

There's no such thing as bad weather....

Now you may be expecting this to be followed by "...only inappropriate clothing" (Alfred Wainwright) but I'm favouring a less famous quote "There's no such thing as bad weather, there's just weather and your attitude towards it" as we delve into the whys and whats of outdoor clothing.



Effective outdoor clothing is the most important resource we can invest in

... to enable rich and sustained play and learning outdoors.

Being comfortable outdoors can increase everybody's engagement. There is nothing more effective at distracting you from a deep learning experience than feeling damp or cold, as your body focuses on survival rather than higher cognitive behaviours.

If children and adults are physically comfortable outdoors they can start to explore, observe, play and learn. Over time both children and practitioners will grow in confidence and barriers will be overcome.

Having the right sort of clothing for your setting will help to embed the outdoors as part of your normal daily practice.

The only thing that can equal clothing in importance is a settings' values and attitudes to the outdoors. Even with a limited outdoor space, with the support of enthusiastic, invested adults and effective clothing, children can access the outdoors for sustained periods, becoming deeply involved in imaginative and creative embodied learning.

Value for money

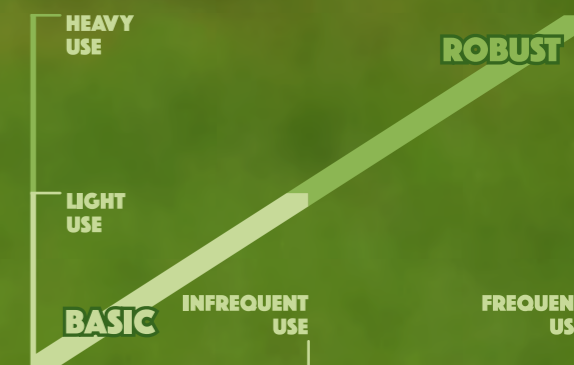
Buying outdoor clothing can be a significant investment for any setting. Making the decision to buy the cheapest waterproofs you can find may not be the best decision for your setting.

To achieve best value for money a number of factors need to be considered:

Activity type: What sorts of activity will the clothing need to endure?

Light use - walking and light play such as splashing in puddles and running around - or more **heavy use**, which might include crawling, kneeling, sitting, climbing, sliding, etc.

Frequency: How often is the clothing going to



be worn? Occasionally, eg once a month for an hour or so, or all day, every day?

Try before you buy

Most suppliers are happy to send you samples to help you choose the best option and correct sizes for your setting. If you order samples you need to return them if you are not planning to buy.

Case study: realistic expectations

Sheffield Woodland Kindergarten are a fully outdoors nursery offering care for children aged two plus. MJ attended and, when his peers started school in September, his days were increased to 5 days a week to prepare for his move to school after his 5th birthday in the summer term. MJ wore his outdoor dungarees every day. His favourite activity was climbing - he'd climb anything and jump off too! His clothing definitely experienced robust outdoor play. The expectation was that he would get through a couple of pairs of good quality dungarees a year due to the high frequency of use and high level of robust play.

It's a false economy to buy cheaper lightweight brands if clothing will be exposed to a tough environment. The clothing will fail and replacements will be required. But we also need to have realistic expectations of robust clothing, and replacements budgeted for if used frequently.

Muddy Faces Tip

Believe it or not, in the UK, it doesn't rain the majority of the time - it just feels like it does!

Even if it is not raining during your session, the ground is most likely to be damp. Many experienced practitioners encourage the wearing of waterproof bottoms for protection from the wind, mud, damp and vegetation. Dungarees give the added freedom, particularly for younger children, of being able to lie and play on their tummies whilst still protected from the damp.

If you can afford it, we recommend buying **higher quality waterproof trousers or dungarees** to allow for the extra wear and tear trousers get compared to jackets.



Factors to consider

How waterproof clothing looks, feels and works are all very important, and providing clothing that children and staff feel comfortable in will support the success of an outdoor project. Choosing items children can put on and take off without major adult assistance promotes independence and participation.





Tick box	Consideration	Comments
Jackets		
	Removable or adjustable hood	Will the hood stay up? Will it go over a hat?
	Comfortable material around face	Some zips & seams can be rough or spiky on the face
	Zip protected from dirt and rain	Does the zip have a storm flap and is it made of plastic or metal?
	Arm cuffs elastic or velcro	To keep hands free & able to move
	Length of coat	Particularly important for adults who squat or kneel, as a short jacket can expose the lower back
Trousers & dungarees		
	Can straps & braces be adjusted?	This will allow a better fit for different sizes
	Are clips or toggles easy to use?	Elastic or velcro makes it easier
	Detachable elastic stirrup at feet	It is important to have plenty of length in the trouser. If not, when kneeling, force pulls on the bottom of the trouser and they may rip out.
	Width of leg cuff fits over boots	If elastic is too tight to go over boot water will run into the boots
	Waistband and braces not too tight or loose	Too tight they dig in; too loose they fall down
	Height of trouser	A high trouser or dungaree can prevent cold air and moisture from reaching the lower back
All-in-ones (most of the above applies)		
	Length	Make sure there is plenty of length for when children are squatting or kneeling
Other considerations		
	Colour	How a colour shows up the dirt is important. Navy or black are popular for this reason
	Children with particular needs	You might avoid material that rustles, or specific colours

How waterproof is the clothing?

An item of clothing labelled as 'waterproof' can range from keeping out most of the rain for brief showers only, to keeping you dry whilst exposed to rain for longer periods. A clear understanding of how waterproof an item is will help with comparing products effectively.

Look out for our waterproof rating system.

Muddy Faces waterproof clothing rating

-  2000-3000mm 1 drop is light water
-  4000-6000mm resistant down to
-  7000-9000mm 4 drops which
-  10,000-12,000mm is extremely waterproof

Is the material environmentally considerate?

The **OEKO-TEX® Standard 100** is an independent test and certification system which most clothing now follows.

"Human beings are 100% washable & dryable."

Kathryn Solly



Care - cleaning, washing and storage

Outdoor clothing's longevity is important, and a care and storage strategy is vital.

Waterproof clothing, if maintained in the correct way, should last for a long time, giving good value for money. Dirt and residue can build up on your waterproof clothing, affecting the garment's breathability and waterproof efficiency. However, every wash, particularly in a machine, reduces the lifespan of the clothing.

We recommend (for most outdoor clothing) that you rinse under running water or, if water is limited, rinse in a bucket of water then rinse again in a clean bucket of water.

Machine washing

Always check the label of your garment for exact care details. Rinse out any detergents from the machine before washing as detergent and fabric softener destroy the waterproof coating on many fabrics.

Drying

After rinsing the garment, hang it up to air dry completely. Do not use a drying machine.

Storage

Make sure all waterproofs are dry before storing away; this will help prevent them becoming mouldy or musty. Avoid storing in direct sunlight as this can cause damage to the fabric.



Don't forget the grown ups

Clothing is as important for adults as it is for children, possibly more important as children tend to be more active and generate more of their own heat. Adults need to be comfortable in order to facilitate good quality outdoor play and learning. They need to be able to move easily and to regulate their temperature to remain comfortable. If this is not the case,

then a practitioner could become cold, less interactive and less alert, leading to sessions being cut short even though the children are still fully engaged outdoors.

Top tips

From Sheffield Woodland Kindergarten.

- Try setting up a quarterly **clothes swap** for parents

- Holes in socks – don't throw them away - turn them into wrist warmers
- Reuse items in different seasons
- Encourage children to become independent in regulating their own temperature, eg knowing where their drink bottle is, and to get a drink when they feel thirsty, and if they feel cold to add their extra layer.



Shop for outdoor clothing

Muddy Faces are a specialist outdoor clothing supplier with a well-tested range of outdoor clothing and footwear.



Visit the Outdoor Hub

Clothing guides including [dressing for the outdoors](#), [layering](#) and information for parents.

