

The importance of free-flow indoor/outdoor provision

Free flow play is the term used in the **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)** to describe children having the choice to move indoors and outdoors freely within their learning environment. Free flow play offers greater flexibility for children's learning and development and offers a wider choice of opportunities and experiences across the day. It supports young children to:

- **Develop greater independence and follow their own play agenda.** As children are able to access the different environments freely, they are able to make their own independent choices as to whether they should play outdoors or experience inside. Older children especially thrive on being given extra responsibilities and this supports their sense of ownership and autonomy.
- **Progress at their own pace and caters to all learning styles.** Free flow indoor and outdoor provision gives children the opportunity to develop at their own pace, they can decide to either spend the morning outside participating in experiences that reflect the natural world or learning through smaller scale opportunities in the indoor environment. This ensures children do not have to rush any valuable learning experiences to take advantage of their allocated timed session outdoors, consequently children have greater periods of time to become engrossed in their learning, revisiting and consolidating key skills and developing their conceptual understanding.
- **Routines can flow with the needs of the child.** Young children benefit from having longer periods of time outside. They need to know that they can be outside every day, when they want to and that they can develop their ideas for play over time. Free-flow indoor/outdoor provision provides this curriculum flexibility.
- **Develop decision making skills and helps practise dealing with the consequences of their choice.** As children are able to choose where they would like to play and with what, this develops their decision making and planning skills.
- **Develop an understanding of their environment and surroundings.** Free flow access between the indoors and outdoors, opens up many new spontaneous learning opportunities, particularly as the outdoor space and curriculum, harnesses the special nature of the outdoors, offering children what the indoors cannot. In this way, outdoor provision, complements and extends provision indoors.
- **Build relationships and develop creativity.** Having free-flow access to both the indoors and outdoors, creates a flexible and versatile environment where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play environment. There is often increased collaboration, communication and creativity in this environment.