Outdoor Play and Physical Development Policy

Grass Roots Nursery Group

1. Purpose

This policy outlines the importance of outdoor play and physical development for all children at Grass Roots Nursery Group. It sets out the principles and procedures that ensure outdoor experiences are safe, inclusive, developmentally rich, and embedded in daily practice.

This is a practitioner-facing document.

2. Statutory Responsibilities (EYFS)

Our approach reflects the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), including:

- Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements
- Promoting good health and physical development
- Ensuring access to outdoor play for all children
- Maintaining safe, secure outdoor environments
- Supporting children's personal, social, and emotional wellbeing

Outdoor play is a statutory entitlement and forms a core part of our curriculum.

3. Our Approach

Practitioners at Grass Roots Nursery Group are expected to:

- provide daily outdoor play for all children
- ensure outdoor environments are safe, inclusive, and accessible
- support children's physical development through varied, challenging opportunities
- model safe behaviour and support children to take appropriate risks
- use outdoor play as a context for learning across the EYFS
- observe children's interests and plan responsively
- communicate with parents about routines, clothing, and expectations
- follow all risk assessments and safety procedures consistently

Leaders ensure staff are trained, confident, and supported to deliver high-quality outdoor provision.

4. Key Principles

Daily Outdoor Play

All children access outdoor play every day, in all weathers, with appropriate clothing and adaptations.

Accessible Environments

Outdoor spaces are designed and maintained to be accessible to all children, including those with SEND or mobility needs.

Safety and Supervision

Children are supervised at all times, with regular safety checks and dynamic risk assessments.

Parent Partnership

We work closely with parents to ensure children are prepared for outdoor play and understand its importance.

Holistic Development

Outdoor play supports physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and sensory development.

5. Safe and Secure Environment

We ensure:

- daily safety checks of outdoor areas
- regular formal risk assessments
- secure boundaries, gates, and access points
- safe storage of equipment and resources
- clear supervision zones and staff deployment

Any hazards are addressed immediately, and areas are closed off if unsafe.

6. Outdoor Play Opportunities

We provide a balance of:

- free play – exploration, climbing, running, imaginative play
- structured activities – games, obstacle courses, group challenges
- sensory experiences – sand, water, mud, natural materials
- creative opportunities – painting, building, music, mark-making
- nature-based learning – seasons, weather, wildlife, gardening

Outdoor play complements indoor learning and forms part of our continuous provision.

7. Allotment and Nature-Based Learning

Our allotment provides opportunities for:

- gardening and planting
- understanding growth, seasons, and food
- caring for living things
- sensory exploration
- developing responsibility and teamwork

Children visit the allotment regularly as part of their outdoor learning.

8. Health and Safety

We follow all relevant health and safety procedures, including:

- sun care (hats, shade, sunscreen with parental consent)
- weather-appropriate clothing
- hydration and rest breaks
- safe use of outdoor equipment
- infection control procedures

Staff remain vigilant to environmental changes such as ice, heat, wind, or slippery surfaces.

9. Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are completed:

- daily for outdoor areas

- termly as part of formal review
- dynamically during play
- for specific activities (e.g., water play, climbing, gardening)
- for any off-site visits or local walks

Activities are adapted or paused if risks cannot be safely managed.

10. Benefits of Outdoor Play (Including EYFS Links)

Outdoor play supports children's holistic development and contributes to all areas of the EYFS.

Physical Development

- Strength, balance, coordination, and gross motor skills
- Fine motor development through tools, natural materials, and equipment

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Confidence, resilience, independence
- Cooperation, turn-taking, emotional regulation

Communication and Language

- Vocabulary development
- Storytelling, questioning, expressive language

Cognitive Development

- Problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking
- Curiosity, exploration, sustained engagement

Literacy

- Mark-making, environmental print, storytelling

Mathematics

- Counting, measuring, comparing, patterning, spatial reasoning

Understanding the World

- Nature, seasons, habitats, weather, scientific enquiry

Expressive Arts and Design

- Creativity using natural materials
- Music, movement, imaginative play

Health Benefits

- Physical fitness
- Mental wellbeing
- Vitamin D exposure
- Stress reduction

11. Daily Outdoor Play Procedure

Morning Preparation

- complete a headcount
- conduct a brief safety check of the outdoor area
- ensure children are dressed appropriately
- gather any required equipment (hats, sunscreen, coats)

Outdoor Transition

- mark children as outdoors on Famly
- complete a Famly headcount

Outdoor Play Session

- facilitate a balance of structured and free play
- maintain constant supervision
- conduct dynamic safety checks throughout
- support children's independence, exploration, and risk-taking

Returning Indoors

- gather children and complete a headcount
- mark children as indoors on Famly
- support children to tidy up and transition calmly

12. Specific Considerations

Weather Conditions

Outdoor play continues in most weather, with adaptations such as:

- shaded areas in hot weather
- waterproofs in rain
- reduced time outdoors in extreme conditions

Individual Needs

We make reasonable adjustments for children with:

- mobility needs
- sensory needs
- medical conditions
- SEND

Parent Communication

Parents are informed about:

- clothing requirements
- changes to routines
- any incidents or concerns

Emergency Procedures

Staff follow emergency procedures including:

- first aid
- contacting emergency services
- designated meeting points
- following the Missing Child Policy if required

13. Examples of Outdoor Play Activities

- free exploration
- climbing, running, balancing
- ball games and group games
- sand, water, and mud play
- gardening and allotment activities
- nature walks and observation
- creative arts outdoors
- building and construction with natural materials

14. Links to Other Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Outdoor Adventuring
- Outings and Visits Policy
- Health and Safety Policy and Procedures
- Risk Assessment Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Promoting Positive Behaviour
- Inclusion and SEND Policy

These policies work together to ensure safe, enriching outdoor experiences.

15. Review Cycle

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required due to changes in legislation, guidance, or best practice.