



Risk-benefit assessment toolkit for EYFS settings

What is it?

This toolkit will support you to implement a risk-benefit approach when carrying out risk assessments in your setting. We recognise that you'll already have your own risk assessment resources in place and encourage you to continue using your existing processes. A risk-benefit approach will help you to consider a balance of risk and benefit for learners in outdoor activities, supporting children (and practitioners) to feel confident and safe outdoors.

In this toolkit are five guidance sheets for different outdoor features or activities that you may encounter when taking part in the Nature Park programme:

Sticks and loose parts

Digging, planting and soil

Plants and trees

Sand pit

Water and ponds

How do I use it?

It's up to you how these resources best support your existing risk assessment processes, and which sections are most helpful for you and your setting.

Each sheet includes:

- potential risks to consider and how you can manage these risks, to support you when completing your risk assessments
- a selection of benefits and learning opportunities which can help you communicate the value of outdoor play and discovery to parents and carers, or inspire your own activity planning
- examples of relevant 'I wonder' statements to spark curiosity in children
- a nature connection and safety principle to share with children, to help them keep themselves and others safe, as well as look after nature





Risk-benefit assessment toolkit: Sticks and loose parts

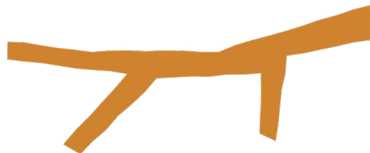
Use this resource to help you assess and manage potential risks when using sticks, logs and loose parts, while also utilising them to enrich children's learning and discovery.



Benefits and learning opportunities

Children will have opportunities to:

- develop fine and gross motor skills
- engage in imaginative and collaborative play and teamwork
- engage in role play and develop empathy towards others and nature
- experiment and problem solve
- understand the needs of living things and habitats (e.g. through creating a log pile)
- observe and appreciate nature through creative activities and nature art, noticing shape, pattern and texture



Nature connection and safety principle

“When we play with sticks and loose parts, we carry them carefully and keep them low to the ground, so everyone stays safe. We work together and check with an adult before lifting heavy things. We leave living plants and creatures where they live.”

Supporting enquiry and discovery

- I wonder what we could build with these sticks?
- I wonder what might live under this log?
- I wonder how we can use sticks and logs to make a campfire/fence/home for an animal?
- I wonder what creatures might use sticks for their homes?
- I wonder how we can carry these logs safely as a team?

Potential risks

Poking, minor cuts and bruises, splinters

Bites and stings from invertebrates

Check the area and materials to be used before activity
Explain boundaries and behaviour standards for children and staff to follow
Staff observation and reminders to children of appropriate behaviour
Explain and demonstrate how to carry sticks, logs and other materials safely (and how to add them to e.g. a log pile or dead hedge)

Ensure staff can recognise insects that may sting or bite (e.g. bees, wasps, hornets, midges, mosquitoes, gnats, ticks)
Clean out bug/bee homes on an annual basis (late winter/early spring, ensuring they are empty before cleaning)
Explain boundaries and behaviour standards for observing bug homes and not disturbing wildlife

Managing risks





Risk-benefit assessment toolkit: Digging, planting and soil

Use this resource to help you assess and manage potential risks when digging, planting and using soil, while also utilising them to enrich children’s learning and discovery.



Benefits and learning opportunities

Children will have opportunities to:

- engage in open, creative and sensory play opportunities
- increase understanding of the natural world
- develop fine and gross motor skills
- experiment and problem solve
- engage in storytelling and role play outdoors
- learn about plant life cycles and develop empathy for nature by planting and caring for plants
- improve mental health and wellbeing through exploration and play



Nature connection and safety principle

“When we dig and play in mud, we look after worms, bugs and plants by leaving them where they live. We always use tools safely and check with an adult before touching or tasting anything.”

Supporting enquiry and discovery

- I wonder what happens when we add water to the soil?
- I wonder what creatures live in this soil?
- I wonder how roots help plants grow?
- I wonder why worms are good for the garden?
- I wonder what shapes we can make with mud?

Potential risks

Minor cuts and bruises from rocks and sediment, toys and small hand tools

Toxins from dog, cat and fox excrement, or dangerous litter

Bites and stings from invertebrates

Managing risks

Wear **suitable footwear** (closed-toe, comfortable, good grip)
Check areas working in for any **sharp items** before activity
Ensure children are taught **how to use tools safely** and **supervised** during use
Limit number of children playing in an area at any one time, based on space and activity
Make dig pit or mud kitchen a **suitable size** to ensure adequate supervision and quality of play, with a **barrier** or **defined edge**

Check areas before use for litter or animal excrement and remove as necessary (cats may bury their faeces)
Wash hands after play
Regularly wash through your mud kitchen (depending on use: a regular clean weekly or every few weeks, and a deep clean every 1-2 months)

Ensure staff can **recognise insects** that may sting or bite (e.g. bees, wasps, hornets, midges, mosquitoes, gnats, ticks)





Risk-benefit assessment toolkit: Plants and trees

Use this resource to help you assess and manage potential risks when engaging with natural features such as fruit and vegetables, trees, shrubs and bushes, and wild plants, while also utilising them to enrich children’s learning and discovery.



Benefits and learning opportunities

Children will have opportunities to:

- learn about **food chains**, where our food comes from and healthy eating
- increase **understanding of the natural world**
- feel **calm and relaxed** outdoors
- begin to understand **pollination**
- introduce **natural colours** to grey or human-made settings
- experience **scents and textures** of different plants, such as herbs
- learn about **plant life cycles** and develop **empathy for nature** by planting and caring for plants
- **observe and appreciate nature** through creative activities, noticing colours, shape and pattern
- gain **understanding of number** through counting, grouping and sorting
- engage in **storytelling and role play** outdoors

Nature connection and safety principle

“Some plants are good for eating, but lots of them are best left for animals and insects. We always check with an adult before touching or tasting anything.”

Supporting enquiry and discovery

- I wonder what creature would eat this plant?
- I wonder what lives here?
- I wonder how old this tree/plant is?
- I wonder how birds/insects/other animals keep themselves safe outdoors?
- I wonder how this fruit grows on this plant?



Potential risks

Possible irritation (e.g. stinging nettles) or **allergies** to plants on skin or if eaten; Ingestion of **poisonous plants** including fruits/berries and bulbs

Cuts and bruises from use of small hand tools (may include knives for food preparation)

Scratches or poking from tree bark and plants

Falling from trees

Bites and stings from invertebrates



Managing risks

Check for **intolerances and allergies**
Review plants in outdoor space for those that are potentially harmful
Ensure children know what they can and cannot eat and that staff are aware of any dangerous plants

Ensure children are taught how to use tools **safely and supervised** during use

Check for sharp sticks or thorns and remove, or talk to children about behaviour in these areas

Introduce **tree climbing with boundaries** (specific trees and only to certain height, children must climb with **three limbs on the tree** at any time)

Ensure staff can **recognise insects** that may sting or bite (e.g. bees, wasps, hornets, midges, mosquitoes, gnats, ticks)



Risk-benefit assessment toolkit: Sand pit

Use this resource to help you assess and manage potential risks when using a sand pit, while also utilising them to enrich children’s learning and discovery.



Benefits and learning opportunities

Children will have opportunities to:

- engage in open, creative and sensory play opportunities
- connect to nature in a supervised environment
- improve mental health and wellbeing through exploration and play
- fulfil Understanding the World EYFS objectives
- engage in problem-solving, exploration of volume and mass, flow and measuring using standard and non-standard units (e.g. cups, jugs and buckets)
- experiment with both wet and dry sand
- develop social, co-operative and language skills
- develop fine and gross motor skills

Nature connection and safety principle

“When we are in the sand pit, we play gently and carefully to look after each other, and leave insects and plants where they live so they can enjoy the space too.”

Supporting enquiry and discovery

- I wonder what happens if we add water?
- I wonder what plants or animals might live in sand?
- I wonder where else in the world we might find sand?
- I wonder how we could make a home for a creature in the sand?
- I wonder what shapes we can make with our hands or tools?



Potential risks

Managing risks

Possibility of sand in eyes

Limit number of children playing in sand pit at any one time, based on space and activity
Wash hands after play
Explain boundaries and behaviour standards for children and staff to follow, e.g. no throwing of sand

Minor cuts and bruises from rocks and sediment, toys and hand tools

Ensure children are taught how to use tools safely, and supervised during use

Bites and stings from invertebrates

Ensure staff can recognise insects that may sting or bite (e.g. bees, wasps, hornets, midges, mosquitoes, gnats, ticks)

Toxins from dog, cat and fox excrement, or dangerous litter

Rake through sand pit to check for and remove debris, litter or animal excrement (daily or weekly, before use)
Wash hands after play
Rinse through and let your sand pit dry every 1-2 months (or sooner if contaminated) to keep sand clean

Slips, trips and falls

Wear suitable footwear (closed-toe, comfortable, good grip)
Limit number of children playing in sand pit at any one time, based on space and activity
Ensure pit is a suitable size to ensure adequate supervision and quality of play with a barrier or defined edge





Risk-benefit assessment toolkit: Water and ponds

Use this resource to help you assess and manage potential risks when using water and ponds, while also utilising them to enrich children's learning and discovery.

Benefits and learning opportunities



Children will have opportunities to:

- increase understanding of the natural world (Understanding the World objective), learning about habitats and observing wildlife
- learn about food chains and life cycles
- observe and record changes over time
- learn how rain can be gathered to help water plants in the garden
- connect to nature in a supervised environment
- engage in storytelling and role play outdoors
- engage in problem-solving, exploration of volume and mass, flow and measuring using standard and non-standard units (e.g. cups, jugs and buckets)



Nature connection and safety principle

“When we play near water, we walk and sit carefully and take notice of what is around us. This water is important for plants and animals, so we don't drink it and make sure we wash our hands.”

Supporting enquiry and discovery

- I wonder how frogs or insects use the pond to live?
- I wonder what happens when rainwater fills the pond?
- I wonder how water changes through the seasons?
- I wonder how water moves when we tip the watering can slowly or quickly?
- I wonder who lives in the pond?

Potential risks

Drowning, which can occur even in very shallow water

Slippery surfaces or uneven ground

Sun exposure (increased due to water reflection)

Managing risks

Appropriate **signs and fencing** for the area - ensure area is secure with safe areas to access
Ensure **sensible ratios of children to adults** (e.g. 1 adult to 2 children) - children only access areas of water under adult **supervision**
Explain **boundaries and behaviour expectations**, e.g. no running, define a safe distance from the edge
Children should [only pond dip when kneeling on both knees or lying flat on their stomachs](#)

A **maintenance plan** should keep areas around the pond safe and clear of vegetation
Wear **suitable footwear** (closed-toe, comfortable, good grip)

Wear **appropriate sun protection** (hats, sunglasses) if needed
Ask parents/carers to **apply sun cream** to children before they come to the setting



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Risk-benefit assessment toolkit: Water and ponds

Potential risks

Possible injuries or allergies associated with interacting with plants, insects, reptiles etc.

Waterborne diseases associated with contaminated water (e.g. warm water in water butts can become contaminated with Legionella bacteria)

Managing risks

Check for intolerances and allergies before session
Provide correct equipment for pond dipping activities (e.g. nets, trays or buckets, magnifying glass, waterproof gloves, towels, first aid kit)
Limit number of children looking for living things at any one time

Supervise children and explain boundaries and behaviour expectations to reduce risk of putting hands in mouths
Wash hands after play
Ensure **water butts** are in a shaded area to reduce overheating
Do not use a fine spray setting on a hose with water from a water butt, to reduce particles being inhaled
Disconnect hoses when not in use
Use water from water butt frequently to help replenish with fresh rainwater
Empty and clean water butts annually



For more quality-assured learning resources visit www.educationnaturepark.org.uk

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