MODULE #4



Outdoor Play & Confident Conversations

This module invites you to reflect on:

- Common concerns raised by families, educators, colleagues, and Program Advisors.
- Your comfort level when discussing the benefits of outdoor play.
- Strategies for effectively addressing and responding to these concerns.
- Realistic scenarios you may encounter and practical ways to navigate them.

***Module Length: Approx. 1.5 hrs to complete**

Reflection

Take some time to reflect on the following question. We encourage you to write down your responses and come back to it from time to time as you complete the modules!



Which concerns related to outdoor learning are most frequently raised by Families, Educators/Colleagues, or Program Advisors?



How confident do you feel sharing the benefits of outdoor play with others?

Very Comfortable!

Comfortable!

Somewhat Comfortable!

Not Comfortable!

When discussing outdoor play with others what makes you feel most confident?	What barriers (internal or external) affect your confidence when advocating for outdoor play?

Before we can effectively address concerns, educators need a solid understanding of why outdoor play is essential. If you are still exploring your own 'why,' please refer to ***Module #1: From Awareness to Practice – An Outdoor Learning Journey*** *in this series or connect with THRC's Pedagogical Mentors for further support!*

Navigating Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations often reflect individual values, emotions, and lived experiences. Each person approaches outdoor learning with a different comfort, level, and honouring these differences with respect is essential.

When concerns are raised, it is important to consider:

- How will you facilitate open and respectful communication to gain a clear understanding of the individual's level of comfort?
- What are their experiences of playing outside when they were young?

Use Proactive Communication



- Include your outdoor-play philosophy in the programs handbook and highlight this during tours.
- *Example:* "If you'd like, I can walk you through the safety measures we use and some of the benefits we see when children engage in outdoor and risky play".

Frame outdoor play as a learning opportunity



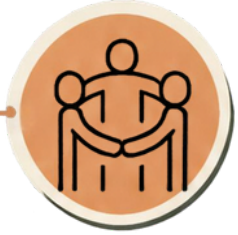
- Connect the learning to Ontario's Pedagogy How Does Learning Happen.
- Example: "Today outside we learned to... this supports engagement as outlined in How Does Learning Happen".

Show empathy



- Acknowledge their feelings and use "I statements" Example: "I hear your safety concern, and it's something we prioritize too".
- Follow this with an explanation of your program's safety practices.

Invite Participation



- Offer outdoor play open houses or family nature walks.
- Update families, educators and Program Advisors about outdoor learning through newsletters, photos, and documentation and invite them to contribute or add feedback.

Perspective-Taking Activity

As we have just explored, families bring a wide range of experiences, beliefs, and comfort levels to conversations about outdoor play. We know that taking time to understand these perspectives helps educators build trusting relationships, respond with empathy, and engage in meaningful dialogue.

Consider the perspective of **one** of the following families:

- A family new to Canada experiencing winter for the first time.
- A family whose child has a previous injury related to outdoor play.
- A family with limited access to outdoor spaces in their community.

Reflect:

- What experiences might shape their perspective?
- What questions could help you better understand their comfort level?
- What information or support might be helpful?



By seeking to understand a family's unique experiences before responding, educators can create collaborative partnerships that respect family perspectives while supporting children's engagement in outdoor play and learning.



Exploring Commuication Strategies

Let's explore some communication strategies commonly used in difficult conversations. Learning about communication strategies is important because it helps you interact more effectively, especially in challenging or sensitive situations.

Communication strategies help:

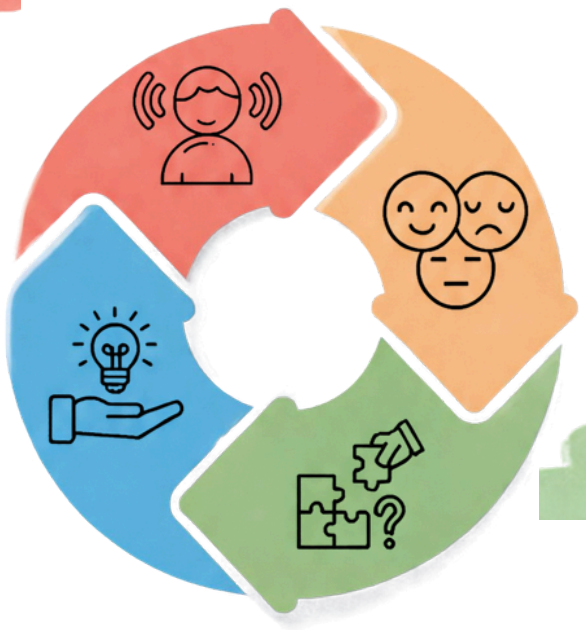
- **Build understanding and trust by acknowledging others' perspectives and emotions.**
- **Reduce conflict and defensiveness through respectful language and active listening.**
- **Support collaboration by focusing on shared goals rather than opposing positions.**
- **Encourage problem-solving that works for everyone involved.**

Active Listening:

Demonstrates that you are truly hearing and understanding the other person's concern—without interrupting or judging.

Validating Feelings

Acknowledges emotions without agreeing or disagreeing with the perspective.



Sharing Professional Knowledge

Offers evidence-based information in a calm, respectful way.

Collaborative Problem-Solving

Invites the other person into the solution rather than positioning yourself as the decision-maker.

Communication Strategy Match Up

Now it's time to test your knowledge of the communication strategies you explored on the previous pages.

Below are the four strategies commonly used in difficult conversations, along with example statements related to outdoor play.

Your task:
Match each statement to the communication strategy it demonstrates.



ACTIVE LISTENING

"I understand why you might feel worried—many families share similar concerns."



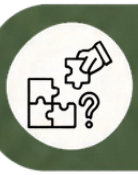
VALIDATING FEELINGS

"Let's think together about what might help you feel more comfortable with outdoor play."



SHARING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

"It sounds like **safety** is your biggest concern, especially in this we**ather**."



COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

"Research shows that outdoor play supports children's physical health, resilience & emotional well-being."

Refer to the **Example Key** section after completing this activity for further suggestions/answers.

Scenarios for Discussion and Reflection

Concern #1: *"I am afraid my child will get hurt"*

What underlying concern(s) might be driving their question?

How can you respond with empathy first?

What communication strategy can you use?



Looking for more ways to build your confidence with Risky Play experiences? Check out Module #3: A Journey Into Risky Play in this series, or connect with THRC's Pedagogical Mentors for additional support!

Scenarios for Discussion and Reflection

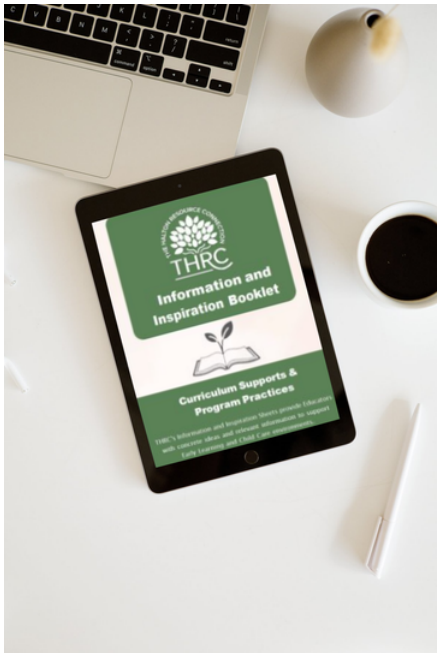
Concern 2: *"My child will be too cold / too hot / uncomfortable"*

What underlying concern(s) might be driving their question?

What proactive communcation could you use?

What communication strategy can you use?

Looking for more ways to explore the benefits of Outdoor Play in all types of weather? ? Check out THRC's Information and Inspiration Sheets!



Scenarios for Discussion and Reflection

Concern 3: "Outdoor play seems unstructured. Are they learning anything?"

What underlying concern(s) might be driving their question?

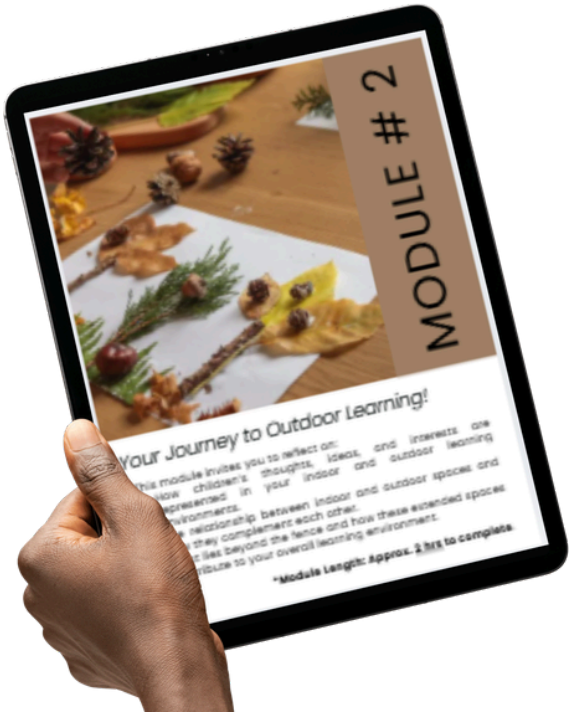
In what ways could this concern open the door to a learning opportunity?

What communication strategy can you use?

Looking for more ways to strengthen the connection between Indoor and Outdoor learning? Check out Module #2: Your Outdoor Learning Journey in this series, or connect with THRC's Pedagogical Mentors for additional support!







Scenarios for Discussion and Reflection

Concern 4: "Why do you bring the children outside in rain/snow/mud?"

What underlying concern(s) might be driving their question?

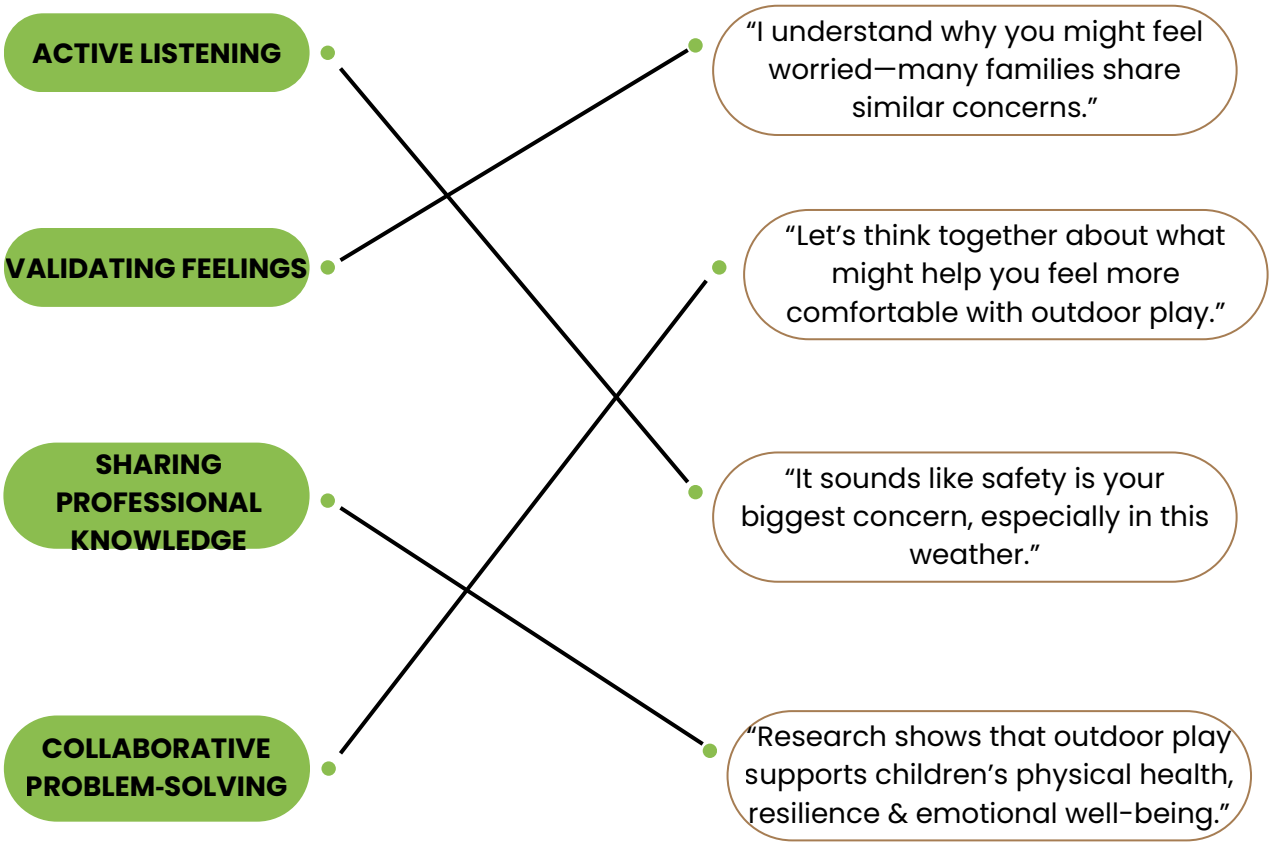
How might you invite participation while reassuring others that their concerns matter?

What communication strategy can you use?

Looking for more ways to explore the benefits of playing in Mud, Rain or Snow? Check out THRC's Information and Inspiration Sheets!



MODULE #4
EXAMPLE KEY & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Self-Directed Learning Opportunities:

- Play Nature Podcast By: Rusty Keeler: Getting Licensing and Risky Play to Fit Together

THRC Resource Library has a variety of resources to support your journey.

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