The Early Years

Sustainability and Climate Change Audit



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irresistible-learning.co.uk

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE AUDIT

This audit is designed to assist you in evaluating your current practice and environment, with a view to looking at what improvements we can be made and how these can best be prioritised through your 'Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan'. Some changes be achieved relatively quicky whilst others will be more long term, requiring significant planning and investment. The audit embraces all three pillars of sustainability; social, environmental and economic. There are a wide range of aspects to consider, it can feel daunting, but I hope this audit can help you find goals that are achievable. The most important aspect is to have a clear plan and be actively working towards more sustainable practices, playing our part in creating a brighter future.

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our environment.





The three pillars of sustainability are based on the Brundtland Report (1987), which was very careful to identify the importance of three key elements of sustainability: environmental regeneration and protection; economic strategies; and equitable societies.

Environmental Pillar: In terms of Early Years a central focus of this is nurturing children's meaningful connections with the natural world. The pillar emphases enhancing the biodiversity within our settings and developing more sustainable habits, such as recycling and energy conservation. It also encourages thinking about the wider environment, reducing CO2 emissions through improved building energy efficiency, eco-sourced furnishings, natural materials and reusable resources. Above all, it promotes a mindset of care for the planet where we feel optimistic and empowered to affect change and make a positive difference. This pillar recognises that the foundation of environmental consciousness starts in the Early Years.

Social Pillar: In the Early Years, this pillar focuses on creating inclusive and supportive environments for children, families, and communities. It involves offering meaningful support to families that are facing hardship and distress and building strong connections beyond the setting, working collaboratively with the local community and actively engaging parents and carers. The pillar places children's well-being, rights, and holistic development at its core, promoting social equity and ensuring equal access to opportunities for all. It also recognises the importance of nurturing staff well-being and supporting their ongoing professional development.

Economic Pillar: This pillar focuses on building financially viable systems that ensure long-term sustainability. Its goal is to make early childhood education both affordable and high quality, while maintaining the financial stability of providers, educators, and families. It emphasises the value of investing in early childhood education, recognising that early investment delivers significant long-term benefits for both individuals and society as a whole. Economic sustainability also involves adopting financial models that integrate environmental responsibility: reducing wate, supporting the local economy, improving energy and resource efficiency and committing to long-term, forward-thinking strategies.

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Name: …….

Setting: …….

Date: …….

CONNECTING WITH NATURE	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Is outdoor learning prioritised, at least as much, if not more than indoors			
Are children planting and gardening outdoors			
Are children involved in all parts of the growing process – from seed to plate			
Are there indoor plants			
Is forest school practice incorporated			
Are children encouraged to slow down and notice the beauty of nature; nature walks, perhaps with cameras, microscopes, magnifying glasses			
Do we explore natural elements such as rain, making fires, wind			
Do we visit woodlands, parks or beaches			
Do we have pets or animals			
Do we have opportunity for farm visits			
Do children grow plants to take home			
Do children monitor the weather			
Do we compost			
Do we rewild part of our outdoors			

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BIODIVERSITY	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Do we plant trees, variety of local species and including fruit trees			
Are children planting nature gardens with wild flowers			
Are we growing vegetables			
Do we have bug hotels			
Do we have birdboxes			
Do we have bat boxes			
Do we have			
Do we have bird feeders			
Do we have wormeries			
Can we encourage seed swaps			
Do we compost			
Do we rewild part of our outdoors			
Do we have a (safe) pond area			

NOTE: With all these categories – if you think of additional options, please let me know and I can add them and update this audit

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OUTDOOR LEARNING is general outdoor learning prioritised – with more time outside	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Can children freely access the outdoors			
Do we have natural elements in the outdoors, logs, rocks, small ponds			
Do we prioritise natural materials outdoors – wooden tables, wooden playhouse etc			
Varied outdoor markmaking opportunities, chalk, clay paint, etc			
Varied outdoor role play opportunities			
Mud kitchen			
Sandpit			
Water play			
Large scale loose parts such as planks, tyres, rope, crates, guttering			
Natural loose parts, pebbles, tree rings, etc			
Do children garden & compost			
Quite areas dens etc			
Multi-sensory areas e.g.: sound gardens			
Science/ STEM Pulleys, scales			
Climbing options			
Bikes, trikes and scooters			
Lots of seating for adults – to get us down to their level – to better facilitate conversation			

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MATERIALS	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Do we evaluate both carbon footprint of materials and options for reuse or recycling. Consider source and end of life (final destination).			
Do we avoid all food products; threading pasta, tuff trays with lentils, playdough with flour			
Do we offer woodwork			
Do we offer clay			
Do we offer Sewing – threading, stitching, weaving and felting			
Use recycled paper			
Use recycled card			
Use natural found materials for making such a stick men, fairy dens			
Natural loose parts indoors and outdoors			
Wooden block play indoors and outdoors			
Photography, for capturing nature			
Explore light, shadows, reflection, projection			
Discontinue felt tip pens – use alternatives; pencils, charcoal, chalk			
Use natural paints, clay slip, blueberry juice etc			
Do we talk with children about where material come form			
Use a scrapstore, second hand shops and car boot sales			

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SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE- EVERY DAY HABITS	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Do we sort waste			
Do we recycle			
Do we use repurposed items			
Do we compost			
Are we reducing our consumption/ reducing the amount of waste			
Do we turn off lights when not needed			
Do we reduce water usage			
Do we conserve heating			
Mindful of the food we eat – healthy/ local (food miles)/ seasonal/less meat			
Promote cloth nappies			
Alternatives to wet wipes			
Reusable aprons			
Equipment switched off, commuters, white boards etc			
Travel to setting, by foot/bike pubic transport			
Avoid single use plastics and disposable plastics kept to minimum			
Less printing			
Avoid glitter			
Reusable milk bottles			

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SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE- ENVIRONMENT	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Building design – passive heating			
Eco building materials			
Solar panels, wind generators			
Furnishings; natural flooring, hessian display/documentation boards, more fabric less plastic			
Low energy lighting/ timers			
Eco friendly furniture			
Energy monitors			
Water meters			
Laundry racks			
Washing lines			
Limit AI usage (very high carbon footprint)			
Adaption and resilience: With hotter temperature/ higher rainfall, stronger winds. Outdoor shade, shelters etc			
Rainwater tanks			

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SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Do we support families facing distress and hardship			
Do we prioritise inclusion			
Intergenerational practices			
Do we celebrate difference			
Do we share out eco- values with families			
Do we reach out beyond setting to the local community			
Do we welcome parents and volunteers e.g.; to help garden			
Do we make our facilities available to the community at the weekend/ evenings (if practical)			
Do we nurture staff – well-being and staff development			
Do we nurture parents/carers– well-being and development			
Could we organise life skills workshops for parents – cooking woodwork, gardening sewing			
Could we have home learning bags, with books, resources, recipes etc			
Are all culture represented within our setting, picture artworks etc			
Liaise positively with other nearby settings, share CPD, liaise with feeder schools			
Support local artists – artists in residence			
Support local growers			
Be a point of networking for the local community			

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FUTURE SKILLS	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Do we prioritise development in children's creative and critical thinking			
Do we interact to nurture development of creativity - sustained shared thinking			
Do we observe progression in children's creative development - if we value creativity this is essential (See: Holistic Creativity Framework)			
Do we offer children numerous opportunities to problem solve for themselves			
Do we focus on building key dispositions to learning such as perseverance, resilience and persistence			
Do we embed a culture of make and repair			
Do we encourage a sense of agency – where children are empowered that they 'can-do' (ideas into action)			
Encourage an optimistic mindset – avoid talking about climate catastrophe			
Embrace stories that relate to the environment, weather, recycling, compost, worms, growing etc			
Do we help children develop a love for nature			

NOTE: Creative and critical thinking skills have been cited as key skills that children need in order to adapt to a rapidly changing world and to be the future innovators, finding solutions to the increasing challenges we face. For detailed information on how we can best nurture creativity and observe progression see: The Creativity Framework

https://irresistible-learning.co.uk/resource/holistic-creativity-framework/

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ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Sustainable financial management: Durable long-lasting materials Energy efficient lighting and appliances Reducing paper with digital communication Repairing toys and furniture Buying second hand			
Support the local economy: Purchasing food from local farmers Partnering with local businesses for events Inviting local artisans or workers to volunteer			
Encourage resource efficiency: Save water and electricity Compost food waste Share learning materials between classrooms Use multipurpose supplies			
Invest in staff development: Sustainable institutions invest in their people Ongoing teacher training Fair wages and good working conditions Low staff turnover (reduces recruitment costs)			
Build partnerships and secure diverse funding: To remain financially stable, settings can: Apply for educational grants Collaborate with community organizations Seek sponsorships for specific programs Organize fundraising events			

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MANAGEMENT/ / LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	Currently	Aim	Priority level
Appointed sustainability lead			
Develop a climate action plan (based on audit)			
Ensure included in setting improvement plan			
Model values - by showing respects for materials and nature and staff, families and community			
Develop values and habits in children - via play and everyday experiences - not didactic facts			
Access sustainability CPD for all staff			
Utilise Local authority initiatives and Early Years advisory team			
Access the National Education Nature Park – for further information and resources https://www.educationnaturepark.org.uk/			
Enrol in a program, such as eco schools: https://www.eco-schools.org.uk/			
Visit: Sustainability Support for Education www.sustainabilitysupportforeducation.org.uk			
In depth go-to resource from Liverpool John Moores University https://www.ncfe.org.uk/media/xbcbjrfj/early-years-sustainability-resource.pdf			
Sustainability plans and aims shared on website			
Be political: Consider options that best prioritise early years and sustainability			
Initiatives to reduce carbon emissions such as Planet Mark and ISO 14001 certification			

Implementing a plan

Prioritise aims/ targets using the audit and think of realistic time frames. Consider how we can best engage children and families. Allocate who will lead, and how we can review to measure success.

Sustainability and climate change action plan

Setting: ……..

Short term aims

Short term – 2-8 weeks
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:

Medium term aims

Medium term 2-12 months
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:

Long term aims

Long term: up to 5 years
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:
Aim: Expected impact: Engaging children and families: Outcome:
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