



# Little Ladybird Creche & Montessori

## Policy #24

### Outdoor Play

## Introduction

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Numerous studies of outdoor experiences have shown that natural outdoor environments have an impact on humans. They reduce stress and create a feeling of well-being. Small children consistently prefer the natural landscape over built environments. The natural world is essential to the emotional health of children. Studies show that early experiences with the natural world are linked with the development of imagination and the sense of wonder, and wonder is an important motivator for life-long learning.

The outdoor environment is an invaluable place of learning and engagement. It provides opportunities for children to explore, discover and develop an understanding of the natural environment around them with unique opportunities for sensory experiences, physical activities, observations, constructive play with sand, water and mud, socio-dramatic play, art, science, mathematics and environmental education.

There is little that happens indoors that cannot happen outdoors, but the outdoors may provide opportunities for experiences that cannot be replicated indoors.

At *Little Ladybird Creche & Montessori* we aim to provide a safe, stimulating outdoor environment where space is used effectively to enable children to explore a broad and balanced curriculum using a range of interesting resources suitable to their individual needs.

*Discovery play gardens offer children a chance to manipulate the environment and explore, to feel wonder and to pretend, and to interact with nature, animals and insects, and other children. They are environments that encourage children's rich and complex play and greatly expand their learning opportunities. Children's discovery play gardens are places where children can learn in a natural environment through exploration, discovery, and the power of their own imaginations.*

## Policy Statement

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In this service a strong emphasis is placed on the importance of children's play; both for its own sake and as a critical factor in child development.

Outdoor play activities are a vital part of childhood experience and an important complement to indoor activities. We consider that outdoor play is just as important as the indoor programme.

We believe that outdoor play has more to offer children than indoor activities so rather than see it as a short interval in the real business of the day we see it as a vital part of the real business of the day – every day.



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We recognise that:

- Nature has a positive impact on children's physical and mental well-being.
- Playing outside provides opportunities for children to use all their senses, to experience wonder and enchantment, to work on a larger scale and to enjoy a greater sense of freedom and independence.

Therefore the outdoor play environment at *Little Ladybird Creche & Montessori* is designed with the same care and attention as that paid to the indoor environment.

The outdoor space is designed to provide:

- Rich, diverse, multisensory experiences.
- Opportunities for noisy, boisterous, vigorous, physically active play.
- Opportunities for physical challenge and risk-taking that are inherent in the value of play.
- Rough, uneven surfaces, with opportunities for the development of physical strength, balance, and coordination.
- Natural elements and loose parts that children can combine, manipulate, and adapt for their own purposes.

## Safety

- Safety is a primary consideration in planning all activities. Supervision of children while playing outside is paramount (see page 70 of Supporting Quality: **guidelines for professional practice in early childhood services (3rd edition) Book 1** by Geraldine French. Barnardos' Training and Resource Service, 2008 for further detail on safety measures).

We aim to ensure the risk of injury is minimised while allowing children appropriate challenges. Children will be given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop their abilities without exposing them to unacceptable risks

## Procedures & Practices

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Outdoor play is a natural enhancement and extension of indoor environments and children should be able to choose to play outside at any time. There should be a flow of play between inside and outside.

There are many ways to provide children with enriching outdoor experiences as an extension and enhancement of indoor play. All aspects of the curriculum can be promoted successfully outdoors.

- Use the outdoor play area as a context and a natural resource for learning.
- Include the outdoor play area when planning for learning.
- Consult with children about their interests, needs and wishes for the outdoor environment.
- Enable children to access the outdoors on a daily basis taking appropriate measures to deal with the weather conditions e.g. provide wellies, warm clothing, hats and long sleeves, sun protection...
- Ensure that the outdoor play area offers children the opportunity to investigate and explore, problem solve, use their imagination and creativity.



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- Ensure that children experience social interactions – being able to choose whether and when to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, compete and resolve conflicts.
- Provide long, uninterrupted periods for spontaneous free play.
- Provide a variety of materials to stimulate different kinds of play:
  - sand, mud, water, clay, paint, and other open-ended materials for sensory play;
  - blocks and construction toys for cognitive development;
  - dress-up clothes and props for pretend play;
  - balls, hoops, climbing places;
  - open space for gross motor play;
  - materials for building dens, making concoctions, using tools
- Provide loose parts for play, both indoors and out, and encourage children to manipulate the environment to support their play.
- Consider the opportunities for challenge and age-appropriate risk-taking in play.
- Include activities which test the limits of capabilities, rough and tumble, chase, games.
- Ensure that all children have access to play opportunities and are included in play.
- Let children play for their own purposes.
- Play with children on their terms.
- Recognise the value of messy play, rough-and-tumble play, and nonsense play.
- Ensure the outdoors offers children opportunities to develop both their fine motor and large motor skills.
- Ensure that children enjoy energetic activity and the feeling of wellbeing that it brings.
- Observe, assess and record the learning that happens in the outdoor play area.
- Give children opportunity to plan and have ownership for their learning in the outdoors.
- Help children to care for the outside environment through the context of their outdoor play area and to care for living things.
- Enable children to develop an appreciation of natural beauty and a sense of wonder about the world.
- Enable children to manage and use the space and freedom afforded by the outdoor play area.
- Give children the opportunity to relax, enjoy and have fun outdoors
- Help children to learn how to use tools safely and effectively and to follow safety rules.

## **Safety**

- All staff members must be vigilant in their supervision of the children and diligent in the inspection of the play areas.
- All equipment must be maintained to ensure the children's safety. New equipment will be installed to the latest Safety Standards.
- The leaders of each programme (or designates) must carry out visual inspections of the playground and equipment on a daily basis to ensure safety is maintained.
- Carry out a monthly and seasonal inspection of the playground and equipment to determine the need for repairs.
- Ensure that there is a minimum of two adults in the playground at all times while the children are using it.
- Ratios of children to adults must be maintained at all times.
- Staff members should place themselves strategically around the playground. so that all children may be observed and reached quickly.
- Ensure that one staff member supervises each large play structure.



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- Carefully monitor the use of wheeled toys.
- Ensure that emergency kits are close at hand.
- Ensure that children are made aware of the safety rules.

## **Playground and equipment maintenance**

- Check daily for broken glass, animal droppings and broken equipment.
- Hard play surfaces need to be swept clean of stones, sand and gravel.
- Check sand for contamination. Clean and disinfect.
- Always remove cords, string or skipping ropes tied to slides, or other playground equipment.
- Check structures for frost and/or ice build up. Restrict use of climbing structure if it cannot be kept dry.
- Ice poses an extreme fall risk. Ice should be broken, sanded, or salted where appropriate before children are allowed to play in the area.
- Conduct daily checks on equipment. Watch for signs of decay, rust, splinters, sharp protrusions, protruding nuts, rivets or nails. Log any problems and bring to the attention of the manager for correction.

## Communication Plan

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All parents/carers are to be informed of the policy and procedures regarding outside space on registration. Staff members will check with parents/carers that they have read and understood the policy and provide any assistance needed.

A summary of this policy will be included in the parent handbook. This policy will also be reviewed with staff at induction and annual staff training.

A copy of all policies will be available during all hours of operation to staff members and parents in the Policy Handbook located in the main office downstairs. Parents/carers may receive a copy of the policy at any time upon request. Parents/carers and staff will receive written notification of any updates.

### Review Date

Date: .....

### Person Responsible

### Related Policies, Procedures and Forms

- Child Protection Policy
- Medications Policy
- Accidents, Incidents and Injuries Policy
- Furniture, Fittings and Equipment Policy



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## References

- **The Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 and Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) (Amendment) Regulations, 2006**
- **Creating Playgrounds Kids Love**, Vicki L. Stoecklin, M. Ed White. Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group, 2000
- **Health care information for childcare staff and families from the Centre for Community Child Health** Childcare and Children's Health Vol 10 No. 2 June 2007
- **Managing risk in play provision: A position statement** Play Safety Forum August, 2002
- **The Fascination of Learning Through the Outdoors** Cork City Partnership

## Contact Information: [Who to contact for more information]

Name: .....

Contact Details: .....

## Policy Created

Date: .....

## Review Date

Date: .....

## Signatures

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