



Go outdoors with your group

Making the most of the great outdoors with your group of children, young people or families has so many benefits. Going outdoors provides us with a different and often bigger space for the session than a church building or hall. It connects us with the natural world and gives a variety of opportunities to explore, appreciate and learn about God's creation. A number of recent studies have highlighted how disconnected people in the UK are from nature, and by contrast others have indicated how good it makes us feel when we spend time outside.

Whilst most of us have experienced special moments gathered around a camp fire or walking through the woods with a group, week by week it can feel like getting outside takes a lot of effort. Whilst it won't work for every group and there are things to think through, this short guide aims to help. As one volunteer leader commented 'I think it's just simpler when we go outside!'

Where can we go outdoors?

One of the first things to think about is 'where'? Not all church buildings are blessed with a suitable outdoor space on their doorstep but with a bit of imagination you might just find the ideal outdoor space for your group. It might be that you decide to set up a group that always meets outside – come rain or shine! You might decide that once a month or once a term you go outdoors, or it might be an annual event that everyone looks forward to and requires that extra bit of planning.

- Have you ever explored using the churchyard? With some creative thinking and necessary permission seeking, could a corner of it become a regular outside meeting space for your group?
- By putting up a temporary shelter (with a tarpaulin or similar) could you create an outdoor space that can be used whatever the weather?
- Many Primary Schools now have a Forest School area which could be worth visiting for inspiration and ideas, or it may even be a space you could use outside of school hours.
- Is there a nearby park, beach or woodland that would provide a good meeting place? Toilet facilities and car parking might be things you need to consider in this. Take time to explore any potential venue or location and think through how it might work in different weather conditions and at different times of the day/year.
- Is there somewhere with a campfire or barbecue facility?
- Is there shelter so that the meeting doesn't have to move back indoors on a rainy day?
- Whilst using a variety of different locations can be good, it can sometimes help the group to have a regular place to meet outdoors.

What can we do outdoors?

There are a variety of tried and tested resources available for outdoor group activities and it might be that you adapt some of these to fit your particular group. You might want to focus on more active games and activities, or more reflective ones in your session – or perhaps a combination of the two. Exploring our natural surroundings or using them to illustrate a Bible story or parable. Pausing to listen to the sounds around us or simply making the most of the extra space.

Here is a list of suggestions to get you thinking:

- Mini beast/bug hunt
- Exploring rock pools
- Tree walk/bark rubbing
- How many can you find? 5 flowers/5 insects/5 birds/5 trees
- Making bee or bug hotels
- Gathering different leaves, fir cones, acorns, conkers for a harvest display
- Storytelling/worship around the campfire
- Camp cooking
- Wide games or Rounders
- Litter pick/beach clean

And here are some more ideas with a possible theme to link to:

- Writing your own psalm or poem about creation (Psalms/Creation Story)
- Creating a big picture/collage from found materials (link to a story or a Psalm)
- Sitting and listening – what can you hear? (being still/listening to God)
- Building a cairn from pebbles/rocks (grateful/thankyou prayers)
- Gathering sticks to make heart-shaped mobiles or crosses (God loves his world)
- Plastic tub model boat race (Jesus calms the storm)
- Sand castle competition (Parable of Wise & Foolish Builders)
- Planting seeds/making seed bombs (Parable of the Sower)
- Scavenger hunt/treasure hunt (Parables: Lost Sheep or Hidden Treasure)
- Barbecue on the beach or picnic by a lake (Jesus appears to his disciples by the lake)

Other things to consider

Some important things to think through as you plan an activity or take a group outdoors:

- Risk assessments (could be adapted from DofE, Scouts or Forest School websites)
- First aid
- Parental consent / Emergency contact details
- Changes in the weather (or tides, if at the coast)
- If it's a public space: do you need permission? or might others be using it?
- Boundaries: making clear to your group where they can and can't go
- Hand washing / Food handling
- Use natural or recyclable materials for activities wherever possible
- When foraging for making things only collect items that have already fallen. Don't pick, break off or take from trees, plants or bushes.
- Be careful of wildlife and if habitat is accidentally disturbed try to leave it as you found it.

Useful links & resources:

Books: Outdoor Church by Sally Welch

Forest Church by Bruce Stanley

Outdoor worship ideas from Engage Worship www.engageworship.org

50 things to do before you're 11¾ www.nationaltrust.org.uk/50-things-to-do

Woodland Trust Nature Detectives <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/>

Outdoor Church Hubs – these are happening once or twice a year in each Archdeaconry for those already running outdoor groups/worship, contact us for more information.

For any further advice or help, contact your Archdeaconry based Go Team Adviser:

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/supporting-children/youth-children/>