

Section 1

Health and safety



Risk Management

The most important thing to remember about safety is that it is not an ‘add on’, but should be an integral part of planning for any activity – inside or outside. Teachers must certainly be aware of any potential risks or hazards that may arise from working outside the classroom, but children should also be enabled to learn to recognise and manage risks for themselves.

Teachers are brilliant at managing risk, because they do it all the time – moving children safely between the playground and the classroom, walking sensibly from one part of the school to another, ensuring that children know how to use equipment and tools correctly, and all the other day-to-day activities that take place within school. In turn, children also become experts in risk management, by following established, familiar procedures, agreeing and following rules, and knowing what to do if they encounter any problems.

The best way to prepare for an outdoor learning activity – in the school grounds or somewhere in the local area – is to hold a brief meeting for all the staff who will be involved in leading or supervising the activity to discuss the significant safety issues. For example, a local walk may involve crossing roads, so procedures need to be agreed for this (suitable crossing points, children crossing in ‘waves’ or as a whole class, etc.); a gardening activity in the school allotment may involve the children using tools which they are not used to or a particular child may have special educational needs or behaviour issues that need to be considered.

The health and safety ideas which come out of this meeting should be recorded on the teacher’s plan, and should help to inform their teaching and the way they manage the children (and other adults) during the activity. Other issues to consider and include on the plan (if necessary) could be:

- the size of the groups that the children work in;
- the number of responsible adults required (this is usually set by your school or local authority, and for children under 5, adult-child ratios are prescribed nationally – see the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*);
- whether to seek help from additional adults (such as parents, grandparents or guardians) – remember that these people need to have undergone the appropriate checks for working with children;
- how the adults will work with the children – for example, will each group be accompanied by an adult at all times or will there be more remote supervision?
- first aid – activities in the local area will require a first aid kit being taken (including inhalers, allergy relief or adrenaline injectors for any children who need these), but activities in the school grounds will usually be dealt with by the first-aider(s) in the school building.

Prior to the activity, you should carry out a ‘safety sweep’ to check for any hazards or problems and to minimise risk of harm. For example, you may need to check for broken glass or dog excrement.

As well as discussing health and safety issues with the staff who are going to be involved with an activity outside the classroom, it is essential to involve the children in this process. This should not just be the teacher telling the children about how they should behave and what hazards they may encounter, but the children should play an active part in recognising risks and thinking about how to manage them. Talk with the children about issues such as:

- using tools or equipment safely;
- how they are going to behave outside (and how misbehaviour should be dealt with – particularly if it risks anyone’s safety or health);
- which areas are ‘out-of-bounds’;

