

# A Practitioner's Guide to OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING **'Top 10 TARP TIPS'**



## One of the best bits of kit for Outdoor ELC?? What can I do with it?

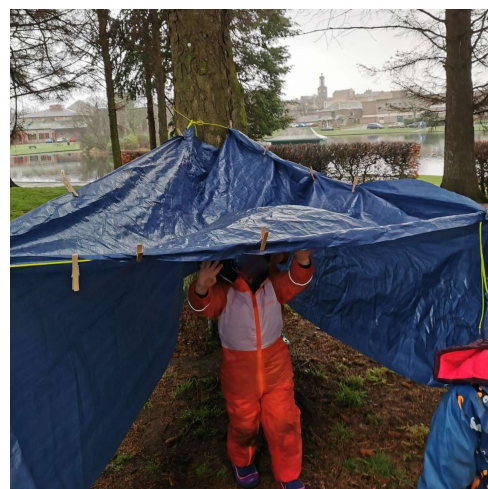
A tarp is one of the most useful resources in a practitioner's backpack and is one of our essential pieces of kit for bringing ELC activities outdoors. They are low cost, versatile, can be washed down easily, dry quickly and are multi-functional. They also come in a variety of sizes and colours to suit your needs. Usually you will see them used as a place to sit while having lunch or a dry place for bags.... but what are some of the other things tarps can be used for in Outdoor Play and Learning??

Below we have come up with our top 10 tarp tips (slight tongue twister!) but we know there are definitely more. Share your ideas and photos with us on Twitter and Facebook!

### 1. Den Building

Kids' favourite activity and a great opportunity for problem solving, teamwork, concentration, and creativity! Depending on your location a den may be made from natural materials as well as tarps, or even with minimum materials such as some ropes or cords, tarp dens can be standalone.

Some tips for helping children make their own special den/place: Find a good location- check wind/slope of



ground/overhanging branches. Paracord or rope can make a supportive structure but sometimes some big sticks tied together (teepee style) can also provide a frame. Most tarps will have eyelets at the corner allowing you to secure them with cord – often necessary in windy Scotland!



## 2. Water Play with tarps



If you are lucky enough to have a small slope then a water slide is a great fun activity! Secure the tarp at the top leaving the ends free to avoid sharp injuries to sliders' bottoms! Pour some water down the slope and slide to your heart's content (waterproof suits make the best clothing to slide in and stay dry). You can also use tarps as a funnel for water play.



## 3. Shapes & Shadows

This is a great idea from Creative Star (see useful links below) to use older tarps for outdoor learning.

Cut shapes out of an old tarp, neatening the edges with duct tape so they don't rip so easily. There are many learning opportunities for this tarp, including discussions about shapes and pairs. You can also hang it from a tree and look at the shadows it creates with the sun changing during the day. Or the shapes can be windows in your creative den building!



#### 4. Parachutes

Lots of ideas for parachute play that you can substitute a tarp for!

Holding the edges of the tarp try to inflate it by raising arms high then run inside the 'parachute' and make a turtle shape.

Or, holding the edges, place some light inflatable balls or soft bean bags on the tarp, try to make them jump on the surface but not fall off the tarp.



#### 5. Nature Discovery

Place a tarp under a tree or bush and shake – see what falls down. You can use a magnifying glass to see small bugs or try to identify the leaves that you find.

Alternatively leave the tarp out overnight and discover what bugs are hiding underneath it the next day.



#### 6. Obstacle Course

A tarp makes a great feature of an obstacle course for crawling under assault course style. It can be made more challenging by pegging down the corners!

## 7. Play with wind

Living in Scotland it is often windy!! Why not discover ways to catch the wind?

Use some rope to attach to the corners of a tarp and experiment with catching the wind. Can you make your tarp fly like a kite?

Or use a smaller tarp like a cape and make believe you are a superhero running down a hill.



## 8. Outdoor Art

Tarps are a great base to show off your natural art creations or as a canvas for mud painting.

Collect natural materials and create art mandalas, your favourite storybook character or make some mud and use instead of paint! Easy to wash off at the end of the day and less harmful to the environment!

## 9. Toilet Shelter

Adding some privacy for wild wees!

Tie the tarp between two trees and secure with paracord or ball bungees around a tree, if needed rocks or large logs can be used to weight the bottom down, ensuring no rogue winds cause it to move!



## 10. Create a game

You can get inventive with some natural materials and make some of your favourite indoor games outdoors using a tarp.

Can you make an X and O grid with sticks, then use stones and pine cones for markers? Or what about a giant snakes and ladders game on the tarp or a maze using some paper tape to make a grid? Or even a Rascal's Roll like these two giggling girls decided on?



### Hints for attaching tarps

- Make a loop at the end of a rope using an overhand knot and then thread this through the eyelet of tarp, pull the rope back through your loop leaving the end of the rope free to secure around tree.
- If you have some nylon webbing/climbing slings these can go around the tree and a small carabiner can connect to rope.
- Ball bungees are also great for securing around smaller objects or trees (See Useful Links below).
- If you don't have any eyelets on your tarp but still want to attach it, place a small smooth rock in the corner of the tarp and fold the tarp around it. Tie a knot around the rock and you'll have an extremely strong attachment that will not rip or loosen.
- Clothes pegs can help secure tarps to rope structures and are kid friendly so they can use independently.

## Useful Links

**Creative Star Learning** has many great articles on tarps. Search the resource index for lots of great ideas: <https://creativestarning.co.uk/index/>

We especially love this 'Messy Maths' tip: <https://creativestarning.co.uk/early-years-outdoors/give-your-old-tarp-a-mathematical-makeover/>

**Loose Parts Toolkit:**

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf>

**Tarps can be bought in many places - check out your local hardware store:**

- **B & Q** <https://www.diy.com/departments/tools-equipment/tarpaulins-sheets-sacks/tarpaulins/DIY638854.cat>
- **Homebase** <https://www.homebase.co.uk/search/products?q=tarpaulin>
- **Screwfix** <https://www.screwfix.com/c/tools/tarpaulin/cat8940029>

**Accessories for Den Building including paracord, carabiners, slings and bungee balls:**  
<https://muddyfaces.co.uk/product-category/den-building-construction/>

[https://www.decathlon.co.uk/C-541994-climbing-ropes-and-ropes-bags/T-387255\\_387252](https://www.decathlon.co.uk/C-541994-climbing-ropes-and-ropes-bags/T-387255_387252)

**You can ask your local climbing centre if they have old ropes to retire which can still be used for den building.**