

Managing a group outdoors

Essentials

The curriculum is packed full of opportunities for exciting and rich learning. It also recognises the importance of real-world learning outside of the classroom. Many subjects can be enhanced by the opportunity to put theory into practice, or to learn through tangible interaction with real-world examples. Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) is also supported by a host of evidence illustrating improvements

in attainment and behaviour back in the classroom – visit the website of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom for further details: lotc.org.uk.

However, LOtC presents a number of challenges. The ideas included in this sheet offer practical solutions to some of the most common problems you are likely to encounter.

How to deal with:

Disappearing children

You set off with 30 children and when you arrive there only seem to be 29...

1. Roll call

This idea is really simple – give each child a number, then when you shout 'roll call!' they all shout their numbers back in order. This not only checks you have everyone but also makes sure they are paying attention. Make it more fun by challenging the class to see how loud or quickly they can complete the roll call.

2. Buddy system

Assign each child in the class a buddy. Buddies stick together at all times and look after each other. A clear briefing is needed on a buddy's responsibilities, and you have to be careful who gets buddied with whom.

3. Easy identification

If you ever see Scouts out and about they will probably be wearing a brightly coloured scarf. This is not only because they are proud to be Scouts, but also because the leaders know that any young person wearing that scarf is one of theirs. You can apply the same principle using hats, scarves, rucksacks or waterproofs.



Dawdlers

You're waiting to instruct the class on the next exciting task, but the first kids have been waiting five minutes by the time the last kids catch up and now they're getting restless...

1. Games and songs

Games that keep a group together work to slow down the fast ones, and speed up the slow ones. They are also lots of fun. Here are a couple of ideas:

- **Monster in the middle** – the group hold hands to form a ring or 'electric fence'. In the middle is a monster - you! The group move so that the monster never touches the fence. The monster carefully picks a path to the next destination (occasionally making strange noises and jumping towards unsuspecting members of the electric fence).



- **Songs** – 'repeat after me' songs are ideal to keep a group together. The format is simple; you sing/shout a line, the group sings/shouts it back at you. Try Googling songs such as 'The Crazy Moose' or 'The Little Jeep'.
- **Follow the leader** – you can't follow the leader if you can't see them, which means everyone has to stick together.

2. Tail end Charlie

Sometimes the dawdlers just need some encouragement. Placing an adult at the back of the group is a simple way to make sure this happens and to make sure you definitely know where the back of your group is.

3. Ongoing tasks

Sometimes there are good reasons for some of your kids to take more time. On these occasions it might be best to slow down/occupy the kids who are faster. This can be achieved in a number of ways – perhaps by giving them something extra to carry, or briefing the group with a day-long task to work on whenever they have time.

Splitting up your group

You've sent the class off in small groups, but there's a world out there for them to disappear into and not only do you need to keep them safe, you also need to get back on time...

1. Boundaries

Boundaries are used to define the area a group is allowed to work in. The boundaries you set could be physical ('between this wall and that tree', 'without crossing any fences', 'only outside not inside'), or use sight lines ('anywhere you can see this rucksack from, so you can always see Mr Smith').

2. Timekeepers

Groups are often well intentioned but lose track of time. Designate one person in each group to act as a timekeeper whose job it is to make sure they get back on time. Stopwatches or countdown timers are useful for this task, but standard wristwatches will work too.

3. Recall training

This dog training technique works just as well for children! Whenever a signal is given, the first two groups back get a reward. The signal might be a whistle, the chiming of a clock tower, or the end of the allotted time for a task.

Spare time

Everything has gone well and you're ready to get back to school but the coach driver rings to tell you he's stuck in traffic. Why not kill time with these five-minute fillers? Some require props, but others can be played at a moment's notice:

1. Knights, dragons and shields

Everybody is a knight, they secretly pick another person in the group to be a dragon, and a second person to be their shield. When you shout 'Go!' they must move to keep their shield between themselves and the dragon. Everyone has different dragons and shields, so everyone moves and much hilarity ensues.

2. Zip, zap, boing!

In a circle, pass the word 'Zip!' from person to person with an appropriate hand action. If someone says 'Zap!' instead of 'Zip!', then the direction changes and 'Zip!' goes the other way around the circle. If someone says 'Boing!' then the next person is missed out. Got that?

3. Scavenger hunts

Prepare a list of cryptic clues. Kids have to find objects matching your descriptions and bring you the evidence. Just be careful if you specify 'something brown and sticky!'

4. Juggling balls

Hundreds of games can be played with a set of juggling balls. 'Team juggle' requires the whole group to pass the ball in a sequence. 'Object tag' is similar to normal tag but you become 'it' if the ball hits you, while in 'human chains' players have to pass the ball from one end of the chain to the other in the quickest possible time.



Little Jimmy

There's always one – they've lost their pencil, they need the loo and they've arrived without anything that was on the kit list.

1. Make sure everyone goes to the loo

If you're about to leave somewhere with toilets, take advantage of the facilities before you head off. It's much easier than stopping en route or holding out until you arrive at your destination. Make sure everyone visits the loo, even if they say they don't need it!

2. Bring spare kit

This should include essentials for doing class work (pencils, erasers, pencil sharpeners) as well as the extras that might prove to be important. For example, think about taking bottles of water, a hat and gloves (depending on weather), plastic emergency ponchos or spare sandwiches. If you're taking part in an adventurous activity then hair bobbles are also useful.