

With help, they swing in a swing or go for gentle wagon rides.

Young toddlers use the clear expanses of the outdoor play area for walking, carrying, pushing, climbing, throwing, and exploring. While their movements may be awkward, outside they have lots of space for maneuvering, falling down, and picking themselves up. Older toddlers, who have become pretty steady on their feet, take advantage of the outdoor space to run, ride, climb, swing, slide, throw, dig, paint, play in water, fill and empty, collect stones, make up simple games, and grapple with problems — how to cover the picnic table with a sheet to make a house, how to get the riding toy back up the hill, and what to do when two toddlers want to fill the same dump truck with walnuts.

How Caregivers Support Children at Outside Time

Caregivers pay close attention to children's outdoor exploration and play, offer children physical and emotional support, and interact with children in enjoying all the features of the outdoor environment. The following specific strategies help them carry out this role:

- Provide loose materials for children's comfort and play.
- Provide a variety of experiences for nonmobile infants.
- Use the same general support strategies used at choice time.
- Observe nature with children.
- Bring outside time to a gentle close.

Provide loose materials for children's comfort and play

Nonmobile infants spend most of their time outdoors lying on blankets spread on the ground, so caregivers keep some clean blankets in a basket or diaper bag that they can easily grab on their way out to the play yard. Because some older, mobile infants may at first be hesitant to crawl or cruise around outdoors, they often appreciate being given a basket of interesting objects to explore while sitting on a blanket, until they work up their courage to move across the grass, up the steps, or over the stone walkway to find their own things to explore.

The baskets of playthings for mobile infants can be kept ready by the door to the play yard. Caregivers can place other loose playthings or materials in wagons so toddlers at the “Me do it!” stage can help to transport them outside, as Peter does when he pulls the paint wagon outside (p. 363). Caregivers can also provide small buckets, baskets, or cloth bags with handles, and toddlers can use these to carry out their sand toys, tennis balls, streamers, bubble-blowing equipment, and playground chalk.

Provide a variety of experiences for nonmobile infants

While mobile infants and toddlers generally find lots of things to explore and play with outside in the presence of their trusted caregivers, nonmobile infants depend on caregivers to put them in some location where they can easily stretch and wiggle and watch interesting things.



During outside time, caregivers use the same strategies they used for supporting children at choice time. They pay close attention to what the children do, engage in conversational give and take with them, and encourage them to help put away playthings at the end of outdoor time.

This means putting infants down in a safe place and varying that place from time to time. Then they can see a variety of sights — blooming flowers, tree bark, dried leaves on the lawn, branches overhead, sky and clouds, children crawling, stems of grass, stones, and banners waving. On warm days, caregivers place babies near the edge of a blanket so they can feel the grass with their feet or hands. As caregivers carry babies outside and back inside again, they stop so the babies can have an up-close look at the pine tree, the toddlers playing next door, or the rabbit in his cage. If caregivers occasionally wheel infants in strollers, they choose a route that provides interesting things for the children to see, hear, and feel against their skin and vary the route to diversify the experiences.

Use the same general support strategies used at choice time

In many ways, outside time is choice time moved outdoors. Therefore, once caregivers have moved infants and toddlers and their materials safely outdoors, they use the strategies described on pages 343–359 for supporting children at choice time: They pay close attention to children as they explore and play, follow their leads and ideas, engage in play and conversational give and take with them, support their peer interactions, help them take a problem-solving approach to any social conflicts, and listen for older toddlers to talk about their intentions and about what they have done (their planning and recalling). And at the end of outside time,

caregivers encourage toddlers to help put away playthings and carry materials back indoors.

Observe nature with children

One of the special pleasures of being outside with very young children is witnessing their wonderment as they roll in snow, splash in puddles, squat to watch ants move a crumb toward their anthill, find an intricate spider web on the fence, point to birds flying overhead, or gather their own pile of stones. Even though infants and toddlers say relatively little during these experiences (“Big,” “My big”), they are gaining an essential understanding of the natural world through their actions and senses.

Caregivers do not need to overwhelm very young children with a barrage of words and lengthy explanations about what they are seeing and doing, but they do need to appreciate children’s actions and interests; comment on or acknowledge them when it is natural to do so; and allow children plenty of time to stop and smell the flowers, watch the worms in the dirt, shuffle through the leaves, and pick up yet another stick. Teachers should also be aware of any aversion they have to the outdoors so as *not* to pass along fears or disgust to children. If teachers and caregivers acknowledge and appreciate children’s open-minded sense of wonder at the natural world, they may find that seeing bugs and slime through their eyes helps them change their attitudes too.



One of the great pleasures of being with children is witnessing their wonderment about what they find, including a crawling bug!

Bring outside time to a gentle close

Five minutes or so before the end of outside time, caregivers tell children that the time outdoors is almost over. Nanette, for example, going from child to child, sings, “Five more minutes of outside time, then we’ll go inside for lunch.” Even though children may not know exactly what an

adult is saying or singing, eventually they associate the same ritual phrase or song with rounding up the toys and going back inside, going home, or whatever happens next in the routine. Even with infants, it is important to let them know why you are picking them up, folding up their blanket, and carrying them inside. “I’m going to pick you up, Emma,” says Sandy, her caregiver. “It’s time for us to go back inside.”

Understanding Group Time

At group time, caregiver Sonja places a dishpan on the floor between Maggie and Sean, mobile infants. The dishpan contains about an inch of water and some yellow rubber ducks. “Here are some water and some ducks,” Sonja says to the children, joining them on the floor. Maggie leans over and splashes her hands in the water. Sean pushes a duck along and then picks it up by the head and brings it to his mouth. Watching him, Maggie puts the fingers of one hand into her mouth, makes a face, and then returns to splashing.



At group time, toddlers Conner, Nick, Cher, and Jo and their caregiver Jenna spread newspapers on the art table. When the table is covered, Jenna sets down a tray of small plastic squeeze bottles that the children have been using at the water table. “Here are some bottles of dribble salt (p. 239) for

you to squeeze,” she says to the children. Conner selects a bottle, shakes it, turns it upside down, and squeezes it with both hands. Jenna tries the same actions with a bottle she selects, and Nick watches Conner. Noticing Nick watching him, Conner takes another bottle, sets it down in front of Nick, and says “Bottle?” Nick simply looks at the bottle. “Nick, it looks like Conner is giving you a bottle to squeeze,” Jenna interprets. Taking the bottle, Nick squeezes it as Conner did, then sticks a finger into the resulting pool of dribble, licks his finger, and makes a face. Jenna follows suit, sticking her finger into the dribble she has squeezed out and then tasting it. She comments to Nick, “It tastes salty.”

Cher and Jo dribble salt from their bottles while moving their arms back and forth. Jenna tries moving her arms the same way. As Conner and Nick continue to squeeze their bottles and muck about, Cher and Jo leave the table, wash their hands at the sink, and then take their empty squeeze bottles to the house area. Jenna, Conner, and Nick continue to dribble salt. When Conner and Nick have emptied all the squeeze bottles and have saturated the newspaper, they help Jenna push the sodden newspaper into the wastebasket. “Aw gone!” says Conner.



Debbie, a caregiver, and her four toddlers, Miranda, Timmy, Sean, and Sarah, sit on the floor in the toy area.