilitated, academic learning time. Set rules and parameters before going outside and then reiterate when you get outside.
- **Names for different areas:** just like they know where the office, washroom etc is inside, you can give creative names to certain areas outside. ('The forest hub', etc)
- **Give a 'tour of the outdoors'** so they know where their boundaries are for the day (or for each time you're outside)
- **Create local maps:** students map their outdoor area. [See great examples here](#).
- **Go over risks and hazards in your outdoor area** - have students brainstorm risks and ways to mitigate them



## 5. Continuum for teaching and learning outside

**Focus on 3 ways of supporting students:**

1. **Bringing the classroom outside for learning** - E.g.: if planning to read a book, read it outside!
2. **Interacting with Nature as a Pedagogical tool**- E.g.: weather. Use weather of natural outdoors not inside classroom (take outside temperature instead of inside classroom)
3. **Emergent and Inquiry Learning in Nature** E.g.: Child curious and enjoying free-play outdoors, then you support her in her inquiry and interests.



## 6. Literacy Outdoors

These academic sections have some ideas to get you started ...there are so many more resources and ideas out there!!!

- **Reading** - sit spots reading, read aloud outside on tarp/sit upons, read to a partner, do reading log and reflections
- **Writing**- Using clipboards to do writing assignments, writing about your natural world around you, create or do a scavenger hunt, paint quotes or material onto rocks, create their own field guides
- **Oral Communication**- create a natural amphitheatre for presentations, use a stick as a microphone, practice sharing circles (using talking stick), integrate communication games like [Silent Opera](#) or Pictionary
- **Media** - drawing, writing and discussing images, sounds, graphics, and words around them outside, play podcasts outside and have them analyze/reflect with a partner, bring magazines outside for them to dissect advertisements, write letters to editor about importance of protecting local and global environment

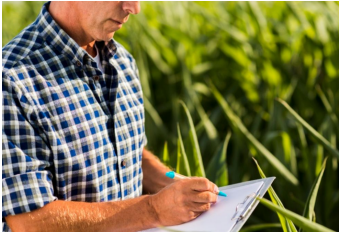
## 7. Numeracy Outdoors

- **Number Sense and Numeration**: ten frame collection of nature materials and counting them, use chalk to do large number lines on tarmac, What Time is it Mr.Wolf game
- **Data Management**: Graph the different types of trees, survey classmates on favourite animals
- **Measurement**: estimate and measure length, area, mass, capacity, time, and temperature of outdoor items
- **Geometry and Spatial Sense**: use sticks to make shapes, examine shapes of natural materials
- **Patterning and Algebra**: use sticks, rocks and leaves to practice patterning

\*Remember: it doesn't all have to be nature based or experiential - bring your worksheets outside on clipboards!!



## 8. Assessment and Documentation



- **Bring devices outside to take notes and photos-** Document student learning to assess and evaluate later
- **Utilize similar assessment methods to inside-** Tweak your assessment methods (observation charts, checklists etc) to outdoor setting (waterproof bag over clipboard and pen)
- **Use pre-and post-learning techniques** - ex: if building shelters, students make predictions and document planning and results. Have students use written work outside daily.
- **Use journals as assessment documenting tool** - students can hand in once a week for evaluation, etc
- **Co-create criteria with students** - create buy in to specific programming

## 9. Student Supports

- **Ensuring accessibility to outdoor programming for all of your students:** consider wheelchair access, medical conditions, attention span and timing outdoors
- **ESL Students:** Storytelling with visual supports, slow and clear instructions with visual aids, knowledge building circles
- **Complaining/uncomfortable students:** Give them specific leadership tasks, praise them for their positive efforts, see what their interests are and plan accordingly to that, create a reward system (ex: marble (or better yet, rocks!) reward system. See [Marble Jar Reward System](#))
- **Create a Borrow Bin:** Ensure students have access to necessary clothing items to “dress for the weather” (items can be collected from donations/clothing drive, thrift shop, lost and found and more)

## 12. Resources

- [Back to Nature Network Resources](#)
- [Megan Zeni - Room to Play - The Classroom Gardener](#)
- [The Big Book of Nature Activities](#)
- [Learning for a Sustainable Future - Connecting the Dots](#)
- [Learning for a Sustainable Future- Resources and Lessons](#)
- [Messy Maths - A Playful Learning Approach for Early Years](#)
- [Dirty Teaching - A Beginners Guide to Learning Outdoors](#)
- [A Walking Curriculum - Evoking Wonder and Developing Sense of Place](#)
- [Take Me Outside](#)
- [The Green Classroom Lesson Plans](#)
- [TRCA- Environmental Leaders for Tomorrow](#)
- [TDSB - Outdoor Ed Learn from Home](#)
- [PDSB Learning Naturally](#)
- [Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario - Research Summaries](#)

