

A Practitioner's Guide to OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING

'FIVE MINUTE FIRES'

“Help – Everyone’s talking about fires but how do you
actually build one?”



For a fire first timer, building a fire outdoors can be scary. There are so many things to consider that it's not surprising some people are put off. The good news is, by following a few simple steps you too can enjoy the benefits of fire as a source of heat to get warm, a way to cook snacks, a space to sit around and enjoy staring into the flames, and last but not least to relax and maybe sing a few songs. It is also a great educational experience for children, especially if they are involved in the risk/benefit analysis.

The tips this week are for practitioners who have never lit a fire and who have the 'heebie jeebies' just thinking about it.

Have you heard of the Outdoor Woodland Learning (OWL) Network Scotland? Their Fire Guidance is AMAZING, it even has a risk assessment template! See **Useful Links** at the end of this guide for more.

Do I need a qualification or special training to light a fire in our outdoor space?

It depends – it's always best practice to check with the landowner for permission, check your insurance and also know the fire policy within your local authority area. Every Local Authority varies so if using public land, you need to check first. There are Countryside Rangers in many Local Authorities who will be able to advise. They are great for local knowledge so are a good contact to have and also can provide free training. Find your local one here: <https://scra-online.co.uk/>

What you need for your first TINY fire and WHY

- A bucket of water (to put it out)
- Cotton wool (this is your 'tinder' and the first thing to catch fire)
- Dead and dry 'pencil lead' thickness sticks ('kindling' to get your fire going a bit)
- Dry wood 'pencil thickness' (this is 'fuel' if you are building a bigger/longer lasting fire this would be thicker)
- Petroleum jelly (Vaseline is SO FLAMMABLE)
- A striker (produces sparks and not flames)
- Tin bowl (or the base of a Ghillie Kettle as demonstrated in our video below) Why? It's small, so your first fire will be contained
- Logs or ropes (for marking your 'kneeling' and 'do not enter' circles)

Top Tip – Practice this in your setting with your team and no children until you are confident

Where is the best place to light your first fire?

We recommend above ground fires to minimise the impact on the environment. If you have a permanent setting you may want to build a 'fire pit' area.

Check for:

- Overhanging tree branches
- Exposed tree roots
- Animal dens / Insect homes
- Flammable materials such as leaf litter

If you are using local parks or greenspace you must check the rules about fires with your local parks department or ranger service. Be aware that schools will be required to follow their local authority Health and Safety and Risk Assessment guidelines.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code says: “Wherever possible, use a stove rather than light an open fire. If you do wish to light an open fire, keep it small, under control, and supervised - fires that get out of control can cause major damage, for which you might be liable.”

Marking the boundaries and making rules



Creating ‘fire circles’ or rectangles help children and staff identify safe and ‘no go’ areas.

Having an entrance and an exit helps stop children rushing to the fire.

Realising the Ambition (4.3; p47)

“Physical spaces, both outside and indoors, should be constantly reviewed to incorporate a wide range of responsive, familiar, and exciting new play opportunities. **Notice how the children interact with their environment and respond to their interests and use of their spaces.**”

Involve children in the planning, marking and risk assessment of fires.

You can generate hundreds of learning opportunities discussing fire. Why do we need boundaries? Why should we stay back from the fire? Is fire hot or cold? Why should we not have any loose clothing? What is loose clothing? What about long dangling hair?

We have used ropes, but some practitioners prefer marking the fire area with large logs, which can reduce the risk of falling into the fire, and therefore reduce the perimeter distance. Fire preparation is explained beautifully and in detail by Muddy Faces, see useful links below.

What's an outer circle? – The outer circle shows the children the boundary from where they need to kneel down if they want to approach the fire area.

What's an inner circle? An inner circle shows the boundary of the fire's ‘no go zone’, it shows the children the line they cannot reach over.

Practice this with children using 'pretend fires' so they are familiar with the routine. Kneeling if you are in close vicinity to any fire reduces the risk of falling into the fire. Why? Because when you are kneeling there is less chance of tripping, stumbling, and falling 'the length of yourself' into the fire.

Starting your first fire

- Gather your materials
- Put your Ghillie Kettle base on the center of your fire circle/shape
- Make sure you have a nonflammable base to put it on such as concrete/stone (remember grass is flammable!)
- Break up your cotton wool and smear it with a little petroleum jelly
- Use your striker to make sparks near your cotton wool (this can take practice)
- When the cotton wool ignites add kindling and watch the fire 'catch'
- Add small pieces of wood as fuel and watch the burning process
- Keep it small and simple for the first few attempts



To put the fire out

- ✓ Let the fire die down then slowly pour your bucket of water onto the embers. Why? Because with smaller pieces, it's easier to tell when the fire is completely out.
- ✓ Once there are no flames, slowly drown the embers in water.
- ✓ For larger future fires have at least 2 buckets of water.
- ✓ Drown, stir, drown, and feel. Use a shovel (or a stick) to mix the embers and water. If it's too hot to touch, it's too hot to leave.

With practice, experience, appropriate supervision, good risk assessments and safe practices you can introduce children to creating their own small fires in a designated area.

Continued Professional Learning

Gaining confidence and developing skills through knowledge and experience takes time, the Fire Tips are designed as an introduction for practitioners, and not as a training tool.

More details on training are in the **Useful Links** below.

Love watching our videos?
This week, check out Hamish Orr from Baltic Street Adventure Playground showing you a super easy step by step 'FIVE MINUTE FIRE' film featuring Isla from Earthtime

<https://bit.ly/5MinFireBSAP>

Fire from a child's view - featuring Ruben Age 4

<https://vimeo.com/423796794>

Useful Links

Out to Play (Section 6, page 67)

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/publication/play-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-children-practical-guidance/>

Fire Guidance Outdoor and Woodland Learning Scotland

<https://www.owlscotland.org/resources/resource-library/fire-guidance>

Lighting Fires: Scottish Outdoor Access Code

<https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/practical-guide-all/camping/lighting-fires>

Fire Scotland

<https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/safer-summer.aspx>

Scout Master

<https://scoutmastercg.com/how-to-build-a-campfire/>

Muddy Faces Fire Preparation

<https://muddyfaces.co.uk/activity/fire-area-preparation/>

Fire Training

<https://www.owlscotland.org/local-options/forest-schools/forest-school-training>