

COMMON MYTHS

OUTDOOR LEARNING



IN ASSOCIATION WITH
The Outdoor Teacher

SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

MYTH 1

I need an additional qualification to teach pupils outside, either in the school grounds or the local area. It's a legal requirement!

REALITY

Staff should be competent and capable to lead activities. A qualified teacher can offer a wide range of nature and outdoor-based, creative activities with no further qualifications required. Follow the same principles you would use when planning, teaching, and reflecting within any area of your practice and seek additional support if necessary.

Outdoor spaces provide real-world experiences where the "rules" and patterns found in a textbook will often be challenged, leading to deeper learning and understanding.



You must have a Forest School Level 3 Qualification to offer Forest School-type activities.

MYTH 5

REALITY

Any "Forest School-type" activity can be integrated into a variety of your own teaching programmes. You do not need to have an additional Level 3 Qualification to use den building as part of your teaching. Den building could be part of a lesson exploring animals and adaptation, or the properties of materials, or the culture of nomadic people.

Forest school is not the 'activities' but rather the overarching ethos; child-led and not adult-directed. You can provide spaces for a child-led approach within your teaching practice. If you are running a long-term Forest School Programme, it is recommended you have a Level 3 Qualification.

All children need appropriate outdoor clothes to take part in outdoor learning.

MYTH 2

REALITY

Many days have fine weather! You only need special clothing if you are going into muddy and wilder places for longer periods. Good clothing helps but it is not essential.

Build up the session duration, content and location to reflect the students' clothing, the weather and conditions underfoot. Make use of spares and consider a system to collect items as students grow out of their clothes and footwear.



MYTH 6

REALITY

You cannot fulfil your curriculum requirements through outdoor learning and forest school activities

A great number of outdoor learning activities can be linked to core subjects like Maths, Science and English. You are the expert and with a little time, you can take an individual activity and make a mind map that will link back to most curriculum subjects across all key stages.



Health and safety means I can't run any Forest School or outdoor learning activities without specific safety training.

MYTH 7

REALITY

It is likely that your school already has risk assessments in place for a range of basic outdoor activities and locations, e.g. planting bulbs in a flower bed, playing games or walking to the local park. If that's the case, you just need to follow the recommended safety practices. For activities involving fire or sharp tools you will need specific safety training.

For basic activities without a current risk assessment, you need to put in place appropriate control measures and record them on your risk assessment or risk-benefit assessment template. This requires common sense and sign-off from a senior manager. Check your school insurance covers environmental education, including fire-making or using sharp tools.



MYTH 3

It is not normal to feel apprehensive when taking groups outdoors.

REALITY

Doing unfamiliar things feels scary. Start with smaller groups, perhaps 15 minutes in the playground, and take it from there. There are many avenues to build your confidence including: online resources, mentoring and shadowing, and face to face with a confident outdoor educator in school.

The HSE encourages people to have a bit of common sense about their attitudes to risk, not to make everything risk-free. You need to look out for risks that the children would not be able to assess by themselves. Kids do not need to be wrapped up in cotton wool. It's okay for things to be 'edgy', this promotes learning. Make this a teaching point together.



MYTH 8

REALITY

You need a high-quality green space or outdoor classroom to offer outdoor learning or Forest School.

The outdoor space is enough. School grounds, nearby parks or walks offer a wide range of resources. You can gather and bring in resources to support an activity. As a staff group or with pupils, audit and gather information about the green spaces and features nearby.

At school, if the weather turns or you need somewhere to write up some notes, go back into the classroom. Learn how to put up a tarp if you do want to spend a bit longer outside, or your group learning how to do this could be a great teaching opportunity.



You must be an outdoor-type person to offer outdoor or forest school practical ideas for learning?

MYTH 4

REALITY

Think about the opportunities as real-world rather than outdoors. You need to have an interest in the opportunities these activities provide. You can learn and explore alongside your students.

For example, if you are teaching KS1 tessellation, go outside and use a brick wall to demonstrate one example of tessellation. Ask children to find examples of other tessellating shapes (perhaps markings on the playground). Do leaves tessellate?



WHAT IS OUTDOOR LEARNING?

Outdoor Learning is a broad term that includes discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world, and engaging in environmental and adventure activities.

Outdoor Learning involves the transformation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours through direct engagement with the outdoor environment for the personal and social benefit of individuals, families, society and the planet.

Purposeful experiences in the outdoors can be a catalyst for powerful and memorable learning.

Definition from the [Institute for Outdoor Learning](#)

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This myth-busting guide was co-produced by The Outdoor Teacher and the South Downs National Park Authority as part of their ambition to help teachers access the outdoors, nature and real-world learning on their doorstep.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Speak to your school's Educational Visit Coordinator, Outdoor Education Advisor at your Local Education Authority or connect with an outdoor education centre or provider near your school.



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