

Outdoor learning - risks, hazards and actions

Most outdoor learning experiences take place with very low levels of risk. However, on occasion, it may be necessary to expose students to slightly higher levels of risk. Naturally, it is important to balance risks and opportunities in any outdoor learning experience to ensure that actions are proportionate and reasonable.



One of the most important steps in minimising risk will be to undertake a site assessment of the outdoor learning area PRIOR to taking students to this area to ensure the site is clear of hazards.

The following table suggests risks and hazards that may occur with outdoor learning experiences. Included you will see suggested actions to take in addressing each of these risks or hazards. Use this table to assess your outside learning space and to make your case for further outside time to other teachers and your principal.

Risk/Hazard	Action
Sun	Advise students of risks of sunburn. Ensure students cover exposed skin, wearing hats and sunscreen. Keep sunscreen in outdoor learning spaces. Work in the shade where possible.
Low branches	Give students a verbal warning to take care (especially the eyes). Encourage students to complete work in open areas where possible.
Prickly materials - natural (e.g. plants)	Give students a verbal warning. Work together to identify plants with sharp or prickly parts for future reference – include this information in your class-wide <i>Outdoor Learning Guidelines</i> .
Sharp or prickly materials - non-natural (e.g. waste, broken glass etc.)	Conduct a safety sweep before entering the area. Give students a verbal warning. Remind students of dangers, and if necessary show examples of hazardous material.

Uneven ground, holes in the path, objects on the ground (such as stones or fallen branches)	Advise students to walk carefully. Encourage students to wear suitable footwear and plan a route appropriate to the weather if venturing into densely vegetated areas or along uneven paths.
Poisonous plants and fungi	Give students verbal warnings and advise them to avoid putting unknown materials into their mouths or putting fingers in their mouths. Seek medical assistance if ingested. Carry water and wet wipes/anti-bacterial gel if travelling far from hand-washing facilities. Work together to identify poisonous plants and fungi for future reference – include this information in your class-wide <i>Outdoor Learning Guidelines</i> .
Insect bites, stings or allergies	Before heading outside, be aware of any allergies (including insect stings, hay fever, nuts) or medical conditions (such as asthma) and ensure students have their medication (Ventolin or EpiPen etc.) and can administer them. Advise all students of potential risks (don't touch bees, alert other students to dangers, etc.). Carry a First Aid kit. Tuck trousers into socks if in a potential tick area.
Disease or infection (e.g. <i>Toxocara canis</i> [dog faeces], Tetanus [soil], Lyme Disease [ticks])	Advise students of the risks. Cover broken skin on hands with gloves. Seek medical assistance if infection is suspected. Tuck trousers into socks if in a potential tick area.
Slippery surfaces	Advise students of the risks and encourage students to wear appropriate footwear in wet or icy weather.
Open water	Give students a verbal warning of the danger area. Advise students to keep clear of the water's edge. Have a throw line or lifejackets if working near fast flowing or dangerous water.
Thunderstorms, heavy rain or gale force winds	Check weather conditions before taking activities outside. Move some or all of the activity indoors if weather conditions are too severe.
Students going out of sight	Advise students of boundaries and remind them to stay within sight of their group or teacher.

Additional risks or hazards when leaving the school grounds can be assessed using the information on the following table:

Risk/Hazard	Action
Students going out of sight	Ensure correct ratios of adults to students. Work with students to develop an appropriate 'missing person' procedure that everyone is aware of, and decide on a meeting point in emergency situations.
Dogs	Advise students of risks. Ask students to avoid contact with dogs and ask pet owners to control dogs. In the event of an aggressive dog, advise students to avoid looking at the dog and to turn sideways to the dog.
General public	Avoid contact with strangers and pets where possible. Advise students to be respectful of other people enjoying time in nature.
Vehicles/crossing roads	Advise students of risks and remind students of road safety procedures.