





INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR ED

How to make outdoor ed
inclusive to all learners





MENTAL HEALTH STATISTICS





- 1 in 5 youth have social, emotional, and behavioral problems that impair their learning (Fabiano & Evans, 2019; Merikangas et al., 2010).
 - A review of hundreds of studies found that school-wide social-emotional learning (SEL) programs improve academic progress among students by 13% on average (Durlak et al., 2011). *please refer to table*
 - A review of 43 studies found that school-based services are effective at decreasing mental health problems. Group (Tier 2) and individualized (Tier 3) services have been particularly successful (Sanchez et al., 2017).
- 
- 

Figure 1. Washington State's Social Emotional Learning Standards and Benchmarks

Self	Social
Standard 1: Self-Awareness —Individual can identify their emotions, personal assets, areas for growth, and potential external resources and supports.	Standard 4: Social Awareness —Individual can take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
<u>Benchmark 1A</u> : Demonstrates awareness and understanding of one’s own emotions and emotions’ influence on behavior. <u>Benchmark 1B</u> : Demonstrates awareness of personal and collective identity encompassing strengths, areas for growth, aspirations, and cultural and linguistic assets. <u>Benchmark 1C</u> : Demonstrates self-awareness and understanding of external influences, e.g., culture, family, school, and community resources and supports.	<u>Benchmark 4A</u> : Demonstrates awareness of other people’s emotions, perspectives, cultures, languages, histories, identities, and abilities. <u>Benchmark 4B</u> : Demonstrates an awareness and respect for similarities and differences among community, cultural and social groups. <u>Benchmark 4C</u> : Demonstrates an understanding of the variation within and across cultures.
Standard 2: Self-Management —Individual can regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.	Standard 5: Social Management —Individual can make safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions.
<u>Benchmark 2A</u> : Demonstrates the skills to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, impulses, and stress in constructive ways. <u>Benchmark 2B</u> : Demonstrates responsible decision-making and problem-solving skills.	<u>Benchmark 5A</u> : Demonstrates a range of communication and social skills to interact effectively with others. <u>Benchmark 5B</u> : Demonstrates the ability to identify and take steps to resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. <u>Benchmark 5C</u> : Demonstrates the ability to engage in respectful and healthy relationships with individuals of diverse perspectives, cultures, language, history, identity, and ability.
Standard 3: Self-Efficacy —Individual can motivate themselves, persevere, and see themselves as capable.	Standard 6: Social Engagement —Individual can consider others and show a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community.
<u>Benchmark 3A</u> : Demonstrates the skills to set, monitor, adapt, persevere, achieve, and evaluate goals. <u>Benchmark 3B</u> : Demonstrates problem-solving skills to engage responsibly in a variety of situations. <u>Benchmark 3C</u> : Demonstrates awareness and ability to speak on behalf of personal rights and advocacy.	<u>Benchmark 6A</u> : Demonstrates a sense of school and community responsibility. <u>Benchmark 6B</u> : Demonstrates the ability to work with others to set, monitor, adapt, achieve, and evaluate goals. <u>Benchmark 6C</u> : Contributes productively to one’s school, workplace, and community.




OUTDOOR ED AS (PART) OF THE SOLUTION

- Learning outdoors supports child development. Children greatly benefit developmentally from being outdoors. Outdoor education and play support emotional, behavioral and intellectual development. Studies have shown that students who learn outdoors develop: a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity, decision-making and problem-solving skills, empathy towards others, motor skills, self-discipline and initiative. *reference handout*
 - Learning outdoors helps develop a sense of place and civic attitudes and behaviors. Outdoor experiences help students increase their understanding of their natural and human communities which leads to a sense of place. Through connection to place, students develop stronger environmental attitudes and civic behaviors. Outdoors learning experiences are the foundation of raising the next generation of active citizens who take care of their natural and human communities.
- 
- 



Setting boundaries, an essential part of outdoor ed and creating safe spaces!





8 SENSORY SYSTEMS



visual



tactile



olfactory



gustatory



auditory



vestibular



proprioception

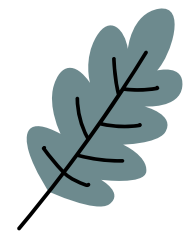


interoception

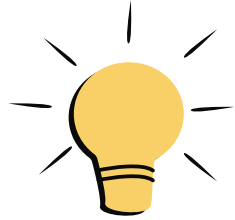




SENSORY INTEGRATION/ SENSORY PROCESSING




The process of organizing sensory inputs so that the brain produces a useful body response.



When our senses are integrated, we are better regulated!



Sensory integration is linked with mental health, physical health, emotional regulation, and capacity to perform tasks.



SENSORY SEEKING BEHAVIOR









- ☀️ Constantly touching people/objects
- ☀️ Unable to sit still/ constantly moving
- ☀️ Jumping, spinning, or rocking
- ☀️ Fidgeting with anything within reach
- ☀️ Frequently picking at fingers
- ☀️ Unsafe behavior on the playground
- ☀️ Crashing into things
- ☀️ Seeking pressure

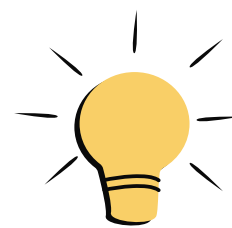




SENSORY DEFENSIVE BEHAVIOR



-  Covers ears
-  Decreased eye contact
-  Retreats to calm, quiet places
-  Humming/ verbal stimming
-  Finicky eating
-  Avoids messes, doesn't want to touch sand/soil/etc.
-  Fearful or aggressive
-  "shutdown" caused by an overload of sensory info



Kids can exhibit a combination of sensory seeking & sensory defensive behavior.



It's complicated & individual.







TOOLS AND MATERIALS FOR SENSORY-SEEKING AND SENSORY-AVOIDING LEARNERS

Providing a variety of tools can help make outdoor experiences more accessible and enjoyable for all students. Consider having the following on hand:



- Large tweezers or forceps - Helps avoid direct contact with certain textures
 - Trash pickers or grabbers - Great for interacting with nature from a distance
 - Gloves - Work gloves or disposable food service gloves for added sensory protection
 - Handheld tally counters - Engaging for students who enjoy tracking or repetitive movements
 - Extra socks, gloves, and hats - Essential for comfort in varying weather conditions
 - Emergency borrow clothes - Helps students stay dry and comfortable if needed
 - Hand sanitizer - Supports hygiene for those who are sensitive to dirt or grime
 - Magnifying glasses - Encourages close observation without direct contact
- 
- 





THE POWER OF THE SIT SPOT

For individuals with sensory-avoiding behaviors, direct contact with nature—such as sitting on sand, damp grass, or rough surfaces—can be uncomfortable or overwhelming. A designated sit spot provides a safety barrier, making it easier for all learners to engage in outdoor environments.

Options for Sit Spots:

- Camping chairs
 - Cut squares of packaging foam
 - Sections of old yoga mats (lightweight, reusable, and easy to carry in field packs)
- 
- 



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS



Allow students to choose their level of engagement and participation.



Provide options for movement breaks or quiet spaces.



Normalize the use of tools and accommodations to create an inclusive learning environment.



By incorporating these strategies, outdoor education can be a more comfortable and enriching experience for all students, ensuring they feel safe, supported, and engaged in the natural world.

