

Behaviour Tips

Teaching outdoors can be daunting if you have a challenging class or if you are new to outdoor learning. When I taught challenging classes, the change in environment would often see a change in behaviours. Children want to be outdoors and enjoy the change in environment, and this can improve behaviour. However, there are a few strategies you can use to help you.

Grouping

How I ask children to stand in a group is often determined by the weather. If it is wet and windy, my voice will not carry as far, and children feel cold when standing still. Therefore, I would instruct the children to stand as penguins – huddled together to keep warm and close to hear.

If I wanted them close but not as close, my instruction might be “Sticky elbows”. This sees all children standing in a circle with their elbows close to their sides but touching the person beside them. This gives a close circle.

If I wanted to be a little more relaxed, I might give them an area to sit on; this can often be on a large tarpaulin or designated area.

Position

Before I have the children positioned, I need to think about my own position. I often found ensuring I was facing the sun rather than the youngsters really helped them focus. This is especially important if you are showing them something. This can also be true in high winds. Ensure you are the one facing the wind, and the children will focus more.



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Teaching Space

Explain to the children that while you are outdoors, in their playground, it is the groups' teaching space during teaching time, and you expect the same behaviours as a classroom. It is such a simple distinction but can really help.

Attention

If the children are over a wide area, you need a clear strategy for bringing them back together as a group. For this, I had 2 strategies. I would either use a whistle or my voice. If it was a whistle, I might use an ocarina or duck whistle as they are a gentler sound. If I were using my voice, I would tell children that it was their job to pass the message on and get everyone across. Often, with a new class, the first time outside would see us practising this at the start of the first lesson outdoors.

What to Teach

For my first lesson outdoors, I would always select something simple, which would allow time for us to go over the behaviour expectations and practice coming together as a group. For me, this was often an art lesson using Andy Goldsworthy as a stimulus.

How Long

Remember that you can spend as little or as much of a lesson outdoors as you feel comfortable. You do not need to teach the full lesson outside!

Your Gut

I would also say always listen to your gut. You know your class. You know your capabilities. Listen to your gut and do what feels right, and it will work.

