



National
Guidance
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Frequently Asked Questions – How can Outdoor Learning Contribute to Mental Health?

The Evidence

There is a growing body of evidence that time spent in outdoor green spaces is vital for mental health, and that well-managed outdoor learning and adventure activities can be powerful ways of helping children and young people to develop their emotional and psychological wellbeing, mental resilience and happiness. Some of this evidence is summarised in the following documents:

[Carpenter & Harper \(2016\): Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Activities in the Outdoors](#)

[Giving Evidence/Blagrave Trust \(2015\): The Existing Evidence Base about the Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning](#)

[OpenSpace \(2006\): Wild Adventure Space for Young People – Survey of Findings](#)

[Sylva Foundation \(2019\): Forest School - Bringing Children Closer to Nature](#)

[The Wildlife Trusts \(2020\): 30 Days Wild - A Five Year Review](#)

[World Health Organisation \(2016\): Urban Green Spaces and Health – a Review of Evidence](#)

[The National Trust \(2012\): Natural Childhood](#)

Research commissioned by Natural England has found that coronavirus has had a negative impact on children's mental health and wellbeing, and demonstrates the positive role of nature in supporting children's well-being:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-child-data-wave-1-experimental-statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-childrens-survey-experimental-statistics.

Mental Health Benefits of Outdoor Learning

In most establishments, outdoor learning is most appropriately used in an educational or developmental context, in which the mental health benefits are part of a wider set of intended outcomes.

The following OEAP National Guidance documents summarise the many areas where outdoor learning, off-site visits and learning outside the classroom can be particularly effective:

[2.1b "Learning Outcomes"](#)

[8.2a "Learning Outcomes Mind Map"](#)

These areas include many which are relevant to mental health, including:

- self-confidence;
- self-esteem;
- positive relationships with peers;
- positive relationships with adults;
- resilience;
- experiencing awe and wonder at nature and place;
- experiencing silence and solitude;
- fun and enjoyment with others;
- healthy physical activity;
- developing a healthy lifestyle;
- time in natural/green places;
- connecting with nature;
- reflective learning;
- self-management.

Outdoor Mental Health Interventions and Outdoor Therapy

In some settings, outdoor learning can be used in a therapeutic context, in order to help people who are experiencing mental distress, mental health problems or mental illness. The competence required to manage such interventions so that they are effective, safe and ethical, includes the expertise of practitioners of both outdoor learning and psychological therapy (such as counselling or psychotherapy). The Institute for Outdoor Learning has published a Statement of Good Practice for Outdoor Mental Health Interventions and Outdoor Therapy – this is available at:

www.outdoor-learning.org/Good-Practice/Good-Practice/Outdoor-Mental-Health

