

Help Sheet

0 – 25 Specialist Teaching And Support Service

How to use outdoor play to support a child with SEND.



Why?

- To provide space for children who find busy environments overwhelming by either:
 - Enabling children with SEND to go outside.
 - Other children going outside, so that the indoor environment is quieter for children with SEND.
- To facilitate sensory preferences e.g. children who like to run, climb and swing.
- To help children to benefit from the calming effect of heavy work e.g. pushing, pulling, lifting and carrying.

You will need:

- To organise staffing so that outdoor play can be open for the majority of every session.
- To have clothing appropriate for the weather for children and staff.
- If possible, have a sheltered area – shade from the sun and shelter from rain.
- To set up activities that promote 'heavy work' and support sensory preferences.

How?

Provide activities to promote heavy work:

- Digging, planting and pulling up weeds.
- Baking in the outdoor mud kitchen – mixing and stirring stiff cake mixes, dough or mud.
- Raking, sweeping leaves or gravel and shovelling snow.
- Filling, moving and emptying wheelbarrows.
- Filling and pouring from watering cans or buckets.
- Pushing along bikes, trikes and scooters.
- Using climbing frames and trim trails, swinging on monkey bars and zip wires.
- Moving along balance beams, bridges, stepping stones or logs.

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- Jumping or bouncing - small or large trampoline, bouncing on space hoppers or large play mats.
- Moving large loose parts e.g. crates, tyres, reels.

Things to note:

- Joining children in their play outside is usually more successful than asking a child to do an adult directed task.
- Request support from an occupational therapist if a child needs bespoke sensory support.
- Be mindful of children who have physical needs and adapt activities accordingly.



Reference / Evidence base – informed by:

The OT Toolbox <https://www.theottoolbox.com/heavy-work-activities/>