



WORDS FROM THE WOODS

Week 7 – 11th May 2020

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

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A sense of place...

This time at home has had some benefits, one of which is really getting to know your local space, be it your garden or a local walk. When children regularly attend a Forest School site, they really get to know their place and the different areas within it. When a group first comes to a site, I love to let them really get to know it and feel as if they belong there. Eventually they may start to come up with names for an area, like the 'Rocket tree' or 'Fairy mound'. This sense of belonging gives them confidence, through their knowledge and experience, that they can apply to do things that really motivate them. There are several things you can do too to help your child really get to know the space they can access and that is what we will cover this week.

Treasure Hunts

At the beginning of many of my Forest School sessions I will often let the children in and then have something for them to go and find around the site. This is a great opportunity for them to reconnect with the space and notice what has changed since they were there last. This can be something that I have actually hidden, like my soft toy animals, which are something familiar that they can relate to, to golden stones or maybe flour (which will wash away) set along a trail. Sometimes we will have a brief look at a book and then find different pictures on wooden discs from that story or I have made a salt dough gingerbread family. There might be objects from your house that shouldn't be in nature to try and spot. Maybe it will be pictures of birds and you will spot or hear a real one, the ideas are endless, so please see the pictures below for all these ideas and more that can easily be placed out in your garden or on a walk for children to spot. Just be aware that they need to be fairly obvious and not to put out too many as I can guarantee you will forget about some!



Another option is something that is already there that they can find, maybe a particular colour, smell or touch. Something that is 'yucky' or makes them go 'ooh' is fun. Or you can try to find something as big as your arm; smaller than your foot or taller than you for comparative language. The Go Find It card game has some of these ideas and is great fun, it can be found here <https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/gofindit.html>



At Forest School sometimes the treasure hunt is to collect sticks of different sizes for a fire or you may collect little pieces of colour on a sticky strip. This is simply a piece of card with double sided sticky tape on it, or can be tape of any sort made into a bracelet on the wrist. Maybe you will collect items to make a beautiful picture straight on the ground



Maps

When you know a place, or when you are getting to know a place, it can be good to orientate yourself and try to represent the area by some other means, such as a map. A map does not just need to be drawn on paper, it can be a model of your green space, or walk, that you make on the ground using natural materials that can be found. It can be as small as an A4 piece of paper or as large as the one shown on the right, which is framed by some sticks.

Another way to make a map is by making a 'map stick' also known as a 'journey stick'. This works really well if you go for a walk and along the way you collect different items that represent different parts of your walk or green space. Then find a stick/or an alternative and tie your items on with string/elastic bands/wool and retell the story of your journey through your area.



This map stick was a walk around the Ridgeway site where we first came across the red berries on the hawthorn trees, then there is a stick for the log area, next a Beech leaf for the tree we hang our swing from, which is also tied on. There is some grass tied on for a grassy slope, then a piece of a larch tree in this area, next a leaf from the Elder tree at the top end and finally some Oak leaves from the big Oak that gives our Forest School its name.

What I then love doing is making a simple picture map of a site for the children to use. You can mark treasure on it and it is a great introduction to map reading and how to orientate a map to make sense of it. It can be quite surprising how even young children can start to understand this way of thinking. This can be a joint project you work on together- deciding what features should be included and what the different areas are called, this will then turn your area into something rather magical and special, a place that you will really treasure and connect with.



Grounding yourself

Parenting at home is tough in lockdown, believe me I have two teenagers! They are both very good kids but being with each other 24hrs a day really amplifies all those wonderful teenage traits that are part and parcel of their development. I recently went on a 'Parenting in Lockdown' course with Jo McAndrews, having been on a previous one on talking to children about climate change. She talked about what children need, with the most important thing being that they feel they are connected to someone and loved, but then one of the other important things was to have nature connection, whether indoors or out. She also shared some ideas on what to do when we feel stressed, adults or children. There are 3 main ways of helping ourselves:

1. Breath- There are many different breathing exercises that can be practiced to bring some calm. At Forest School I like to get a leaf, hold it up in front of your face and blow with a long gentle breath, like you are blowing a candle flame without it going out.
2. Body- Stress builds in our muscles so we need to shake it out, so you can literally shake your arms and legs. Or you can stretch up really high and bend over to touch your toes.
3. Mind- Ground yourself by firmly planting your feet on the ground and imagining you are a strong tree. You can then bring your hands in and place them on your heart and tummy, did you know these important organs function a bit like our 2nd brains? Then think some positive thoughts and be kind to yourself, tell yourself you are safe and you matter/are loved.

These are all important practices, which are potentially easier to introduce at a younger age and are even more effective if practiced outdoors, where our well-being and calmness are enhanced.

Elder treat

So, I have been eagerly awaiting the frothy flowers of the Elder tree coming out this month and I have just spotted the first ones in our garden. Which means it is time to get some extra sugar and lemons in to make some yummy Elderflower drinks! We are just coming to the end of last year's cordial so it is very timely, what follows is the recipe I use for the cordial, however if you want a more instant, less sugary drink then the photo has the recipe we use at Forest School to make a delicious Elderflower drink, especially nice with some ice (but please use within 24hrs). Some people say the flavour is best when the flowers are picked on a sunny day, I prefer a dull day as there are less insects to shake off and worry about, you will need to rinse the flowers briefly too.

2.5 Kg Sugar

1.5 litres water

2 unwaxed lemons

20 Elderflower heads

85g citric acid (get online)

- Dissolve the sugar in the water by gently heating and stirring,
- Cut large strips of lemon peel off the lemons then chop lemon into rounds. Add to the liquid
- Once sugar is dissolved add the washed flowers & citric acid. Stir well and let infuse for 24hrs. Strain then put in a sterile bottle. If you put some in jars it can freeze too



You will need to make sure you identify the Elder tree correctly, often children think the flowers of Cow Parsley are similar. The Cow Parsley is a plant that can grow to chest height, whereas the Elder tree, although often not a tall tree and bushy in form, is a tree and does have a ridged bark and serrated leaves like those in the picture. Use a book or the Seek app to check if you are unsure. Happy drinking!

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