

Engaging Infants and Toddlers at Outside Time

The What, Why, and How

Week 2 Learning Unit

Creating An Outdoor Space for Infants and Toddlers



Week 2 Learning Unit Topics

Creating an outdoor space for infants and toddlers:

- Location of outdoor space for infants and toddlers
- Equipment and materials for infants
- Equipment and materials for toddlers
- Use of loose parts
- Storage of materials
- PQA items for outside time



Engaging Outdoor Environments

Think of your favorite outdoor space.

- Where is it located?
- What is in the space?
- What items do you have with you in the space?
- What makes it your favorite place?

An outdoor play area is rich in sights, textures, sounds, smells, and opportunities for movement and greatly expands children's store of sensory-motor experiences.



How does a child's experience with the outdoors at home influence their experience with the outdoors at school?

Outdoor Space for Infants and Toddlers

- The outdoor space is an important extension of the indoor exploration and play environment.
- When they are outside, infants can hear, see, smell, or feel trees, clouds, wind, warm and cool temperatures, and changes in light.
- Toddlers can run, throw, kick, climb, swing, or dig in the outdoor space and find plants, animals, and insects to examine.



Location

- To make movement from the indoor to the outdoor space easy and hassle-free, the play yard should be located as close to the indoor play space as possible.
- If the outdoor space is not directly accessible, caregivers will need to think about how children can safely move there. For example, infants can be transported in strollers or wagons and toddlers will be able to walk with their caregivers.
- In settings that share an outdoor space with preschool programs, the infant and toddler play area should be separated from older children's play area.
- Even if the use of the shared space by each group can be scheduled for different times of day, mobile infants and toddlers need play equipment geared to their specific needs located in its own designated area.
- The immediate neighborhood can also be a part of the children's outdoor experience. This gives children the opportunity to go places they cannot yet go on their own and to see, hear, or smell a variety of sights, sounds, and aromas.
- Infants and toddlers need to move, so it is important that stroller and wagon rides supplement rather than take the place of children's on-the-ground exploration and play in a safe outdoor play yard.
- During on-the-ground exploration, it is important to ensure that any sticks, leaves, and stones that children pick up to mouth are nontoxic and too large to swallow.

Sensory-Motor Learners

- Infants and toddlers are sensory-motor learners, which means that they need access to materials that appeal to their five senses and the ability to move freely in their environment.
- Just as we think about changing materials and equipment in our indoor space based on children's physical development, we need to consider the materials and equipment in our outdoor space.
- A benefit of taking children outside is the different sensory materials they experience (looking at the clouds, touching the grass, exploring sticks, rocks, pinecones, etc.).
- The outdoors naturally provide more space to allow for children to have big body movement (laying out large blankets for tummy time, rolling, crawling, running, jumping).



Think of ways to incorporate sensory materials and equipment that reflect children's home cultures and the community they live in. For example, a family has a hammock in their backyard or a parent works at an auto shop and donates recycled tires that children use to climb in and out of.

Equipment and Materials for Infants

Movement Opportunities	Things That Move in the Wind	Crawling Surfaces	Water Play Materials	Garden Plants	Play Yard Gate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in terrain, such as a small hill • Low log/flat tree stump rounds • Inflated tube • Low wooden platform • Tunnel • Bench • Outdoor infant swing seat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamers • Wind Chimes • Banners • Hanging foil pie tins • Canopies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grass • Herb ground covers • Sand • Wooden decking • Pathways of clay, concrete, or wood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tubs for water • Toys for floating • Scoops • Containers/cups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised garden beds • Potted plants • Flowers • Vegetables • Herbs • Grasses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be used to define space outside for nonmobile infants

Treasure Baskets

- Caregivers can provide nonmobile infants with treasure baskets to explore during outside time.
- Treasure baskets are baskets that contain natural and household objects for infants to explore.
- Items should vary in weight, size, texture, color, taste, temperature, and sound.



What materials could you add to a treasure basket that would reflect the cultures and communities of your children?

Examples of Equipment and Materials for Infants



Examples of Equipment and Materials for Infants (continued)



Equipment and Materials for Toddlers

Natural Features	Things to Climb	Things to Get Inside Of	Things to Balance On	Swings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shade trees • Low shrubs/plants • Vegetable gardens • Stepping stones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climbing structure that is toddler-appropriate • Slide • Platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boxes • Tunnels • Tents • Low-hanging branches of trees or shrubs • Playhouse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low tree stump rounds • Planks • Low balance beams • Flat rocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low, soft-seat swings • Low hammock • Tire swings • Outdoor gliders

Equipment and Materials for Toddlers (continued)

Sand and Water	Balls	Riding and Rocking Toys	Push and Pull Toys	Loose Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandbox (large enough for several children) • Sand materials • Sensory table or container for water • Pots/pan • Scooping materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large beach balls • Playground balls • Rubber balls • Tennis balls • Big yoga balls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small tricycles • Rocking toys • Large trucks • Wheeled toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wagons • Wheelbarrow • Strollers • Sleds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural material (pinecones, sticks, rocks) • Art materials (chalk, paint, paper) • Recycled materials • Bubbles • Blankets

Examples of Equipment and Materials for Toddlers



Examples of Equipment and Materials for Toddlers (continued)



Examples of Equipment and Materials for Toddlers (continued)



Examples of Equipment and Materials for Toddlers (continued)



Loose Parts

What	Where	How
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions. • Can be used alone or together with other materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose parts can be stored in containers on the playground, in a nearby shed, or in containers that are brought out for outside time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While using loose parts, children determine how materials are used.

Safety matters. Ensure your loose parts are large enough to not be a choking hazard.

Benefits of Loose Parts

- Developmentally appropriate because children play with them in ways that suit their developmental levels.
- Promote a wide variety of play.
- Extend the learning environment outdoors.
- Support the Key Developmental Indicators.
- Offer opportunities for parent and community involvement.



How can you incorporate loose materials from a child's home environment into the outdoor area?

Types of Loose Parts

Natural	Manufactured	Locational/Seasonal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stones • Stumps • Logs • Large branches • Twigs • Sand • Gravel • Water • Leaves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buckets, tubs, laundry baskets • Plastic garden pots • Boxes • Gutters • Drain tile • PVC pipe • Rope • Cardboard tubes • Fabric • Art materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seashells • Beach rocks • Hay bales • Cornstalks • Traffic cones • Logs • Seed pods, acorns, pinecones of all sizes • Pumpkins

Storage

- Whenever possible, caregivers should store all loose outdoor playthings at the play yard in a shed or watertight storage box.
- Otherwise, these materials, along with riding toys, wagons, carts, strollers, and sleds can be stored as close to the play yard as possible.
- The storage system should allow caregivers to save steps and time to focus more on children than on moving materials.



Assessing Your Own Space

The Infant-Toddler PQA provides guidance for setting up high-quality outdoor learning environments for infant and toddlers.

PQA
Infant-Toddler Program
Quality Assessment

Form A — Observation Items

HighScope® Educational Research Foundation

The graphic features the title 'PQA Infant-Toddler Program Quality Assessment' in large, bold, black letters. Below the title is a bar chart with five blue cylindrical bars of increasing height from left to right. The bottom of the graphic has a blue background with the text 'Form A — Observation Items' in white, bold letters. In the bottom right corner, 'HighScope® Educational Research Foundation' is written in a smaller font.

I. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Circle one indicator level for this item based on the scoring rules on page ix.

I-F. Outdoor play space is safe and accessible, and has adequate space, equipment, and materials for various types of play.

1 2 3 4 5

Check here if not observed or reported.

Note: Where extreme weather conditions or safety considerations prevent the regular use of the outdoor play space, a large and open indoor space, such as a gross-motor room, may be used as a substitute.

	Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes
Row 1	<input type="checkbox"/> There is no outdoor play area. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No place for children to use their gross-motor skills. - No substitute gross-motor room [as described in note above]. 	<input type="checkbox"/> There is an outdoor play area nearby. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children walk or are pushed in strollers to local playground. - Program provides a covered outdoor porch. - There is a gross-motor room [as described in note above] with some portable materials such as balls, push toys, riding toys. 	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area is easily accessible from the indoor play and care space. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Door of the room with children opens onto playground. - Children walk or infants are carried down hallway to playground. - There is a gross-motor room [as described in note above] with things to climb on, such as lofts and climbers; and portable materials such as balls, riding toys, bubbles, cars, push and pull toys, a parachute, a rocking horse, and a boat. 	<p>Notes: (a) If level 1 is checked, score a 1 and leave the remaining rows blank. (b) If weather prevents children and caregivers from going outside, check "not observed or reported," above.</p>
Row 2	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area provides limited space: less than 50 square feet per child. Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play area is a strip of grass alongside of building. 	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area provides some space, between 51 and 99 square feet per child. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Space is overcrowded with equipment and materials. - Children are bumping into one another. - Materials are placed anywhere on the playground. - A child on a scooter propels himself in front of the climber. 	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area provides plentiful space for children to explore and move freely, at least 100 square feet per child. The playground is divided into distinct play areas. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Separate areas for riding/moving toys, sand and water play, climbing, swings. - An area where infants can lie on blankets, safe from mobile children. - Ample space for children with disabilities to move around the playground without problems. 	<p>Notes: (a) Estimate square footage by walking the width and length of the playground, computing the area, and dividing by the number of children outside for the day ($W \times L \div \#$ of children = sq. ft. per child). (b) If level 1 is checked, score a 1 and leave all remaining rows blank.</p>

I. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

I-F. (continued)

	Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes
Row 3	<input type="checkbox"/> There are no or inadequate barriers to separate children from traffic, passersby, and/or older children. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No fencing. - Low fences. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Adequate barriers separate children from traffic, passersby, and/or older children. Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular-height chainlink fence with privacy slats. 	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area is enclosed and visually screened from traffic. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A high wooden or vinyl fence blocks out the view of traffic and/or pedestrians. - Playground is enclosed by buildings which block the view; for example, it may be a space in the middle of a campus or alongside of a building. 	
Row 4	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area/equipment is unsafe. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equipment is in poor condition and/or dangerous for this age group. - Hazardous items on the ground are not removed regularly. - There are unlocked fences or gates. - Portable materials are not safe for young children. - All age groups use the same playground and equipment. - Playground surface is too hot for crawling infants and playing toddlers. 	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area is safe. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equipment and surfaces are occasionally checked for hazards and hazardous items. - Playground equipment is designed for preschool children but used by toddlers. - Infants are separated from toddlers, but toddlers and preschoolers use same playground. 	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area is designed for infants and toddlers and is safe and well maintained. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equipment is checked regularly for hazards. - Play area is checked daily for hazardous items such as bottles, cans, dead animals, trash. - Fences/gates are locked. - Portable materials are safe for infants and toddlers and are checked daily. - Infants and toddlers are separated and have age-appropriate equipment. 	<p>CQ: How is your outdoor space maintained? How often is it checked for hazards?</p>

I. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

I-F. (continued)

	Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes
Row 5	<input type="checkbox"/> There are no outdoor play materials or equipment for children.	<input type="checkbox"/> The space, equipment, and materials in the outdoor play area allow for some types of outdoor play. Examples: - Space, equipment, and materials for running, swinging, rolling/kicking balls, using push and pull toys.	<input type="checkbox"/> The outdoor play area includes both portable and stationary equipment and materials for various types of play. Examples: - Portable equipment: push and pull toys, balls, bubbles, tricycles and other riding toys, a rocking horse, movable tunnel. - Stationary equipment and materials: sand and water, swings, slides, climbing structures, tunnels. - Equipment for children with disabilities.	
Row 6	<input type="checkbox"/> There are no impact-absorbing surfaces. Example: - There is grass and/or cement under swings, slide, and climber.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are some impact-absorbing surfaces.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are impact-absorbing surfaces under swings, slides, and climbers. Example: - Fine or coarse sand, rubber mats, wood mulch.	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark "N/A" if there are no swings, climbers, or other large equipment on playground.
Row 7	<input type="checkbox"/> There is no grass.	<input type="checkbox"/> Grassy spaces are too small and/or poorly maintained. Example: - Overgrown grass, weeds.	<input type="checkbox"/> Grassy areas are well maintained for lying down, rolling, crawling, walking, and running.	
Row 8	<input type="checkbox"/> There is no shade. Examples: - Building structure offers shade only at times when children are not outside. - Surfaces get too hot for crawling children.	<input type="checkbox"/> Play structures and/or umbrellas provide some shade. Examples: - Building structure offers shade during morning but not afternoon outside times. - Sometimes awning is pulled out to shade the surface to keep it from getting hot.	<input type="checkbox"/> Trees, shrubs, porches, and/or awnings provide adequate shade. Examples: - Building structure offers shade during all outside times. - Awning is pulled out all the time to provide extra shading for surfaces that get hot.	

II. SCHEDULES AND ROUTINES

Circle one indicator level for this item based on the scoring rules on page ix.

II-H. Outside times provide nature-based sensory-motor learning opportunities.

1 2 3 4 5

Check here if not observed or reported.

[Notes: (a) If outside time is scheduled but not observed, score at level 1. (b) Where extreme weather conditions or safety considerations prevent the regular use of the outdoor play space, a large and open indoor space, such as a gross-motor room, may be used as a substitute. (c) If the observation occurs on a day that is atypical due to unusual weather or other special conditions, check “not observed or reported.”]

	Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes
Row 1	<input type="checkbox"/> There is no daily outside time.	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes outside time is a part of the day for some children Example: - Nonmobile infants are not taken outside, but mobile infants and toddlers go outside when there is enough time before lunch.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outside time is a part of each day for all children. Examples: - Caregivers take infants outside every day. During cold weather, infants are bundled up and taken for a stroll outside, and mobile infants and toddlers go out for brief amounts of time. - On a hot day, caregivers may take nonmobile infants out and place them on a blanket in the shade while mobile infants and toddlers play in the shade or go in the sprinkler.	Note: If level 1 is checked, score a 1 and leave the remaining rows blank.
Row 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Children do not have choices during outside time. Examples: - For infants and nonmobile children, riding in a stroller is the only outdoor activity. - Toddlers only go on walks or play teacher-led games.	<input type="checkbox"/> Children have some choices during outside time. Examples: - Sometimes infants are placed on a blanket in the shade. - Toddlers can ride tricycles, climb on a climber, and play with balls.	<input type="checkbox"/> Children have many choices during outside time. Examples: - Children may roll, creep, crawl, cruise, toddle, walk, climb, run, pedal, dig, paint, pretend, build, splash, converse, ride, swing, slide, push, pull, get under or into, pretend.	

II. SCHEDULES AND ROUTINES

II-H. (continued)

	Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes
Row 3	<p><input type="checkbox"/> When outdoors, caregivers do not encourage children to explore materials with all their senses.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Grass is the only material available to explore.- Caregivers do not bring out portable materials.	<p><input type="checkbox"/> When outdoors, caregivers encourage children to explore some materials with all their senses.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Nonmobile infants do not use sand and water, but are given toys to explore outside while lying on a blanket.- Sometimes caregivers have toddlers play on the tricycles only, or direct them to stay on the blacktop, such as after it rains.	<p><input type="checkbox"/> When outdoors, caregivers encourage children to explore natural and play materials with all their senses.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Children pick up, smell, carry, and drop sticks, large stones, leaves, and dandelions.- They can play in sand and/or water, crawl on grass.- Caregivers bring out materials for children to use and/or lie on, such as blankets, mats, balls, bats, shovels, buckets, bubbles, blocks, and bikes.- Children can go anywhere on the playground and use any of the materials available.	
Row 4	<p><input type="checkbox"/> When outdoors, children do not interact or play with caregivers.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Caregivers supervise children for safety but do not get involved in their play.	<p><input type="checkbox"/> When outdoors, children sometimes interact and play with caregivers.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Caregivers supervise children for safety and sometimes get involved in their play, such as pushing them on the swings.	<p><input type="checkbox"/> When outdoors, children interact and play with caregivers.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Caregivers supervise children for safety and get involved in their play.- Caregiver plays chase with toddlers Sammy and Nevaeh.- Caregiver sits on the ground with Emani, a mobile infant, and rolls a ball back and forth to her.- A small group of toddlers push their feet through the sand with their caregiver.	

II. SCHEDULES AND ROUTINES

II-H. (continued)

	Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes
Row 5	<p>In infant and mixed-age rooms</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nonmobile and mobile infants spend all their outside time in playpens, carriages, strollers, swings, or wagons.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Every day Mariah walks the infants she cares for around the setting in a stroller. 	<p>In infant and mixed-age rooms</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nonmobile and mobile infants spend some of their outside time in playpens, carriages, strollers, swings, or wagons.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Every other day, caregivers take the children for a walk in the stroller(s). 	<p>In infant and mixed-age rooms</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nonmobile and mobile infants spend little or none of their outside time in playpens, carriages, strollers, swings, or wagons.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strollers are used only in special situations, such as when taking nonmobile infants for a walk, transporting children in and out of the setting, or going out in very cold weather. – When outdoors, infants are placed on blankets in the shade to explore and move their bodies; mobile infants can crawl, scoot, and roll around the playground. 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Mark “N/A” if it is a toddler-only room.</p>

Things to Consider...

Resistance from Families

Sometimes families are resistant to having their child spend time outside. What can you do in these situations?

- Gather information about their concerns.
- Share information with families about what happens during outside time and how learning taking place. Share pictures of their child during outside time.
- Invite families to join the classroom for an outside time.
- Assist families in getting the outdoor gear they may need.

Resistance from Caregivers

Sometimes caregivers are reluctant to go outside with children. What can you do in these situations?

- Evaluate the daily routine to ensure that outside time occurs at a time of day that works best for the current group of children. Is a change of time necessary?
- Plan transitions to outside (and back in) that are developmentally appropriate and allow for small groups of infants and toddlers to transition at one time.
- Ensure caregivers have proper gear for outside time (rainboots, hats, mittens, snowpants, sunhats, etc.).

Things to Consider... (continued)

Limited Outdoor Space

Sometimes programs are limited in the space they have available for classrooms. What can you do in these situations?

- Evaluate your space using the Infant-Toddler PQA. Is there equipment in the space that needs to be added or removed?
- Think about storage and portable materials. What can you bring outside that would provide sensory-motor exploration in the available space?
- Explore the larger area. Are there other spaces on or near the property that can be explored during outside time such as walking paths or nearby parks?

Designated Time of Shared Outdoor Space

Sometimes classrooms are given a designated time to go outside that might not best suit their room. What can you do in these situations?

- Discuss the daily routines of all the classrooms. Are there particular times that work for each room? How can that time be organized to best meet the needs of the children?
- If outside time is during a time when you notice children need to rest, how can you create a cozy space outside where children can rest?
- How can you bring your inside routine to outside time? What materials would you need to bring? What activities can be done outside?

Things to Consider... (continued)

Mixed Ages

Sometimes the play yard is shared with mixed age groups. What can you do in these situations?

- Evaluate your space using the Infant-Toddler PQA. Is there appropriately sized equipment? Does anything need to be added or removed?
- How can you create safe and/or defined areas for nonmobile infants?
- What materials might need to be stored separately so that they can be used with teacher supervision and older toddlers while keeping them out of reach of younger infants and toddlers?



A Peek Ahead

How adults support during outside time:

- 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.

