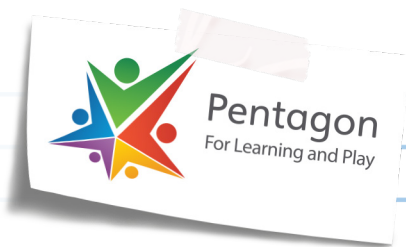


The benefits of outdoor play for the Age 2 Progress Check



should then come together to discuss and reflect on the observations.

Children should be allowed to contribute actively to the process.

A favourite way of doing this is for a child's Key Person to work with the child to produce an "All About Me" picture or booklet, where the child can talk about their current interest, their background and home life, what their likes and dislikes are, what they would like to learn to do next, and what they are particularly proud of. They can add pictures to this and take it home to complete with parents/carers too.

The EYFS Progress Check at Age 2

The EYFS progress check at Age 2 is designed to help EYFS practitioners, parents and carers to identify and understand a child's particular strengths as well as any areas where development is less than expected and more help may be needed.

It's a good basis on which to formulate a "next steps" plan for a child as they move through nursery. There is no prescribed format for the progress check to be completed.

The EYFS Framework just specifies that information about a child's development in the prime areas of learning and development of the EYFS should be provided to parents/carers in writing.

It makes sense then, that the progress check should be completed by someone who knows the child well and works with them directly in their EYFS setting. A child's Key Person or Key Worker is usually the best person for this.

The expectation is that a report should be put together based on "ongoing observational assessments carried out as part of everyday practice in the setting".

It should be based on "skills, knowledge, understanding and behaviour that the child demonstrates consistently and independently" and should take account of the "views and contributions of parents, the views of other practitioners and, where relevant, other professionals working with the child".

Parents' observations should be included in the check as they have in-depth knowledge of their own child. Parents/carers and their child's EYFS practitioner



Once the check has been completed, both parents/carers and practitioners should have a clear picture of how the child's development will be taken forward, and what can be done to help encourage and support areas of development where needed, both at home and in the EYFS setting, taking into account each child's individual personality, ideas and interests.

Outdoor Play - Helping Young Children to Develop in the Prime Areas of Learning

There is no doubt about it that the outdoor environment is one of the very best resources for facilitating and encouraging a child's overall development and supporting good health and wellbeing. Children have all different styles of learning

so it is important to adapt and try to accommodate different needs, and this can be done outdoors.

When it comes to the three prime areas of learning for nursery and preschool children, and carrying out an Age 2 Progress Check for an child, a good outdoor learning area offers very specific benefits:

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Well being” relates to a person’s physical health, mental health and emotional well-being and is considered to be central to how we feel about ourselves.

It is thought that when a person’s wellbeing is high, they are at ease with their surroundings, their self confidence and self esteem are improved, and so they are able to engage more deeply in activities.

Regular time spent playing outdoors is an essential factor in a child’s well being. In recent times, there has been a noticeable move to try and get more children back to playing outdoors regularly and spending time engaged in outdoor learning.

Through play, children are stimulated to learn, and this in turn strengthens their well being. Even better if they can do this outdoors. Research suggests that the outdoors is where children like to be most of all, given the opportunity.

When Early Years settings offer children the freedom to play outside and to make active choices to go outside, engage and play, it reinforces emotional well being in each of those children and helps them to embrace the outer world independently.



It isn’t just about recharging batteries and preparing for a more structured approach to learning indoors. It’s about embracing the outdoors as a focal point for learning and play in its own right, and using the outdoors as a mechanism for development in all of the prime areas. A good outdoor provision can offer children really high quality experiences and have a significantly positive impact on children’s personal, social and emotional development. International research shows clear links between access to the outdoors and good mental health and well-being and overall development in children.



Psychologists believe that play supports emotional development by providing a way for children to express and cope with feelings, for example by acting out being angry, sad, or worried in a situation they can actually control.

Pretend play allows them to think out loud about experiences charged with both pleasant and unpleasant feelings.

Jean Piaget, the swiss clinical psychologist known for his pioneering work in child development, identified that pretend play helps children express their inner feelings by simplifying events (creating an imaginary character, plot, or setting to match their emotional state), compensating for situations by adding “forbidden” acts to pretend play, (such as wanting to eat chocolate cake for breakfast), controlling emotional expression by repeatedly reenacting unpleasant or frightening experiences, and avoiding adverse consequences by pretending that another character, real or imaginary, commits inappropriate acts (e.g. a teddy drawing on the walls) and suffers the consequences.

The more a child can play outdoors in an uninhibited environment, involving themselves freely in role play and taking time to explore their thoughts and emotions, the more their personal, social and emotional development is enriched.

Mud Kitchens, sand and water tables, themed play panels, dens and den building areas equipped with “real world” items and toys, for example, are ideal outdoor resources for broadening and extending role play and pretend play opportunities for Early Years children.

These forms of outdoor play allow children to explore and improve their social competence and interactions with others too, and many psychologists and practitioners believe that academic success as a child moves on to school depends largely on their ability to interact positively with both peers and adults, which children learn from a very early age.

Engaging with one another through play, particularly in the outdoors environment where again children are less inhibited and have more space and confidence to engage, enables children to experiment with roles of the people in their home, school, and community.

They come into contact with the needs and wishes of others and experience other people’s points of view.

In an Early Years setting, the positive impact of good quality regular outdoor play on a child’s personal, social and emotional development will reflect in the following ways. Children will:

- ☀ Be more confident to try new activities, and to say why they like some activities more than others.
- ☀ Gradually become more confident to speak in a familiar group, to talk about their ideas and to choose resources they need for their chosen activities.
- ☀ Express when they do or don’t need help.
- ☀ Be able to talk about how they and others show feelings.
- ☀ Be able to talk about their own and others’ behaviour, and know that some behaviour is unacceptable.
- ☀ Play as part of a group and understand and follow the rules and routine.
- ☀ Learn to play co-operatively, taking turns with others.
- ☀ Show sensitivity to others’ needs and feelings,

forming positive relationships with adults and other children.

Communication and Language

The outdoor environment is a brilliant place to extend and support language development.

Many of the opportunities that the outdoors offers for developing a child’s ability to communicate are interlinked with the prime area of personal, social and emotional development, and many of the positive impacts listed above naturally apply to the prime area of communication as well.

When young children are having fun and enjoying themselves playing outdoors, this is the time when some of their most developed language emerges naturally.

Quite often when they are inside, children are expected to conform to more quiet and controlled behaviours. But running around outside, being themselves (and often being noisy!), is usually the time when they really find their voices!

We already know from research that regular outdoor play supports a child’s brain development and understanding.

Modern day emphasis on provision of good quality outdoor play in a child’s early years, from birth to 5, and including children in reception classes as well as in nursery and preschool settings, has really increased awareness of the learning that takes place when children are physically active.

This has a huge impact on language and communication. Exploring the outside world around them allows children to experience and practise using a wide range of new vocabulary and develop their ability to communicate effectively with others.

As well as learning and experimenting with new vocabulary, outdoor play allows children to practice both verbal and nonverbal communication skills as

they negotiate roles, attempt to extend and develop play, and learn to listen to, recognise, understand and appreciate other people's ideas and opinions.

A well resourced outdoor learning area can deliver really rich and in-depth learning opportunities for language and communication in the following ways:

- Through imaginative role play and acting out stories in large open spaces. Young children use sound and language to recreate roles and experiences such as driving a racing car or a train. Expressing their emotions as they fly down a slide, swing through the air, jump, climb and explore play frames, cook a meal for their friends or Key Person in a mud kitchen. Using the muscles in their mouths to make different sounds to express what they are thinking or doing (animal noises, engine noises etc), their ability to speak clearly and form word sounds is strengthened. They find new ways and words to explain what it is they are doing and to communicate the game to others.
- By using their voices in a variety of ways, from quiet whispered conversation in a play den, calling out instructions or numbers as they jump along playground markings, through to loud shouting from one end of a playframe or slide to another!
- Through mark making on a large scale, with chalk, paint, mud or water, on the floor, walls or specific mark making panels, they can experiment with written language.
- Listening to and learning scientific and descriptive vocabulary relating to the outdoors, such as the weather, plants and flowers, minibeasts and wildlife, roads and traffic. Resources to attract wildlife and capture weather forces such as rain, light and heat, are ideal for demonstrating and exploring vocabulary.
- Exploring print, words and symbols in the outdoor environment, such as notices, maps, labels and signs.
- Creating outdoor reading areas where children can explore and enjoy all types of literature in the fresh air. Research has revealed that reading in an

outdoor environment can open children up to the story, the words and the language much more, as their senses are heightened through sensory influences. It's a different and exciting experience which captures their interest and imagination.

- Through outdoor crafts and messy play. Describing textures, smells, sights, changes and movement. Gathering seasonal natural resources from the outdoors, flowers, conkers, leaves, bugs etc, and displaying them on a tuff spot table for children to explore and discuss teaches all sorts of new vocabulary and language concepts.

Physical Development

Put simply, outdoor play is absolutely essential to and one of the few ways of ensuring good physical development for children.

Children need to play outdoors to stay physically healthy and happy. The NHS and the Chief Medical Officer are very clear in their guidelines that **physical activity should be encouraged from birth** and the amount of sedentary time for all babies and children should be minimised.



All preschool children under the age of 5 who are capable of walking should be physically active for at least three hours a day. A good outdoor play area is key to achieving this in all nursery and preschool settings!

The physical benefits to outdoor play for young children are unlimited and immeasurable.

Outdoor play in any form gets children up and moving. When children play outside regularly, they are more likely to maintain a healthy weight because they get the chance to burn off extra calories.

Outdoor play is particularly important in early childhood because it helps to combat child obesity, which is recognised as a major problem affecting children today.

Research also indicates that regular outdoor play and exercise enjoyed in the fresh air can lead to better sleep, which is needed for good physical and mental health and development.

Outdoor activities and exercise help children to develop small and large muscles, strengthened bones, increased flexibility and fine and gross motor skills.



Why the focus on the outdoors for physical activity?

Amongst the other benefits listed already, getting children outdoors for exposure to sensible amounts of sunlight is one of the best ways of ensuring that children's bodies are producing enough Vitamin D.

Vitamin D is essential for healthy physical development and is produced through the skin from exposure to the sun. Whilst it is known that too much sun exposure is bad for us, it is also known that it is impossible to get an adequate amount of Vitamin D from food and vitamin supplements alone.

Good outdoor play areas offer plenty of opportunities for children to play in natural daylight, with a mixture of sheltered areas to prevent over exposure to the sun, and also facilitate outdoor play whatever the weather, come rain or shine.

In nursery and preschool settings, and as a marker for strengths and areas of improvement during the Age 2 Progress Check, good physical development through outdoor play will become evident as children start to demonstrate, amongst other things, the following:

- Fine and gross motor development and body awareness as they actively use their bodies to manoeuvre around the playground and nursery rooms. Improved balance and overall coordination.
- Increased physical confidence, security and self assurance. Using their bodies in new and different ways to travel, walking, running, hopping, skipping, swinging, jumping, and integrating these skills into games.
- Using their hands and bodies to create and build simple structures, such as towers, with a variety of materials such as wooden blocks, construction blocks, cardboard tubes, yogurt pots, sponges.
- An ability to mark make and control writing or mark making tools such as crayons, pencils and paintbrushes.
- A natural progression in small motor development from scribbles and faint lines to more definite shapes, forms and representational pictures.
- Starting to demonstrate an understanding of health and self-care, enjoying and expressing an understanding of the importance of exercise and healthy foods for good health. Discussing food at snack and mealtimes. Engaging and talking about ways to keep healthy and safe. Through learning to become more independent children start to manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs successfully, including dressing and going to the toilet independently, washing their hands before and after eating and after messy play.

We are experts in outdoor play provision and have a wide [range of products](#) to facilitate, enrich and enliven outdoor play and learning areas in nurseries and preschools. Please have a look at our [EYFS page](#) of our website for further information.