



TIP SHEET FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING

Research confirms the importance of outdoor time for children. [Studies](#) have shown the positive effects outdoor instruction has on students' social and emotional health, academic achievement, physical health, and mental health. Educators can help students realize these benefits by following the guidelines below for educational, safe, and engaging outdoor learning.

- **Plan ahead.** Familiarize yourself with the area where your students will be engaging in outdoor learning. Ensure the area, including student seating and teaching materials, are ready before outdoor learning begins. Determine any accommodations that may be needed for students with disabilities to make their experience positive. Make sure you know if any of your students are allergic to pollen, bees, ants, or wasps.
- **Anticipate distractions and plan accordingly.** Students may not be able to stay focused on the lesson if construction is taking place on the building next door or an unanticipated event occurs in an adjacent outdoor learning area or near the school campus. Have a back-up lesson with associated materials available in case you are unable to implement the lesson as planned, as well as designated alternative location in the event outdoor learning becomes impractical or unsafe.
- **Share your plans with your students' families.** Explain the importance of outdoor learning so that parents will support your efforts. Remind parents to dress their children in appropriate clothing and pre-apply sun or bug protection as needed for outdoor learning days. A consistent schedule can be helpful for families. Be sure to have a plan for students who arrive at school unprepared for outdoor learning.
- **Set expectations.** Make sure the students know your behavioral expectations and any rules and/or safety concerns specific to learning outdoors. Make sure to explain the difference between recess behavior and outdoor learning behavior. Review the proper usage of any tools and materials that will be used. Explain that there are insects and other animals outdoors and they should observe and respect them.
- **Start simple.** Your first outdoor learning lesson should get your students familiar with their surroundings and help them to learn the rules and boundaries of your outdoor learning space. Later, after your students are accustomed to learning outdoors, you can try new ideas like setting up different centers or stations for students to complete activities independently.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUTDOOR MEAL SERVICE

Eating meals outdoors is a great way to maintain social distancing requirements that may be more challenging in a larger gathering space like a cafeteria.

- **Equip yourself.** Whether you're distributing meals exclusively outdoors or through a combination of indoors and outdoors, make sure you have all the supplies and equipment you need for a successful and safe meal service. Find recommendations for portable carts, insulated bags, and more [here](#).
- **Create a flow.** Help students move through the outdoor eating space by creating clear traffic directions. It may be helpful to designate different doors as entrances and exits to avoid congestion. Limit the number of students going through the line at one time with staggered mealtimes by class or assign one individual to bring presorted meals to students once they are seated in the outdoor eating space.
- **Have a back-up plan.** Severe weather, changing space needs, and power fluctuations have the potential to disrupt outdoor meal service operations. Develop a back-up plan for these and other likely scenarios and communicate it with your team and school staff.
- **Talk with your food providers.** Food distributors, meal vendors, and Food Service Management Companies want to see your meal service succeed. Share your outdoor meal service plan with your providers and request recommendations for food items most suited to your needs.
- **Set expectations.** Prepare students for outdoor meal service by setting expectations around behavior, rules, and safety considerations. For example, teachers and staff should remind students that they must wear masks when they are not eating or drinking.
- **Keep food and students safe.** Follow [food safety](#) practices by keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Also ensure items are properly labeled for students with specific dietary accommodations, allergies, or dietary preferences.

MEAL SERVICE RESOURCES:

- Safely Distributing School Meals During COVID-19 (CDC), www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/safely-distributing-meals.html
- Institute of Child Nutrition, theicn.org/school-nutrition-programs/
- Chef Ann Foundation, www.thelunchbox.org/emergency-feeding/food



OUTDOOR LEARNING RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS:

Books:

- Dirty Teaching, Juliet Robertson
- Last Child in the Woods, Richard Louv
- Your Brain on Nature, Drs. Eva M. Selhub and Alan C. Logan
- Beyond Ecophobia, David Sobel

Websites:

- Learning Through Landscapes, www.ltl.org.uk/
- Green Schoolyards America COVID-19 Learning Library Chapter on Education Outdoors, www.greenschoolyards.org/education-outdoors
- Children and Nature Network, www.childrenandnature.org/schools/
- OSSE's Environmental Literacy Curricular Resources, osse.dc.gov/node/1113336
- National Environmental Education Foundation, www.neefusa.org/education/resources