

Engaging Infants and Toddlers at Outside Time

The What, Why, and How

Week 1 Learning Unit

Outside Time With Infants and Toddlers



Week 1 Learning Unit Topics

Introduction to Outside Time

- What is outside time?
- Why is outside time important?
- Active learning at outside time.



Week 1 Learning Unit Topics (continued)

Before getting into this week's learning unit, reflect on the question below and jot your answer down.

If you could be anywhere you wanted,
where would you choose to be?



Week 1 Learning Unit Topics (continued)

Common answers include:

- A beach or a swimming pool.
- Camping or hiking in the woods.
- Snow skiing in the mountains.
- Outdoor street shopping at flea markets, fairs, etc.
- Reading a book in a hammock.



Week 1 Learning Unit Topics (continued)

As adults, we typically pick the outdoors as the place we would **CHOOSE** to be!

How do you think this relates to children?

Children feel the same!



Week 1 Learning Unit Topics (continued)

“Young children reap the rewards that nature has to offer when they spend time in a well-planned outdoor environment. They need an abundance of natural materials in a well-designed space, large blocks of uninterrupted time and caring adults to guide them in their discovery. They gain important skills and a deeper respect and love of nature as they have direct experiences with the natural elements in their environment. Learning begins at birth and infants and toddlers need to have every opportunity to explore, engage, discover and wonder.”

Veselack, E., Miller, D., Cain-Chang, L. (2015). *Raindrops on noses and toes in the dirt*. Dimensions Educational Research Foundation.

What Is Outside Time?

- Outside time allows infants and toddlers to extend their exploration and play to an outdoor setting.
- As at choice time, infants and toddlers make choices about what to do outdoors during outside time.
- Children find the outdoors rich in sensory-motor experiences for constructing new knowledge.
- Outside time puts infants and toddlers in direct contact with nature.



Benefits of Outdoor Play

1. Air temperature changes improve children's ability to adapt to cold and heat.
2. Cool and cold air improves appetites and energizes people of all ages.
3. Exercise and fresh air support children's natural rhythm of sleep and wakefulness.
4. Cooler outdoor air generally contains more moisture and is easier on the body's airways and immune system than drier, heated indoor air.



Benefits of Outdoor Play (continued)

5. Provides a relaxing alternative to crowded living conditions.
6. Provides many opportunities for sensory-motor learning.
7. Puts children in direct contact with nature and living things.
8. Provides greater opportunities for unrestricted physical movement and more physical challenges than indoor environments.



Benefits of Outdoor Play (continued)

9. Gives adults opportunities to learn more about children's abilities.
10. Provides a sense of distance as children experience what is up close — spiders, worms, grass — and what is far away — the treetops, the house next door, the clouds.
11. Children have the rare opportunity to be big compared to ants, grasshoppers, birds, squirrels, and dandelions.
12. In the sunlight, children soak up the vitamin D they need to absorb calcium for strong bones and teeth.



Where Does It Occur?

- The play yard should be located as close to the indoor play space as possible.
- The immediate neighborhood can also be a part of children's outdoor experience.

More about this in Week 2



When Does Outside Time Occur?

- Spending daily time outdoors in all seasons positively affects even very young children.
- Caregivers find an appropriate time within the schedule each day to bring children outdoors.

Where this time period occurs in the program's daily routine may shift based on the change of seasons (e.g., in the winter outside time is later in the day and in the summer it is earlier in the day).



What Do Infants and Toddlers Do During Outside Time?

- Infants and toddlers observe, explore, and play on their own or with others at their own pace and level of interest and development.
- Depending on their developmental level, children make choices, solve problems, express feelings, imitate and pretend, move, sing, talk, and explore the properties of objects.
- Depending on temperament, some children cautiously approach outdoor sounds, textures, sights, and sensations, while others take to outdoor play with energy and curiosity.
- Experience the HighScope Infant-Toddler Curriculum through the Key Developmental Indicators (KDIs).



What Do Infants and Toddlers Do During Outside Time? (continued)

Nonmobile Infants

- Lay on their backs while gazing at nearby sights, wiggling, stretching, and reaching for or grasping at objects.
- Enjoy feeling the warmth of the sun and movement of the air.

Mobile Infants

- Sit and explore objects or materials and examine growing things.
- Crawl across the grass, up and down steps, over small hills, and into large boxes.
- Pull themselves up to stand by holding on to a low bench, a picnic table, or the edge of the sandbox.

Younger Toddlers

- Use 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

- Take advantage of the outdoor space to run, ride, climb, swing, slide, throw, dig, paint, play in water, fill and empty containers, collect stones, and make up simple games.
- Grapple with problems such as how to cover the picnic table with a sheet to make a house, how to get the riding toy back up the hill, or what to do when two toddlers want to fill the same dump truck with walnuts.

What Do Adults Do During Outside Time?

- Pay close attention to children's outdoor exploration and play.
- Offer children physical and emotional support.
- Interact with children in enjoying all the features of the outdoor environment.

More about this in Week 3

Specific Outdoor Adult Strategies

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

Active Learning: How Infants and Toddlers Learn

Five Ingredients of Active Learning:

- Materials
- Manipulation
- Choice
- Child communication, language, and thought
- Adult scaffolding

How can understanding children's home cultures assist caregivers in supporting children's interest in materials, making choices, manipulating materials in individual and unique ways, communication, and engagement during outside time?



Ingredients of Active Learning

Materials

There are abundant, age-appropriate materials the child can use in a variety of ways. Learning grows directly out of the child's direct actions with the materials.

Outside Time Examples:

- Infants lay on a blanket and reach for interesting materials their caregiver has laid out for them.
- Toddlers choose from a variety of natural and play materials that appeal to all five senses.

How are you adding materials that reflect your children's home cultures and the outdoor experiences they enjoy? For example, a family goes kayaking every weekend, so you add a couple small kayaks for children to climb in and out of during outside time.



During outside time, caregivers encourage children to explore materials from nature as well as incorporate materials and equipment from the indoor space to the outdoor space.

Ingredients of Active Learning (continued)

Manipulation

The child has opportunities to explore (with all five senses), manipulate, combine, and transform the chosen materials.

Outside Time Examples:

- A sitting infant chooses a wooden spoon from the treasure basket in between his legs and looks at it, mouths it, and bangs it on the basket.
- Toddlers run, throw, crawl, and push materials.



During outside time, Sam uses the cardboard tube as a “spy scope” as he watches what is happening in the sandbox. He carries the tube to the sandbox, stands it up, and uses a cup to fill it with sand. A little while later, he uses it as a “spy scope” again to look at the climber. Running over there, he climbs to the top of the slide, lets the tube go down, and then follows it.

Ingredients of Active Learning (continued)

Choice

Children choose what to do. Since learning results from children's attempts to pursue personal interests and goals, the opportunity for them to choose activities and materials is essential.

Outside Time Examples:

- Infants choose what they want to look at, (i.e., peers, play materials provided by the caregiver, clouds, trees, flowers).
- Toddlers choose whether to play in the sandbox, use loose parts, ride a tricycle, or swing in a swing.

How are all children given opportunities to make choices during outside time?



Even the youngest infants make choices by choosing what to look at and what materials they touch and mouth. For example, this group of infants can choose to look at other children, caregivers, and/or materials (red scarf blowing in the wind, tree stump, ball, etc.).

Ingredients of Active Learning (continued)

Child Communication, Language and Thought

Children communicate their needs, feelings, discoveries, and ideas through motions, gestures, facial expressions, sounds, sign language, and words adults value, attend to, and encourage children's communication and language in a give-and-take manner.

Outside Time Examples:

- An infant coos as she watches and listens to the sounds of a wooden wind chime as it blows in the wind.
- A toddler says, "Up, again!" after he and his caregiver slid down the slide together.



Joshua communicates about a sound he heard by pointing in the direction of the sound and babbling. His caregiver responds by looking in that direction and asks, "Do you hear that bird in the tree?"

Ingredients of Active Learning (continued)

Adult Scaffolding

Adults establish and maintain trusting relationships with each child in their care. Adults recognize and encourage each child's intentions, actions, interactions, communications, explorations, problem solving, and creativity.

Outside Time Examples:

- The caregiver gathers a variety of natural materials to offer an infant while lying on a blanket.
- The caregiver encourages a toddler to help pull the snow sled to the top of the hill and then slide down together.

As you reflect on your interactions with children during outside time, how are you respecting their culture, home language, and abilities?



This caregiver is following children's interest and respecting their ideas of how to use the materials. She provides support by stabilizing the truck while the child climbs to the top so he can watch the truck go down.

Outside Time Summary

This is a HighScope Outside Time

- Children and caregivers go outside daily, except when extreme weather conditions prohibit it.
- Infants are placed on blankets, so they can freely move their bodies and explore materials that appeal to their senses.
- Toddlers climb, pour, jump, run, pretend, swing, ride, play alone or with others.
- Caregivers supervise children for safety and also join in their play.

This is NOT a HighScope Outside Time

- Replacing outside time with play in a gym space when children could go outside.
- Infants spend outside time in strollers, wagons, or other restrictive equipment.
- Caregivers direct children's activities (e.g., all children must play a game or run races).
- Caregivers only supervise children for safety.

A Peek Ahead

Next week you will explore:

Creating an outdoor play yard for infants and toddlers

- Location
- Equipment and materials for infants
- Equipment and materials for toddlers
- Storage

