



TAKING OUTDOOR PLAY SERIOUSLY

Advice for Parents:
Play Matters



PlayBoard NI - Leading the Play Agenda

www.playboard.org

Play matters

Returning to school after the summer holidays in 2020 will be a little bit different to previous years. Our children will of course experience the normal rush of excitement and nervous energy, however this year we imagine their excitement may be tempered somewhat with concern for safety and well-being.

As parents you too will be worried and anxious, this is totally understandable, instead of returning to school after a normal carefree summer recess, your children will be returning to school after a prolonged six-month period of lockdown as a consequence of the coronavirus commonly called Covid-19.

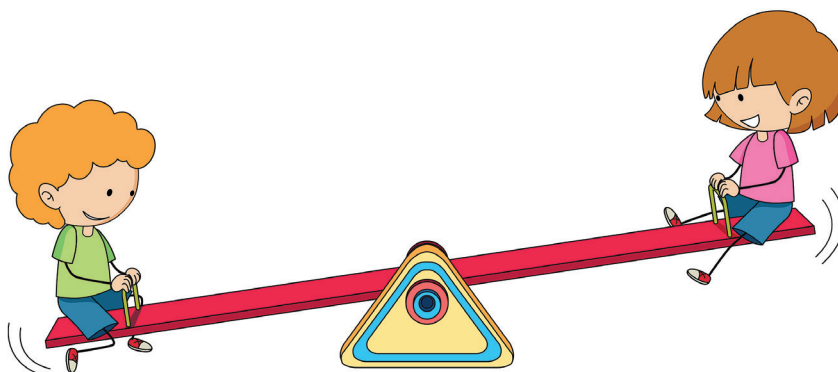
Teaching staff, although keen to resume normal teaching practice are also anxious. Schools are having to adapt and change to address and embrace a suite of public health guidance. Apart from hand washing and social distancing measures, you may note your school is placing a greater emphasis on taking learning outdoors. This is because all the scientific evidence suggests that the transmission of the coronavirus is significantly reduced when outdoors.

Schools will be capitalising on maximising the potential of outdoor spaces as a necessary approach and context for delivering the education curriculum. This approach is to be welcomed as the impact of outdoor play and learning on children and young people's health and well-being, wider achievements, attainment and personal development is widely recognised by health and educational practitioners.

Playing outdoors is a vital ingredient for a healthy and happy childhood!

Our message for parents

Lots of people think that play is what children do when they have nothing better to do. In fact, play often is the better thing to do! Play is important at any time.



Benefits of outdoor play and learning

Playing and learning outdoors, children encounter many opportunities to grow, develop and learn, such as:

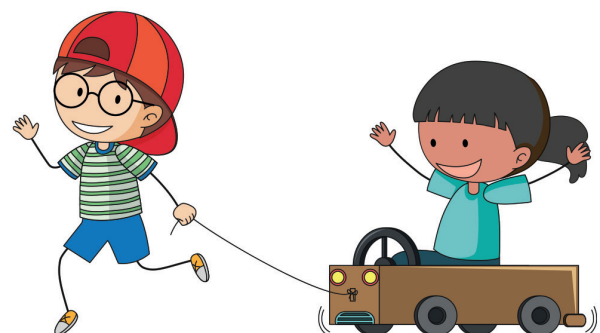
- Improving physical fitness
- Letting off steam
- Developing co-ordination, strength, agility and stamina
- Building self-confidence, independence and self-esteem
- Engaging with others, fostering social connections and peer friendships, solving problems and increasing resilience
- Training their immune systems through exposure to bacteria, germs and microbes in the environment.

Use of school grounds for learning

Teachers possess skills and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment that are valid and useful in an outdoor context. The abilities of teachers enable them to be effective outside as well as indoors. All subjects, all ages and all levels can be taught outdoors. Many current themes in education can be taken outside with a little thought and creativity.

Manage your fears and concerns

Back to school usually creates a rush of excitement for the new school year. No matter the age of your child, the first day back is a big deal for you and them alike. If you are trying to channel your own nerves or anxiety due to the pandemic, be aware that children are like little sponges. Witnessing a parent in a state of anxiety can be more than just momentarily unsettling for children. Children look to their parents for information about how to interpret ambiguous situations; if a parent seems consistently anxious and fearful, the child will determine that a variety of scenarios are unsafe.



Get involved in school life

Foster a close, purposeful relationship with your child's school and teacher. A strong relationship can help you assist your child's learning journey and make better sense of the totality of their experiences in school.

Safety first

Going back to school will likely look a little different from what you and your child were used to before. It's also possible that your school may reopen for a period of time and then, due to a coronavirus outbreak, decide to close again temporarily. This is an evolving situation, you may need to be flexible and ready to adapt should the situation arise.

Keep up to date

Become familiar with public health guidance and your school's policies and practices. Remember government guidance changes so keep up to date with the latest version.



Useful tips to help your child's easy transition back

- Try to be mindful not to transfer any anxieties you may have on to your child
- Talk to your child about how they are feeling about returning to school and offer reassurance if need be
- Remember to follow any restrictions the school has in place to mitigate infection
- Where possible try to walk or cycle to school
- Remember the benefits of playing outdoors.

Useful links

Play Matters - Play for Parents Guide www.playboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PlayBoard-Play-For-Parents-Guide-2019.pdf

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education, Public Health Agency and Department of Health have been working together to develop guidelines for the transition back to school. The Education Restart Programme details the measures and guidance that will enable children's return, including the New School Day guidance www.education-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/education-restart

UNICEF - What will a return to school during the COVID-19 pandemic look like? www.unicef.org/coronavirus/what-will-return-school-during-covid-19-pandemic-look





**WE ALL
MUST DO IT
TO GET
THROUGH IT**

 **STAY SAFE**

 **SAVE LIVES**



Department of
Education

PlayBoard is the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Northern Ireland.

PlayBoard's TOPS (Taking Outdoor Play Seriously) Quality Assurance Programme and Award for Outdoor Play is aimed at supporting schools to bring about a comprehensive transformation of their school environment in order to encourage and support outdoor play and outdoor learning.

www.playboard.org/what-we-do/tops-taking-outdoor-play-seriously/

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