

Teach it Outside

Six steps to managing behaviour outside.

Taking your class outside has proven benefits but if children are running around, not engaged and not listening, the dream of teams working together absorbed in their task can seem far away from reality. The result is many teachers are put off and don't reap the benefits.

Use the following steps to support you and your class when going outside. We recommend repeating these at the start of every half term just to remind the class of boundaries and expectations.

Step 1. When you start going out, choose a dry, warm and non-windy day. Children, like animals, are on high alert on windy days - it's also hard to make yourself heard.

Step 2. While you're establishing routines and boundaries, stay in open spaces, not woodland, close to the school building. This way you can ensure you can see your whole class and manage wild behaviour quickly before it happens or gets out of control.

Step 3. Define the space the children must remain within. It is important, particularly if you're in a wooded area, to use visible boundaries. Around the same size of your classroom is always a good area to start with.

Step 4. Start the session with the children standing in a large circle, so they are focused on you and the instructions for the lesson.

Step 5. Focus and listening - start each outdoor lesson with the whistle game (see below). This is a great way to ensure your class are responding to commands without raising your voice and can be reused as a way of managing the session and behaviour.

Step 6. Clearly and calmly explain what is going to be happen, that the same rules apply outside as inside e.g if you want the children to listen you will use the same method as you use in class – counting down for example.

"The key to behaviour in outdoor learning was simple - follow outdoors what you do indoors. I also found creating routines around outdoor learning were key. They allowed the children to naturally rise to the expectations I had for their behaviour and learning beyond the classroom"

Carmel Phillipz, Hyrstmount Junior School

Team building – the whistle game

This simple game is one of our favourites, the benefits to children and teachers are enormous and we use it daily to start Grow to School sessions. It encourages good listening skills, gives the teacher control, enforces boundaries when working outside and children from ages 5 to 11 love it!

Resources: A whistle and hoops

Instructions:

- Divide the class into four teams.
- Give each team a hoop of a different colour red, yellow etc. If you do not want to use hoops, give each team a base to work from, this could be a corner or a feature of the playground.
- Ask the teams to go to their base.
- Explain you will give the signal "Move" and the children can start to move around the area. They will want to run, so if you do not want them to, simply ask them to move in 'slo-mo' or to walk like a person on the moon etc. Similarly, if you do not want them to go too far limit the area they can move in by showing them – e.g. not past that line, the corner of that wall, that tree etc.
- Next explain that when they hear one blow of the whistle they must freeze, if they hear two blows they must return to their base.
- Shout "Move!" and wait a bit before blowing the whistle once, wait for everyone to freeze before calling "Move!" again. Keep practicing with one whistle until they are all stopping quickly, praising lavishly those who are quick at stopping.
- If any children are not following your rules, e.g. running when you said walk or straying beyond the boundaries you specified, blow the whistle once to remind them. If they continue blow the whistle twice to bring everyone back to base and reiterate the rules again.
- When the whole class stops instantly at the first whistle, blow the whistle twice. They should all run back to their team's base.
- Repeat the activity until you are happy they are listening. Then introduce three blows of the whistle with an activity of your choice - walk like an Egyptian, a silly action, star jumps etc.
- Now enjoy blowing your whistle and seeing who is paying attention. Do not bring them back to their bases too often, but have fun blowing one whistle, then three then shouting move.
- With older children you can introduce four or five whistles with accompanying movements.
- The aim is that when you are out with the children in any environment, they know to stop what they are doing at one whistle and return to base (or you if you have specified this), on two whistles.
- Play regularly with your class and after time as they get better, allow them to choose their own movements and increase the amount of whistle blows