



WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Week 2- 30th March 2020

Tips and ideas for learning and connecting outdoors during Covid-19...

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Whatever the weather...

The weather last week was amazing. That lovely sunshine we had all been looking forward to, after quite a grey winter, really heralded the start of Spring with all that nature has to offer in the form of flowers; blossom; buzzing insects; beautiful butterflies; fresh green leaves and the all important Vitamin D from all that sunshine (great for immune systems). This week is looking like a return to grey, but still that is no reason not to get outside and rediscover all that you did last week. It may be a bit chilly so make sure to wear plenty of layers which will keep you warmer for longer, then can be easily stripped off. If it gets wet then waterproof clothing and footwear allows you to get wet and muddy (whilst keeping your clothes clean, so not just for when it is wet!). So, enjoy our activities all about smell, touch, sound & taste.

Looking after ourselves

Nature is a great healer and of great benefit to our mental health. The space and freedom of forest school is also very good for children (and everyone else too), allowing them time to process the changes that are taking place in their lives at the moment. This time and space can be replicated in the garden or on a walk and gives us a chance to practice making judgements on the risks that we may across too, an essential life skill. From making a judgement about whether we can balance across a log or climbing a tree safely. It is really important not to do all the risk assessing for children and remove all dangers. It is good to let them to make choices on lower level risk and be involved in discussions with you about more dangerous activities. There will then come a point when they are competent at making choices and can be trusted to have less supervision, another very important part in their development. Meanwhile make sure you are on hand to supervise more adventurous play.

If trying to replicate a more Forest School and child friendly garden those of you with 'messy' or untidy gardens will be at an advantage, as it is exploring those wilder areas and any 'loose parts' that will be key in their imaginative and creative play. Leave sticks, stones, cones, piles of leaves. Designate a digging area that will not disturb your growing areas and see if you can find old sheets and rope for constructing dens or anything else that takes the imagination. See more on this here <https://www.treehugger.com/family/interesting-backyards-make-best-playgrounds.html> . The activities in these newsletters are not strictly Forest School, but a really good starting point for getting outdoors into nature. Then Forest School may follow on as the children take the lead and explore, make discoveries and create with what they find.

play • learn • connect

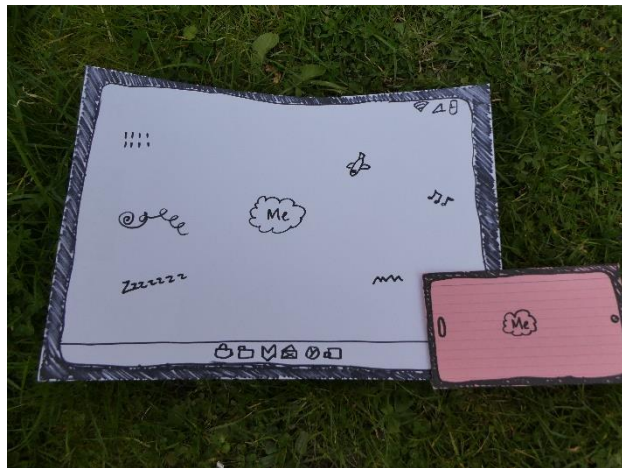
Sounds of Nature

For a bit of relaxation time in the outdoors there is nothing better than stopping for a few minutes and listening to the sounds around you. Some will be people-made, some from nature- a good discussion point. For the youngest children they will need to do this with their adult and with eyes open at first. You will need to start with short amounts of time and then can progress to longer times with eyes closed and by yourself for a fully immersive experience in nature. Children can count how many sounds they hear on their fingers or point to where they hear the sounds coming from. This then leads into trying a Sound Map activity.

A Sound Map is a way of recording the sounds you hear on a piece of paper. Any size of paper will do: record card; A4 or you can go even bigger! You could pretend the piece of paper is a mobile phone or tablet and that you are going to record the sounds you hear. Sounds can be represented by symbols or words, whichever you prefer. Make sure to put yourself in the centre and then put sound symbols in relation to where you heard them.

If your child becomes really comfortable with sitting still in their own space, they can do something called a 'sit spot'. In this activity they find somewhere to sit and use all their senses to notice and observe nature and anything else around them for say 5min, then they can extend it to longer. This allows for deep connections with their surroundings and an awareness of themselves in it. It can also be considered a mindful activity.

Although being quiet and reflective outdoors is great it can also be an opportunity to *make* noise. Grab a couple of sticks and bang them together- what is the loudest noise you can make or how about the quietest? Test out the sounds on other objects in the house or garden. Then you can introduce other items: flower pots; buckets; pots and pans. You can even make your own musical washing line by stringing a range of items along a fence or wall and make your own orchestra. Let the noise commence and bring some joyfulness in to your space!



Touch and Feel

It is easy to forget to use our sense of touch when exploring the outdoors. Why not take off your shoes and go for a walk on a Barefoot Safari, use your eyes to spot anything too prickly, but do try to find as many different textures as possible, maybe even some mud. This could be done indoors too if you can create your own texture trail from different materials found around the home, could be interesting!

On a walk or around the garden you can go on a Texture Hunt, pick up and feel any objects you find (making sure it is not something living and growing) and think about whether they are soft, hard, rough, smooth or any other texture word you can think of. Pop them a little pot or bag, then when you finish you can sort each item into groups of different texture words on a piece of paper or on the ground. An empty egg box is great for collecting as your items can be put straight into different sections.

Feeling the textures of bigger things like trees, walls and fences is a great chance to do some wax crayon rubbings. Grab a piece of paper and a wax crayon, hold your paper onto whatever you are getting a rubbing of and turn your crayon onto its side, then rub it across the paper to get a texture pattern. Play around with this and do another rubbing on top with different colours and get creative...



Take a sniff...

Follow your nose and sniff out the best smells that nature has to offer, or the stinkiest! All you need for this is a small dish or flower pot then wander around picking up objects you find or taking a pinch of something there is lots of growing. Hold it up close to your nose and take a good sniff, what do you think-Nice? Yucky? Then pop it in your pot. Find a special twig that will become your stirring stick, maybe you can give it a fantastical name. Give it a stir and take another sniff, now the magic takes place-pour a little of some magic potion in (water with food colouring added). Stir and wait for a magical change then give it another sniff, if it has been a dry day the smell will of changed, if a wet day then a little bit of imagination may need to be applied- maybe it smells of strawberries or marshmallows!

This may develop into a potion mixing activity to make more smells or maybe a magic potion or you could try petal perfumes once more flowers are out.



Tasty Nature!

Maybe you have some food growing in the garden that is ready to eat or you could plant something to eat later in the year. We will have more about planting and foraging in another issue, meanwhile why not make a lovely picnic/snack to eat in your garden or in a quiet spot on a local walk, food always tastes better outdoors-yum, yum!