



Well played: a teacher's
guide to powerful outdoor
learning and activities

Real
examples to
supercharge
student wellbeing
& curriculum



Outside the box



The movement towards taking education outdoors is growing, with the implications of COVID-19 adding to the proven benefits of open-air learning and physical activity.

In fact, 88 % of teachers surveyed in the global Outdoor Classroom Day Survey (2017/18) said children are more engaged in learning when taking lessons outdoors – and the same number said that children are happier after playing outdoors.



children are more engaged in learning when taking lessons outdoors



It's proven

Research shows that outdoor learning and play create healthier kids: children come to school more often, can concentrate better, physically sit at their desks for longer, can see better, and can learn more.

On the following pages, you'll find some practical activity suggestions for teachers. These simple ideas are designed to help them use outdoor spaces and playgrounds to creatively support student development and boost engagement.



Outdoor, **active learning**: Science & Maths

Objectives

- Use the playground to help teach Science and Maths concepts, in a hands-on, fun way.
- Boost student engagement, learning and wellbeing.

$$\frac{(A+B)}{C}$$



Activities

- Can younger students count the number of rungs on a ladder and bars on the monkey bar while using them? Can they add them together?
- Use sand and water play to demonstrate quantity, weight and gravity.
- Use sliding, climbing and swinging in the playground to observe physical forces like gravity, momentum, and friction.
- Create an obstacle course (think ladders, tunnels, balance beams, climbing walls, monkey bars and slides) and record the time it takes for students to complete it.
- For older students, take it up a notch and calculate the mean, median and mode times. Can they work out their speed using time and distance?
- Get pupils into teams and then challenge them to direct each other around the playground using only turns (eg turn 90 degrees clockwise, 180 anticlockwise).



Jumping



Objectives

- Support array of physical development needs – including coordination, flexibility, endurance, motor skills, reflexes and reaction time.
- Improve spatial awareness, boost mental alertness and help develop neurological connections (important for skills like reading).

Remember

- Remind children to land safely on the balls of their feet and roll back onto their heels. Landing flat-footed can cause twisted ankles.

Activities

- **Leap frog** - An oldie but a goodie! Divide into small groups for a fast game of leap frog. Set up your start and finish lines, say “go” and watch your teams of leap froggers take off, each player hopping over the person in front and immediately crouching down to be hopped over. The first team to cross the finish line wins the race.
- **Stepping stones** (or lily pads) - Place a number of hula hoops on the ground in a straight line with space in between. Line up students and tell them to take turns, one at a time, to jump from one target to the next to get across the lake. If they touch the ground outside the target, they start over.



Jumping

Activities

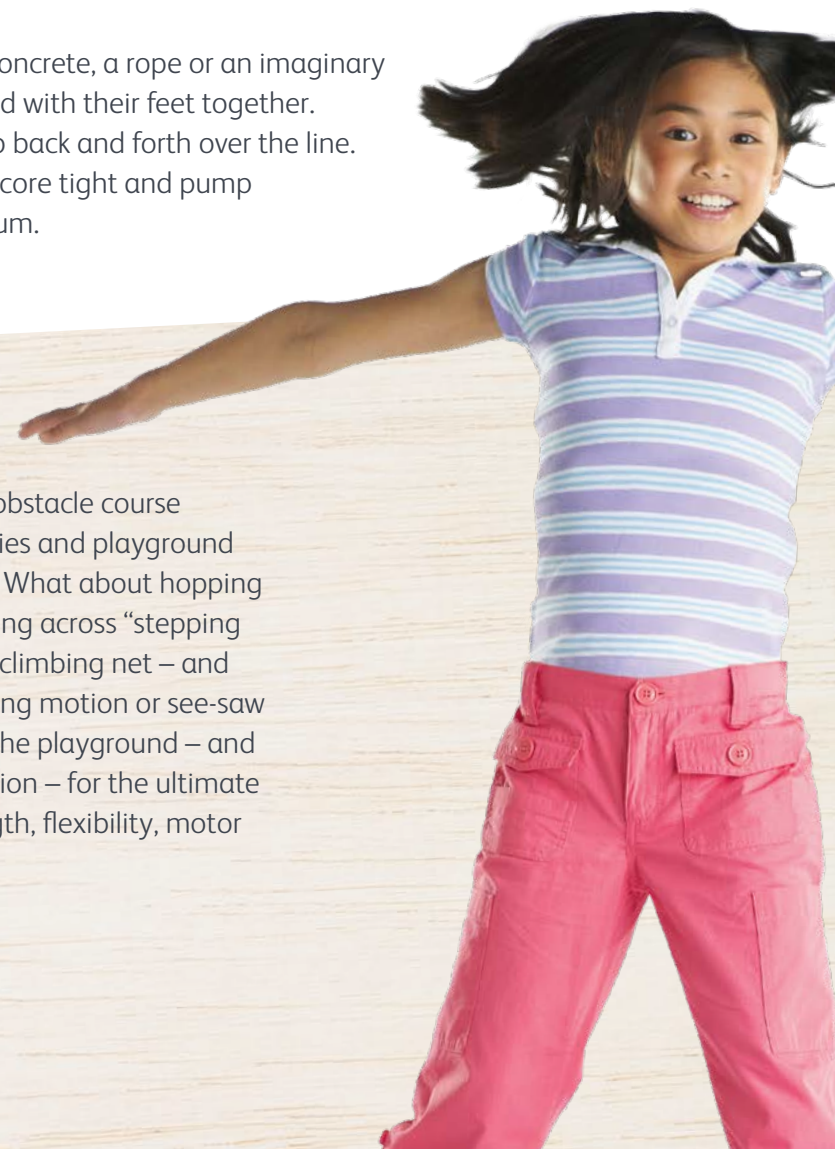
- **Jumping relays** (using sacks or small balls / balloons) - Another classic jumping game that combines fun and fitness is the sack race. Or you could have students try to hold a soft, small ball between their legs as they hop to the other end and pass off the ball to the next team member.



- **Hop or skip** Younger children still developing skills should start by hopping, which can be easier said than done! Explain that it means jumping with one foot and landing on the same foot. They should use the ball of their foot to jump off and land on softly, bending their ankle and knee when they land. For older children, rope skipping is the perfect activity for cardiovascular health and coordination.



- **Obstacle course** - Design an obstacle course that combines jumping activities and playground equipment for double the fun. What about hopping to the monkey bars, then leaping across “stepping stones” (or hula hoops) to the climbing net – and finish it all off with a bit of spring motion or see-saw action. Use what you have in the playground – and combine it with your imagination – for the ultimate obstacle course to hone strength, flexibility, motor skills and memory.



Boost **core strength, abs & posture**



**Before they
start to play**

Do an 'ab activation' check and then send them out for some unstructured fun.

Objectives

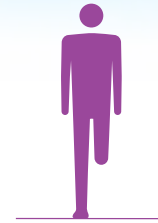
- Support a strong core to improve balance, coordination and motor skills.
- Help children sit and write for longer without slouching and excessive fidgeting.
- Improve endurance for writing, learning and physical activities.

Activities

- **Hanging knee raise** - Have your students hang straight from the monkey bars with an overhand grip. Then, ask them to use their abs to raise their knees up towards their chest. The trick is to ensure the abs are activated – make sure they don't swing their hips or use their legs to lift.
- **Plank** - Planks are performed by lifting the body onto toes and elbows. Elbows should be underneath shoulders and body weight evenly distributed with tummies sucked in to support the spine. Your students' torsos should be as straight as a pencil – no hips in the air! Ask them to hold planks for 10 seconds to start with, and work up to a minute as they get stronger. To vary the exercise your students can anchor their feet or hands on a raised surface – try using a wobbly rocker (if you have one in the playground) for even more intensity!



Boost **core strength, abs & posture**



Activities

- **Balancing** - Firstly, ask students to engage their abs, then, have them balance on one leg for as long as they can. Use a stepping log, stone, bench or even just the ground. Try it alternating eyes open and closed for a challenge.
- **Climbing** - As children propel themselves over climbing nets or scramble walls their entire core is working together to support the movement.
- **Bicycle crunches** - Try these bicycle crunches to activate the transverse abdominus and work into the obliques. Have your students lay on their back with abs activated. As they crunch up, they'll twist so opposite elbows and knees meet. Repeat for the other side, working up to 15 reps for each side. Chins should be tucked into their chest to support the neck.



Simple reminder

Get your students to draw their belly buttons in and lift their chests tall to activate their abs. Ask them to do this before they go down the slide, when they're on the swings, or running in the playground – it's a simple way to build abdominal exercises into their everyday activities.



Balance

Objectives

- Develop better physical control while doing tasks, which helps minimise fatigue.
- Lower risk of injury, with appropriate postural responses as needed (like putting their hands out for protection when they fall).
- Improve gross motor skills and sports ability (and therefore confidence and self-esteem).

Activities

- **Unstable swings and moving games** - Including suspended climbing ladders and jungle gyms.
- **Stepping-stone games with big jumps** - No steps between the 'stones'!
- **Straight and tall** - Students balance items on their head and walk around the playground. Get faster to turn up the competition and laughter!
- **Tightrope** - Use a rope on the ground and imagine it's a tightrope. Have students try walking forward, placing the heel of one foot in front of the toes of the other foot. After a little practice, try variations like walking backwards.
- **Balance beam** - Walk along beams or logs. Students who fall off have to start again.
- **Sit, kneel, or stand on a flat platform swing** - Once students can simply balance, play catch or balloon tennis while sitting, kneeling or standing.



Strength & Stamina

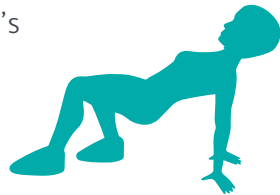
Objectives

- Boost persistence and resilience for everything from writing and drawing (for longer periods) to postural control and alertness



Activities

- **Hop scotch relays** - give special directions for each square – like having to hop three times or turn around.
- **Wheelbarrow walking** - someone supports a child's legs as they walk on their hands (with their back straight).
- **Crazy animal races** - pretend to be different animals like crabs, frogs, bears and worms – such a great way to use a child's body weight as resistance.



Strength & Stamina



A leg spelling bee
You can make "a" to fire up the core muscles and brain muscles at the same time!

Activities

- **Obstacle course** - age-appropriate challenges using playground equipment.
- **Playground climbing and swinging** - monkey bars are perfect.
- **Tug of war** - with an old sheet or piece of soft rope.
- **Alphalegs** - Ask kids to lie on their back with legs straight in the air, and 'spell' out the alphabet with pointed toes.
- **Balloon tennis** - great stamina and strength training as children hit the balloon above shoulder height repeatedly.



Stretching & Flexibility

Objectives

- Help with everyday movements and improve endurance and mobility during sport and play.
- Improve posture.
- Improves blood circulation.
- Helps prevent injuries and supports faster recovery.
- Assist in being more coordinated and better balanced.
- Warm up, or cool down, it's easy to find a place to stretch in the playground.

Activities

- **Stationary leg raises** - Have your students support themselves by holding onto a stable pole with one hand. Then, alternatively raise and lower their legs. As they progress their range of motion should increase – be sure they're not over-exerting their reach before they're warmed up. You can vary this exercise by slowly high kicking while walking.
- **Power skips** - Here's a way to use the monkey bars without dangling from them! Ask your students to power skip the length of the monkey bar – bringing their knees up high to their chest and reaching their arm up high into the sky. Go for height, not distance – you can ask them to aim to tap the rungs of the monkey bar with their hands.



Don't push too far
you shouldn't feel pain
when stretching!



Stretching & Flexibility



Stretching exercises help with **balance** and **coordination** too!

Activities

- **Inchworms** - This is great for activating the core, stretching hamstrings and lower back. Have your students pretend to be inchworms by starting in a standing position, then keeping legs straight, reach their hands down and walk them out until they're in a push-up position. Without getting up, they should walk their feet towards their hands, until they're in a V-shape position. Repeat up to eight times either on the ground —or for the adventurous, inch over a horizontal playground ladder or bridge.
- **Static hamstring stretch** - Use a leg-stretch fitness station or bench. After a workout or active play session students can cool down and stretch their hamstrings by placing one leg out straight onto a flat surface, and then leaning forward from the hips. Switch legs and repeat.
- **Static chest stretch** - Regularly stretching your chest can be a great way to improve posture. Use any stable pole or doorway for this one. Have your students bend their arm 90-degrees and hold on to a pole or doorway. Then, turn the body away from the raised arm to feel the stretch. You can change the target muscles by lowering or raising the arm.



Yoga

With its playful poses and inherent message to take exercise at your own pace, yoga is a **fantastic fun** and **calming activity for children**.

With poses like cat, cow, and tree, yoga appeals wonderfully to children's imaginations and helps them engage with their environment, which is essential for gross and fine motor skills development. Studies have also shown that yoga can be calming for children diagnosed with ADHD, improving their impulse control and leading to better concentration and behaviour in the classroom. For children that don't excel at traditional sports, achieving yoga poses can help build self-confidence.



Here's how you can have some fun with yoga, either in the classroom or on the playground.

- **Be a tree** - Ask students to pretend to be a tree by placing the sole of one foot onto the calf or thigh of the opposite leg. Have them reach out high into the sky and ask 'what kind of tree are you'?
- **Practice being frogs** - Have your students support themselves by holding onto a stable pole with one hand. Then, alternating legs have them raise and lower their legs. As they progress their range of motion should increase – be sure they're not over-exerting their reach before they're warmed up. You can vary this exercise by slowly high kicking while walking.
- **Relax and breathe like the ocean** - as they lay down, ask them to imagine their breath coming in and going out like the sea.



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Stand up for stronger legs



Activities

- **Squats** - Build strength in their glutes, quadriceps and hamstrings with squats. Use a slide, bench or any flat surface in your playground. Stand with feet hip width apart keep chest up and shoulders back. First, push your glutes backwards like you're sitting on a chair in mid-air, then sink straight down, pause at the bottom and then come back up to standing. When squatting make sure students don't rock onto their toes, extend their knees past their toes, keep their feet flat and push back up with the weight through their heels.
- **Calf raises** - Get your students to find a step with a vertical bar nearby they can hold onto for balance. (With their varied heights and surfaces, modular play systems – with multiple parts and activities – are perfect for this.) Standing with the balls of their feet planted on the step, slowly raise high up on tip toes, pause, and then slowly drop back down, lowering your heels off the step. This will build calf muscles and help with posture and balance. It's a great stretch for the Achilles and calf muscles too!



Facts

- Children spend about **two hours a day sitting down** engaged in screen time (not including the time they spend in class). And it gets longer as they get older.
- Regular prolonged periods of **sitting down disengages and shortens leg muscles** – which is bad news for balance, strength and agility. This also puts children at risk of developing health conditions in adulthood including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis and obesity.
- Our legs contain some of the **largest muscle groups in the body**: the quadriceps, hamstrings and glutes. These large and lean muscles are pivotal to supporting movement, posture, flexibility and strength in our legs, so they need to be worked out regularly.
- Children who combine aerobic activity with leg strengthening exercises will be able to **run faster, jump higher and play longer**. Get your students out of their seats and into the playground for a fun way to get fit for life!



Stand up for stronger legs

Activities

- **Single leg lunges** - Use a slide or swing. (You have to be facing away from the slide for this one.) Bring your left foot up to rest behind you on the bottom of the slide. With your hands on your hips, drop your left knee down to the ground and bend your right knee forward into the lunge, and then come back up. Don't extend your right knee beyond your toes. Do about 15 reps and then switch sides. Great for working quads and improving balance! For an extra challenge you can use a swing seat.
- **Step up** - It seems like a simple move but it's a surprising workout for glutes and quadriceps. Use a stepper, fitness station, slide ladder, step or stepping logs. Use the slide ladder or a similar sturdy surface that has two height levels to simply step up. Do one leg at a time or alternate stepping both legs. Use a high step for a dynamic workout.
- **Skipping** (with a jump rope) - Effective, easy and fun, skipping is an all-over workout that will get your heart rate up in addition to burning fat and maintaining leg strength. It's less intensive on joints than running and builds balance, agility, and coordination. If you modify your jumps with criss-cross moves and other tricks it will keep the mind stimulated too!



General playground fun & fitness

Scavenger hunt

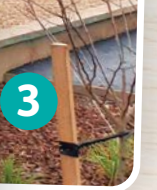
- Bring adventure and discovery to play time. A scavenger hunt will inspire creativity and imagination while keeping heart rates up.
- The seamless combination of nature and built environment in playgrounds offers an amazing way to teach students to engage with, and learn about, the world around them. Send them on a treasure hunt with written clues to encourage problem-solving and teamwork.

Here are some playground hiding spots:

- 1 On a swing seat.
- 2 On top of monkey bars.
- 3 Under leaves on the ground.
- 4 Buried in sand.
- 5 Inside climbing towers.
- 6 In tree branches or bushes.
- 7 At the bottom of a slide.
- 8 Tied to climbing nets.



Put a time limit on the hunt **for a fast, fun cardio workout!**



Questions or advice?
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