



Outdoor Play Policy

At St Marks Pre-school we believe that children learn best when they are in an environment where they are most comfortable. As such, the outdoor environment is treated as an extension of the indoor classroom, where the children can access planned and freely chosen activities at their will.

Benefits of outdoor play include:

- Exercise, and the development of co-ordination and physical skills.
- Building children's immune systems and tackling obesity.
- Developing social skills. Reducing stress and anxiety.
- The provision of real experiences, which are an essential part of children's learning.

Aims

St Marks Pre-school aims to:

- Create a rich and enabling outdoor environment that is welcoming, practical and accessible to all children.
- Ensure that the outdoor environment is a continuation of the indoor environment, with continuous provision available for all children in the pre-school, including children who have any additional needs.
- Enable access to the outdoor play environment in most weathers.
- Allow children the freedom to explore and investigate in a safe environment.
- Encourage confidence and independence through self-chosen challenges and managing risks in an appropriate manner.
- Support children for them to gain in self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Help children to have a greater understanding of the natural world, including the understanding of where vegetables and fruit come from, and a sense of time indicated by the changing seasons.

Risky play

Without risks children will not learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle. Children need and want to take risks, to explore boundaries and try new experiences. Risks are important for children to become safer in the future.

At St Marks Pre-school we believe that this can be achieved under careful supervision without the benefits being taken away. Risk assessments will be carried out on any risky play activities.

Benefits of risky play for children

Children will:

- Learn more from having small risks; these will always be explained to the children and will be pointed out to them.
- Be more prepared for the outside world by experiencing real things.

- Develop a range of physical competencies and abilities, including a growing ability to manage risk (adults arguably tend to underestimate children's capabilities).
- Explore, develop and represent learning experiences that can help them to make sense of the world. They will have opportunities to learn rules and boundaries, take risks and make mistakes, think creatively and imaginatively and communicate with others as they investigate or solve problems.
- Develop personal safety, so that children can attempt challenges without fear of harm; and develop a sense of responsibility for the safety and feelings of others.
- Develop resilience and willingness to take risks, which are important for children's persistence in the face of challenges.
- Develop concentration, independence and social skills. 'Having a go' is an important learning disposition, risky play allows children to try something new without worrying about what might happen

Factors determining if the level of risk is acceptable or tolerable:

- Severity of coming to harm.
- Likelihood of coming to harm.
- Benefits, rewards, or outcomes of the activity.

Risky play activities will only take place if:

- The likelihood of harm is extremely low.
- There is an obvious benefit to the children.
- The hazards are clear to the children.
- There are no reasonable practical ways to manage the risk.

Procedure

Adults will always directly supervise whilst children take part in risky play activities.

Objectives

To achieve our aims the practitioner team will:

- Carry out regular risk assessments on the outdoor environment.
- Check the garden and playground for any dangers at the beginning of each day.
- Allow children free access to outdoor equipment.
- Request that parents provide wellies and suitable outdoor clothing to go out in most weathers.
- Keep a selection of waterproof trousers, coats and wellies for those children who need them.
- Ensure a wide range of natural materials are available for children to explore and investigate, i.e. sand, soil, stones, wood etc.
- Provide materials that encourage imagination and creativity, i.e. tyres, planks, large pieces of fabric, boxes, crates, rope etc.
- Give the children the opportunity to plant and grow flowers, fruit and vegetables.
- Support children to take managed risks and encourage them to assess risk themselves, so that they can learn how to 'be safe'.
- Engage with children to extend learning opportunities.

- Support children’s outdoor learning within the indoor environment, e.g. using books and internet access to follow up experiences and gain a deeper depth of learning.
- Encourage children to build relationships and collaborate in their play and use resources such as sand timers to negotiate turn-taking.
- Encourage children to climb the climbing equipment only when they feel competent to do so. Practitioners will not lift children onto any climbing equipment until they are able to climb it themselves, as it is our belief that this is not safe and they may not be able to get down.
- Discourage children from climbing on any equipment when they are carrying an item of equipment.

Method

The practitioner team will:

- Be appropriately dressed, i.e. in suitable clothing and outdoor wear such as waterproofs, hats, sun cream etc.
- Have first aid training and kits to hand.
- Check the gates on entering and leaving the garden.
- Regularly carry out checks to ensure the outside area is free from rubbish and safe: all equipment is checked for breakages, pooling water, security and cleanliness before taking children outside.
- Ensure equipment is stored appropriately at the end of each day.
- Ensure the adult-child ratio is maintained.

Monitoring and evaluating

This will include:

- Practitioner observations, discussions and feedback.
- Annually reviewing the policy to ensure that it meets the needs of the children.
- Discussion and feedback from parents/carers.

This policy was adopted at a meeting of the pre-school held on (date)

Signed on behalf of the pre-school

Also see: Health and Safety Learning, Development and Assessment
 Recording and Reporting of Accidents and Incidents Safeguarding
 Supporting Children with SEN