

**Thinking differently about
provision for autistic children in
early years and primary education.**

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**Positive
Challenging
Exciting**



What we do...

Enthuse Enjoy Challenge Inspire



Have fun
Get wet and muddy
Make fires
Explore



**Skills
Engagement
Care**

**Fun
Safe
Learning**



So why outdoors?

No walls
Lower sensory
challenge
Collaborative
purpose



- 100 studies +
- Mental restoration
- Eases acute emotions
- Lowers stress and anxiety
(including systolic blood pressure and noradrenaline and cortisol levels).

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/news/englands-largest-outdoor-learning-project-reveals-children-more-motivated-to-learn-when-outside>

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/cfe-through-outdoor-learning.pdf>



A Short Story

- School refusal
- Unwanted behaviours
- Ed Pysch.
- OWLS CIC



Outdoor sensory diet

Touch/Deep pressure

Hammock – swaddle
Hammock – flipping
Hammock – swinging
Mud play
Exploring outdoor textures
Making woodland arts/crafts
Gardening
Clay play
Digging out tree root plates
Water play
Collecting sticks
Moving logs
Exploring ice/puddles/bogs/mud pools
Den building
Wind/rain on face
Moving water – fingers/legs/feet
Pressure from sea waves
Leaves on face/hands
Being buried in leaves or sand

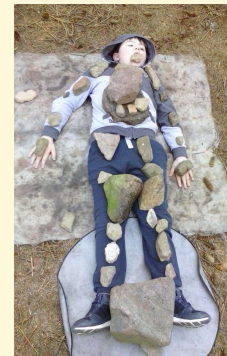


Movement/proprioception/vestibular

Hammock swinging and other movements
Climbing in and out of the hammock
Climbing trees, balancing, jumping off, jumping over
Bouncing on fallen trees
Running in woods
Playing games – stuck in the mud, hide and seek, Camouflage
Carrying kit in a rucksack
Lifting kettle/pouring water
Placing fire bowl
Moving heavy logs
Collecting sticks
Sliding on ice
Cooking and preparing food
Splashing in puddles
Woodland exploration
Digging in tree root plates
Climbing/jumping balancing on rocks
Den building
Squeezing into tree roots/holes

What we did

- Planned the day together
- Chess and other games
- Outdoor play
- Tree climbing
- Informal social stories



Listening/Auditory

Bird song
Tree sounds in the wind
Making musical instruments
Exploring sounds of different trees
Hitting/banging
Observing silence
Listening to moving water
Making water move - sounds
Cracking of ice
Puddle jumping
Mud play
Dropping rocks in water
Sea waves
Leaves falling in the wind
Grass

Looking/Vision

Tree branch movement
Changes of the seasons
Woodland crafts
Plants/flowers/types of trees
Wildlife
Pond/stream dipping
Bark
Relaxing light on the eyes
Exploring tree root plates
Camouflage exploration
Den building
Changes in weather – clouds/plant reactions



Smell/Taste/Oral

Natural foods – sorrel/pine/sap
Cooking
Fire / smoke
Hot chocolate! – warming drinks
Smells of plants/leaves when crushed
Seasonal changes
Being buried in leaves
Scent in woodlands after rain
Scent of the beach – seaweed
Smelling the earth in a tree root hole

The defining moment

- Major meltdown
- What we did
- Why it worked
- Evidence



Perseverance

- Reduced fear of failure
- Determination
- Laughing with others
- Tolerance of failure



Strategies we use

We develop a secure and unconditional safe connection.

Playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy.
(PACE Golding and Hughes 2012)

We stay open, engaged while remaining calm and non judgemental.

Real autonomy - strengths based.



Success

- Relaxed
- Communicative
- Low anxiety
- Responding to requests
- Displaying his humour
- Open to trying new things



Building bridges

We smile and actively listen!

We reduce our demands.

We reduce our body language.

We use structure, boundaries and routine within a relaxing environment.



What we offer

Work with children to

Manage stress and anxiety to reduce meltdown frequency and intensity.

Develop communication and life skills.

To enable inclusion and class participation at an appropriate level.

Develop realistic and attainable positive mental health skills for life.

Work with adults to

Support children to facilitate faster recovery from a meltdown.

Reduce the pressure on anxious children in order to lower the number of harmful meltdowns occurring.

Support children in developing the common missing skills.

Create a programme with the children to support long-term positive mental health development.

Adaptation of teaching skills to enable inclusion and success for all children.



More strategies we use

We use collaboration not power!

We model, model, model!

We follow the child's pace and interests.

We show empathy and not anger.



Final ideas for strategies

We reduce our controlling and demand language.

We try to be non-directive.

We work with the child to find a solution that is acceptable to everyone.

We avoid imposition.

We review to enable transition.



What we are discovering

This approach works for many autistic young people.



The Future ?

Enable more schools and providers to understand the benefits of outdoor provision with PACE for children on the autistic spectrum.

