

3 Enabling children to choose the clothes they wear in an outdoor preschool

Willow Outdoor Preschool is a part-time service for children aged two years and eight months to five years and six months, in which children spend their time outdoors. Parents who choose this preschool are aware that their children will spend their time outdoors and will often be muddy at the end of the day. When children start in the preschool, educators give guidelines to parents about the type of clothes that are suitable for the preschool environment. Parents are asked to ensure that children arrive every day in clothes suitable for the weather and to bring extra clothes, which are kept in individual baskets.

The outdoor space has several covered areas, a polytunnel which is floored, a playhouse and other sheltered areas. The preschool also has an indoor centre with a fully equipped classroom, which they use on days with very bad weather.

The educators believe it is important to enable children to make decisions in the preschool, including what clothes they want to wear. When it is raining, educators give children choices, for example the choice of taking shelter or putting on a raincoat. If a child tells an educator that she/he is cold, the educator asks the child what they want to do about being cold. Children usually say they want to put on more clothes, so educators suggest they get more clothes from their baskets. If a child says she/he is too hot, the educator will ask the child what they want to do, and they usually say they want to take off their coat or jumper, which the educator supports.

The educators note that the parents trust them in their approach to early learning and care.



How the children are ensured Space, Voice, Audience and Influence in choosing what clothes to wear

Space

- The children feel safe to express their views because the educators enable them to decide what clothes to wear.
- The practice of educators is to continuously ask children what they want to wear and listen to children's clothing choices, which often change throughout the day.
- All children are invited by educators to decide what clothes they want to wear.

Voice

- Educators support children in the clothing choices and decisions they make.
- Children know that they can make choices about their clothing and either change their clothes themselves or ask educators if they need or want to change their clothes.
- Children can tell educators if they are too hot or cold and educators ask them what they want to do. Children also put on or take off their own clothes whenever they want.
- When it is raining, educators give children a choice of putting on a coat or taking shelter.

Audience

- The educators show the children that they are ready and willing to listen to their views by enabling them to choose the clothes they want to wear or want to take off throughout the day.
- The educators make it clear to children that they support and encourage children to make their own clothing choices.
- When it is raining, educators give children choices.

Influence

- Children know they can make choices because educators act on their views.
- Educators give children constant feedback about their right to choose what clothes to wear.
- Educators give children options to choose from when it's raining.
- Children know about the impact of their decisions because they make daily choices about their own clothing.