

5 ways to involve...

Parents and carers

Children's families are a wonderful outdoor play resource, says **Julie Mountain**

Working parents might not be able to stay at the setting, but there are still ways you can encourage them to support your work with their children. Use posters, email, social media and face-to-face chats to let parents know how they can help.



1 SPRING CLEAN

Organise a Saturday morning spring clean.

Involving parents in tidying up outdoors will freshen up your provision and give you the opportunity for informal chats about children's progress and to explain the benefits of learning outdoors.

Jobs might include: trimming shrubs; sanding down and repainting sheds or fences; sorting through and repairing or disposing of resources; planting bulbs (for next spring); weeding; giving mud lab/kitchen resources a good wash; and chopping up and laminating books.



2 DEN-BUILDING

Revamp your den-building kits by asking for donations of

household textiles such as old sheets, duvet covers, curtains, large towels, offcuts of dressmaking fabric and shower curtains.

You could also ask parents to take



Above: parents tidying outside

Below: donated loose parts, a den, and physical play



3 BOING WHOOSH ROLYPOLY!

Help children to

engage in vigorous physical activity beyond your setting by sharing Jasmine Pasch's Boing Whoosh RolyPoly! approach with parents.

- Boing movements are in the vertical plane – for example, bouncing down the street or jumping in every puddle.

- Whoosh movements are to-and-fro movements – for example, sliding on ice or through mud or swinging a toddler in your arms.

- RolyPoly movements are rotational – for example, spinning round lampposts or rolling down a grassy slope.

Why not share Early Education's Top Tips with parents – each has ten simple ways to encourage Boing Whoosh RolyPoly movements: www.early-education.org.uk/boing-whoosh-rolypoly.



4 COLLECTIONS

Curate collections to support schema and

heuristic play outdoors – parents are a brilliant source of loose parts with rich affordances that will encourage open-ended play. One way of building a collection quickly is to attach a box, decorated with the objects you are requesting, to the entrance to the setting – parents can drop off their donations along with their children.

Change your donation request every two or three weeks, and eventually you'll end up with a billion colourful plastic bottle tops... Also ask for: corks; conkers; pegs; shells; beads; buttons; ribbons; and laundry dosing balls.



5 BE PLAYFUL, BE BRAVE

Parents tend to be less informed and so more

risk-averse when it comes to outdoor play. This can lead to 'helicopter parenting', whereby opportunities for physical risk-taking beyond your setting are limited, with adults' language reinforcing unnecessary fears.

Talk to parents about the risk-benefit approach to outdoor play (there is lots of information about this at www.nurseryworld.co.uk) and encourage them to dynamically risk-assess – also known as using common sense!

Playing alongside their children and taking physical risks themselves will also build parents' confidence in assessing whether climbing the 'wrong' way up the slide or sprinting down a hill like a flying superhero really is dangerous.

And another thing...

Share the benefits of playing outdoors. For example, let parents know about the Health & Safety Executive's messages about risk-taking in play (www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf) and the national activity guidance at: <https://bit.ly/2tYaW6J>. ■

