



Erasmus+

# FEELING SAFE AND COMFORTABLE OUTDOORS



Preparing for outdoor experiences!



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# I. INTRODUCTION

Learning outdoors opens up a world of opportunities that are often not covered by current educational models, but increasingly schools and teachers are taking an interest in it. However often teachers and educators find taking a class outdoors for the first time to be nerve wracking or daunting. This guideline has been created to make teachers and educators feel more safe and comfortable outdoors.

In this guideline you will learn:

- The importance of preparation and the essential kit you need to bring for outdoor activities.
- To understand the practicalities of working outdoors and ensuring that your group feels comfortable in this environment.
- How to deal with challenging behaviours in nature
- The key approaches to understanding how to assess the risks and articulate the benefits for children.



## II. WHY TAKING CHILDREN OUTDOORS?

Outdoors and nature-based learning has numerous benefits for children's holistic development!



# III. PREPARATION BEFORE GOING OUTDOORS

## STEP 1: Decide where you want to go with your class and the activities you want to carry out

Think of what sort of nature you want to see: beach, forest, park, nature reserve etc? Prepare the list of activities you want to carry out with your group and make a list of resources needed.

## STEP 2: Risk benefit to outdoor learning: 'as safe as necessary'

Before every activity, the risk benefit analysis should be reviewed and appropriate health and safety procedures put in place. It is usual in organised outdoor learning for a residual degree of risk to be regarded bearable and in balance with the advantages that will come.



A risk benefit analysis is a review of an activity that examines any risks associated with the activity as well as the benefits the activity will bring to the participants. In using this approach, you are recognising that risk is also an essential element of learning and provides educational value to children.

Therefore, focus on 'as safe as necessary', not as 'safe as possible' approach.

The purpose of using the risk benefit analysis is to ensure that necessary safety precautions are taken to mitigate significant risks to staff and participants. The benefits of the activities are weighed against any risks which may be taken.

Your own organisation may have its own safeguarding and risk-assessment policy so it is important to check the regulations already in place.

However, in annex 1 you can find some recommended questions to ask in preparation of a risk benefit analysis. This is based on BirdLife Malta's safeguarding and risk-benefit analysis policy.

Discuss the possible risks with parents and agree on the acceptable risk level, making sure you also present the benefits of outdoor play and connecting children with nature!

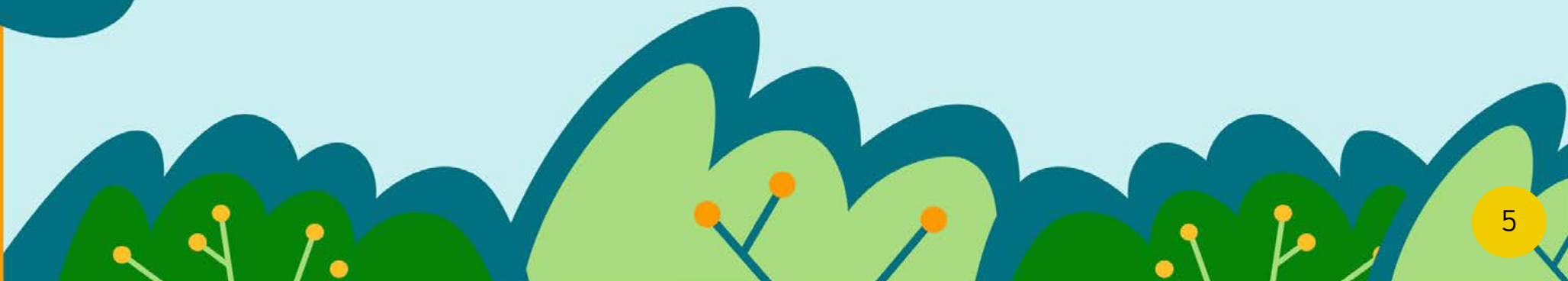


### STEP 3: The day before the outing

The weather can be unpredictable so it is important that you bring anything you may possibly need! By looking after yourself, you will make sure that you make the most of being outdoors and are in the best possible position to look after anyone else you bring with you.

Therefore, before you go, make sure that you:

1. Check the weather forecast so you can choose what you need to bring with you. This will change according which country you are in and the season.
  - Rain: This shouldn't stop you from going outside! Make sure you have a good fully waterproof jacket, waterproof trousers, light warm layers such as fleeces are good, walking boots which are waterproof/wellies.
  - Cold: Good practice is to bring lots of light, warm layers that you can put on or take off to regulate your temperature. Make sure you bring a warm hat, gloves and scarf.
  - Sunny and warm: Make sure you put on sun screen, wear a hat and bring plenty of water (which you should do anyway). It is good to wear light, loose clothing.



2. Pack a bag with all the essential thing you will need:

- Water
- Spare clothes (if necessary)
- Food
- Suncream, insect repellent, hand sanitizer etc. as necessary
- First aid kit (always if you are with a group).
- Charged mobile phone with credit.

3. You will need to make sure that everyone in your group has the right clothing and supplies with them. Don't assume that parents/guardians know what their children should bring, even if some of the items appear obvious. Send a basic check list for everything they might need for the day, especially if going for a field trip outside the school premises – Annex 2.

4. Take your energy and good mood for a fun day outdoors!





# IV. TIPS WHEN OUTDOORS

An important aspect of teaching outdoors is being aware that not all children may feel comfortable with being outdoors, especially nowadays when they may choose to play computer games instead. But there are always ways to change this!

Wet feet, sunburn or uncomfortable clothing are enough to ruin an otherwise lovely day out. Therefore, you need to ensure that everyone has what they need, and a fun day is waiting ahead with games, activities and learning experiences!

Be aware of how the environment impacts you and the people around you

- Don't stand with the sun behind you as it will be difficult for your group to see you properly.
- Be aware of speaking clearly as it can be difficult to hear. If you need to, speak to the group at the front and then make your way to the back and repeat again.
- Adapt your activities according to the weather. If it is very hot and sunny, it probably isn't the best idea to plan a session full of running around in the open! Similarly, if it is cold and wet try and include more moving around activities.
- Make sure you remind everyone to look after their needs, especially if you are working with young children. They may need reminders to drink water and apply sun cream etc.
- Check-in with everyone periodically, ask how they are feeling, whether they need a break or if they have any problems.

## Managing a group outdoors

Children behave differently when they are in nature. There are vast opportunities for exploration and discovery so it can be harder to control a class to make sure that everyone is safe and together, whilst enjoying themselves. Here are a few tips to help you with this:

- Establish boundaries at the very start. Identify key signposts in the area that children are allowed to play in, and where they cannot go by themselves.
- Establish a call that will bring the group back together. It could be clapping, a whistle or anything you prefer that will get everyone's attention. It can be the same technique you use in your classroom to grab their attention.

- Don't worry if children are not following the activity exactly! If they are exploring, having fun, and enjoying time in nature it is okay to go with the flow. They are still learning, and it shows their interest in the activities you are leading.
- Ensure that you have a good adult: child ratio for your audience and activity.

### Recommendations based in Malta

Age	Adults	Children
0-2	1	3
2-3	1	4
4-8	1	6
9-12	1	8
13-18	1	10

## Toilets

- It is important when planning your outdoor visit to incorporate toilet breaks, especially if you have young children. Not all outdoor spaces have toilet facilities or aren't close to where your activity will take place. Make sure you know where they are and that you have told everyone in your group. Let them know if you are moving some distance away from the toilets. If there are no toilets, warn the group of this.



# V. BEHAVIOUR OUTDOORS AND RESPECTING NATURE

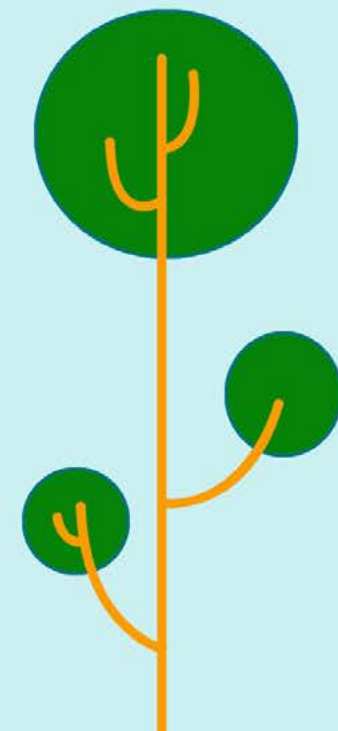
Spending time in nature can require us to act differently to respect the wildlife and enable us to fully enjoy the experience. In order to protect nature when you are outdoors with your class, there are a few guidelines that need to be followed. Before taking your children outdoors, explain these guidelines to them to help them respect nature and behave appropriately.

## Follow the rules of nature reserves or parks being used

- Don't go into locations that aren't open to the public.
- Follow any signs.
- Stick to paths and boundaries that have been set out.

## Respect Nature

- To avoid disrupting the natural environment, try to move around softly; avoid stepping on flowers/plants.
- To avoid disturbing animals, keep a safe distance from them.
- Don't tamper with the natural environment, leave it intact, do not pick flowers.
- Things should be left alone. This includes plants, animals, and habitats.
- Don't scare the birds - When birdwatching, please do not wear bright clothing, make loud noises.
- Be gentle with every living creature!





### Lessen your impact on the environment

- Bring your rubbish home with you (including organic waste, as can attract invasive species such as rats).
- Be conscious of how your actions impact the environment.
- Use equipment that is either non-polluting or low polluting.
- Encourage the use of transportation that has little or no environmental impact.

### Dealing with challenging behaviours

Here are some of the negative behaviours you might observe whilst being outdoors:


1. Squashing minibeasts.

2. Disgust and fear
3. Handling minibeasts but in a way that hurts them.
4. Turning over stones and not replacing them carefully.
5. Pulling off bark that either damages the habitat completely or they do not replace anything that was moved.
6. Picking flowers, pulling up plants.

### Here is how to deal with them:

1. Stay calm
2. Try and distract them by showing the group or explaining something interesting about what the child behaving negatively too -





for example slugs have 10 thousand teeth! Or male spiders sometimes have something that looks like boxing gloves called palps- this is how you can determine whether they are male.

3. Reframe the minibeast in a positive way by sounding enthusiastic and excited about the discovery. Thank the child for sharing this with the group.
4. Demonstrate that there is nothing to be afraid of and show the children how to appreciate nature with care.
5. Explain the process of pollution and the importance of flowers/plants.


This may/may not be possible, depending on your group and how willing they are to listen to you. At

the very least move the group on and prevent them from causing any further damage. If you can, follow up with a discussion questioning why they reacted that way after the situation is over.

#### How to deal with your own fear of the outdoors?

Another aspect of teaching outdoors is your possible fear of something in particular. Such as the common fear of spiders or snakes or minibeasts/bugs as a whole. The way you feel about these species will directly influence the way your group will feel about them.

Is there anything in particular that scares you about them? Articulate that fear and write it down. Learn everything you can about this species.



It can be difficult to overcome a fear, however, it is crucial that you don't let your own fear influence the way that your group feels about it. This could affect their future behaviour and attitude and cause them to harm or disrespect nature. Therefore, if you cannot overcome your fear, do practice maintaining your composure if you come across the species that causes you a particular problem.

Activity to help you:

Choose common animals which you can find locally and you are afraid of (spider, earwig, bat, snake etc.). Draw each animal and label the different body parts. Research interesting stories,

information or biological facts. You will discover many interesting facts, their benefits and role in the environment and you might even manage to get over your fear.

Go outside to your chosen local nature spot. See if you can find at least one or two of the different species you have chosen. See if you can spot the features that you discovered. If possible, bring someone with you and explain what you found out about these species.

Share your learning with your students!

## Getting to know your local environment

You can easily build confidence to explore nature even if you don't possess nature knowledge and you are not experts! You can start by:

- Learning how to observe different features of plants and trees, birds and other wildlife, insects (interactive modules available [here](#))
- Researching activities to connect children with nature and linking them with your curriculum requirements.

This guideline has been produced within the framework of the European project Teach, Inspire and Protect, funded by the Erasmus+ program.



# Annex 1: Questions to ask whilst doing a risk benefit analysis

## RISK BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF OUTDOOR LEARNING

It is the intention that through answering these questions, practitioners may become more aware of the reasons for doing an activity and what to expect from the experience, therefore making a more informed choice.

1. What are the benefits of an outdoor experience to your class?
2. Has a risk assessment been undertaken?
3. Does it contain any risks that are identified as significantly greater than those experience in normal school life?
4. Can these risks be reduced with adversely affecting the benefit of the experience?
  - If no, consider how serious the risk might be: cuts/bruises? Broken bones? Loss of life?
5. How likely is it that a significant risk will happen?
5. In your view, are the benefits in proper balance with any potential for harm?
6. Is there a person from whom you could seek guidance and further opinion?
7. Do you believe the planned activities should continue?
8. Summarise your justification for this experience:
  - Education Benefits
  - Prominent risks
  - Justification



## Annex 2: Basic Item Check List to bring outdoors

Basic Item Check List	Check
<b>Clothing</b>	
Fully waterproof jacket	
Waterproof trousers	
Light warm layers (fleeces etc.)	
Hats, Gloves and Scarves	
Sun Hat	
Comfortable Trousers (Avoid denim or materials which are uncomfortable if you get wet)	
Comfortable Shoes (Walking Boots (good for both wet and dry days)/Welly Boots (only in wet conditions) /Trainers (only in dry conditions)	
<b>Consumables</b>	
At least 1-2 litres of water	
Food (snacks which will give you slow-burn energy are great, like fruit and nuts) Always bring more than you think you might need, better to have too much than go hungry and lose your energy! It's always nice to share with your friends too!	



Other	
Sun Cream	
Insect Repellent	
Hand sanitizer	
First Aid Kit	
Charged mobile phone with credit	
Resources (if they have)	
Binoculars	
Eye loupes/ magnifying glass	
ID sheets (birds, plants, minibeasts)	
Paper and colours	

For more activities to connect children with nature, please visit this [page](#).  
 Feel free to contact [dinjawahda@birdlifemalta.org](mailto:dinjawahda@birdlifemalta.org)  
 if you require additional information.

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