



Outdoor policy

This policy is written in accordance with the statutory framework for the Early foundation stage (2025): Outdoor Access

3.68 Providers must provide access to an outdoor play area. If that is not possible, they must ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis (unless circumstances make this inappropriate, for example unsafe weather conditions). Providers must follow their legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 (for example, the provisions on reasonable adjustments).

The purpose of this policy is to promote and support outdoor play and learning as an essential part of a child's development. We aim to provide children with regular access to outdoor environments that stimulate curiosity, physical development & social interaction.

Little Squirrels are passionate about the benefits that outdoor play provides for our children. We believe that outdoors, children have the freedom to learn and explore by following their own interests on a much larger scale. The outdoor provides so many learning opportunities; covering all the curriculum. To fully explore and learn about the natural environment, children must be able to do this practically by exploring and putting all their senses to the test. We class the outdoors as our 'second classroom', not just a space/time for children to burn off energy.

Aims of this policy:

- ♥ To ensure that outdoor learning experiences are safe, enjoyable, and educational.
- ♥ To enhance children's physical, emotional, and social development through outdoor play.
- ♥ To support children's connection to nature and the environment.
- ♥ To offer opportunities for children to engage in risk-assessed activities that promote resilience and independence.

Little Squirrels understands that the outdoor play is essential for developing these skills:

Personal social and emotional development: Outdoor play is important for children to develop confidence and self-regulation skills. Children can fully explore and test their limits while they are outdoors; this may be climbing a tree for the first time, testing out going down a slide backwards or experiencing snow/hail for the first time etc. Being outdoor lowers anxiety and stress levels in as little as 20 minutes.

While outdoors children have a lot of opportunities to problem solve, this supports children making positive relationships with their peers and working as a team e.g lifting heavy objects/transporting.

Physical development: Outdoor play promotes muscle growth and development; it is essential that children have 3 hours a day of physical activity for muscle growth and development. They have the freedom to explore and negotiate space and obstacles while outside; all while developing balance and co-ordination. Also not forgetting the benefits that fresh air provides everyone!

Communication and language: The outdoors is a language rich space, providing hundreds of opportunities to talk, think, wonder and understand the natural world around us. While children observe they usually ask questions and talk about what they can see, creating many quality interactions with peers and the adults that care for them.

Outdoor play is part of everyday at Little Squirrels, we spend most the duration of the day outdoors. We believe that "there is no such thing as bad weather just inappropriate clothing". To do this it is essential that we have the full support from our parents, ensuring that all the children have appropriate clothing kept at nursery to ensure we are equipped for the unexpected English weather we have. This includes labelled:

- ♥ A water-proof suit (or coat and trousers).
- ♥ Wellington boots (Waterproof over shoes for younger babies)

- ♥ Gloves, Hat and Scarf for the colder months – (waterproof gloves are brilliant for cold little hands if possible)
- ♥ Sun-cream that is labelled with the child's name and dated
- ♥ Sun hat
- ♥ Swimsuits

The role of our team to ensure high quality provision outdoors is:

- ♥ Staff must ensure that they have a positive view on outdoor play and the benefits it has on children's development.
- ♥ Staff must be willing to go outdoors in all weathers ensuring that they have appropriate clothing, suitable for all weathers (raincoats, suitable footwear, sun-cream, sun-hats etc.)
- ♥ Staff are good role-models in front of the children, not impacting any negative views about the outdoor environment/ weather / fear of insects or wildlife they may have.
- ♥ Staff are enthusiastic and ensure that they deliver and teach all areas of the curriculum throughout their activities outdoors.
- ♥ Staff set up exciting and stimulating activities outdoors (in-line with our teaching and learning approach)
- ♥ Continue to make quality interactions outdoors, enhancing play and learning.

Health and Safety outdoors

The care and safety of the children is our priority at Little Squirrels. We understand that outdoors the children are taking more risks.

How do we ensure the safety of the children is met outdoors:

- ♥ Practitioners carry out a daily risk assessment check at the beginning of every day and a closing check at the end of every day; this is to ensure there are no harmful or dangerous objects in the garden & the equipment is safe.
- ♥ All equipment and activities are appropriately risk assessed by managers and practitioners (these are updated and reviewed regularly).
- ♥ Practitioners have received appropriate health and safety training, they have the skills to risk assess activities and are always vigilant when supervising the children.
- ♥ Ratios are maintained throughout the setting to ensure children are adequately supervised.
- ♥ Where appropriate – activities that are of higher risk (e.g obstacle course or use of tools) a member of staff supervises the activity at a closer level.
- ♥ Children are made aware of risks and encouraged to risk assess also at an appropriate level for the children to understand.
- ♥ Practitioners implement awareness of health and safety in their planning and activities to ensure the children have some awareness.
- ♥ Children are appropriately dressed for all weather conditions.
- ♥ Practitioners ensure that they are always good role models to the children, this may involve demonstrating safe climbing, handling tools etc.
- ♥ All members of the team are first aid trained.
- ♥ All practitioners are aware of where the first aid box is allocated & how to use the equipment.

Walks outside of nursery

We like to go on outdoor walks to woods quite frequently at nursery. This includes all ages within the setting. The team follow the same due-diligent health and safety procedures when going for walks. This includes:

- ♥ A checklist completed before going on walks to ensure we are equipped and reminded of potential risks and dangers before leaving the building.
- ♥ The register for the day
- ♥ Ensuring we have a first aid bag to take.
- ♥ A mobile phone to make emergency phone calls.
- ♥ Clean water.
- ♥ Safety rope (for the children to hold on to).
- ♥ Nappies & wipes
- ♥ Knowledge of the designated paths and potential hazards (Farm animals, farm equipment or heavily bogged areas)

Going on walks to woods provides further learning benefits to a child's development that they may not necessarily experience in the nursery environment. Practitioners will ensure that:

- ♥ Children are aware of road safety – we have to walk next to the road to access the stile leading into the field footpath. Children hold on to a safety rope while walking next to the road and are taught about the importance of road safety.
- ♥ Children are made aware of dangerous objects such as: barbed wire, plants/weeds, mushrooms, and other objects that children are not familiar with. Practitioners teach the children about the dangers of different objects, what to do if they are unsure about something and how to identify hazards/risks.
- ♥ Teach children how to respect footpaths, farms, wildlife, and wild stock.
- ♥ Model how to keep safe when in new environments.

Risky Play

We are really passionate about the importance of children experiencing risky play in their early years development. The benefits risky play has is endless, with children being able to build on their resilience, confidence, problem solving skills and understanding of risks; all while developing their physical, emotional and language development. There has been many studies and research that evidences children that have experienced risky play in early years, have secure prime areas of learning, allowing them a successful education in primary school and high school.

The benefits

The benefits of risky play:

Physical development:

- ♥ Improved gross motor skills
- ♥ Helps with balance and co-ordination

- ♥ Body awareness (supporting sensory regulation and input)
- ♥ Cognitive development
- ♥ Problem solving skills – presenting challenges that require children to think critically and plan to make decisions of their next steps.
- ♥ Creative play – children become creative and imaginative when engaging in risky play.

Personal social and emotional development

- ♥ Resilience and confidence - Overcoming challenges and testing their own limits builds resilience. By learning from problems and mistakes enhances a child's emotional resilience.
- ♥ Supports mental health – When children engage in risky play, they often encounter fear and become 'brave' as they would put it. Learning to overcome these feelings in a safe environment with members of our team guiding them, allows them to develop emotional regulation skills.
- ♥ Co-operation and team work – Children work together to solve problems and, negotiating ideas and rules. It could be helping each other, adding something to the obstacle course or giving a helping hand while balancing. This builds on friendships, empathy, and teamwork.
- ♥ Builds bonds by showing the children we trust their capabilities.

Self regulation and Risk Assessment

- ♥ Children will learn how to assess their own risks in future play and learning, if they have been guided by adults how to do this with modelling. This supports them with making safe decisions in their future.
- ♥ Decision making – When children make decisions about their own ideas and safety, this promotes confidence in their ability to make choices and helps them to understand consequences.

Listening and attention skills

- ♥ When children are taking part in risky play, it requires them to focus, to plan and think ahead on their next move. This helps with executive functioning.
- ♥ Children will need to listen to adults when they may require help when taking part in risky play. Following instructions and directions.

Examples of risky play we have at nursery:

- ♥ Climbing on the obstacle course
- ♥ Balancing on balance beams, logs, tyres, crates, wood and cable drums
- ♥ Playing outdoors with mud, sand, stones, sticks (loose parts)
- ♥ On walks – climbing tree's
- ♥ 'real' equipment – Tools, glass jars.

Little Squirrels team roles to support children with risky play

- ♥ Ensure children are supervised at all times when participating in risky play
- ♥ Be close by to guide children when climbing up or down – this may include verbal instructions or be there to hold a hand while balancing.

- ♥ Practitioners will not 'place' younger children on climbing equipment that is not within their 'limits' to safely get down themselves.
- ♥ Practitioners will support children with getting down from where they have climbed, again with verbal instructions and guidance (picking them up as a last resort)
- ♥ Practitioners to have a strong understanding of the importance of risky play.

Accidents and Incidents:

- ♥ Any accidents or incidents during outdoor play will be recorded, and parents will be notified in accordance with nursery procedures.
- ♥ In case of an emergency, practitioners will follow the established emergency procedures, ensuring children are kept safe at all times.

Inclusivity:

- ♥ All children, including those with additional needs, will have the opportunity to engage in outdoor learning and play.
- ♥ Our outdoor space will be designed to be accessible and inclusive for every child.

Hygiene:

- ♥ Handwashing routines will be carried out after children have been outside.
- ♥ Children will be encouraged to practice hygiene, such as using tissues for sneezing or coughing and washing their hands after playing outside.

Policy updated by Kylie Jones and the Little Squirrels team **May 2026**.