Outdoor Explorers Program for Early Childhood Settings

Resource Guide
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What is OPAL?

OPAL is a program that involves everyone in the community working together to create all kinds of ways for children and families to enjoy healthy eating and to have fun being active. OPAL is working with local councils to support communities by coordinating activities and making changes to local services to make sure healthy lifestyle choices are easier choices for families and individuals. Currently, there are a total of 20 OPAL communities across South Australia.

Every twelve months OPAL provides new tips around specific healthy lifestyle behaviours to help children and families make healthier choices in their lives. Healthy messages that have been the focus of OPAL’s work to date include:

1. “Water. The Original Cool Drink.”
2. “Give the Screen a Rest. Active Play is Best!”
3. “Make it a Fresh Snack”
4. “Think Feet First: Step, Cycle, Scoot to School”
5. “A Healthy Brekky is Easy As, Peel, Pour, Pop”

The current message is ‘Life looks brighter outside. Enjoy the day with outdoor play at your local park or playground’. The aim of this theme is to support families to enjoy time together outside through exploring local parks and playgrounds. This theme is the basis for this resource.

Background about Life Looks Brighter Outside theme

What you should know

- Kids 8-12 years spend nearly half their free time plugged into technology but prefer outdoor play and want to spend more time playing with their parents (Australian State of Play report, 2012).
- Whilst the increased amount of children’s screen time is one reason for the decrease in outdoor activity, other factors play a role such as: an increasingly scheduled after school life, smaller back yards, increased risk aversion to activities such as climbing trees, and concerns about child safety and children independently going to parks (ABS, 2012).
- Getting active outdoors has real benefits for children in terms of their physical and mental health.
- Local councils have a wide range of parks, playgrounds and walking trails.
- OPAL wants to support the community to be active in local parks and playgrounds and will make this a prime focus through the Life Looks Brighter Outside theme in 2014.
- To do this, OPAL wants to support parents to recognise the fun they can have with their children outside and for children to explore and live an adventure.
- Only 1 in 4 children have climbed a tree (Nature Play SA, 2014).
Activity habits of our kids

Kids need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day (Australian Government National Physical Activity Guidelines).

63% of South Australian children do not meet the guidelines for sufficient physical activity. But kids are not alone, with 59% of South Australian adults also not meeting the guidelines for adults of at least 30 minutes per day of physical activity (SAMSS, 2012/13).

In Australia 87% of children spend more time playing indoors than outdoors (Planet Ark 2011).

South Australian children spend an average of 4.5 hours a day in front of a screen, exceeding the national average by half an hour (CSIRO, 2007). Yet our children spend less than two hours a day outside (Planet Ark, 2013).

The average Australian child spends less time outdoors than a maximum security prisoner (Griffin Longley, CEO, Nature Play WA).

What makes getting outside so hard?

Some facts

An Australian study of 2000 respondents comprising 8-12 year old children, parents and grandparents of 8-12 year old children in 2012 (Australian State of Play report, 2012) revealed the following barriers to being more active outdoors:

- **Time:**
  - since the 1970’s there has been a 50% decrease in free play time
  - kids say homework is stopping them from playing
  - parents name work and home pressures.

- **Inspiration:**
  - 37% of kids 8-12 years have run out of ideas for play
  - some parents don’t think kids want to play the games of their own childhood and are unsure of what to do instead especially once kids outgrow the local playground.

- **Technology:**
  - 37% of kids report they don’t have anyone to play with because everyone else is indoors playing on computers
  - children spend nearly half (47%) of their free time ‘plugged’ into technology, although this is less on the weekends when getting outside is the main activity.

- **Safety and facilities:**
  - concerns about leaving children alone at the park
  - lack of safe access via local walking routes to the park
  - lack of facilities such as toilets, cafés and equipment for all ages to use.
But there is hope...

- 1 in 2 kids (8-12 years) don’t play every day but most (65%) of this age group say outdoor play is their favourite activity – not technology.
- More than half of kids (55%) want to spend more time playing with their parents.
- 53% of parents and grandparents agree kids should spend more time playing outside.

Opportunities for visits to parks and playgrounds

Kids lead a scheduled and busy life. Encouraging kids to visit local parks and playgrounds more often will enable them to be more active. This also requires a reduction in other more sedentary types of activities such as watching TV or surfing the net. Encouraging parents to take their kids to the park will also provide opportunities for more social activities. The most likely time for families to visit local parks and playgrounds is on the weekends and during the week after school.

Why focus on parks and playgrounds?

- Parents want their kids to be happy and being outdoors will create opportunities for learning, exploration and happy memories.
- Parents understand the benefits of outdoor play but just need to find the time and prioritise getting outside.
- Kids love exploration and independence and want to spend more time outdoors with friends or their parents and less on their computer.

Benefits of outdoor play

- Opportunity to connect with family and spend time with parents.
- Independence and freedom for children.
- Opportunity to get dirty and connect with nature.
- Physical health benefits – kids need 60 minutes of physical activity a day.
- Connection to the local community.
- Teaching of values and behaviour, improving social skills, imagination, creativity and problem solving skills through shared play.
- Mental health benefits.
- Encourages a positive attitude towards nature and caring for the natural environment.
What is the Outdoor Explorers Program?

Target audience:
- Children aged 3-5 years and their immediate families or caregivers attending preschool or child care within an OPAL community.

Program aims:
For children:
- Encourage children to engage in active play to develop fundamental movement skills
- Encourage children to explore and enjoy spending time outdoors
- Familiarise children with the natural environment

For parents/caregivers:
- Encourage parents to provide their children with opportunities to be active outdoors, including visiting local parks and play spaces
- Encourage parents to be a positive role model by playing with their children outside

For early childhood settings:
- Further strengthen educators’ knowledge and skills in helping children develop physical and cognitive abilities in an outdoor setting
- Provide centres with resources and activity ideas to help children learn about, explore and enjoy the outdoors and natural environments

Setting:
- A safe, supportive, fun and expectation-free learning environment – e.g. preschools and child care centres.

Strategies:
- Implement the fun and exciting Outdoor Explorers Program that focuses on children being active outdoors and experiencing natural environments
- Link the benefits of learning, playing and being outdoors with a healthy lifestyle now and in the future.
- Support children’s learning by connecting with their families around the issues of children being active and their connection with nature.
Key points

The program is about...

- Exposing children to a variety of learning opportunities including those to increase children’s physical activity levels
- Giving children the opportunity to explore different natural elements
- Allowing children to direct their own learning through exploration and imaginative play as well as teaching them new skills (e.g.: fundamental movement skills).
- Supporting children’s learning within the Early Years Learning Framework, linking with the National Quality Framework and utilising existing resources available in early childhood settings
- Linking the benefits of active outdoor play with a healthy lifestyle
- Involving families in the experience and encouraging parents and caregivers to enjoy the outdoors and learning, playing and being active together

The outdoor environment is an important resource for child development

- Outdoor play in nature offers a number of benefits, including opportunities to learn physical skills and build stamina; social skills; how to manage risks; and respect for nature.
- Your site can offer a whole range of developmental activities and learning opportunities by providing a variety of different play spaces. Children should have room to:
  - be ‘loud’ and engage in active play (e.g.: running around, jumping and climbing);
  - act out their imagination, dramatize, socialise and learn together;
  - develop cognitive and problem solving skills (building and construction, investigating and exploring);
  - play quietly by themselves or with a friend, relax and observe
- Children require the opportunity to grow, learn, and have enjoyable experiences in a safe play environment. Educators supervising outdoor play should:
  - create an environment that empowers children’s creativity and ability to play independently;
  - enhance the quality of the play experience by interacting with children and providing structured/guided/scaffolded activities as needed;
  - carefully observe to ensure that children play in appropriate and safe ways.
Links to the Early Years Learning Framework

Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children learn to approach and explore the natural environment with their senses when they feel safe, secure and supported by educators
- Children approach new safe situations with confidence
- Children learn to be more open to the challenge of discovering and trying new experiences and activities in the natural environment
- Children learn confidence to explore and engage with social and physical environments through relationships and play
- Children explore different identities and points of view in dramatic play and share aspects of their culture with the other children and educators
- Children celebrate and share their contributions and achievements with others

Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected to and contribute to their world

- Children become more aware of and demonstrate an increasing knowledge of the natural world by learning through play and repeated exposure to different natural elements
- Children show a growing appreciation for and learn the importance of respecting and caring for the environment including:
  - Broaden their understanding of the world in which they live
  - Understand different ways of contributing through play and projects
  - Explore relationships with other living and non-living things and observe, notice and respond to change
  - Develop an awareness of the impact of human activity on environments and the interdependence of living things.

Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Children use their senses (including taste) to explore and investigate the outdoors and different natural elements.
- Children show an increasing awareness of being active and the importance of this for their health and wellbeing through reading and discussing outdoor play and physical activity themed storybooks, sensory exploration of natural elements and outdoor play based learning.
- Children manipulate various tools with increasing competence and develop both gross and fine motor skills whilst engaging in outdoor play activities and show enthusiasm for participating in physical play.
- Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing and increasingly co-operate and work collaboratively with others as well as enjoy moments of solitude.
- Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing and recognise and communicate their bodily needs (for example, thirst, hunger, rest, comfort, physical activity).
Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

Children express wonder and interest in their environment and are curious and enthusiastic participants in their learning through multi-sensory exploration of the outdoors and different natural elements.

Children explore the benefits and pleasures of being active and engaging in various outdoor play activities.

Children use play to investigate, imagine and explore ideas relating to the outdoor and natural environment.

Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating when they explore their environment, make predictions and generalisations about the natural world and use reflective thinking to consider why things happen and what can be learnt from these experiences.

Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials, such as using their senses to explore natural and built environments.

Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

Children respond verbally and non-verbally to the different natural and outdoor elements they see, hear, touch, smell and/or taste

Children view and listen to printed outdoor and active play-themed storybooks read to them and respond with relevant comments and/or questions.

Children sing and chant outdoor and active play-themed songs and rhymes.

Children use outdoor and active play-themed drawing, painting and craft activities to express their ideas and make meaning of being active in outdoor environments and the natural world.

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia states:

“Outdoor learning spaces are a feature of Australian learning environments. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. Play spaces in natural environments include plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature. They foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education. ”

“Environments and resources can also highlight our responsibilities for a sustainable future and promote children’s understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment. They can foster hope, wonder and knowledge about the natural world.”

References:

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Council of Australian Governments 2009, Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia.
Links to the National Quality Standard

Quality Areas

1. Educational program and practice
   The program helps each child to learn and develop cognitive skills (e.g.: problem solving, inquiry, experimentation and investigating), physical development of both fine and gross motor skills and important social skills (e.g.: cooperation and team work).
   Children are supported by educators to participate in play and learning.
   The program provides experiences that stimulate and engage each child in learning and flexibility of the program allows each child’s interests to be included in the program.

2. Children’s health and safety
   Early childhood sites adequately supervise children so they feel safe and secure and take necessary precautions to protect children from illness and hazards whilst still providing age and developmentally appropriate challenges and risk taking experiences.
   Early childhood sites provide nutritious and appropriate food and drinks for children.

3. Physical environment
   Indoor and outdoor spaces allow children to play, learn and develop their skill by participating in a range of experiences. Early childhood sites create outdoor (and indoor) spaces that are welcoming and suitable for children and buildings, furniture, equipment and resources are safe and well-maintained.

6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
   The program aims to include families by communicating children’s learning and providing information to extend the learning into the home environment in a respectful manner. The program allows the opportunity for early childhood sites to engage with the local community via the connection with the OPAL initiative and the Mid Murray council.
About the program

Before starting the program
Connecting with the parents and families is a good opportunity to involve them in the learning that their children are doing and also help them to learn about the importance of children being active in outdoor spaces, including local parks and playgrounds. Before commencing the program it is recommended that the letter to parents (see Appendix 1) is sent home to families so that they are aware of the program and the focus on active play and outdoor exploration at your site.

Playing and exploring outdoors means that children will occasionally get dirty or wet. It might a good idea to speak to parents about keeping a change of clothes (and shoes or gumboots) handy for each child and having some plastic bags on hand to keep wet clothes from soaking car seats on the way home.

Also included in this resource guide are suggestions about how you can encourage messages about outdoor play to ‘get home’ through different activities and communication channels (see page 39 for ideas). Prior to starting the program, plan which of these or any new ideas you come up with you want to do to engage your parents and families. Each centre will be different and you will know what works best at your site.

Program Overview
This program has been designed to be run over five weeks, with a different outdoor element to focus on each week. It will be up to each site to decide whether the program activities will occur on one set day or on multiple days across the week. Sites are encouraged to conclude with a Parent Picnic Event, as a useful way to connect with children’s families and celebrate what the children have learnt (see page 40 for more details). Each week focuses on becoming familiar with different natural elements (things found in nature) and developing fundamental movement skills by engaging in active outdoor play. Activities and ideas listed are only suggestions and sites are encouraged to incorporate other activity ideas and adapt the program as needed to suit their own site. You might like to consider taking activities outside that you would normally do inside, such as having snack or lunch outdoors - children can sit on picnic rugs, a grassy area or take some chairs and tables outside. The different components of the program are outlined below and more details for each will be discussed later in the resource guide:

Discussion - Each week introduce the natural element (e.g.: soil and sand or living creatures) and recap from the previous week. Repeated exposure will help to reinforce what children have learnt. Discuss the natural element and children’s knowledge, understanding and previous experiences. Also have samples or pictures to pass around for children to look at and touch. Talk about how spending time outdoors and exploring nature is fun. Also discuss that being outdoors provides an opportunity to be active and how different activities help our bodies to keep fit and healthy. Discuss the importance of caring for the environment so that everyone can enjoy it.
**Exploration** - Allow the children enough time to explore the outdoor element for that week by providing them with a range of activities that will stimulate different areas of learning and skill development such as; cooperation, confidence, creativity, curiosity, problem solving, inquiry and experimentation. Choose a variety of play options including; constructive/building activities; symbolic or imaginative play opportunities; physical activities (e.g. running, jumping, climbing, etc.); and sensory activities (play associated with stimulating senses). Examples of activities are listed for each week, later in the resource guide.

**Active Outdoor Play** - These activities are to be facilitated by educators, with the aim to develop children’s Fundamental Movement Skills (*see Appendix 2 for more information on FMS*). Each week choose 1-3 active outdoor play activities (ideas are provided or make up your own), ensuring you use a range of activities. Choose suitable activities for your children based on their abilities and the available time, space/area and equipment at your site.

**Story time and other activities** - Read and discuss the storybook provided relating to the outdoor element for that week. Use the story as a prompt for further discussion with the children. Include a range of other activities such as nature related arts and crafts to complete in centre and/or to take home (*examples are included on page 34*). Consider having story time outside - children can sit on picnic rugs, a grassy area or take some chairs outside.

**Extension ideas:**
Below are some additional ideas that complement the Outdoor Explorers Program, you might like to include one or all of these or use them to extend the program beyond five weeks:

- **Focus on sustainability, preserving and appreciating nature and caring for the environment.** This is touched on during the program and may come about from child inquiries but could be expanded upon after the program. This could also incorporate looking at rubbish and recycling and link with ‘nude food days.’
- **Focus on the different seasons and weather,** incorporating lessons about why there are different seasons and what happens outside in nature as the weather changes. Could also look at the different things children do as the weather changes (e.g.: wearing warmer clothes, foods they eat, different things they like to play with, etc.)
- **Look at plant cycles and the importance of soil, sun and water for plants to grow.** Look at the different parts of plants and link to an edible garden (if available).
Session 1: Soil and Sand

Discussion
Introduce the program and explain that you’ll be exploring nature and having fun being active outdoors. Discuss the natural element for this week and ask questions about children’s knowledge, understanding and previous experiences. Have samples or pictures to pass around for children to look at and touch.

Discussion points:

- What is this? (What is soil? What is sand?) What are some other names?
  Possible answers: it’s sand, dirt, mud, etc...
- Where do we find sand? What about soil?
  Possible answers: at the beach, at the park, in the backyard, in the sandpit, etc...
- What colour is it?
  Possible answers: brown/black/red, yellow/white/beige...
- What does it feel like? Smell like?
  Possible answers: feels grainy, soft, smells like the earth...
- What is it used for?
  Possible answers: to plant/grow things, to make sandcastles, sand can be used to make glass, etc...
- Discuss the importance of caring for the environment, how our actions affect the environment, why the natural environment is important (e.g.: why we shouldn’t contaminate soil, importance or recycling, not littering, etc). Link to the things you already do at your centre to help look after the environment (e.g.: composting food scraps, rainwater tank, recycling, etc).

Exploring activities
Aim to choose at least two different activities from below or come up with your own, ensuring there is a variety of activities to allow for multiple play opportunities. Allow children enough time to engage with each of these activities and explore the sand and soil at their own pace. As they are playing, discuss their experiences and encourage them to try new things. (Prompts: names of things they are playing with, colours and shapes, different smells, texture (e.g. how they feel) of the sand or soil, etc.)

- Build a sandcastle, using buckets and spades or just play in the sand with sifters and scoops.
- Create ‘mud creatures’ or sculptures using clay.
- Hide things in the sand for children to find, such as plastic dinosaurs or shells. You could also use laminated cards with pictures or words on them that relate to an activity (e.g.: words or pictures from a story you’ve read).
- Use toy tractors, trucks and other vehicles to move dirt or make paths and tunnels to drive in.
- Play with dirt in a digging patch; children can use different tools, such as shovels/spades, rakes, trowels, buckets, wheelbarrows.
- Make mud pies, using old mixing bowls, spoons and pie dishes and the sun as an oven. Allow children to experiment with different types of “pie”: garden soil, dirt, mulch, sand, mud or a combination of all of the above.
Make a volcano by creating a mountain in the sandpit or a dirt pile. Fill plastic bottles with a mixture of 1/2 water and 1/2 vinegar. Add food dye color to the mixture to make colourful lava. Dig a hole at the ‘peak’ of your mountain and bury the bottles up to the neck or as deep as you can get them to go. Next add a teaspoon of baking soda to the bottles, then stand back and watch the eruptions begin. Add more baking soda to make the volcano erupt again. (The process can be seen here www.teachpreschool.org/2012/05/erupting-volcanoes-in-preschool).

Create mini landscapes (such as a dinosaur land or fairy village) using soil, sticks and leaves, etc. (an example can be found here theimaginationtree.com/2011/02/small-world-play-dinosaur-land.html).

Use coloured sand for sensory play, digging trays or artwork. You can make your own coloured sand by adding food dye to white sand (an example can be found here www.teachpreschool.org/2011/09/we-made-colored-sand-and-fall-leaves-in-preschool).

Put some sand or soil in a tray and let children practice writing or drawing using their fingers or a stiff paintbrush.

Make footprints or handprints in the sand (or mud!) and compare the size of children’s feet/hands. You could also make stamps and create animal tracks.

Active Outdoor Play

OPTIONAL: Choose a warm up activity (see page 35 or make up your own) to complete before commencing the active outdoor play activities.

Choose 1-3 active outdoor play activities from Table.1 (or make up your own), ensuring you use a range of activities that enable development of Fundamental Movement Skills. Choose activities suitable for your children based on their abilities and the available time, space/area and equipment at your site.

OPTIONAL: Choose a cool down activity (see page 36 or make up your own) to complete after the outdoor play activities, to allow children to ‘unwind’ ready for quieter/ indoor activities.
Stuck in the Mud

Resources needed:
Large area to run around, you may like to use a coloured sports bib to who is ‘it’

Instructions:
Choose one child to be ‘it’. All the other children move around (running, fast walking, skipping, etc.). The player who is ‘it’ must chase and tag as many other children as they can. When tagged, the child must freeze and stand with their legs and arms apart. The only way to be freed is for a non-tagged child to crawl through their legs (if there are any issues with crawling under other children’s legs, they can crawl in a circle around the stuck child). Children are safe while crawling under legs and cannot be tagged when in that position. The game ends when all the children have been tagged and are ‘stuck in the mud’. To increase the difficulty, choose several children to be ‘it’.

Long Jump (if appropriate space is available)

Resources needed:
Large sandpit or soil area. Markers to measure distance and start line.

Instructions:
Demonstrate how to jump - a small run up then jumping with feet together and leaning the body forward. Measure the distance children can jump across the sandpit.

Climbing the mountain

Resources needed:
Foam steps and a foam wedge

Instructions:
Securely join the foam wedge and steps together (see picture below), to create a mountain. Ask the children to climb to the top and back down again. Foot prints (human or animal) can be stuck on to suggest different ways for the children to walk.

You could sing the song ‘I’m going up’:
I’m going up, I’m going up, I’m going way up high
I’m coming down, I’m coming down, I’m coming way down low
Up, up, up, up, up.
Down, down, down, down, down.

Balancing Sand Bags

Resources needed:
Bean bags (or substitute, e.g.: bundles of socks) and cones/markers

Instructions:
Set up two cones approximately 4 metres apart. Allow each child to choose a body part (e.g.: head, shoulder, neck, top of hand, etc.), or use cards with pictures of body parts to choose. Each child must then figure out how they can move to the end cone without the bean bag falling off, e.g.: walking, crawling, hopping, etc. The child is to start at one cone and try to move to the other cone whilst balancing the bean bag on the chosen body part without it falling off.
If the bean bag falls on the floor, the child is to start from the beginning again.
Examples of body part and movement: head/shoulder/elbow/hands/neck = walk, run; back = crawl; stomach = crab walk; knee = hop; feet = walk on heels.
Begin with upper limb body parts. To increase the difficulty: increase the distance between cones, use more than one bean bag, choose more than one body part to balance the bean bags on or introduce bumpy surfaces (e.g.: balancing on a rope on the floor). You could also ask the child to complete the task sideways, backwards, blindfolded or on a balance beam.

Wheelbarrow Walk

Resources needed:
Cones or markers and a grassed area (substitute with gym mats)

Instructions:
Have the child lie down on their tummy with their legs held out straight behind them. Make sure the palms of their hands are resting on the ground next to their shoulders. Place your hands under their thighs and lift their legs of the floor –their legs become the “wheelbarrow handles” (and their body is carrying the pretend soil or sand). Have the child walk forwards on their hands whilst you are supporting their legs. To make it easier have the child kneel/crouch down so their stomach is horizontal to the ground and hold their legs up higher. To increase the difficulty, place your hands under their ankles which allows child to support more of their own weight, have the child collect beanbags along the way or ask them to walk further.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locomotor Skills such as running, jumping, hopping, galloping, skipping and leaping</th>
<th>Fundamental Movement Skills</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>such as catching, throwing, kicking, striking, underarm roll and striking</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balance Skills movements where body remains in place, but moves around its horizontal and vertical axes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References:
> Barilla, D and Pelliccia, N 2010, Gross Motor...not just rolling around, A Gross Motor Resource to Help Parents Prepare their Children for School.
**Story Time and Other Activities**

- Read the story book “Mud” to the children. Use the illustrations and storyline as a discussion point. Relate this back to the exploration or play activities children have participated in.
- Set up other activities inside that relate to the learning opportunities presented outside, for example sorting boxes, active/outdoor play themed books and puzzles, colouring-in sheets, etc. (*see page 34 for more ideas or make up your own*).
- Hand out the OPAL *Life Looks Brighter Outside* brochures to each child (or to parents/caregivers) to take home. Explain what they are and why it is important to share these with their families.
- “What I explored this week...” sheets (*see Appendix 3*) are a way to record the activities children have tried during the program and what they thought of them. Guide each child to complete their sheet by drawing, painting, pasting objects or photos of what they recall from that week’s session. Scribe for them a description of the picture or their thoughts and comments about the activity. Record something the child learnt to do or really enjoyed doing. To encourage parents to provide outdoor play opportunities for their child, send these sheets home at the end of each week and ask families to complete the home challenges. Request that they return completed home challenges to display at your centre or use as part of a prize draw or competition.

**Preparation and Materials needed:**

- Prior to the session(s) print and gather any resources required for that week’s activities.
- Gather samples or pictures of soil and sand

**You will need:**

- *Life Looks Brighter Outside* poster and coreflute sign to display (supplied by OPAL)
- OPAL *Life Looks Brighter Outside* brochures – enough copies for each child to take home (supplied by OPAL)
- Children’s story book *I’m a Mud* by Mary Lyn Ray (supplied by OPAL)
- “What I explored this week...” sheets (*see Appendix 3*) and any other resources (e.g.: pictures, glue, pencils) needed for children to complete these.
- Any resources and equipment needed for the Exploring, Active Outdoor Play and other activities. E.g.: Samples of soil and sand (if no sandpit); tools such as shovels/spades, rakes, trowels, buckets and wheelbarrows; old mixing bowls, spoons and pie dishes (for mud pies); toy tractors, trucks, etc. for sandpit play; art and craft supplies; and beanbags, cones (and any other equipment) for active outdoor play activities.
Session 2: Water

Discussion
Introduce the natural element and recap from the previous week. Repeated exposure will help to reinforce what children have learnt. Discuss the natural element for this week and ask questions about children’s knowledge, understanding and previous experiences. Have samples or pictures to pass around for children to look at and touch. Discussion points:

ividad What is this? Where does it come from?
Possible answers: it’s water, it comes from clouds/rain, the tap, rivers, the ocean, puddles, etc...

What does it look like?
Possible answers: at home, at Kindy, at the beach, at the park, in the backyard, etc...

What does it feel like? Smell like?
Possible answers: wet, cold/hot, smell of rain...

What is it used for?
Possible answers: to drink, to wash, to help things grow, to swim in, a home for fish, etc...

Discuss the importance of caring for the environment, how our actions affect the environment, why the natural environment is important (e.g.: why we shouldn’t waste water, importance or recycling, not littering, etc). Link to the things you already do at your centre to help look after the environment (e.g.: composting food scraps, rainwater tank, recycling, etc).

Exploring activities
Aim to choose at least two different activities from below or come up with your own, ensuring there is a variety of activities to allow for multiple play opportunities. Allow children enough time to engage with each of these activities and explore the water at their own pace. As they are playing, discuss their experiences and encourage them to try new things. (Prompts: names of things they are playing with, colours and shapes, different smells, texture (e.g. how they feel), etc.)

Build your own waterfall/ water feature using plastic bottles, funnels, colanders, tubes, pipes, etc. Allow the children to experiment with different coloured water.

Set up a water play table/trough (or watercourse if you have one!) with a variety of objects, such as toy boats, sponges, pump bottles, spray bottles, etc. Depending on what you provide you can use these to stimulate different conversations and learning’s, e.g.: different sized containers to discuss volume and measurement or different weighted objects to discuss concepts of sinking and floating.

Have bubble mix and different types of bubble wands available to blow bubbles with.

Set up an outdoor ‘home corner’ and have a bath to wash dolls, tub to wash clothes (dolls or dress-ups) or sink to wash dishes!

Create mini frog habitats using a tray with rocks and logs for the frogs to sit on or hide in or create an underwater world for water loving creatures (fish, sharks dolphins, turtles or mermaids).

Create a bird bath for native birds to drink from or bathe in using old buckets, flower pots or saucepan lids. Depending on what you use the children might like to decorate it.
Set up a rain gauge, discuss what it’s used for and ask children to help read it after there has been some rain.

Fill some spray bottles with water and allow children to experiment! They could try spraying different things to see what happens, e.g.: water will soak into sand, form water beads on leaves, or change the colour of certain rocks. During warmer weather they could even spray themselves to cool down or a friend (when they ask first if it’s okay).

Ask the children to help water the garden using a watering can or small bucket.

Create beach sensory water bags using plastic zip lock bags, tape, water and assorted beach items (e.g.: shells, stones, glass pebbles, ocean toys). For instructions visit www.ready-set-read.com/2012/07/how-to-make-beach-water-sensory-bag-for.html.

Build simple boats for children to play with in a water trough (or watercourse if you have one!). Use lightweight materials that float for the base such as wine corks or foam, toothpicks make a good mast to attach a cloth sail.

**Active Outdoor Play**

OPTIONAL: Choose a warm up activity (*see page 35 or make up your own*) to complete before commencing the active outdoor play activities.

Choose 1-3 active outdoor play activities from Table.2 (or make up your own), ensuring you use a range of activities that enable development of Fundamental Movement Skills. Choose activities suitable for your children based on their abilities and the available time, space/area and equipment at your site.

OPTIONAL: Choose a cool down activity (*see page 36 or make up your own*) to complete after the outdoor play activities, to allow children to ‘unwind’ ready for quieter/ indoor activities.
Lily Pad Jumping

Resources needed:
Large space and coloured chalk/markers, hoops or masking tape (to create lily pads)

Instructions:
Make a start line then mark 4 spots in a line, these are the lily pads. Make several rows in different colours so that the children know which row to follow, and in a number appropriate to the number of children you have. Have the children jump (feet together) from one to the next until they reach the end lily pad. Increase or decrease the difficulty by moving the ‘lily pads’ closer or further apart.

Skipping

Instructions:
Demonstrate how to skip to the children.

Instructions:
Set up two buckets approximately 4 metres apart. Fill one bucket with water and leave the other empty. Instruct the children to line up behind the full bucket. One at a time, ask them to scoop a cupful of water and carefully carry it to the other bucket, as fast as they can but trying not to spill any. Empty the cup into the end bucket and run back passing it to the next child to have a turn.

Water Relay

Resources needed:
Markers, buckets, cups and water

Instructions:
Set up two buckets approximately 4 metres apart. Fill one bucket with water and leave the other empty. Instruct the children to line up behind the full bucket. One at a time, ask them to scoop a cupful of water and carefully carry it to the other bucket, as fast as they can but trying not to spill any. Empty the cup into the end bucket and run back passing it to the next child to have a turn.

Don’t Fall in the River

Resources needed:
Balance beams of different heights.

Instructions:
Instruct the children to walk along the beam, trying not to fall into the river. Children advance to a higher beam once they confidently complete each height.

Catch the Raindrop

Resources needed:
Piece of string (or elastic), piece of cardboard in the shape of a raindrop, gym mats (to lie on)

Instructions:
Instruct the child to lie flat on their back with their legs straight out in front of them. Tie a piece of string to a cardboard raindrop and dangle this above the child’s head. Instruct the child to lift their head and upper body off the floor to catch the raindrop by clapping their hands together. When they catch one say, “splat!” (Make sure that when dangling the raindrop above their head, in order for them to catch it they need to lift their body off the floor). See how many raindrops they can catch in a row. If the child cannot catch the raindrop with two hands, they can hit it with one hand. To increase the difficulty dangle the raindrop just outside of the child’s reach, e.g.: out to the side of their head or dangle the raindrop higher above their body so they have to lift their head and body higher off the floor.

Don’t Pop the Bubble

Resources needed:
A ball for each pair of children

Instructions:
Children will need to be in pairs for this activity-try to match them with a child of similar height. Ask each pair to stand back to back with the ‘bubble’ (ball) placed between them. Instruct them to walk around without letting it drop to the ground - or it will pop! Children can practice first by standing back to back with their arms linked and walking around, before introducing the ball. To increase difficulty ask the children to pick up objects from different heights (the lower the object, the harder it will be) or instruct them to move around obstacles (chair, bucket, etc).

Target Throwing

Resources needed:
Filled water balloons or alternative (e.g.: soft ball, ball of wool, bath sponge, scrunched up paper, etc.), large target

Instructions:
Ideal placement of the target is on a wall. Mark a line where the thrower stands. Demonstrate how to throw over arm and ask the children to practice the action before beginning. Instruct the child to throw the balloon as hard as possible at the target. Move the start line further away to increase difficulty.

Group Target Throwing

Mark a dividing line between two groups of children using masking tape or a rope. Have a basket of soft balls (or alternative) set up at the side of each area. When the signal is given to start the game, children throw their balls over the line (over arm or underarm). After approximately 30 seconds, stop and see who has the least number of balls on their side. Swap teams and play again. Remember to use the cues “throw hard,” “throw over arm,” “throw underarm” and “step with the opposite foot”. To clean up the area encourage the children to throw the balls into the baskets as a target.

Shrink and grow

Resources needed:
A soft ball/ beach ball for each pair of children (or one child and one adult)

Instructions:
Instruct each pair to stand a few metres apart and practice catching and throwing. Each time the ball is caught multiple times (e.g.:10 times) in a row, one child can step back. If the ball is dropped the child drops down to one knee, if dropped twice in a row drop to both knees and if dropped three times in a row, sit on their bottom. Every time the ball is then successfully caught, they can come back up in the reverse of the order mentioned above.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamental Movement Skills</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locomotor Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>such as running, jumping, hopping, galloping, skipping and leaping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>movements where body remains in place, but moves around its horizontal and vertical axes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>such as catching, throwing, kicking, striking, underarm roll and striking</td>
</tr>
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</table>

References:
Story Time and Other Activities

- Read the story book “Splish, Splash, Splosh!” to the children. Use the illustrations and storyline as a discussion point. Relate this back to the exploration or play activities children have participated in.
- Set up other activities inside that relate to the learning opportunities presented outside, for example sorting boxes, active/outdoor play themed books and puzzles, colouring-in sheets, etc. (see page 34 for more ideas or make up your own).
- “What I explored this week...” sheets (see Appendix 3) are a way to record the activities children have tried during the program and what they thought of them. Guide each child to complete their sheet by drawing, painting, pasting objects or photos of what they recall from that week’s session. Scribe for them a description of the picture or their thoughts and comments about the activity. Record something the child learnt to do or really enjoyed doing. To encourage parents to provide outdoor play opportunities for their child, send these sheets home at the end of each week and ask families to complete the home challenges. Request that they return completed home challenges to display at your centre or use as part of a prize draw or competition.

Preparation and Materials needed:

- Prior to the session(s) print and gather any resources required for that week’s activities.
- Gather samples or pictures of water

You will need:

- Children’s story book Splish, Splash, Splosh! By Mick Manning (supplied by OPAL)
- “What I explored this week...” sheets (see Appendix 3) and any other resources (e.g.: pictures, glue, pencils) needed for children to complete these.
- Any resources and equipment needed for the Exploring, Active Outdoor Play and other activities. E.g.: plastic bottles, funnels, colanders, tubes, pipes (for water feature); water play table/trough and water toys, different sized containers and different weighted objects; watering cans; spray bottles and sponges; bubble mix and bubble wands; resources to create frog habitats or bird bath; art and craft supplies; water balloons, balls, buckets, cups, balance beams, cones (and any other equipment) for active outdoor play activities.
Session 3: Sticks and Stones

Discussion
Introduce the natural element and recap from the previous week. Repeated exposure will help to reinforce what children have learnt. Discuss the natural element for this week and ask questions about children’s knowledge, understanding and previous experiences. Have samples or pictures to pass around for children to look at and touch. Discussion points:

- What are these? What are sticks? What are stones?
  Possible answers: they are parts of trees, they are made of wood, etc...

- Where do they come from? Where do we find them?
  Possible answers: outside, from trees, from the ground, in rivers, etc....

- What are some other names for sticks? And for stones?
  Possible answers: branches, twigs, logs, rocks, pebbles, boulders, etc...

- What do they look like?
  Possible answers: long, skinny, round, big, small, have leaves on them, brown, grey, etc...

- What do they feel like? Smell like?
  Possible answers: rough, smooth, lumpy, smell like wood, etc...

- What are they used for?
  Possible answers: wood comes from trees and is used to build things, stones are used to build things, can be used in the garden, to play with, etc....

- Discuss the importance of caring for the environment, how our actions affect the environment, why the natural environment is important (e.g.: why we shouldn’t disturb rocks (they are homes for bugs), importance or recycling, not littering, etc). Link to the things you already do at your centre to help look after the environment (e.g.: composting food scraps, rainwater tank, recycling, etc).

Exploring activities
Aim to choose at least two different activities from below or come up with your own, ensuring there is a variety of activities to allow for multiple play opportunities. Allow children enough time to engage with each of these activities and explore the sticks and stones at their own pace. Remind the children about the appropriate ways to play with sticks and stones. As they are playing, discuss their experiences and encourage them to try new things. (Prompts: names of things they are playing with, colours and shapes, different smells, texture (e.g. how they feel), etc.)

- Collect a variety of different size/shape/colour stones and sticks for children to compare the differences and use for sorting activities.

- Create pet rocks using sticks, leaves gumnuts, etc. and eyes. These can be on display at the centre or taken home.

- Create a cubby or tee-pee with branches and twigs for children to hide in and role play.

- Decorate rocks with paint and glitter and use them for the edging of a path or to decorate the garden.
Use rocks to create cool designs as you would for marble painting. Place paper in a shallow box or tray. Plop on a few colours of watered down paint, then add a few rocks. Shake the box left to right and around in circles.

Build an imaginary animal, fairy or dinosaur home out of sticks, leaves and pebbles.

Play with ‘stepping stones’, make different paths for children to step, hop, leap or jump along.

Build a pretend campfire using a ring of stones, twigs and sticks. Use orange and red cellophane for a pretend flame, sit around the fire and tell stories.

Write the alphabet and numbers on smooth stones to use in literacy and numeracy activities.

Allow children to experiment with weight by using a set of scales to weigh different sized rocks or sticks. There are a number of websites with instructions and ideas to make your own simple set of scales using timber off cuts or a coat hanger, buckets and a few other bits and pieces or use a set of old kitchen scales. Kid friendly ready-made sets are also available from various educational websites (e.g.: www.edex.com.au/edx-junior-balance.html).

Make your own rock! You will need pebbles, paper cups, glue (preferably clear). Have the children pour glue into their cups. Then add whichever pebbles they want and make sure they are covered by the glue (push them in well). Once dry, peel off cup and check out your rock! (You may need to let the glue rock dry for a bit longer after removing the cup).

### Active Outdoor Play

**OPTIONAL:** Choose a warm up activity *(see page 35 or make up your own)* to complete before commencing the active outdoor play activities.

Choose 1-3 active outdoor play activities from Table.3 (or make up your own), ensuring you use a range of activities that enable development of Fundamental Movement Skills. Choose activities suitable for your children based on their abilities and the available time, space/area and equipment at your site.

**OPTIONAL:** Choose a cool down activity *(see page 36 or make up your own)* to complete after the outdoor play activities, to allow children to ‘unwind’ ready for quieter/ indoor activities.
** Fundamental Movement Skills **

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**Musical ‘Rock’ Statues**

**Resources needed:**
Large space for dancing, running, etc. CD player and music that the children are familiar with

**Instructions:**
Set up a suitable area for the children so they have adequate room to complete each skill without running into each other. Demonstrate each skill and the children may need to practise each skill a number of times prior to incorporating the music. Ask children to move around the space to the music using a skill that the carer calls out (e.g. jumping like a kangaroo or galloping like a horse). When the music stops, the children must freeze on the spot like a solid statue. When the music starts they may move around again. Make this activity non-competitive so that all children remain in the game. Ask each child, in turn, to pick the movements that the other children should copy. To make it easier, use music with a slower beat and ask the children to do the actions slowly. To make it harder, ask the children to change direction when doing the locomotor skills e.g. jumping forwards, then sideways etc.

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**Pebble Drop**

**Resources needed:**
Small (preferably smooth) pebbles or rocks (marbles can be used as an alternative) and containers of various heights and widths, and their lids (e.g.: shoe boxes, lunch boxes, takeaway containers and jars)

**Instructions:**
Arrange 10-20 pebbles on the floor in front of a container. Instruct the children to pick marbles up off the floor whilst standing, using their toes. Each child is to place the pebble in the container nearby, using their toes, whilst balancing on their other foot. To begin with, children can stand on a flat surface and use wider and lower containers (e.g.: shoebox lid).

If needed position the activity near a wall for the child to lean against if they lose balance. To increase the difficulty use higher containers (e.g.: shoe box) and smaller containers (jar lid), position the activity in the middle of the area/room where the child has nowhere to lean on, or have child stand on a softer surface such as a mat or cushion.

**Rolling Stones**

**Resources needed:**
Gym mats and foam wedge

**Instructions:**
This activity is designed to allow children to practice rolling on their side. Set up the wedge at the edge of the gym mat. Line the children up behind the wedge and taking turns, they can lie on the wedge and roll down onto the gym mat. It is useful for the leader to instruct the children to roll straight on to the mat to help ensure the child rolls down and doesn’t slide down the wedge.

**Variations:**
- Lay a rope in a straight line along the length of some gym mats. Place beanbags alongside the rope at about the halfway point. Put a bucket at one end of the rope and line the children up at the other end. The children then roll along the rope, collecting a beanbag on their way and putting it in the bucket at the end.
- Encourage the children to take their time and to feel for the rope on their tummies. Clear a large space for children to spread out and lay down. Play music during this activity. Instruct the children to roll around to the music and stop when the music stops. Encourage the children to roll in different directions.

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**Kick the Boulder**

**Resources needed:**
Cones or any type of markers for goals and one large bouncy ball (boulder) per child.

**Instructions:**
Provide each child with a “boulder”. Demonstrate how to kick the ball, making sure the non-kicking foot is placed even with, or slightly behind the ball. Kick the ball with the shoelace area or the toe and instruct the child to kick as hard as they can. The children could initially kick their balls against a wall several times to practise the skill.

Then in pairs ask the children to kick the ball to each other over a distance of approximately two metres. Set up one set of cones or markers per pair as goals. In pairs have the children take turns running up and kicking the ball at the goal, with the second child positioned about one metre behind the goal to retrieve the ball. Then swap over and repeat as many times as you like. To increase or decrease the difficulty, vary the distance of the start line from the goal or the width of the goal. To begin with ask the children to stand closer together when kicking to each other. As the children improve move the start line so they have to kick the ball at the goal on a 45 degree angle. Or get them to kick a ball at a set of skittles and try to knock them down.

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**Rolling Rock Soccer**

**Resources needed:**
Cones or markers and large ball (soccer ball)

**Instructions:**
Set up the markers, side by side about 2 metres apart. Have the child stand between the markers and stand opposite them about 3 metres away. Instruct the child to try and stop the ball with their hands from going in the goals. Gently roll the ball into the goals whilst the child attempts to protect the goal by catching the ball. To increase the difficulty roll the ball from further away, use a smaller ball or roll the ball from different directions. Children could also do this in pairs.

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**References:**
Story Time and Other Activities

- Read the story book “Stanley’s Stick” to the children. Use the illustrations and storyline as a discussion point. Relate this back to the exploration or play activities children have participated in.
- Set up other activities inside that relate to the learning opportunities presented outside, for example sorting boxes, active/ outdoor play themed books and puzzles, colouring-in sheets, etc. (see page 34 for more ideas or make up your own).
- “What I explored this week...” sheets (see Appendix 3) are a way to record the activities children have tried during the program and what they thought of them. Guide each child to complete their sheet by drawing, painting, pasting objects or photos of what they recall from that week’s session. Scribe for them a description of the picture or their thoughts and comments about the activity. Record something the child learnt to do or really enjoyed doing. To encourage parents to provide outdoor play opportunities for their child, send these sheets home at the end of each week and ask families to complete the home challenges. Request that they return completed home challenges to display at your centre or use as part of a prize draw or competition.

Preparation and Materials needed:

- Prior to the session(s) print and gather any resources required for that week’s activities.
- Gather samples or pictures of stones and sticks

You will need:

- Children’s story book Stanley’s Stick by John Hegley (supplied by OPAL)
- “What I explored this week...” sheets (see Appendix 3) and any other resources (e.g.: pictures, glue, pencils) needed for children to complete these.
- Any resources and equipment needed for the Exploring, Active Outdoor Play and other activities. E.g.: variety of different stones and sticks for sorting activities and literacy and numeracy activities; art and craft supplies and natural elements to create pet and decorative rocks; branches and twigs for cubbies; things to make imaginary homes; stepping stones; CD player and music; small pebbles and containers of various heights and widths; cones; large balls; a long straight stick (and any other equipment) for active outdoor play activities.
Session 4: Trees and Plants

Discussion
Introduce the natural element and recap from the previous week. Repeated exposure will help to reinforce what children have learnt. Discuss the natural element for this week and ask questions about children’s knowledge, understanding and previous experiences. Have samples or pictures to pass around for children to look at and touch. Discussion points:

- What can you see in this picture? What are trees and plants?
  Possible answers: they grow, they are outside, they have leaves, etc...

- Where do we find them?
  Possible answers: outside, in pots, in the garden, at my house, in the park, etc...

- What do they look like?
  Possible answers: big, small, brown, green, stretched out, round, bent/hanging over, etc...

- What do they feel like? Smell like?
  Possible answers: leaves are smooth, bark is rough, etc...

- What are the different parts of a tree or plant?
  Possible answers: roots, stem, trunk, bark, branches, leaves, fruit, seeds, flower, etc...

- Talk about how different seasons can effect leaves
  Prompts: leaves change colour in autumn, fall off trees in winter, some stay green, etc...

- What are they used for?
  Possible answers: wood comes from trees and can be used to build things, plants and trees can grow food, provide shelter, homes for animals, etc...

Discuss the importance of caring for the environment, how our actions affect the environment, why the natural environment is important (e.g.: why we shouldn’t disturb rocks or bark (they are homes for bugs), importance or recycling, not littering, etc). Link to the things you already do at your centre to help look after the environment (e.g.: composting food scraps, rainwater tank, recycling, etc).

Exploring activities
Aim to choose at least two different activities from below or come up with your own, ensuring there is a variety of activities to allow for multiple play opportunities. Allow children enough time to engage with each of these activities and explore the sticks and stones at their own pace. Remind the children about the appropriate ways to play with sticks and stones. As they are playing, discuss their experiences and encourage them to try new things. (Prompts: names of things they are playing with, colours and shapes, different smells, texture (e.g. how they feel), etc.)

- Take the children outside to explore: what’s growing at your centre- look at all the different things growing (e.g.: grass, different trees, bushes, shrubs, veggies, flowers). Ask the children if they can name them. Use magnifying glasses to look up close or a camera to take photos of what you see.
- Use pine needles/branch or sticks as a paint brush. Or different types of branches to create different effects.
- Decorate pine cones of varying shapes and sizes. Paint them different colours or use glitter.
Create leaf art: leaf rubbings with different size and shaped leaves and crayons or coloured pencils; leaf prints using paint and stamping onto paper; leaf window hangings by pressing leaves between sheets of clear contact; leaf mobiles, attach leaves to wool and sticks and hang from ceiling; or make a leaf collage, using leaves the children have collected from the yard.

Plant veggies or trees in your garden or plant flowers/herbs into pots decorated by the children.

Create bookmarks by pressing flowers and leaves onto cardboard and covering in clear contact.

Use different sizes and shapes of scrap wood for art pieces or construction activities.


Use a vase of flowers or a plant as a model for children to create still life art with paint or crayons.

Arrange a forest by collecting samples from the yard such as rocks, leaves, flowers, pine needles, etc. Place a ball of play dough in a small pie tin or other small container and flatten it out. Then arrange the ‘forest’ by poking the samples into the play dough so they stand up. Place some rocks all around the edge of the tin. Children can take their mini forests home - they make a great centrepiece to decorate a table.

Explore the different parts and lifecycles of plants. Explore seeds, roots, stems, leaves, fruit and flowers. Vegetables and fruit make great props, for example you could cut open a pumpkin and look at the seeds or bring in an untrimmed carrot or beetroot and look at how it grows, etc.

**Active Outdoor Play**

OPTIONAL: Choose a warm up activity (*see page 35 or make up your own*) to complete before commencing the active outdoor play activities.

Choose 1-3 active outdoor play activities from Table.4 (or make up your own), ensuring you use a range of activities that enable development of Fundamental Movement Skills. Choose activities suitable for your children based on their abilities and the available time, space/area and equipment at your site.

OPTIONAL: Choose a cool down activity (*see page 36 or make up your own*) to complete after the outdoor play activities, to allow children to ‘unwind’ ready for quieter/ indoor activities.
**Table 4**

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<td>such as catching, throwing, kicking, striking, underarm roll and striking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Touch and Go</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resources needed:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large space for moving around</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Position the children in the middle of the yard. Call out various objects in the environment (e.g.: tree, fence, sandpit, etc.) and have the children run to touch the various objects that are called out. With a large group modify so that not too many children are running at once (e.g.: call out individual children’s names, split the group into by girls and boys, or by the colour of their clothes, etc.) and ask the other children to march on the spot while they wait their turn. As you progress, change the task the children perform – running, jumping, run while they kick their bottoms, run on toes, run and clap or use sacks or old pillow case to jump in.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resources needed:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Large space for moving around CD player and music</td>
<td>Soft balls or pinecones (to bowl with) and skittles (can use plastic bottles)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Position children so each child has enough space and won’t bump into other children. While the music is playing, instruct the children to dance and move around – they could pretend they are a leaf blowing in breeze. When the music stops children must freeze like a bid solid tree with arms outstretched like branches and roots (feet) firmly planted to the ground.</td>
<td>Have children to gradually move onto a higher platform when they feel comfortable.</td>
<td>Mark a starting line for children to stand behind. Arrange the skittles about two metres from the start. Instruct the children to bowl the ball or pinecone underarm towards the skittles, trying to knock them all over. To increase the difficulty move the starting line further away or use a smaller bowl.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resources needed:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sacks or old pillowcases, markers or cones</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Give a sack to each child and instruct them to bounce along like a kangaroo. Ask them to position their feet in the bottom corners of the sack and hold on tightly at the top of the sack. Instruct them to bounce to the end marker and back again. This could also be done as a relay with two lines of children, each taking in turn and passing the sack to the next child in the line. Variation: place an object (a beanbag, a leaf, etc.) halfway along the track for them to collect as they’re bouncing along.</td>
<td>Have children to gradually move onto a higher platform when they feel comfortable.</td>
<td>Mark a starting line for children to stand behind. Arrange the skittles about two metres from the start. Instruct the children to bowl the ball or pinecone underarm towards the skittles, trying to knock them all over. To increase the difficulty move the starting line further away or use a smaller bowl.</td>
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<td><strong>Aeroplane Catch</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Resources needed:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instruction:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instruction:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A medium sized ball and gym/foam mats</td>
<td>Ask the child to lie flat on their stomach with their legs straight out behind them. Lie on your stomach in the same position about 1 metre away. Ask the child to lift their neck, shoulders and arms off the ground (10-20cm), then get them to place their feet together and raise their legs (below the knees) in the same way (or start with upper body off the floor and legs flat on the ground if too difficult). Position yourself similarly, push the ball toward the child and ask them to catch it and roll it back to you. Increase or decrease your distance to vary the difficulty.</td>
<td>Suspend a line of string or wool between two posts. Then tie on a piece of string to the end of each ‘berry’ and hang them along the suspended line. Make sure they hang at child waist level. Ensure there is enough space between each balloon for each child to swing and hit the balloon safely. The idea is to pretend they are collecting berries from a tree by knocking them down with their bats. Demonstrate the skill first. Ask the children to take a side-on stance and shift their weight from the front foot to the back foot and back again. Ask the children to practise striking at the balloons with their bats. You could change the berries to apples and incorporate the song ‘Five little apples on a tree’: Five little apples hanging on a tree Five little apples smiling down at me I climbed up high as high as I could Grabbed one apple, hmmm was it good. The other children could act out climbing movements while saying the poem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References:**

**Story Time and Other Activities**

- Read the story book “The Tiny Seed” to the children. Use the illustrations and storyline as a discussion point. Relate this back to the exploration or play activities children have participated in.

- Set up other activities inside that relate to the learning opportunities presented outside, for example sorting boxes, active/outdoor play themed books and puzzles, colouring-in sheets, etc. *(see page 34 for more ideas or make up your own)*.

- “What I explored this week…” sheets *(see Appendix 3)* are a way to record the activities children have tried during the program and what they thought of them. Guide each child to complete their sheet by drawing, painting, pasting objects or photos of what they recall from that week’s session. Scribe for them a description of the picture or their thoughts and comments about the activity. Record something the child learnt to do or really enjoyed doing. To encourage parents to provide outdoor play opportunities for their child, send these sheets home at the end of each week and ask families to complete the home challenges. Request that they return completed home challenges to display at your centre or use as part of a prize draw or competition.

**Preparation and Materials needed:**

- Prior to the session(s) print and gather any resources required for that week’s activities.

- Gather samples, models or pictures of trees and plants

**You will need:**

- Children’s story book *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle (supplied by OPAL)

- “What I explored this week…” sheets *(see Appendix 3)* and any other resources (e.g.: pictures, glue, pencils) needed for children to complete these.

- Any resources and equipment needed for the Exploring, Active Outdoor Play and other activities. E.g.: pine needles, branches, pine cones, different size and shaped leaves, flowers; art and craft supplies; seedlings and pots if doing plantings; logs (if available) or balance beams of different heights; soft balls or pinecones, skittles (can use plastic bottles); balloons, string or wool, soft bat; blue sheet for the creek and six cardboard logs; (and any other equipment) for active outdoor play activities.
Session 5: Living Creatures

Discussion
Introduce the natural element and recap from the previous week. Repeated exposure will help to reinforce what children have learnt. Discuss the natural element for this week and ask questions about children’s knowledge, understanding and previous experiences. Have samples or pictures to pass around for children to look at and touch. Discussion points:

- What can you see in this picture? What are living creatures? (Focus the conversation on native animals, particularly those found locally)
  Possible answers: things that are alive, move around, eat, drink, sleep, have a family...

- Where do we find them? Where do they live? (including where the children might have seen them)
  Possible answers: outside, in trees, under rocks, in water, parks, back yard, etc...

- What are all the different kinds you can think of? (Talk about the different characteristics or each)
  Possible answers: animals (possums, echidnas, kangaroos, birds (magpies, crows, pigeons), bugs, insects, butterflies, spiders, bees, etc...

- Discuss the importance of caring for the environment, how our actions affect the environment, why the natural environment is important (e.g.: why we shouldn’t harm living creatures and why we should respect their homes). Link to the things you already do at your centre to help look after the environment (e.g.: composting food scraps, recycling, planting flowers for bees, etc).

Exploring activities
Aim to choose at least two different activities from below or come up with your own, ensuring there is a variety of activities to allow for multiple play opportunities. Allow children enough time to engage with each of these activities and explore the different living creatures that can be found at the centre. As they are exploring, discuss their experiences.

- Discover which bugs are living at your centre. Use a magnifying glass or a bug catcher to get a closer look. Be careful not to burn the creature because magnifying glasses can create a lot of heat in the sun! Look at the different colours, sizes and body parts (count the number of legs, does it have wings, does it have feelers, etc.) You can take photos, do paintings or drawings of the living creatures you see or create your own using different craft materials.

- Play ‘animal detectives’ and discover: who chews a leaf, who’s droppings are these, who left these footprints, who lives in this hole/nest, etc. Look at the different places they live or like to hide.

- Bring in some living creatures for children to observe, for example: an ant farm, silk worms, tadpoles, or chicken eggs (see page 47 for more information). Or look for worms in the garden or worm farm if available (or you could build one and get the children to help, visit www.yates.com.au/kids-gardening/in-the-garden/build-a-worm-farm-to-find-out-how). Talk about what worms do and why they are important for the garden.

- Listen for bird sounds - sit or lay down on the ground in the yard. Ask the children if they know whose making which sounds. You could also use binoculars and try to find the birds in the trees.
Encourage birds to come into your yard with a bird feeder. Tie some wire or twine to the stem of a pine cone. Spread peanut butter all over it, then roll the pine cone in bird seed (be sure to use one appropriate for native birds). Hand it up outside and watch for birds. Or create a bird bath using old buckets, flower pots or saucepan lids; you might like to decorate the outside with some paint. Fill it with water (make sure you change this every couple of days to keep it fresh) and watch for birds.

Build a viewing ‘hut’ out of cardboard boxes for children to bird watch from. They can use play binoculars and pretend they are zoologists/bird scientists. Make your own binoculars out of cardboard rolls attached to some string for a neck strap. Using coloured cellophane over the ends will create different effects.

Sing action songs such as “We’re going on a bear hunt.” Change the words to reflect the Australian landscape and native animals e.g.: crocodile hunt. Or sing “Bugs & Beetles” using props to act out (see Appendix 10: Songs).

Research the lifecycles of different living creatures such as butterflies, ants or frogs. Or find out how living creatures build their homes or make things people use (e.g.: how birds build nests or how bees make honey).

Discover which native animals and birds live in South Australia or in the local area. How many different kinds are there? Which ones have the children seen? (For information on native animals and birds visit the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management website www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/plants-and-animals/native-plants-animals-and-biodiversity/native-animals).

Active Outdoor Play

OPTIONAL: Choose a warm up activity (see page 35 or make up your own) to complete before commencing the active outdoor play activities.

Choose 1-3 active outdoor play activities from Table.5 (or make up your own), ensuring you use a range of activities that enable development of Fundamental Movement Skills. Choose activities suitable for your children based on their abilities and the available time, space/area and equipment at your site.

OPTIONAL: Choose a cool down activity (see page 36 or make up your own) to complete after the outdoor play activities, to allow children to ‘unwind’ ready for quieter/ indoor activities.
Follow the leader

**Resources needed:**
Large space for moving around

**Instructions:**
Each child takes in turn to be the leader, acting out a different animal or creature (e.g.: bounce along like a kangaroo, fly like a magpie, crawl around like a beetle). Encourage the children to make the different sounds each of the animals make as well.

Hopping Fun

**Resources needed:**
Large space for moving around, circle mats/carpet squares or masking tape

**Instructions:**
Set up in a line three single mats and three double mats (side by side) for every child participating. Set up this line of mats in a circular fashion so that when a child finishes one set of 3 single hops and 3 double hops, they are at the next, to start the next set. Demonstrate hopping on one leg (single) and two legs (double) and ask the children to copy. Then use the line of mats and demonstrate hopping from mat to mat, using two legs (jumping) when you reach the double mats. You can incorporate the following song:

**Hop, hop, hop if you feel you want to.**

Hop, hop, hop if you feel you can.

Hop, hop, hop if you feel you want to Hop, hop, hop if you feel you can.

Change the word to “jump” and repeat the activity. To start, children may jump from two feet and land on one foot or hop hand in hand with another child. To increase the difficulty, move the mats further apart or ask the children to hop in different directions.

Snail Hopscotch

**Resources needed:**
Chalk to draw snail hopscotch (see diagram in bottom right corner) and bean bags or stones

**Instructions:**
The children are to hop in each section of the snail until they reach the centre. Then reverse and hop back to the beginning of the snail. Once back at the beginning, the child hops out, then claims a section of the snail by placing a bean bag in it. Only the ‘owner’ of can step in this section (can be used as a rest stop). Others must jump over this space. The aim to claim as many spaces as possible.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locomotor Skills</th>
<th>Fundamental Movement Skills</th>
<th>Balance Skills</th>
<th>Ball Skills</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>such as running, jumping, hopping, galloping, skipping and leaping</td>
<td>movements where body remains in place, but moves around its horizontal and vertical axes</td>
<td>such as catching, throwing, kicking, striking, underarm roll and striking</td>
<td></td>
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Gone Fishing

**Resources needed:**
Fishing rod (attach a magnet to a length of string and tie this to a twig/pencil/piece of dowel), magnetic fish (attach a magnet to cardboard cut-outs), blue sheet for the lake, a boat - wobble board (or substitute with a soft pillow or couch cushion) and a bucket.

**Instructions:**
Spread out the blue sheet, scatter the fish around and position the ‘boat’ in the centre. Instruct the child to stand on the wobble board (creating the feel of waves) and have them try and catch as many fish as they can from the lake. The child is to wind up the fish and place them in the bucket. Count how many fish they can catch. To begin, scatter the fish close to the wobble board. Gradually scatter the fish further out, and all around the wobble board (sideways and behind).

Bird’s egg and spoon race

**Resources needed:**
Spoons, birds eggs (use plastic eggs or golf balls) and markers.

**Instructions:**
Arrange all of the children at a start line with an egg and a spoon each. Instruct them to place the egg on their spoon and then place their other arm behind their back. When you say go, the children will race - as fast as they can without the egg rolling off the spoon - to the finish line. If the egg falls, the child must return to the starting line.

Body Part Balance Challenge

**Instructions:**
Position children so each child has enough space to move and won’t bump into other children. Call out different body parts to for the children to balance on. Begin with the simpler activities and gradually move to challenging balance activities. Instruct the children to balance on: 2 feet; 2 feet and 1 hand; 1 foot; 1foot and 2 hands; 1 foot and 1 hand; 2 knees; 2 knees and 2 hands; 1 knee and 2 hands; 2 knees and 2 elbows; 2 knees and 1 elbow; 2 knees, 2 hands and your head; 2 knees and your head; bottom and 2 hands (keep feet off the floor); bottom and 1 hand (keep feet off the floor); bottom only. Notice that there may be more than one way to do a balancing activity. Encourage the children to be creative as they do the activities.

Fly Birdy Fly

**Resources needed:**
Balloons (blown up and decorated as different birds)

**Instructions:**
Position the children in one big circle or several smaller circles. Instruct the children to keep the balloon birds flying by tapping the balloons with their hands and other body parts to keep them in the air. To increase the difficulty call out body parts that children are can only use until you change it or gradually add more balloon birds. You could play music while doing this activity.

Collecting Bugs

**Resources needed:**
Plastic toy bugs, buckets

**Instructions:**
Instruct the children stand behind the start line. To collect the bugs, they need to underarm throw them and aim to get them into a bucket. To increase the difficulty, move the bucket further away from the start line.

Bug Tunnel Ball

**Resources needed:**
Five small balls and four or five bug tunnels made from cut out cardboard boxes

**Instructions:**
Set up several tunnels made from cardboard boxes. Demonstrate underarm rolling. In pairs, ask the children to stand on either side of the tunnel, then kneel down and roll the ball through the tunnel to their partner. The partner rolls the balls back. Emphasise bringing the arm back, swinging and rolling gently and low so the ball doesn’t bounce. When children can do the kneedled rolling, progress the activity by asking them to stand and roll the ball underarm through the tunnel. Instruct them to step, bend down low, swing the arm from the back to the front (close to body) and release the ball.

References:

> Barilla, D and Pelliccia, N 2010, Gross Motor...not just rolling around, A Gross Motor Resource to Help Parents Prepare their Children for School.
Story Time and Other Activities

Read the story book “Yucky Worms” to the children. Use the illustrations and storyline as a discussion point. Relate this back to the exploration or play activities children have participated in.

Set up other activities inside that relate to the learning opportunities presented outside, for example sorting boxes, active/outdoor play themed books and puzzles, colouring-in sheets, etc. (see page 34 for more ideas or make up your own).

“What I explored this week…” sheets (see Appendix 3) are a way to record the activities children have tried during the program and what they thought of them. Guide each child to complete their sheet by drawing, painting, pasting objects or photos of what they recall from that week’s session. Scribe for them a description of the picture or their thoughts and comments about the activity. Record something the child learnt to do or really enjoyed doing. To encourage parents to provide outdoor play opportunities for their child, send these sheets home at the end of each week and ask families to complete the home challenges. Request that they return completed home challenges to display at your centre or use as part of a prize draw or competition.

Preparation and Materials needed:

Prior to the session(s) print and gather any resources required for that week’s activities.

Gather samples or pictures of living things

You will need:

Children’s story book Yucky Worms by Vivian French (supplied by OPAL)

“What I explored this week…” sheets (see Appendix 3) and any other resources (e.g.: pictures, glue, pencils) needed for children to complete these.

Any resources and equipment needed for the Exploring, Active Outdoor Play and other activities. E.g.: magnifying glasses, bug catchers; pine cone, peanut butter or empty plant pots; art and craft supplies; spoons, plastic eggs or golf balls and markers; equipment for fishing activity and wobble board; balloons; plastic toy bugs, buckets; small balls and tunnels; (and any other equipment) for active outdoor play activities.
Other activities

These activities are some additional ideas and could be implemented at any stage of the program and adapted as needed.

- Colouring-in and activity sheets. Download these from [www.naturedetectives.org.uk/download](http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk/download) or use the OPAL Life Looks Brighter Outside colouring-in sheet *(see Appendix 4).*
- Nature’s mystery bag - collect different types of leaves, grass, twigs and foliage that will fit in a sack. Have kids reach their hands inside (without looking), hold onto something and try to guess what it is. Ask the children to describe the texture, shape and size as they try to guess.
- Create music and explore rhythm using different natural elements, for example: tapping rocks together; using twigs as drumsticks; make chimes or a xylophone using glasses with different volumes of water in them; make a flute out of bamboo, make your own shakers (seeds, sand or rocks in a jar/plastic container), or “rain stick” (rice in a cylinder), etc.
- Take the children for a walk around the neighbourhood or to visit a local park. Talk about all the different things they see and record these as a painting or drawing.
- Go on a nature walk or nature scavenger hunt and give children a bag to collect nature items in. You could use a list of things to collect or let them choose their own items. When you get back to your centre have a look at what was collected (you could use these for art or a sorting activity).
- Collect a range of natural ‘objects’ for children to explore with all their senses – smell flowers, taste fruit, feel pinecones, hear crunch of leaves, look at different shaped rocks, etc.
- Create kites for children to play with outside and take home. There are lots of templates to make different types of kites on the internet, some links have been provided *(see page 46).* A simple kite can be made by tying string to a plastic bag. The kite ‘flies’ as the child runs along. Use ribbons or streamers to decorate the kites.
- Create sorting boxes or trays using a variety of sticks, leaves, feathers, gumnuts, seeds, pinecones, rocks, or whatever you can find!
- Create a maze or treasure hunt for children to navigate through using verbal clues, cue cards, hidden pictures or a simple map.
- Host a Teddy Bears Picnic and invite children’s teddies to Kindy/Childcare.
- Have ‘outdoor play’ themed books and puzzles on the shelves for children to freely access.
- Create nature inspired arts and crafts – paintings, pastings, drawings, stencils, colouring-in sheets, ‘nature necklace’, gumnut or pinecone creatures, rock pets etc.
- Create a ‘nature journal’. Take photographs of children participating in the activities and throughout the program to put into the journal. Also allow each of the children to choose something to take a photo of (e.g.: a flower, tree, a sandcastle they’ve built, etc.) and include a sentence or two describing it. Put these all together in a booklet or folder. You could also attach mementos, such as: leaves, grass, flowers, gum nuts, etc. Put the completed journal on display for families to look through.
- Identify different things in nature that are living or non-living. Talk about whether they need to eat, need water and whether they grow. Use samples of nature, pictures, figurines or magnets and sort them into a graph of living or non-living.
Go for a ‘listening walk’, give children a checklist to mark of all the sounds they hear during the walk, e.g.: a car, a bird, wind through the trees, a dripping tap, a dog bark, a police or ambulance siren, etc. (‘The Listening Walk’ by Paul Showers, is available from [www.fishpond.com.au](http://www.fishpond.com.au))

Set up an interactive exploration or sensory table for children to explore natural elements. An example can be found here: [theimaginationtree.com/2013/05/nature-exploration-table.html](http://theimaginationtree.com/2013/05/nature-exploration-table.html)

Provide magnifying glasses, rulers, scales or other tools that inspire exploration and experimentation.

Warm up activities

- **If You’re Happy and You Know It** – warm up activity (using action song) that prepares the body for movement. Position the children so that they have adequate room to move without hitting or bumping into each other and so that they can see the facilitator, whose actions they will copy as they are singing along. As the child copies your actions watch to ensure they bend their knees when they squat and that they really stretch up.

- **Heads, Shoulders Knees and Toes** – movement activity to warms up the body and increases body and movement awareness, requires no equipment. The song can accompany the activity if available. Make sure you allow children the time to finish each movement before moving to the next action.

- **Traffic lights** – walking activity to warm up the body. Position the children so they can see the facilitator. Hold up coloured traffic light signs (optional) and give verbal instructions for the children to move around (or follow a predetermined path). Ask the children to walk on ‘green’, jump to a stop on ‘red’ and march on the spot for ‘yellow’. Variations include moving sideways, backwards, marching with eyes closed, giant steps, fairy steps, tip toes, over obstacles (cushions, etc.), on bumpy/uneven surfaces or walking like different animals.

You could also incorporate the Let’s Go Walking Song.

*Let’s go walking, walking, walking
Let’s go walking far, far way
Let’s walk back again, back again, back again.
Let’s walk back again, back the same way.*

- **Running and Jumping** – running on the spot and jumping to warm up the body and get the heart pumping. The facilitator stands at front of the group and demonstrates the actions, asking the children to: run on tip-toes on the spot; run very fast on the spot; run very slow on the spot; run on the spot while turning around, etc. As a group, ask the children to jump like the following animals: frog jump – from squatting position; bunny hop – feet together and using hands as ears; kangaroo hop – positioning hands like a roo. Ensure the children are taking off with two feet, bending their knees and looking ahead, and encourage children to land on two feet.
Cool down activities

- **Simon Says** – a calming activity at the end of an energetic session. Child copies verbal and visual instructions. The facilitator instructs the child to copy the action but only when Simon says. Start with larger actions, run on the spot, jump on the spot, and gradually make the movements smaller and more relaxed. Breathe in and stretch. Make sure you give each child ample time to perform the action demonstrated.

- **Animal Cool-Down Activity** (with an action song) – to bring the session to a close and prepare the children for quieter activities. Position children so each child has adequate personal space and cannot touch other children. Stand in full view of all children so they can copy your actions. Instruct children to copy your actions as you sing the song:

  *The crocodile is snapping, snapping, snapping, the crocodile is snapping just like this* (arms out in front at shoulder height and a gentle snap together);
  *The emu is running, running, running, the emu is running just like this* (running on the spot with knees bent);
  *The kangaroo is jumping, jumping, jumping; the kangaroo is jumping just like this* (jumping on the spot with knees bent);
  *The cockatoo is flapping, flapping, flapping; the cockatoo is flapping just like this* (arms out and rotate upward to shoulder height).

Repeat this twice. Gradually decrease the number and speed of each movement. The last activity will involve slow and relaxing movements: the children will stretch up tall; make big arm circles (gradually getting smaller); reach down and touch their toes; slowly breathe in and out; curl up small. Ensure children are quiet, listening and looking at the carer who demonstrates each action to the children before singing the song. Ensure each child is able to perform the movement skill before moving on to the next. Remind the children how to slowly breathe in and out before combining this with the movement.

- **Cool-Down and Stretching** – activities that focus on slow movements and stretching, allowing the heart rate to return to normal after vigorous activity. Use full body stretches to work on improved flexibility. Use the following activities to gradually slow down movement and provide a period of relaxation. Remind the children to take long, slow, deep breaths as they carry out the movements. Why not incorporate activities that relate to the nature focus for that week – e.g.: splashing in pretend puddles, pretending to swim (freestyle arm actions) floating like a leaf or stretching up to the sky like a tree, etc.

  - **Side Arm Circles**: while marching on the spot, raise arms out from the sides of the body to shoulder height. Now slowly circle arms forward 8 – 10 times and backward 8 – 10 times.
  - **Circles in the Sky**: while marching on the spot, children raise arms overhead. Children pretend they are drawing circles in the sky. Children keep arms overhead and draw a variety of shapes.
  - **Climb the Ladder**: children stand with feet slightly apart. Move arms and legs up and down as if climbing a ladder to the sky. Climb a ladder for 20 – 30 steps.
• On-the-Spot Follow the Leader: choose a leader to lead some slow, cool-down movements -  
  Walk on the spot, moving arms in a gentle swinging motion. Touch shoulders with hands, then reach up over head. Repeat five times.  
  Skip slowly on the spot.  
  Skip side to side.  
  Jump or hop on the spot.  

• Slow March: march slowly on the spot, keeping knees low and gently swinging arms for 15 counts.

• Skating on the Spot: while standing on the spot, imitate a skating motion by extending the right then left leg away from the body at a back/side angle. Swing the arms. Continue this skating motion for 15 – 20 counts.

• Deep Breaths and Hug: slowly take a deep breath in through the nose and out through the mouth. Repeat three times. Wrap arms around shoulders and give self a big hug and a pat on the back.

• Low Kicks: a variation of walking on the spot, with children alternating their feet in low forward kicks. Slowly swing arms by sides.

• Tree in the Wind: stand with both arms overhead, feet placed wide apart, and knees slightly bent. Gently wave arms from side to side and forward like a tree in the wind.

• Slow Leak: stand, arms circled over their heads, pretending to be a great big balloon. Pretend there is a hole in the balloon and the air is slowly leaking out. Move slowly downward to the floor, until the balloon has no more air.

• Digging in Your Heels: stand with one foot forward, pressing heel into the floor and raising toes up. Continue this movement while alternating feet, swinging arms in a strolling movement.

• Action Stories: tell a story with actions that the children can do. Some theme suggestions are: rainstorm coming and then leaving, with fingers and hands tapping the floor in beat to the intensity of the rain; walk through the forest, listening to the birds and the wind in the trees; or visit to a planet in outer space, exploring new terrain.

• Strolling on the Spot: begin by standing on the spot. Stroll one step forward, then one step back, one step forward, then one step back gently swinging arms by sides. Do not raise arms above waist. Continue “strolling” on the spot for 20 – 30 counts.

• Bubble Game: children pretend to be a bubble. Children expand like a bubble blowing up, then “pop”, the bubble breaks!

• Body Shake: gently shake one arm, the other, then both. Shake one leg, the other, both, head, hips, whole body.
Obstacle Courses

You might like to set up an obstacle course for any or all of the weeks. Each obstacle could be decorated to represent the natural elements you are focusing on that week (e.g.: jumping over a creek, balancing on a log, climbing a sand hill). You will need a large area to set up a variety of equipment.

Set out an obstacle course with different equipment that requires a range of movements, e.g.: slide, tunnels or chairs, climbing trestle with balance board, balance beam, blocks for stepping up and down, hurdles or obstacles for stepping or jumping over, soft surfaces for walking on, slopes to walk/roll down. Ideally the equipment you set out should encourage: stepping up and down; in and out; stepping/jumping over; climbing up and climbing over; walking along a narrow board; and climbing through a tunnel or barrel.

Be sure to demonstrate each activity of the course to the children before they attempt them. You should set the course with as many or as few obstacles that will allow you to adequately supervise all the children in the group. Make sure children hold on when climbing. Stand close, offer encouragement and offer a supporting hand to children who require assistance. Have children start on different stations of the course. Once they complete one station move onto the next.

References:
> Barilla, D and Pelliccia, N 2010, Gross Motor...not just rolling around, A Gross Motor Resource to Help Parents Prepare their Children for School.
Making connections to the home environment

To connect with families around outdoor play and to help get this message home, parents need to first know that you are having a focus around this in your learning program. In addition, strategies need to be undertaken to help children transfer their important learning about active outdoor play and exploration to their family home environment. The following are some ideas that can help achieve these aims.

**Noticeboard and Displays**

One way to clearly advertise this is to set up a noticeboard where you can display the OPAL *Life Looks Brighter Outside* poster and highlight the focus for each week of the program. The noticeboard could also have a sheet that encourages children and families to write about or draw their experiences of spending time at a local park or playground or something they explored together, to share with others. It is also a great idea to take photos of outdoor activities each week and place these on the noticeboard. Use different natural elements (leaves, twigs, flowers, rocks, etc.) or pictures of them to set up a display that demonstrates what is presented throughout the program. Display art pieces created with or by the children around the centre to showcase their learning’s. Also allow the children to take some pieces home.

**“What I explored this week...” sheets**

Use the “What I explored this week...” sheets (see Appendix 3) to communicate with parents the activities children have tried during the program and what they thought of them. After each session guide each child to complete their sheet by drawing painting, pasting objects or photos of what they recall from that week’s session. Scribe for them a description of the picture or their thoughts and comments about the activity. Record something the child learnt to do or really enjoyed doing.

To encourage parents to provide outdoor play opportunities for their child, these should be sent home at the end of each week and ask families to complete the home challenges. Request that they return completed home challenges to display at your centre or use as part of a prize draw or competition.

**Family Outdoor Challenge Sheet**

The Family Outdoor Challenge Sheet (see Appendix 6) includes a checklist of outdoor challenges for families to complete and can be another fun way to get families to actively engage in outdoor play. Once families have completed the list ask them to bring their sheets back to your centre and display these for other families to see and get inspired! Include any photos if families have some to share.

The Family Outdoor Challenge Sheet is similar to ‘51 things to do before you’re 12,’ which is a more comprehensive checklist of outdoor exploration ideas developed by Nature Play SA. Visit [www.natureplaysa.org.au/resources/2/51-things-to-do-before-youre-12](http://www.natureplaysa.org.au/resources/2/51-things-to-do-before-youre-12) to download a copy. Why not print this from the website and hand out to families for a longer term challenge? (For some things the children will need to wait until they are older to complete).
Competition

Create a competition to engage your families and get them active and spending time together outside. Whether it’s a fundraising raffle to win a picnic set, a nature photo competition or a race to visit 10 local playgrounds, choose something exciting that showcases to families how much fun outdoors can be. Why not use the Family Outdoor Challenge Sheet (see Appendix 6) or the Home Challenges (from the “What I explored this week...” sheets, see Appendix 3), and give a prize to the family who finishes first or completes the most challenges? Ask the OPAL team to assist you with prizes for families who complete the challenges!

Parent Picnic Event

As a finale, your site might like to consider inviting parents and families to attend a celebration event, where they can spend time together outdoors with their children and share a picnic snack or lunch. This can be an excellent opportunity to talk to them about physical activity and how to encourage being active outside at home or at local parks and playgrounds. You could set up a variety of activities which the children participated in throughout the program, for parents to engage in with their children. Supply a healthy lunch or ask parents to bring along a plate to share. (Contact the OPAL staff for more tips or ideas!)

OPAL newsletter inserts and brochures

Your local OPAL team will supply your site with newsletter inserts and parent brochures to send home with children which will help to reinforce the message to families about the importance of spending time outdoors, the benefits of being active and how much fun can be had spending time at local parks and playgrounds. You might also like to send home the ‘Tips to share with parents’ (see Appendix 5), which is a factsheet containing answers to some of the questions or concerns parents may raise with you.

Positive asking behaviours and conversation

By participating in the Outdoor Explorers program, children have the opportunity to learn new physical skills and to build their confidence to explore the outdoors in the safe, supportive environment of Kindy/Childcare. An ongoing but highly important challenge is to help children to transfer their learning from the education/care setting to the context of their family home environment and to continue to positively influence children’s physical activity and learning behaviours into the future.

If children discover during the program that they enjoy spending time outside doing a particular activity, they need to be able to communicate this to their parents/caregivers so opportunities are provided for them to replicate the activity, create new experiences and practice and fine-tune skills. For example: if during the program a child learns to hop, they need to feel confident and supported to continue practising this skill again at home. This is essential for children to experience sustained benefits once the program is completed. Research has shown that one important way this ‘transfer of learning’ can be achieved is by teaching children ‘positive asking behaviours’ e.g.: helping them learn how to ask for new or different experiences they have enjoyed at your centre, at home.
Some examples of positive asking behaviours which you could talk about with children that relate to outdoor exploration are:

‘Today I learnt to…………… and I liked it. Can we go outside so I can show you how I did it?’
‘Today we learnt about looking after living things. Can we make a home for ……….. to live in?’
‘Today we talked about going to the park and …………… Can I go to the park with you?’
‘Mum/Dad, could we please visit the playground because I like…….’
‘I liked listening to the sounds of the birds at Kindy. Can we please listen for birds at home?’

Outdoor Explorer family loan pack

Create a couple of family loan packs around the Life Looks Brighter Outside theme for children to borrow and take home for a couple of days. Include information and activities for children to complete together with their parent/s or caregiver/s. Packs could include an outdoor explorer ‘persona doll’ (soft toy like a monkey) that visits with families borrowing the pack to enjoy spending time outdoors with them; a diary for the persona doll for families to complete with pictures/story etc about the outdoor experiences engaging in with the persona doll during their visit; an outdoor themed story book for children to read (see page 48 for a list of possible books); and toys/equipment such as magnifying glass, bug catcher, frisbee or other sports equipment for families to play with or explore the outdoors.

Family Nature Club

Encourage the start up of a Family Nature Club, where a group of families meet regularly at a local park or outdoor space and engage in nature orientated activities (e.g.: go for a neighbourhood walk, go to the same or various local park(s), go bushwalking, etc). A Family Nature Club is organised by families, all with an interest in connecting children with nature. More information can be seen here www.natureplaysa.com.au.

Magic Harvest

The Magic Harvest program is about teaching families to grow their own fruit and vegetables at home. If your site has an edible garden, you might like to consider inviting families to attend workshops and show them the basics of how to set up their own veggie patch, using your garden to demonstrate. This is also a great opportunity to engage families, get them spending time together outside and also a chance to educate around healthy eating and lifestyles. If you are interested in getting involved with this program or would like more information please contact OPAL on cblacker@mid-murray.sa.gov.au
Tips for Active Play and Exploring the Outdoors

The focus of this guide is about encouraging children to engage in active play and to explore the outdoors, using their senses to build familiarity, confidence and to foster an appreciation of the natural environment and develop environmental awareness. These tips aim to help make outdoor exploration and physical activity opportunities easier to implement:

- Always implement sun safe practices as per your centre policy. Avoid undertaking outdoor activities in the hottest parts of the day and/or when the UV exposure is greatest. (More information on sun safety can be found at [www.cancersa.org.au/cut-my-risk/sunsmart-for-early-childhood-services](http://www.cancersa.org.au/cut-my-risk/sunsmart-for-early-childhood-services)).

- Dress appropriately for the season – wear a jacket in cooler weather, wear gumboots and raincoats in wet weather, wear lighter clothing in warmer weather, etc. Children should also wear appropriate footwear such as well-fitted sandals or joggers. Thongs are not suitable for active play as they don’t provide proper support for the feet.

- During the program it is expected that children’s clothing may get wet or excessively dirty - you might consider providing children with smocks to wear or asking parents/caregivers to send a spare set of clothing for children during the program, just in case! Plastic bags can also be helpful for putting wet clothes in or preventing wet kids from soaking car seats on their way home.

- Be mindful of potential risks associated with outdoor play - consider the appropriateness of each activity according to your centre’s policies, the age and developmental needs of your children and take steps to minimize or eliminate risks as needed.

- Talk to the children about appropriate behaviour and encourage and praise safe behaviour, for example: sticks are great for drawing patterns in the dirt or building pretend campfires but running with sticks can be dangerous. Encourage the children to come up with their own ‘rules’ and talk about consequences for inappropriate behaviour (e.g.: the child can no longer be involved in a particular activity). By involving children in the decision making, they are more likely to adhere to the rules and regulate behaviour of their peers.

- Consider the cultural and religious beliefs of the children and families surrounding engagement with the natural environment and outdoor play.

- Comfort and safety are important - when children feel safe and comfortable, they are more willing to take risks and participate in new experiences and challenge their physical abilities. Children should be participating in tasks and activities that match their skills and abilities.

- Make sure there is plenty of room and defined areas for different activities, e.g.: areas for running, jumping etc. are separate from those for exploration or scavenging.

- Always supervise activities that involve water.

- Make sure you use safe and age appropriate equipment. All equipment should be checked regularly for wear and tear.

- Children should be encouraged to drink plenty of water when they are being active or playing outdoors.

- When exploring living creatures, be respectful and minimise damage to natural habitats. Use common sense and be aware of risks of insect bites/stings and explain this to children. Provide safe and appropriate methods to observe living creatures (e.g.: bug catchers) and always supervise children. Remind the children to release living creatures once they’ve had a look.
During active play and outdoor exploration activities...

- Encourage children to explore the outdoor environment with their different senses in ways that are comfortable to them e.g. look, listen to, touch/feel, smell, so they can become familiar with the different natural elements.
- Encourage all children to ‘have a go’ when teaching them fundamental movement skills and active outdoor play activities, and encourage them to keep practising at Kindy/Childcare and at home.
- Allow the children to explore outdoors at their own pace but encourage them to “have a go” along the way. Children will often naturally want to be involved when they see their peers enjoying themselves.
- Use positive language and encouragement to support exploration and learning:
  - Use terms such as “exploration” or “adventure” to make the session/activities like an exciting expedition for the children.
  - If children don’t want to participate in an activity, tell them that they don’t have to but allow them to watch their peers engaging in the activity and encourage them to just have a try/ give it a go - they may surprise themselves by liking the activity after all!
  - Talk about feeling brave enough try new activities before automatically giving up.
  - Congratulate children who were brave enough to have a go - it is important that they tried it e.g. “Well done for being brave enough to try hopping”. Make sure this is balanced by giving encouragement to children that haven’t tried it e.g. “You may not feel brave enough to try it yet, but maybe on another day you will feel ready”.
- Consider giving awards/certificates at the end of the program to the children for their participation (see Appendix 7: Certificate of Participation).
- Consider keeping a record of the activities that the children participate in, so that this can be shared with their parents (see example in Appendix 3: “What I explored this week…” sheets).
- Teach children ‘positive asking behaviours’ e.g. help them learn how to ask their parents about doing the activities they have enjoyed or talked about at your centre, at home. This will assist children to transfer their learning about new experiences and give them confidence to try new activities in the context of their family home environment as well as continuing to positively influence children’s activity behaviours into the future.
- During exploration activities, talk to the children about what they are doing. Possible discussion points include:
  - Can they name the things they are playing with? What are the different parts?
  - Where do we find them? What are they used for?
  - What colour is it? What shape is it? Is it big or small?
  - What does it feel like? Is it rough, smooth, soft, cold, warm, lumpy, dry, wet?
  - Does it have a +smell? Does it make a noise?
  - Discuss caring for the environment so everyone can enjoy it.
Evaluation of the program

Evaluation is an important part of any program. It is used to see if the program has achieved the goals it set out to achieve, whether there are any improvements needed for the program, or whether it just did not work at all and why. To see if a program has worked there are usually two or three measurements taken: One at the beginning, one in the middle (optional) and one at the end. These are then compared to see if the goals have been achieved according to what changes have occurred.

An important part of the OPAL initiative is to make sure that any programs that we support are evaluated to determine whether they were successful or unsuccessful in helping children to eat well and be active. Even if the programs created do not work very well, it is still important to us to evaluate why this happened so that in the future it can be improved.

Please complete each of the child, parent and staff evaluation forms (see Appendix 8) and return these to OPAL staff within one month of program completion.

- **Child Evaluation**
  The evaluation component with the child is designed to occur at the end of each week and is more focussed on their enjoyment and participation in the activities (see Appendix 8).
  Include this data in the Staff Evaluation survey.

- **Parent/Caregiver Evaluation**
  The parent survey is designed to be administered verbally - ask parents/caregivers a few questions after the program is completed and record their responses on the tally sheet (see Appendix 8). This can be done when children are dropped off or picked up or alternatively at the Parent Picnic Event, if one is held. Include these numbers with the Staff Evaluation survey.

- **Staff Evaluation**
  The director of your centre is responsible for filling out the Staff Evaluation survey (see Appendix 8) in consultation with other staff. This is to be completed at the end of all the sessions (and Parent Picnic Event if held) and returned to OPAL staff within one month of program completion.
OPAL Partnership

OPAL would like to support early childhood settings to run the ‘Outdoor Explorers’ program in their sites. OPAL can offer a range of materials combined with funding. The following items are available for your site to support implementation of the program:

- Outdoor Explorers Program Resource Guide and CD (electronic copy of resource guide and appendices)
- *Life Looks Brighter Outside* A2 poster
- *Life Looks Brighter Outside* coreflute (at site request)
- *Life Looks Brighter Outside* parent brochures (one per family of 3-5 year old children)
- 5 x children’s story books, 1 x bug catcher, 1 x Frisbee, to use in conjunction with program implementation
- Small grant of $100 to purchase additional resources or equipment to assist with implementation of the program. Examples of what you could purchase are included in Appendix 9 (see page 73). Conditions apply *

**Obtaining the funding**

To receive the funding please invoice OPAL for **$100 (including GST)** as per the details below:

**Outdoor Explorers Program Grant**

Attention: OPAL  
12 Bishopstone Road  
Davoren Park, SA 5113

Once the invoice is completed either email to opal.midmurraycouncil@gmail.com or fax to the Mid Murray Council (Fax no: 8569 1931), addressed to Laura Johns. Please note that in order for you to receive the funding, it is a requirement that you read and sign the Memorandum of Understanding (see Appendix 11) and also return this to OPAL as per above.

*Eligibility for funding will be on a case by case basis. Involvement in previous programs, including appropriate completion of program evaluation is highly favourable.*
Additional resources

**Information resources**

- Tips to share with parents (FAQ sheet) – *see Appendix 5*
- About Fundamental Movement Skills – *see Appendix 2*
- Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Environments - Vision and Values
- Nature Play South Australia
  [www.natureplaysa.org.au](http://www.natureplaysa.org.au)
- The Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management (NRM)
  - Nature Play
  - Loan Library
- Teach Preschool – includes lots of activity ideas with photo descriptions for preschool activities.
  [www.teachpreschool.org](http://www.teachpreschool.org)
- Let the Children Play: Play Outside - a data base of outdoor play and learning resources, tips, tools, blogs and ideas.
  [www.letthechildrenplay.net/p/play-outside.html](http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/p/play-outside.html)
- How to create an irresistible outdoor play space for children
  [www.letthechildrenplay.net/2010/04/8-tips-for-creating-inspiring-outdoor.html](http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/2010/04/8-tips-for-creating-inspiring-outdoor.html)
- ‘Irresistible ideas for play based learning’, a blog designed to inspire and assist teachers and parents of children in the early years
- Natural Playscapes: Creating Outdoor Play Environments for the Soul
- Natural Learning Initiative
  [www.naturalearning.org/](http://www.naturalearning.org/)
- Rethinking outdoor learning environments. (Early Childhood Australia)
- Natural Playspaces (Kidsafe NSW Inc.)
  [www.kidsafensw.org/playground-safety/natural-playspaces](http://www.kidsafensw.org/playground-safety/natural-playspaces)
Activity resources

- *Life Looks Brighter Outside* colouring-in sheet – see Appendix 4
- Downloadable kids colouring-in sheets, templates and activity packs
  [www.naturedetectives.org.uk/download](http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk/download)
- How to make a kite
  - [www.skiptomylou.org/2010/06/05/simple-paper-kite-from-better-in-bulk](http://www.skiptomylou.org/2010/06/05/simple-paper-kite-from-better-in-bulk)
- How to make a bird bath
  - [www.womansday.com/home/craft-ideas/bird-bath](http://www.womansday.com/home/craft-ideas/bird-bath)
- How to make bird feeder
- Build your own ant farm
  - [www.instructables.com/id/Soda-Bottle-Ant-Farm/?ALLSTEPS](http://www.instructables.com/id/Soda-Bottle-Ant-Farm/?ALLSTEPS)
- Build your own worm farm
- Hatch silk worm eggs
- Hatch chicken eggs
- Animals Anonymous - a mobile environmental education service

Other Resources

- Educational Experience - Educational toys and resources available for purchase
- Windmill Educational Toys and Equipment - Educational toys and resources available for purchase
  - [www.windmill.net.au](http://www.windmill.net.au)
- Modern Teaching Aids - Educational toys and resources available for purchase
Story books

Soil and sand:
- Mud Puddle by Robert Munsch
- The Best Mud Pie by Lin Quinn
- I'm a Dirty Dinosaur by Janeen Brian
- Dirt, The Scoop on Soil by Natalie Rosinsky
- Jo MacDonald Had a Garden by Mary Quattlebaum
- Charlie's Dirt Day by Andrew Larsen
- Grug at the Beach by Ted Prior
- A Beach for Us to Play by Nola Turner-Jensen
- Magic Beach by Alison-Lester

Water:
- Billy's Bucket by Kes Gray
- Water, Up, Down, and All Around by Natalie Rosinsky
- Down Comes the Rain by Franklyn Branley
- The Rain Came Down by David Shannon
- Come On, Rain by Karen Hesse
- Water Can Be... by Laura Purdie Salas
- Water Witcher by Jan Ormerod
- Heather Fell in the Water by Doug MacLeod
- Let It Rain by Maryann Cocca-Leffler
- In My Pond by Sara Gillingham
- Why Should I Save Water by Jen Green
- All the Water in the World by George Ella Lyon and Katherine Tillotson

Trees and plants:
- Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert
- We're Going On A Leaf Hunt by Steve Metzger
- Ferdie and the Falling Leaves by Julia Rawlinson
- Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf by Lois Ehlert
- Let It Fall by Maryann Cocca-Leffler
- Why Do Leaves Change Color? by Betsy Maestro
- Leaves by David Ezra Stein
- Tap the Magic Tree by Christie Matheson
- The Tiny Seed by Eric Carle
- One Bean by Anne Rockwell
- Planting a Rainbow by Lois Ehlert
- That's Not a Daffodil! by Elizabeth Honey
- From Seed to Plant by Gail Gibbons
- Isobel's Tree by Dawn Potter

Living creatures:
- Bugs Galore by Peter Stein
- Yucky Worms by Vivian French
- Tadpole’s Promise by Jeanne Willis
- Hey, Little Ant by Phillip Hoose and Hannah Hoose
- Hello, Bugs! by Smriti Prasadam
- Waiting for Wings by Lois Ehlert
- Pouch! by David Ezra Stein
- Oh No Mister Possum by Erin Devlin
- Take a Look, Buzz by Liesbet Slegers
- The Very Busy Spider by Eric Carle
- Over in the Meadow (with CD-ROM) by Jill McDonald and Susan Reed
- Good-Night, Owl! by Pat Hutchins

Sticks and stones:
- Not a Stick by Antoinette Portis
- Stanley's Stick by John Hegley
- If You Find A Rock by Peggy Christian
- Rocks, Hard, Soft, Smooth, and Rough by Natalie Rosinsky
- My Pet Rock, Greg Granite by Jerry Brotzge
- Croc by the Rock by Hilary Robinson
- Let's Look at Pebbles by Angela Royston
- Everybody Needs a Rock by Byrd Baylor
Physical activity:
- From Head to Toe by Eric Carle
- The Animal Boogie by Debbie Harter
- Can You Move Like an Elephant by Judy Hindley
- Follow the Leader by Erica Silverman
- Jumping Day by Barbara Juster Esbenson
- Little Yoga by Rebecca Whitford
- Kangaroo Kangaroo, Where Are You? by Robyn Safarian
- Walking Through the Jungle by Debbie Harter
- Jump by Scott Fischer

Outdoor play and exploring:
- We’re Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen
- Maisy’s Nature Walk by Lucy Cousins
- Are You Ready to Play Outside? by Mo Willems
- Why Should I Protect Nature? by Jen Green
- Little Cloud by Eric Carle
- In the Bush (Our Holiday at Wombat Flat) by Roland Harvey
- Fairy Houses Everywhere by Barry and Tracy Kane

These books are available from online stores such as Fishpond, Booktopia, Amazon or The Book Depository.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to parents
Appendix 2: About Fundamental Movement Skills
Appendix 3: “What I explored this week...” sheets
Appendix 4: *Life Looks Brighter Outside* colouring-in sheet
Appendix 5: Tips to share with parents
Appendix 6: Family Outdoor Challenge Sheet
Appendix 7: Certificate of participation
Appendix 8: Evaluation
Appendix 9: Ideas for use of funding
Appendix 10: Songs
Appendix 11: Memorandum of Understanding
Appendix 1: Letter to Parents

See over page

Please insert the appropriate details where prompted.
Dear Parents/ caregivers,

At [insert Kindy/Childcare centre name] we will soon be learning about active outdoor play and exploring the natural environment. The program is part of OPAL’s latest campaign Life Looks Brighter Outside, which focuses on encouraging families to spend time together outside at local parks and playgrounds.

Being outdoors and connecting with family and friends helps build children’s confidence and independence. It also promotes social skills such as sharing, negotiation and team work. Playing outdoors in nature is important for children, just like healthy food and sleep. Kids that have the opportunity to play outdoors are: fitter, stronger and more co-ordinated. It is also good for their brains, it helps improve: learning, concentration, memory and sleep patterns. Kids need plenty of physical activity every day, at least 60 minutes a day. Running, jumping, riding, climbing and chasing are great ways for kids to be physically active.

OPAL is a program coordinated through the local council that aims to encourage and support children and families in our community to eat well and be active. OPAL supports us in our [insert Kindy/Childcare] work and commitment to help children lead healthy lifestyles. For more information about OPAL please visit [http://www.mid-murray.sa.gov.au/opal](http://www.mid-murray.sa.gov.au/opal).

What is the ‘Outdoor Explorers’ program?
The program is about encouraging children aged 3-5 years, to engage in active play, encourage them to explore and enjoy spending time outdoors and to familiarise them with different things found in the natural environment.

Our ‘Outdoor Explorers’ program will run from: [insert dates/Term]. Please join us to help encourage and support your child to discover the fun and benefits of active play and outdoor exploration by participating in this special program. If you have any questions or require any further information please speak to one of our staff.

Kind regards,

[Insert Kindy/Childcare centre Director name and title]
Appendix 2: About Fundamental Movement Skills

Between the ages of three and five years, children are starting to develop their gross motor skills, also known as fundamental movement skills through a range of activities that involve many different body parts, including their feet, legs, core/trunk, head, arms and hands. Fundamental movement skills (FMS) refer to the ability to control large muscles so that the child can successfully perform basic movements such as running, jumping, throwing, kicking and balancing. FMS are important because they assist cognitive development and set the basis for more complex skills required throughout children’s lives. These skills increase children’s capabilities to play sports, games and other physical and recreational activities proficiently and with confidence.

Development of FMS begins in preschool years and so it is important for both parents and teachers to provide children with sufficient opportunities to practice and engage in such activities as this will ensure they are well prepared for more formal physical education lessons undertaken at school. Children who achieve FMS competence have been found to positively participate in a range of sports and movement activities and maintain involvement during childhood and adolescence. This is important as regular participation leads to increased health benefits and physical fitness and hence sets up good habits for a healthy lifestyle.

Categories of Fundamental Movement Skills:

- **Locomotor skills-** such as running, jumping, hopping, galloping, skipping and leaping.
- **Balance skills-** movements where the body remains in place, but moves around its horizontal and vertical axes.
- **Ball skills-** such as catching, throwing, kicking, striking, underarm roll and striking.

Stages of Development:

- **Three year olds** are still developing the basic skills required for play. They can perform the following FMS:
  - Climb jungle gyms and ladders
  - Run on toes
  - Balance on one leg for a short time
  - Kick a ball from a standing position

- **Four year olds** are developing quickly and learn a lot from their experiences and from their play environment. They can perform the following FMS:
  - Gallop
  - Hop forward
  - Do lame duck skip (only one foot "skips")
  - Throw a ball 3.5 metres overhand
  - Kick a large rolling ball

- **Five year olds** begin to display a variety of styles of play, including copying others, creative play and making up their own games or activities. They can perform the following FMS:
  - Run through an obstacle course avoiding objects
  - Skip forward
  - Maintain balance on a moveable platform
  - Throw a ball with direction and force

References:

Appendix 3: “What I explored this week...” sheets

*See over page*

*Print copies for each child as needed.*

“What I explored this week...” sheets are a way to record the activities children have tried during the program and what they thought of them. Guide each child to complete their sheet by drawing, painting, pasting objects or photos of what they recall from that week’s session. Scribe for them a description of the picture or their thoughts and comments about the activity. Record something the child learnt to do or really enjoyed doing. To encourage parents to provide outdoor play opportunities for their child, send these sheets home at the end of each week and ask families to complete the home challenges. Request that they return completed home challenges to display at your centre or use as part of a prize draw or competition.
When you complete this activity with your child, please ask them what they enjoyed about it and write this in one word (e.g.: ‘Messy!’ ‘Exciting!’) in the space provided next to the challenge. Cut off this slip and return it to your child’s Kindy or Childcare centre.

Name: ..........................................................

What I explored this week....

Soil and sand

Home Challenge

Make a mud pie or cake for your family.
Maybe a mud tea party!
It’s just pretend so don’t eat what you make!

Name: .................................
Name: .................................

What I explored this week....

Water

When you complete this activity with your child, please ask them what they enjoyed about it and write this in one word (e.g.: ‘Messy!’ ‘Exciting’!) in the space provided next to the challenge. Cut off this slip and return it to your child’s Kindy or Childcare centre.

Home Challenge

_wait for a rainy day. Can you catch raindrops on your tongue, hands or nose? What else can you do in the rain?

Name: .................................
Name: ..........................................................

What I explored this week....
Sticks and stones

Home Challenge

_collect some small rocks or pebbles and find some flat ground to build with them. What can you make?_
What I explored this week....
Trees and plants

Home Challenge

Run all the way to the top of a grassy hill and roll down like a log to the bottom.

When you complete this activity with your child, please ask them what they enjoyed about it and write this in one word (e.g.: ‘Messy!’ ‘Exciting!’) in the space provided next to the challenge. Cut off this slip and return it to your child’s Kindy or Childcare centre.
Watch the bugs and see what they do, but don’t touch them unless Mum or Dad say its ok.
Appendix 4: *Life Looks Brighter Outside* colouring-in sheet

*See over page*

*Print enough copies for each of the children*
Life looks brighter outside!

Get out and play this weekend at your local park and playground!

My favorite outdoor activity is.....
Appendix 5: Tips to share with parents

Playing outdoors alone or with family and friends helps build children’s confidence and independence. It also promotes physical skills and builds stamina, increases social skills such as sharing, negotiation and team work, and provides many learning opportunities including how to manage risks and respecting nature. Playing outdoors in nature is important for children, just like healthy food and sleep.

**Kids just want to play**

Kids spend 90% of their time indoors but they say they want to spend more time playing outdoors. Being outdoors and connecting with family and friends helps build children’s confidence and independence. It also promotes social skills such as sharing, negotiation and team work. Kids just see it as fun!

**Give your kids an outdoor boost**

Playing outdoors in nature is important for children, just like healthy food and sleep. Kids that have the opportunity to play outdoors are:

- fitter
- stronger
- more co-ordinated

It is also good for their brains, it helps improve:

- learning concentration
- memory
- sleep patterns

**Kids need physical activity**

Kids need plenty of physical activity every day, at least 60 minutes a day. Running, jumping, riding, climbing and chasing are great ways for kids to be physically active. Your local parks and playgrounds provide a great free space to be active. The kids will be having so much fun they won’t think of it as exercise. Allow them to get messy, meet up with other kids, make choices, agree on their own rules and create an adventure to remember.

**Playtime for parents too**

Remember back to your own childhood when playing outside was part of everyday life. Times have changed and finding time to go to the park may be harder these days, so we are all missing out on the benefits of the great outdoors. That’s the challenge – get out and enjoy the outdoors when you get the chance! Relive the great outdoors with your kids today.

- Adults need at least 30 minutes of physical activity everyday – playing with your kids is a great chance for you to be active too!
Make Saturday and Sunday outdoor fundays! When it comes to family outdoor playtime, weekdays can be a little tricky – but that’s why we have weekends! When we start to think about Saturday and Sunday as outdoor ‘fundays’ our planning for fun and outdoor activities gets a lot easier.

Play outdoors in rain or shine!
Playing outside when it’s cold, doesn’t mean you will catch a cold. Actually, the common cold is caused by any one of a 100 known viruses and is spread by sneezing, coughing and hand contact with someone who is sick. During the colder months these viruses might be more abundant but it’s not the weather itself that could increase your chance of getting a cold. In fact, people are in closer contact with each other in winter because they stay indoors, and so are more likely to infect each other. So rug up, put on your gumboots and raincoat and play outside this winter!

Respect for nature
Children who spend time outdoors begin to foster an appreciation of the natural world and develop environmental awareness and understanding. Positive experiences and connecting with nature from an early age will ensure children protect and preserve the natural environment in later years. The outdoors also provides children with many lessons and opportunities for discovery from learning about animals and plants and their lifecycles to the weather and seasons and what changes occur throughout the year.

Risk is part of play
Although the term 'risk-taking' often has a negative association and we are told to avoid risks, in actual fact some risk taking is an important part of learning and development. For example: for a child learning to ride a bike, there is a genuine risk that they could fall off and injure themselves but without taking the challenge the child would not learn to ride a bike. Challenge and risk during outdoor play allows children the opportunities to learn new skills, try new behaviours and provides experiences to test their limits physically and socially. We all face risks and challenges in our everyday lives and the important point is how we weigh up the risk and how we overcome the challenge. These are important skills that children develop through play, and particularly during active outdoor play.

References:
> Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Council of Australian Governments 2009, Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia.
Appendix 6: Family Outdoor Challenge Sheet

See over page

Print enough copies for each family
Family Outdoor Challenge

Spending time outdoors can be lots of fun! Your local parks and playgrounds are a great place for a family adventure. How many of these outdoor challenges can your family complete?

1. Visit a local pond, creek or lake
   What can you see swimming in the water?

2. After the rain, find some puddles to splash in
   Put on your gumboots and get jumping!

3. Enjoy a healthy picnic lunch at a local park
   For tasty, healthy recipes visit www.gofor2and5.com.au.

4. Play frisbee at an oval
   How high and far can you throw it?

5. Build a cubby house or fort
   Use fallen branches, twigs and sticks.

6. Create an obstacle course at a playground
   Use different playground equipment to climb up, jump over or balance along.

7. Go on a 5 senses scavenger hunt
   Search for something you can see, hear, smell, touch and taste!

8. Follow the leader along a trail
   Walk or ride your bike along a local walking or cycling track

Which was your favourite challenge and why? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What other things does your family enjoy doing outdoors?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix 7: Certificate of Participation

See over page

Print enough copies for each of the children.
Hand these out at the end of the program.
"I am an outdoor explorer"

Over the last five weeks I have explored soil and sand, water, sticks and stones, trees and plants and living things!

This is to certify that

.................................................................

has enjoyed a range of outdoor play activities and explorations as part of the Outdoor Explorers Program.

Congratulations! And remember ‘Life Looks Brighter Outside. Enjoy the day with outdoor play at your local park and playground!’
Appendix 8: Evaluation

Child Evaluation

After each of the five weeks, ask the children how they felt about exploring the natural element from that week. Once you’ve asked the question, guide the children to move to one of three pictures (see pages 69-71) tacked to the floor or wall that shows how they felt about the experience. Use pictures to represent different feelings, ‘dramatic’ pictures will help the children to identify between the different feelings (e.g.: liked it a lot- happy jumping child, didn’t like it yet- sad face, etc). Place these in different locations around the room, stick them onto the wall or print large images for the children to stand on. Have a staff member count the number of children at each of the pictures and record this for each of the sessions. Include this data with the Staff Evaluation survey and return to OPAL.

Ask the children:

- How did you feel about exploring Sand and Soil?
- How did you feel about exploring Water?
- How did you feel about exploring Sticks and Stones?
- How did you feel about exploring Trees and Plants?
- How did you feel about exploring Living Creatures?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children who indicated:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked it!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not sure if I liked it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like it yet.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sand and Soil

Water

Sticks and Stones

Trees and Plants

Living Creatures

*Use pictures that are A3 or larger*
I liked it!
I’m not sure if I liked it
I don’t like it yet
Parent/Caregiver Evaluation

The survey is designed to be administered *verbally* - ask parents/caregivers a few questions after the program is completed and record their responses as a tally on the sheet below. This can be done when children are dropped off or picked up or alternatively at the Parent Picnic Event, if one is held. **Include this data with the Staff Evaluation survey and return to OPAL.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent/Caregiver Evaluation Survey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Since the Outdoor Explorers Program...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your child been more interested in playing outside at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your child seemed more interested in nature or talked more about nature? (e.g.: trees, sand, water, bugs, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your child asked to play any different activities at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you read any of the OPAL information that was sent home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you tried any of the Home Challenges?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you visited any local parks or playgrounds more often?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Staff Evaluation Survey

Name of site: _________________________________________________________
Director: _________________________________________________________
Date/ term program ran: _________________________________________________________

Completed Child Evaluation and copy of results attached: Yes No
Completed Parent Evaluation questions and copy attached: Yes No

Please answer the questions below:

Since running the 'Outdoor Explorers' program.....

We have noticed changes in children’s physical skills and abilities as a result of the Fundamental Movement Skill activities included as part of the program. Yes No
If ‘yes’, please explain ....
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

We have noticed that children are keen to explore more natural elements in the early childhood environment and enjoy spending more time outdoors. Yes No
If ‘yes’, please explain ....
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

We have noticed that children are more familiar with natural elements and the natural environment. Yes No
If ‘yes’, please explain ....
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Parents and carers have commented that children have spent more time playing outdoors at home. Yes No
If ‘yes’, please explain ....
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
Parents and carers have commented that they have visited local parks and play spaces more frequently.  
If ‘yes’, please explain ....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</table>

Did you experience any difficulties running the program?  
If ‘yes’, please explain ....

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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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Were there any aspects of the program that were particularly successful?  
If ‘yes’, please summarise these aspects of the program below.

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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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Did you find the resource guide helpful for implementing the program?  
Do you have any suggestions for additional information or resources we could include that would make the program easier to implement?  
If ‘yes’, please outline your suggestions below.

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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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Would you consider running the program again in future?  
Please indicate why or why not below.

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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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If you have any other comments, please add these below.

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Appendix 9: Ideas for use of funding

OPAL will contribute small grant of $100 to put towards purchasing additional resources or equipment to assist with implementation of the Outdoor Explorers program. This is to be used for purchasing educational resources or equipment or for any costs relating to the program activities (including a parent event). Below are some ideas of the types of things you might like to buy. It is not an exhaustive list and there may be other resources or equipment that would be appropriate and beneficial to your centre.

### Active play or sports equipment
- frisbees, balls, bean bags, gym mats, climbing or balancing equipment, stepping stones, etc.
  - Active Play: [www.windmill.net.au/active-play](http://www.windmill.net.au/active-play)

### Sand and water play equipment
- spades, rakes, buckets, toys, etc.

### Exploring/ science equipment
- bug catchers, magnifying glasses, binoculars, scales, etc.

### Construction and building materials

### Gardening equipment
- spades, shovels, rakes, buckets, pots and seedlings, etc.

### Additional books or puzzles, stencils, craft supplies
- etc. that relate to active play or the natural environment (see page # for a list of suggested books).

### Host living creatures at your centre
- such as hatching chicks or silkworms

### Prizes for competitions held with the families
- such as a picnic set or sports pack.
Appendix 10: Songs

We’re Going on a Bear Hunt

Start with the children standing in a circle, act out each verse (e.g.: walking through the grass, squelching through mud, etc). You can do the actions on the spot or moving around the circle in a clockwise direction. Watch ‘Michael Rosen performs We’re Going on a Bear Hunt’ for www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qyl6ykDwds for possible actions. Repeat each line. While the children are learning the song you might like to try children saying the repeat line after the teacher.

Verse 1
We’re going on a bear hunt,
We’re going to catch a big one,
What a beautiful day,
We’re not scared.
Oh oh!
Grass,
Long, wavy, grass.
We can’t go over it, we can’t go under it,
We’ll have to go through it!
Swishy swashy, swishy swashy.

Verse 2
We’re going on a bear hunt,
We’re going to catch a big one,
What a beautiful day,
We’re not scared.
Oh oh!
A river,
A deep, cold river.
We can’t go over it, we can’t go under it,
We’ll have to go through it!
Splish splosh, splish splosh.

Verse 3
We’re going on a bear hunt,
We’re going to catch a big one,
What a beautiful day,
We’re not scared.
Oh oh!
Mud,
Thick, oozy mud.
We can’t go over it, we can’t go under it,
We’ll have to go through it!
Squelch squelch, squelch squelch
Verse 4
We're going on a bear hunt,
We're going to catch a big one,
What a beautiful day,
We're not scared.
Oh oh!
A forest,
A big, dark forest.
We can't go over it, we can't go under it,
We'll have to go through it!
Stumble trip, stumble trip.

Verse 5
We're going on a bear hunt,
We're going to catch a big one,
What a beautiful day,
We're not scared.
Oh oh!
A cave,
A dark, scary cave.
We can't go over it, we can't go under it,
We'll have to go through it!
Tiptoe, tiptoe.

Say the following verse all together and quickly

Verse 6
OH NO IT'S A BEAR!!!
Quick!
Through the cave, tiptoe, tiptoe,
Through the forest, stumble trip, stumble trip,
Through the river, splish splosh, splish splosh,
Through the mud, squelch squelch, squelch squelch,
Through the grass, swishy swashy, swishy swashy.
Run to the house, run up the stairs,
Oh oh forgot to shut the door!
Run back downstairs, shut the door,
Run back up, to the bedroom,
Jump into bed, pull up the covers,
WE ARE NEVER GOING ON A BEAR HUNT AGAIN!!
Bugs & Beetles

Start with five children to be the beetles (or hold beetle props) and another child to be the gardener. You could have the other children holding props too, such as cabbages, flowers, etc. Five ‘beetles’ (children) stand in a row, gardener comes along and gently taps a ‘beetle’ (child) on the head and this child sits down. (For an example, watch the song performed by Franciscus Henri www.youtube.com/watch?v=etcSOBAoNWA).

Verse 1
Bugs and Beetles in my garden
Oh what horror, oh what dread
5 hungry beetles in my cabbages
Soon my cabbages will be dead
So I go into my garden
Creeping softly tip-toe tread
I sneak up behind those beetles
And I hit one on the head
Ooch, ouch is what he/she said
I hit a little beetle on the head

Verse 2
Bugs and Beetles in my garden
Oh what horror, oh what dread
4 hungry beetles in my cabbages
Soon my cabbages will be dead
So I go into my garden
Creeping softly tip-toe tread
I sneak up behind those beetles
And I hit one on the head
Ooch, ouch is what he/she said
I hit a little beetle on the head

Continue singing, decreasing the number of ‘beetles’ until all have been chased from the cabbage patch.
Appendix 11: Memorandum of Understanding

See over page

Please insert the appropriate details where prompted. Signed MOU to be returned to Laura Johns via email opal.midmurraycouncil@gmail.com or fax 8569 1931.
Outdoor Explorers Program – Memorandum of Understanding

This Memorandum of Understanding is between the OPAL initiative in the Mid Murray Council and

(Insert name of Early Childhood Education site)

1. Background:

The OPAL initiative in the City of Mid Murray Council aims to improve the eating and activity patterns of children, through working with families and the whole community to increase the proportion of 0-18 year olds within a healthy weight range. Early childhood education settings are key stakeholders in the community and the site for implementation of the ‘Outdoor Explorers’ program which aims to educate children (and families) about the importance of being active and provides the opportunity to explore nature and the outdoors.

2. Roles & Responsibilities:

2.1. OPAL in the City of Mid Murray will be responsible for:

2.1.1. In-kind support
- Provide and facilitate staff training for the ‘Outdoor Explorers’ program and assist with ideas for implementation and delivery of the program.
- Provide an ‘Outdoor Explorers’ program resource guide, a selection of children’s story books, a bug catcher and a Frisbee, to aid in the delivery and implementation of the program.
- Provide OPAL Life Looks Brighter Outside themed resources, including a brochure for each family and other supporting materials for correspondence to parents/caregivers.

2.1.2. Financial support
- OPAL will contribute a once-off payment of $100 for implementation of the program. This is to be used for purchasing additional resources or equipment such as additional books, puzzles, sports equipment, outdoor play resources and any costs for other related activities (e.g.: parent event).
- Funding is not to be used for work/activities not related to the program or active and outdoor play, staff time and wages.
2.2. Early Childhood Education sites will be responsible for:

2.2.1. In-kind support

- Staff member(s) attending ‘Outdoor Explorer’ program training provided by OPAL.
- Embedding the program into curriculum, planning for delivery of the program and getting messages home to families.
- Provide staff time and expertise to develop sessions and activities for the implementation and the delivery of the program.
- Upon completion of program delivery, provide feedback to OPAL using the supplied evaluation forms, within one month of program completion.
- Use funds appropriately and for the purposes outlined above (Section 2.1.2) and ensure all related activities are in line with OPAL principles - all activities undertaken and materials provided reflect and promote good healthy eating and physical activity practices, consistent with national guidelines.
- Regular communication of children’s learning and activities relating to the program to parents/caregivers. This can be done through pictures, photos, posters, newsletter inserts, notice boards, celebration events.
- Display OPAL posters and signage at your site to acknowledge OPAL’s contribution and support.

3. Commitment:

Please Note: upon receiving the Resource Guide and children’s story books- they are and will remain the property of each site.

By signing this document, all parties have agreed to roles and responsibilities outlined above in this Memorandum of Understanding.


Signed for and on behalf of
OPAL in the Mid Murray Council
Print Name: Courtney Blacker – OPAL Manager

Signed for and on behalf of

(Insert name of Early Childhood Education site)
Print Name: 

Date 8/10/2014
OPAL by EPISODE is a joint program of Australian, State and Local Governments.