

Risky Play

What? Why? How?



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table to learn
more!

Preschool Teachers Outdoor Summer Workshop



JEFFERS FOUNDATION



Preschool students are naturally inquisitive and the natural environment is a great setting and resource to use to engage students in authentic learning experiences.

* Learn how outdoor instruction heightens preschoolers' development through multisensory exploration, student inquiry, risk taking, and more.

* Join Jeffers facilitators as they: model strategies to effectively use your school's outdoor space for nature play and learning.

* Share ideas to plan for and develop outdoor learning centers, and help you develop ways to maintain a safe and engaging learning environment for your preschoolers in any season.

Who: Preschool teachers (instructors of 3-5 year olds)

What: FREE teacher training sponsored by Jeffers Foundation

When: Tuesday, June 11, 2024 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. Lunch provided

Where: McColl Pond ELC, Savage, MN

Class size: Limited to 25 participants

Credit: Earn 7 CEUs

Come prepared to be outdoors during most of the class time.

McColl Pond, ELC
Savage Community Park
13550 Dakota Avenue South
Savage, MN



Register by June 4, 2024 at [JeffersFoundation.org](https://jeffersfoundation.org)

A registration fee of \$25 will hold your spot.

This fee will be refunded upon completion of the workshop.

Cancellations after June 4th are not refundable.

Questions - Contact: david.grack@jeffersfoundation.org

[JeffersFoundation.org](https://jeffersfoundation.org) Environmental Stewardship Through Education

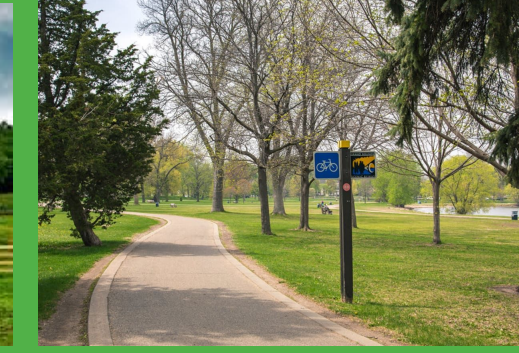


Setting the stage...

Turn & talk to your neighbor(s)

Share about your childhood memories of playing outside. What experiences and activities come to mind?

What is your perception of what adult supervision was like?





HUMMINGBIRD PARENTING
 "I TEND TO STAY
 — physically distant —
 — TO LET THEM EXPLORE —
 AND PROBLEM SOLVE,
 BUT ZOOM IN AT MOMENTS
 WHEN SAFETY IS AN ISSUE
 (which isn't very often)."
 —michele whitaker



What type of parent are you?



Lawnmower parent

Tend to mow down all of children's challenges, discomforts and struggles.



Helicopter parent

Tend to hover, and this can continue through college.



Free-range parent

Allow their kids to walk to school or a nearby playground alone.



Attachment parent

Use natural closeness rather than the clock to determine their babies' needs.



Tiger parent

Known for putting excellence in academics and carefully chosen extracurriculars above leisure time.



Elephant parent

Value encouragement over academic or athletic success.



Agenda

- **Risky Play:**
 - Definition: What is it?
 - Benefits: Why reasonable risk is GOOD!
 - When is risky play not beneficial?
- **Examples of risky play in preschool:**
 - How to provide beneficial risk
 - How to manage risky activities
- **What does risky play look like in your classroom or program?**
 - Where does risky play fit in with my teaching philosophy? My beliefs about children as learners? Our program's mission?



Anna Dutke

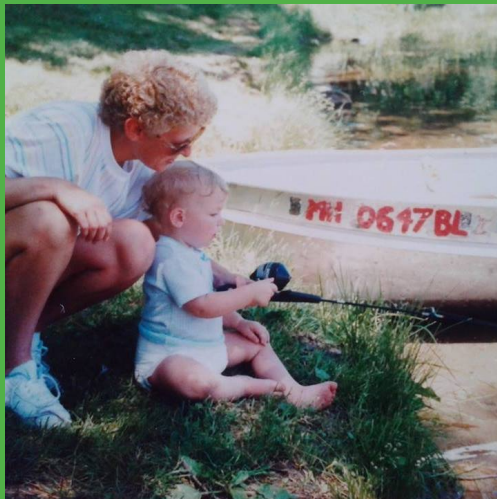
Jeffers Foundation

ISD 196 Nature Preschool Teacher &
TOSA

Facebook: Minnesota Early Childhood Outdoors
(MNECO)

Website: www.MNEarlyEdOutdoors.com

Email: MnEarlyEdOutdoors@gmail.com



“If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.”

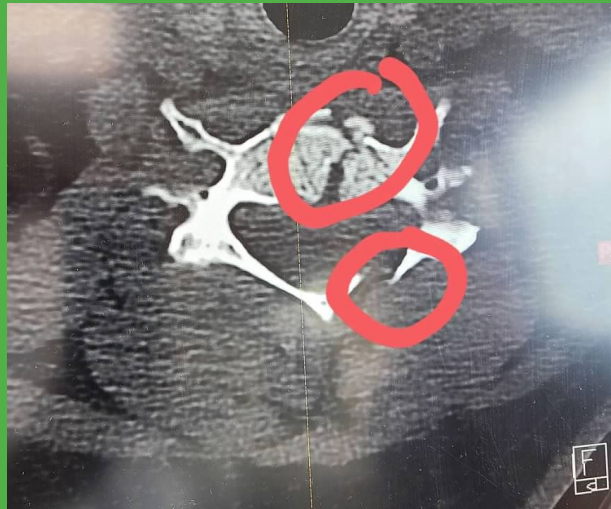
Rachel Carson







Nature is everywhere, we just need to learn to see it." Emma Marris





Risky Play

What are the first words that
come to mind?

Ellen Sandseter's 6 Categories Of Risky Play

This handout is based on research analysis completed by Ellen Sandster for her doctoral thesis entitled Scary Funny—A Qualitative Study Of Risky Play Among Preschool Children. She writes that her results, “indicated that experiencing both exhilaration and fear at the same time was the primary goal of engagement in risky play.”

Great Heights



Children seek opportunities to climb to great heights as well as, jump, balance, hang, or swing from those heights.

Interacting with great heights helps kids face fears and build confidence.

Climbing to great heights comes with the risk of injury from falling.

Rapid Speeds



Children seek opportunities to run, swing, slide, sled, bicycle, skate, roll, ride, and spin at rapid speeds.

Moving at rapid speeds helps children understand and use their bodies.

Moving at rapid speeds can lead to injury from collision.

Dangerous Tools



Children seek opportunities to use potentially dangerous tools like knives, saws, axes, rope, power tools, machinery, etc.

Using dangerous tools helps children build confidence and skills.

Using dangerous tools can lead to injuries and wounds.

Dangerous Elements

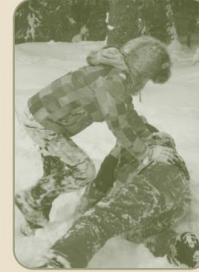


Children seek opportunities to engage with potentially dangerous elements such as fire or deep, cold, or moving water.

Engaging with dangerous elements is a chance to face fears and understand the world.

Engaging with dangerous elements can lead to injuries and wounds.

Rough And Tumble



Children seek opportunities to play fight, wrestle, chase, sword fight with sticks or pool noodles, etc.

Rough and tumble play is a chance to hone physical and social skills.

Participating in rough and tumble play can lead to physical injuries like scratches and bruises.

Disappearing Or Getting Lost



Children seek opportunities to play and explore unfamiliar spaces either alone or in small groups.

Disappearing or getting lost offers a temporary scary thrill.

Allowing children to play at disappearing or getting lost could result in a child *really* getting lost.



Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, referred to as one of the world's leading experts on the value of playground risk-taking, is a professor at Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education in Norway.



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Real Tools



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Natural Elements

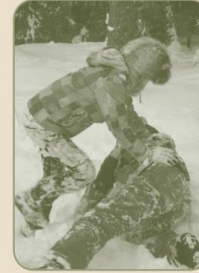


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Risky Play Reflection

Which activities did you seek out as a child?

Which activities do you see your children or students seeking out?

Which activities do you struggle the most with allowing your own children or students participate in?



ACTIVITY

Where do you provide opportunities for children to engage in the following types of risk?

1. Great Heights
2. Rapid Speeds
3. Dangerous Tools
4. Dangerous Elements
5. Rough & Tumble
6. Disappearing/Getting Lost



Any activities that you don't currently provide, but would like to do so



What are the benefits?

Risky Play

Goal: Provide challenge/risk while offering protection from unacceptable harm.

Provide experiences where the benefit of participating is greater than the likelihood of experiencing a severe injury. Risk of severe injury occurring is low.

Hazards: Difficult or impossible for children to identify themselves. There is no benefit for children to experience these. (eliminate or identify)

When you put risk back in children's hands, they tend to handle it carefully, taking the steps they feel comfortable with. Allowing children to take risks actually has the effect of reducing risky behavior.



It's OK To Go Up The Slide
Heather Shumaker

"The more risks you allow children to take, the better they learn to take care of themselves." (Roald Dahl)

Risk

Hazard

Easily identifiable (children notice)

Difficult to assess (for children)

Yields growth

Causes harm / is dangerous

Children can approach with a base of knowledge

Child doesn't have knowledge or or can't think about (plan for) in the moment

There is an element of control -
Children have a choice

Lack of Control - children can not see to make a choice

Change “No” to “Yes”

What does acceptable risk look like for this activity?

What conditions (gear, activity location, etc) need to be in place to support this activity?

What do the children need to be able to do or understand? What supports can be put in to place to help?

What do adults need to be successful in supporting this?



Early Learning Physical Hazard Rating Matrix

This physical hazard rating matrix is intended to help early learning professionals assess the potential danger of play activities or environments. This is useful for creating play settings that balance safety with reasonable risk taking. Use this matrix when conducting benefit and risk assessments and other early learning planning.

Consequence	Likelihood Of Adverse Outcome				
	Highly Unlikely	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Highly Likely
Insignificant No Injuries Or Health Issues	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Minor First Aid Treatment	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Moderate Medical Treatment	Low	Moderate	High	High	Critical
Major Permanent Disability Or Disease	Low	Moderate	High	Critical	Catastrophic
Extreme Death	Moderate	High	Critical	Catastrophic	Catastrophic

Hazard Rating Key	
Low Hazard	Acceptable hazard. No further action required if the hazard has been minimized as much as practical.
Moderate Hazard	Tolerable hazard. Hazard should be reviewed periodically.
High Hazard	Tolerable hazard. Hazard should be reviewed continuously.
Critical Hazard	Unacceptable hazard. Immediate action should be taken to minimize hazard.
Catastrophic Hazard	Unacceptable hazard. Immediate action should be taken to minimize hazard.

Research indicates that young children benefit from risk taking. Risky activities like climbing, rough and tumble play, using tools, exploring new spaces, and playing with water promote healthy development. Such activities also help children learn to assess and manage risk. While risk taking is important, so is safety. Not all risks are dangerous.



"It's a beautiful day for outdoor learning!"

6 BETTER WAYS TO TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER



WHAT WE SAY

WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD

It's freezing out there!



We'll need to put on an extra layer today and bring out some hot chocolate.

Rain again? Looks like we're not going outside today.



Looks like it's a muddy puddle day!

What a dreary day.



Seems like the sun needed a break today. Let's go check out those cool clouds!

It wouldn't be so bad out today if the wind wasn't blowing.



Let's make a little fort or den and howl with the wind!

I don't mind the heat, I just can't stand the humidity.



You know what would be nice right now, a glass of cold lemonade!

This weather is ruining our plans!



Let's try to brainstorm something else that would be fun to do and work with the weather today.

If you choose not to find joy in the snow, you will have less joy in your life but still the same amount of snow.

@mindfulness

Encouraging a child to go outside in all weather builds resilience, but more importantly it saves them from spending their life merely tolerating the "bad" days in favor of a handful of "good" ones - a life of endless expectations & conditions where happiness hinges on sunshine.

NICOLETTE SOWDER



What's harmful? What's not?

Engage students in understanding the “why”

Check your facts... myths vs reality

Validate concerns & personal experiences





What to do when a child is making you nervous?



What to Say to Kids Instead of "Be Careful!"

Help Your Child Foster Awareness by Saying:

- **Notice how...** these rocks are slippery, that branch is strong...
- **Do you see...** the poison ivy, your friends nearby?
- **Try moving...** your feet carefully, your quickly, strongly.
- **Try using your...** hands, feet, arms, legs.
- **Can you hear...** the rushing water, the singing birds, the wind?
- **Do you feel...** stable on that rock, the heat from the fire?
- **Are you feeling...** scared, excited, tired, safe?

Help Your Child Problem Solve by Saying:

- **What's your plan...** if you climb that boulder, cross that log?
- **What can you use...** to get across, for your adventure?
- **Where will you...** put that rock, climb that tree, dig that hole?
- **How will you....** get down, go up, get across?
- **Who will...** be with you, go with you, help you if?

www.backwoodsmama.com



What's Your Plan?

When You Want to Say "BE CAREFUL"



Play with Great Heights

- Stay focused on what you're doing.
- What's your next move?
- Do you feel safe there?
- Take your time.
- Does that branch feel strong and stable?
- I'm here if you need me.

Play Near Dangerous Elements

- Please move slowly and carefully near the...
- Please give each other lots of space so that no one feels like they need to push, and no one gets knocked over by accident.
- Do you feel stable/balanced?
- Do you need more space?

Rough and Tumble Play

- Make eye contact before you tackle someone. Make sure they know you are coming so that they can get their body ready.
- Check in with each other. Make sure everyone is still having a good time.
- Ask them if they're ok.
- Ask them if they're still having fun.
- Did you like that? Make sure you tell them if you didn't like that.

Play Where Children can Get Lost

- If you need to run, meet me at the next trail marker!
- Let's check this cave/fort to make sure it's safe to hide in.

Play with Great Speeds

- Please find a safe spot for your stick while you're running.
- I've noticed that this is a really busy area and I'm worried that someone not playing this game might get knocked over. Watch out for other people and give them lots of space.
- Should we move this game to a more open area?

Play with Harmful Tools

- Sticks need space. Look around you - do you have enough space to swing that big stick?
- Please keep one end of your stick on the ground!
- What's your plan with that big stick?
- Rocks need space!
- Before you throw that rock, what do you need to look for?
- That rock looks really heavy! Can you manage it?





Role of Adults

- Creating space for activities to occur and set parameters & limits as necessary
- Teach & re-teach expectations
- Be aware of, and make decisions to remove or limit known & emerging hazards.
- Know your students!
- Zones:
 - Spread out!
 - Trade off roles: Supervisor vs Engager

Weather

What to think about:

- Wet Skin + Cold = Frostbite
 - Face: Chewing on face masks, jackets, etc.
 - Neck gaiters that can be turned vs the one piece head & neck ones
 - Wrists: Wet sleeves from washing hands or snow
 - Solution: Wipes or hand sanitizer
 - Wet hands from removing gloves
 - Dry & warm up with hand warmer before returning to mitten
 - Wet Socks
 - Waterproof boots
 - Elastic over snow boots
 - Tall boots
- Strong Winds
 - Avoid playing near/under trees
- Lightning - Stay inside!

Encouraging a child to go outside in all weather builds resilience, but more importantly it saves them from spending their life merely tolerating the "bad" days in favor of a handful of "good" ones - a life of endless expectations & conditions where happiness hinges on sunshine.

NICOLETTE SOWDER





Stick Play

Student Expectations:

- Walking sticks on trail – no longer than hip height
- Walk when carrying sticks
- Sticks can't be used to hurt someone
- During nature play, any sticks taller than you requires 2 people to move
- Break off branches before moving
- Big sticks need big spaces.
- Watch out for people with sticks - be aware!

Additional Strategies:

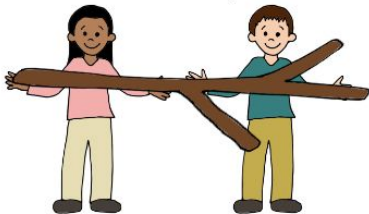
- Stop and redirect once
 - Running
 - Sticks that are too big
- Lose out on playing with sticks for remainder of day
 - Using sticks to hurt others
- Create stick zones - sticks can be played with a certain way here



Stick Play Expectations



You can play with sticks that are shorter than you.



When a stick is taller than you, you need at least 2 people to move it.



Walk when carrying sticks.



Use your imagination, but make sure everyone feels safe.




You can play with sticks that are the same length or shorter than your arm





Guidelines:


- Sticks can be many things, but not weapons.
 - In Nature preschool, we talk about how some people might be scared of guns and swords. One of our rules is to be safe. If students are feeling scared, they also don't feel safe. So as a class, students agree those shouldn't be used.
 - If the play involves "web shooters," "ice machines," or other weapon-like items, students have to ask other students before using it on them. Sound effects must not resemble a gun - may need to help students brainstorm some fun sounds to use.
 - Sticks should NEVER touch people or other sticks (i.e. sword play)
 - When carrying sticks, watch out for others
 - A good Rule of Thumb: if sticks are waist height or smaller one person may carry. This can eventually be changed to shoulder height once students are ready so it could be an actual walking stick.
 - Big sticks need big spaces
 - When carrying sticks, you must walk.
 - Point sticks down when carrying them.
 - Exception to the rule is when 2 students are carrying a stick, then it is ok if it is pointing outward.
 - If drumming or hammering with sticks, use rocks or fallen logs, not living trees.
 - Be aware of your surroundings. Make sure no one is around you, especially in front of you (if the stick breaks off, it will continue to travel forward) or behind you (look back before you raise your stick).
- 



Prior Communication to Families (Nature Preschool)

Dear Families,

Sticks, [inducted in the National Toy Hall of Fame in 2008](#), are a favorite object for students to play with during our time outside. To ensure the safety of the group, we have the following expectations for sticks (or as I call it, stick etiquette):

- When on the trail, students may carry walking sticks. Walking sticks may not be any taller than hip height (this height will increase as students demonstrate capacity for using sticks safely).
 - When carrying sticks, students must walk and they must be pointing up & down (not outward)
 - At our play spots, students may move sticks that are taller than them only with the help of a peer. Sticks can be pointed outward when being moved, but there must be a student on each end to control them & ensure they don't poke into peers.
 - Sticks can be many things, but not weapons.
 - We talk about how some people might be scared of guns and swords. One of our rules is to be safe. If students are feeling scared, they also don't feel safe. So as a class, students agree those shouldn't be used.
 - If the play involves "web shooters," "ice machines," or other weapon-like items, students have to ask other students before using it on them. Sound effects must not resemble a gun - may need to help students brainstorm some fun sounds to use.
 - Sticks cannot be used to hit people or other sticks. If drumming or hammering with sticks, use rocks or fallen logs, not living trees. And be aware of your surroundings. We model checking around us & verbally telling our peers what we are going to be doing so they can move out of the way. Peers should also not be directly in front of where the student is hammering, because if the stick breaks it will travel in that direction.
- 

Stop and Wait Spots

Allows students the freedom & responsibility to move ahead of the teacher on the trail

Stopping spots should be placed so you can see the next spot from the previous one – allows you to check & see if anyone is coming

Student Expectations:

- Students should always stop & wait at the spot and only move on when the teacher says
- If they struggle with waiting, suggest sitting down at each spot.

Additional Strategies:

If you can't stop, than I can't keep you safe when you run ahead so you need to stay behind (or next to) me.

If child struggles staying next to or behind you, hold child's hand



Stopping Spots

[Link to visuals](#)



Look for Stop & Wait Spots on the trail



Stop at the Stop and Wait spots. You can sit or stand while you wait.



Listen for the teacher to say "OK You can go!"



Look for the next Stop & Wait Spot on the trail.



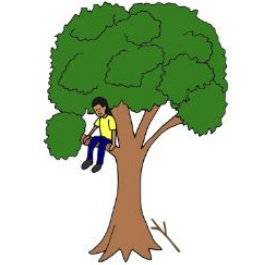
Tree Climbing



Ask a teacher before climbing.



Only climb as high as your teacher can reach.



Hands free when climbing. Leave sticks on ground.



Keep 3 limbs touching the tree at all times
(2 feet and a hand or 2 hands and a foot)



Throwing Snowballs



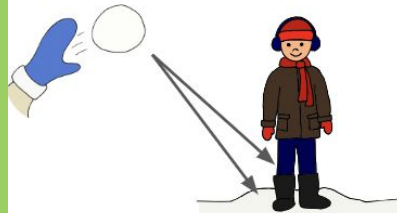
First ask "can I throw snow at you?"



Listen to their answer. If they say no, do not throw snow at them.



Listen to their answer. If they say yes, make a new snowball so you know there is no ice or a rocks inside.



When you throw the snowball, aim for their feet or knees.

Climbing up the Slide



Ask a teacher before climbing.



Before starting to climb, look up the slide to see if someone is coming down.



If someone is coming down, wait before you climb.



If the slide is clear, you can start to climb.



Keep 3 limbs touching the slide at all times (2 feet and a hand or 2 hands and a foot)

Going Down the Slide



Before going down the slide, stop and look. Is anyone coming?



If someone is coming up the slide, Wait!



If no one is coming up the slide, you can go!



Go feet first when going down the slide

Childhood Experiences Outdoors?

- What comes to mind when you think of your childhood experiences and the outdoors?
 - Organized sports/activities
 - On own or with friends? Organizing own games
 - With/without parent supervision
- Which activities from your own childhood would you or others in your family, struggle with allowing your own child to do?

Experiences Outdoors with your own children

- Favorite activities? Places/types of places?
- Struggles/barriers?
- Describe activities your child does when outside?

What do you think about when you hear the term “Risky Play?”

Introduce Risky Play Handout

- Which activities did you seek out as a child?
 - What are the benefits of this activity?
 - What did you learn through the process?
- Which activities does your child seek out?
 - What is your child learning in participating in these activities?
- Which activities are the hardest for you to support/manage?

Risk/Benefit Assessment.

- What are the limits I can apply to certain risk-taking activities, but still let my child play?

Be Careful handout...

- Tone Matters
- If there is an emergency/concern, what do you do? Different voice? Whistle? Phrase?

Weather/Gear Tips & Tricks (if time)

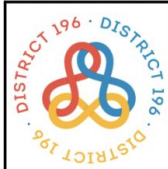
Reflection:

- What is something you are going to try and do or commit to?

Risky Play - ECFE Parent Ed Discussion Lesson template

You can also use a similar
flow/structure to facilitate
conversations between
teaching teams

[Link to Resource](#)



Outdoor Learning Safety Guidelines

Teacher & Staff Routines

It is the responsibility of teachers and any support staff to ensure the safety of all students during outdoor learning. It is critical that their full attention is on the students. Below are safety expectations that teachers and support staff are responsible for implementing prior to and during outdoor learning.

School Office

Main Office:

- Have printed and easily accessible maps of school grounds - should have the names of the outdoor spaces
 - [Map of Oak Ridge](#)
- Create a tracking system of who is outside with their students & a general idea of where they are going
 - Inside/Outside board to keep track of where each classroom is
 - Teachers are responsible for checking in with the nurse as needed.
- Establish protocols for office communication to check in/out.
 - Let the main office know when, where and duration you plan to be outside.
 - Communicate again with the Main Office when you return inside.
 - Change room location sign to where the class will be.
- Establish protocols for in the event of an emergency (school security, fire, evacuation situation, etc) for when teachers are outdoors
 - Establish protocols for what teachers should do during drills (expectations for how to participate when outdoors)

School Nurse:

- Work with individual teachers regarding student health concerns
- Determine a plan/process for teachers to check out and back in from outdoor learning when they have a student with specific medical concerns

Preparing for Outdoor Learning

Know your students:

- Have a small copy of your class roster in your ID badge case.
- Know which students may have additional physical, social, or emotional needs that may warrant additional consideration or attention.
 - Understand how physical activity and/or cold weather may affect a students' medical condition.

- Know which students have medical needs and make provisions for any necessary medications (inhaler, EpiPen, insulin, etc.)
 - Print a copy of Student Health Plans to keep in your backpack.
- Be mindful of student intervention times (Know where students are if they are not with the group and have a plan for students to join the class or leave the class to go to their intervention)

Know your site:

- Review the School's Site Prep: (Checklist is maintained & completed seasonally by the Magnet Team)
 - Make sure the necessary tasks are completed and the sites are ready for you to take students outside
 - Make note of any site-specific updates (especially in the Fall)
 - [Oak Ridge Site Updates](#)
- Familiarize yourself with [your building's outdoor maps](#) and learn the names of different trails and distinguished meeting places. This helps office staff know where everyone is at all times & establishes consistent boundaries.
- Walk the grounds...
 - Identify places to meet and explore with your students
 - What boundaries do you want to set with/for your students in this space (both physical boundaries and activity specific)?
 - How will physical boundaries be identified or marked? Consider using natural landmarks, your backpack or flagging tape that can be removed when you leave if the boundary is classroom or activity specific. If possible, use another color other than orange (orange is used for marking Stop & Wait spots)
 - Where will your gathering space be located?
 - Locate potential hazards. Hazards are dangers that a child is unaware of because a child is unable to recognize them and take necessary precautions, hazards have the potential to cause serious harm.
Examples of potential hazards:
 - Bird feeders propose a hazard for students with peanut allergies as most bird food is processed in an area that contains peanuts, even if the specific mix does not
 - Water
 - Thin ice
 - Dead branches in a tree
 - Dead trees on extremely windy days
 - Unsafe plants
 - Familiarize yourself with unsafe plants & bugs the students may potentially encounter, and the action steps you should take if students come into contact with them. Be prepared to teach your students about identification! Use the map on your school's Site Prep document (link above) to locate areas with unsafe plants
 - [Poison Ivy](#)
 - [Wild Parsnip](#)
 - [Stinging Nettle](#)
 - [Stinging Insects](#)
 - [Ticks](#)

Know Emergency Procedures:

[Severe Weather, Fire or School Security, Evacuation](#)

- In case of severe weather, fire or school security drill/event--report to your drill spot unless otherwise communicated by the main office.
- In the event of an evacuation, the main office will direct you to walk to your evacuation location.
- For additional information, reference Emergency Procedures and work with site administrators to address questions or concerns.

Missing Student

- If a student is considered missing, gather all the students. Do another head count and roll call (go through roster and visual check in with each student). Check the time & contact the school office to inform them that a child is unaccounted for. Be ready to share a description of the learner (ex. clothing color), where the student was last seen.
- If there is more than one adult with your group, one should supervise the students while the other does a sweep of the area.
- If alone, have your students walk with you to check the area and retrace your steps while waiting for additional support from the school office. When checking the area, use your whistle/call several more times to alert the student you are looking for them.

Injury

- Note: All teachers are responsible for carrying a school supplied first aid kit.
- If a student or adult is injured, teachers will do the following based on severity:
 - Minor cuts/scrapes/bruises: Apply bandaid and/or ice pack
 - Major injuries, including head injuries:
 - If student is safe to move, student should be taken to the school nurse ASAP (radio the office for the nurse/other staff to come get the student and bring them to the nurse's office, or the entire class should accompany the student back to school)
 - If unsafe to move, notify the office of your location and extent of the injury. While waiting for the nurse, have all the other students stop playing and gather in an area to ensure everyone is under supervision.
- All injuries should be reported to the school nurse and parent/guardian should be notified (by teacher and/or nurse)
- Note the action steps for the following: [Poison Ivy](#), [Wild Parsnip](#), [Stinging Nettle](#), [Stinging Insects](#) and [Frostbite/Frostnip](#)

Create Your Outdoor Learning Backpack:

- Student Roster
- Emergency Procedures packet
 - Have addresses and map of outdoor learning spaces so, if needed, the office can direct the Emergency Responders to your location
- Red-Green Notification Card
- Radio and cell phone
- Weather Monitoring Equipment--
 - Cell phone with Weather App
- First Aid Kit
 - Latex gloves, bandages, gauze pads, gauze roll, ice packs
- Clean Water
- Wet Wipes or Hand Sanitizer
- Whistle

- Extra Zip Lock Bags--for ice or blood materials
- Garbage bags for litter or wet clothing
- Kleenex/Roll of Toilet Paper
- Plastic Bread Bags (used to put a child's feet into if the inside of their boot gets wet until you can get them back to school)
- **Seasonal/Site Specific:**
 - Extra socks, hats, mittens, and scarves especially for winter. Hand Warmers for emergency situations

Communicate with families:

- Provide families with the weather-appropriate clothing guidelines so they can be prepared for the weather.
 - [What to Wear English](#)
 - [What to Wear Spanish](#)
 - [What to Wear Somali](#)
- Communicate in advance with families about the types of activities you will be doing, (see suggested family communication under activity specific safety guidelines) safety measures that will be taken, and any specific expectations for students.

Classroom Management for Safety Outdoors

Classroom Management for Safety:

"Not all Classrooms Have Four Walls." Outside IS a classroom. Placing the same emphasis on teaching and practicing expectations for outdoor learning routines and lessons, as you do for your indoor classroom, is crucial to your success as a teacher & the safety of students.

- **Teach & Practice Outdoor Learning Expectations (Expectations with an emphasis on safety!)**
 - Before you go outside, teach (and practice!) the behavior and learning expectations for students (just as you do indoors)
 - Circle up before heading outside (or just after heading outside) and again before returning indoors.
 - Have students generate the expectations or set the expectations prior and tell the students. Expectations should be reflective of your indoor classroom expectations: Be Safe, Be Helpful, Be Responsible.
 - **Note:** See additional examples for activity-specific expectations at the bottom of this document

Accounting for Students:

- Establish how students will be accounted for along the trail, and with any transitions or hand offs.
 - Accounting for students:
 - On the back of your badge, have a roster with the first & last names of all your students.
 - Create safety checkpoints - Stop and wait spots--using brightly colored flagging tape or other markers.
 - These are great spots to do quick head counts and check-ins.
 - Students can move ahead independently to the next Stop and Wait Spot when the teacher says OK. Teachers should always be able to see the next spot from the current one, as well as ahead of the trail so they can hold students back from going in the event of a vehicle, dog, etc.
 - Follow whistle protocol for students to know it is time to come back together.

- 1 whistle blow: Stop and Look at Teacher; 2 whistle blows: Stop activity and circle up, 3 whistle blows: emergency that requires students to run to a teacher or designated area.
- Accounting for students during transitions of adults
 - Create a system for accounting where students are at/who they are with. The purpose is that in a time of an emergency, you will be able to quickly and effortlessly know where every child is.
 - Ideas:
 - Clipboard with laminated sheet that has student names, cross off students who are absent each day, write where students are if they are leaving the group (ie speech, bathroom, office, etc)
- Set the expectation that students must always be in a spot where they can see a teacher and the teacher can see them

Student Behavior Management:

- Risk Management:
 - Understand the benefits and risks for any outdoor learning activities you are doing with your students
 - What are the benefits for my students to participate in this activity?
 - What are the potential risks of injury?
 - How can I plan for these risks to reduce the severity of the injury
 - What expectations should I put in place?
 - How should I supervise the activity? *Basic rule: **1 BIG risk per 1 adult.*** (What staff are you already collaborating with that can support other outdoor activities when needed?)

Teach the Expectations:

Teach students the activity-specific safety expectations that are located at the bottom of this document. Note: These expectations may need to be modified based on your adult to student ratios and your student behaviors (Know your students! When in doubt, be extra cautious at first as students are developing skills.)

- Review consequences for misbehavior with students:
 - Make a plan for what happens if a student needs to take a break from an activity
 - Where will the student sit, a tree stump that can be a take a break spot, etc.?
 - What is the plan to help the student learn a missing skill needed to be successful outside?
 - When will the teaching and practice of the skill happen?
 - Student safety is important. Therefore it is crucial that after the expectations are taught, that adults (teachers/paras) follow through with enforcing them by using logical consequences as necessary. If a student is unable to demonstrate staying safe or being responsible or respectful when carrying sticks, rocks, staying safe on the dock, etc. (hitting others with sticks, throwing rocks at people, etc), then that student should take a break from using the material until he/she can make a plan of how to use it as expected. When the student is calm and can share a plan of how to use it as expected, they can try again. Teacher observes to make sure the plan is implemented.

Harmful Animals & Plants:

- Instruct students to stay on the trails unless otherwise told by the teacher.
- Students should be taught to only observe nature unless permission is given to touch or catch. (Do not touch dead animals.)
- Teach:
 - Identification strategies for recognizing potentially harmful plants and animals
 - Strategies for reducing the likelihood of encountering them

- What to do if you make contact with a harmful bug or plant

Unidentified Person:

All teachers & staff are responsible for being able to see students at all times.

- If an unidentified person is in the area and is exhibiting behavior that is unsafe or suspicious, students should be gathered and return to school.
- After students are gathered safely, report suspicious behavior to the office, and the office will follow up. If necessary, the office will send out additional support to accompany students back to school safely.
- If students are approached by an unidentified person, teachers should be in close proximity to ensure the safety of the child and appropriateness of the conversation.

Dogs:

Students are not allowed to approach or pet dogs during outdoor learning. Leashed and unleashed dogs are to be left alone.

- If encountering a dog on the trail, students should be gathered and moved off the trail. Wait calmly for the person and dog to pass.
- If encountering a loose dog, teachers and students should not make any attempt to catch or touch the dog. Notify the office and they will follow up. If a dog remains in the area and exhibits aggressive behavior, leave the area and notify the office..

Immediately Prior to Going Outside

Check the weather:

- Have a weather app on your phone that alerts of lightning in your area.
 - Phone Weather Apps: WeatherBug, My Lightning Tracker & Alerts,
 - Track Lightning on Desktop computer: <https://www.weatherbug.com/alerts/spark/> or <https://www.wunderground.com/wundermap>
- Lightning:
 - In the spring and fall, follow [National Weather Service Guidelines for Lightning](#).
- Cold Weather:
 - Familiarize yourself with risks & signs of [Frostbite/Frostnip](#)
 - When taking your class outside when the temperature is colder than -5°F, check the [National Weather Service Guidelines](#) wind chill chart for the amount of time you can safely spend outdoors.

Check Students' Gear:

- Students are wearing seasonally appropriate outdoor weather gear, including any parent-requested items (i.e. hat, sunshirt, goggles, special glasses, etc.)
- In Winter, students' gear MUST BE DRY: Check shirt and jacket sleeves, mittens, scarves, & socks
- It is the teacher's responsibility to make sure students are dressed to safely go outside. If needed, help students access the resources in your Classroom Outdoor Lending Closet.

Communicate with Main Office:

- Let the main office know when, where and duration you plan to be outside.
- Touch base with health office in regards to any students with identified health conditions and inform them of your intended location so they can plan accordingly
- Bring your walkie and cell phone when you are outside.
 - If using a cell phone, the main office (phone number and site address) needs to be in your contacts.
- Communicate with the Main Office when you return inside.

During Outdoor Learning

Dynamic Risk Assessment

- **Teachers and Support Staff should engage in a dynamic risk assessment when outside.** This involves:
 - Continuing to assess the environment for hazards
 - Continuous re-evaluation of the risk of activities based on the actual students, current environment & weather, etc.
 - Continuous monitoring of student gear and its effectiveness

Additional Activity Specific Safety Guidelines

Crossing Streets to Access Outdoor Learning Spaces:

- [Crossing Streets Safely Guidelines](#)
Sites used for Outdoor Learning that involve crossing the street:
 - Oak Ridge School Forest
 - Prairies 1, 2, and 3
 - Thomas Lake

Ice Safety:

- [Ice Safety Guidelines](#)
 - Document contains site-specific Ice Safety Maps

Campfires:

- [Campfire Safety Guidelines](#)

Sledding/Sliding:

- [Sledding safety guidelines](#)

Water Exploration (Including Pond Dipping):

- [Water Exploration Guidelines](#)

Fishing (including Ice Fishing)

- [Fishing](#)

Stick Use & Play:

- [Fort Building](#)
- [Stick Etiquette](#)

Climbing:

- [Climbing Safety Guidelines](#)

Puddle Exploration (Water or Mud):

- [Puddle Exploration](#)

Snow play:

- [Snow Play](#)

Using Tools

- [Tools](#)

Section 3: The program has written policies and procedures that support nature-based learning.

3.2 The program has specific written risk assessment policies and procedures in place to support nature-based learning.

CATERPILLAR • 1 POINT



The program has **minimal** risk assessment policies and procedures in writing related to nature-based learning and there is **limited** staff understanding of how to conduct a risk assessment.

The program has risk assessment policies and procedures developed and in writing for just some activities such as weather, tree climbing, and stick play. Only the program director completes the risk assessment.

CHRYSLIS • 3 POINTS



The program has **comprehensive** risk assessment policies and procedures in writing related to nature-based learning, but there is **limited** staff understanding of how to conduct a risk assessment.

The program has risk assessment policies and procedures developed and in writing for all activities. Only the lead educators complete it.

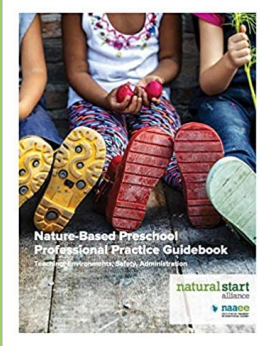
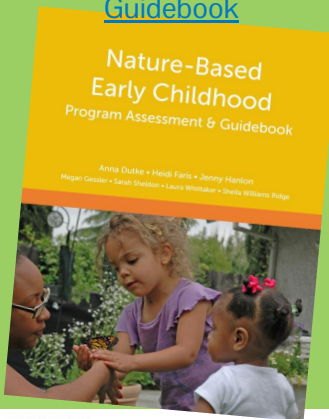
BUTTERFLY • 5 POINTS



The program has **comprehensive** risk assessment policies and procedures in writing related to nature-based learning and **all** staff have an understanding of and are able to conduct ongoing dynamic risk assessments.

The risk assessment policies and procedures are comprehensive and in writing. The staff have all been trained on how to conduct risk assessments and take turns conducting them throughout the year.

[Website to download Free Guidebook](#)



[Website to learn more about this resource](#)

HAZARDS

Hazards are dangers that a child is unaware of. Because a child is unable to recognize them and take necessary precautions, hazards have the potential to cause serious harm. Examples of potential hazards:

- Bird feeders (Note: Bird feeders are potentially a hazard for students with peanut allergies as most bird food is processed in an area that contains peanuts, even if the specific mix does not. In the event a student has a peanut allergy, consider the type of bird seed you use along with setting up a barrier such as a fence or stones around the bird feeders & the seed drop zone so the students cannot access them easily.)
- Environmental allergens (allergens may include trees, molds, pollens, bees, etc)
- Water, especially stagnant or deep and/or swift moving water
- Thin ice
- Dead branches in a tree
- Dead trees on extremely windy days
- Unsafe (dangerous or toxic) plants & animals
- Toxic environmental pollutants
- Roads
- Extreme weather conditions
- Hidden holes
- Rocks under climbing trees (if fallen on, increase risk of severe injury)
- Sticks or plants that are located in areas where impalement is likely (under a climbing tree, at children's eye level when they're climbing or along a pathway)



Take the path that works for you,
your program, and your students.

bit.ly/mnafeeRiskyPlay

Questions?

Mnearlyedoutdoors@gmail.com



MDE Resources



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Outdoor and Nature-Based Learning

Search

Search

The benefits of outdoor experiences for children are well documented. When children spend time outside, they explore science topics using curiosity, creativity and wondering, becoming better problem solvers and critical thinkers. When children are outside, they take turns, talk to each other about what they see and interact with their peers in cooperative ways. Being outside leads to more time being physically active and developing small and large motor skills. Some studies show outdoor learning can increase feelings of well-being, sustained attention and concentration. This particularly benefits children who may have experienced trauma or other life stressors.

View the new outdoor learning videos created in partnership with the [Minnesota Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights](#).

- [Supporting Outdoor Learning Opportunities for Young Children](#)
- [Supporting Outdoor Learning Opportunities as an Early Educator](#)

[Outdoor and Nature-Based Learning Resources for Early Childhood Programs](#) - 10/6/23

Resources to support early education programs and educators.

[+ MDE Resource Guides](#)

[+ Webinars](#)

[+ Local and National Resources](#)



Early educators can use outdoor spaces to support the learning of all children.

Related offsite resources:

[The Benefits of Learning Outdoors webinar](#)

► Early Learning

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

Early Learning Programs

► High-Quality Early Learning

Assessment in Early Childhood

Curricula and Instruction

Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards

Kindergarten Transitions

Knowledge and Competency Framework

Mixed Delivery Systems for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

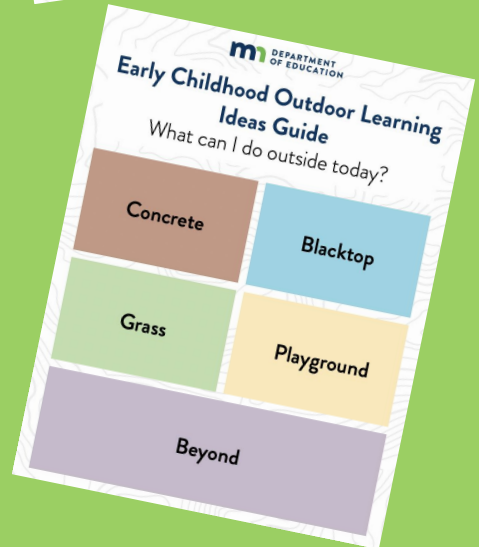
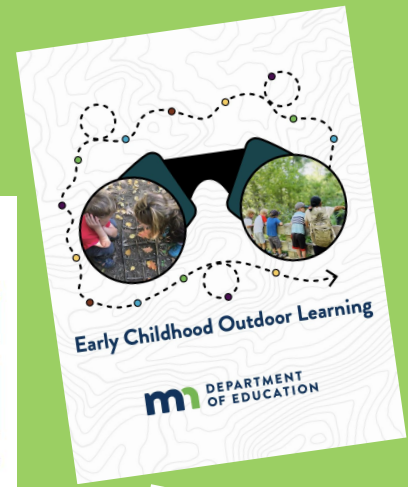
Multilingual Learners in Early Learning Programs

► Outdoor and Nature-Based Learning

Supporting the Early Care and Education Workforce

Prenatal-to-Grade 3 (P3) Initiative

Preschool Development Grant



MNECO: Minnesota Early Childhood Outdoors



DULUTH NATURE PLAY COLLABORATIVE

MNECO
Minnesota Early Childhood Outdoors

2024 Nature Play and Learning Gathering

Saturday,
April 27th, 2024

FREE!

Thank you to the following sponsors and supporters!



Event Schedule:

8:30: Participant check-in at UMD

9:00-11:15: Keynote Presentation & Discussion Groups: “All Relatives Share Empathy: Infusing an Empathy-based Pedagogy in Your Teaching Practice” (details below)

Break/Networking (15 Min)

11:30-12:20: Breakout Sessions

12:30-1:30 PM: Lunch on your own

1:30-4:30 PM: Site visits of Duluth-area nature-based programs

5:00 PM: Social gathering at Ursa Minor Brewing



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OakiWear 25% Coupon for Families

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[Link to session google drive folder:](#)
handouts, pictures of posters, etc.

