



Case Study

The Great Outdoors...whatever the weather



Honey Kaur has been a childminder for 14 years. She has provided loving and nurturing care to countless children. Keeping a strong bond with her families, has meant she is a trusted and respected professional within her local community.

We hear repeatedly that being outdoors is good for us.

If we dare to moan about the weather, someone will pipe up, 'there's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing'.

In my practice as a Childminder, I find these things to be so true. When I'm out in the open with young children, they provide me with many 'eureka' moments.

Adam is one child who does just this.

Adam's arrival

Adam started with my childminder setting during the pandemic. It's fair to say that his parents were nervous first-time parents, along with the added anxiety of the pandemic.

Adam arrived with a list of *dos and don'ts*, including:

1. Don't let him go outside when the weather's cold - he may get sick.
2. He tends to put things in his mouth, so we don't want him to touch anything dirty.

I agreed to his parents' requests as part of building a partnership with them. *It was far too soon to speak with them about year-round outdoor play.*

Adam was a friendly and energetic child. He was interested in playing with dinosaurs, balls and transport. It soon became clear to us that Adam had a delay within his speech and language – he expressed this through getting frustrated easily. We supported him by giving words to his emotions and encouraging his interests.

Over time he began to settle.

Adam's discovery of the garden

Once Adam was reliably settled, we asked his parents to come and see him. As they arrived, Adam was in the garden. It was a mild day - we were being mindful of his parents' anxieties and wishes. We found him playing with trucks, rolling them in the sand and across the flower beds into giant tyres where he was collecting other vehicles.

His parents were amazed and so pleased to see how involved he was. Adam's mum said, "I expected him to try eating the sand!" and "He's making friends." It was great for them to see how capable and engrossed Adam is when playing outdoors, but most of all how happy he is.

I took this opportunity to expand on the benefits of playing outdoors all year-round and how it would benefit Adam's learning. We talked about keeping him safe while allowing him to take risks and keeping him warm by layering. His parents were reassured.

Adam's love of space and freedom

Adam's love for the outdoors continues to grow. He often asks to go outside, even on colder days. His parents are amazed at how much he's growing in confidence and how his language skills are improving.

We encourage Adam's love for the outdoors by taking nature walks, having picnics, running in large fields, and exploring the garden.

Nature is having a profound impact on Adam's development. Not only has it improved his physical health, but it's also helped his cognitive and social skills.

Adam's progress is clear when he:

- fills pots with water and transports them
 - is happy to wear wellies, having insisted on wearing a particular pair of trainers
 - isn't cross about wearing overalls
 - proudly attempts to put his gloves on independently
 - accepts the requests we make: 'it's time to go inside' or 'let's help pack away'
 - manages his emotions: if a child is on a specific bike that he wants, Adam will go to an adult, point to the bike, and communicate he wants a turn. Previously he would have just taken the bike
-

Adam's language and communication development

Adam communicates well using facial expressions, pointing and gestures. We think a lot of this is due to the confidence and contentment he's developed through spending time outdoors.

He makes eye contact with his peers when trying to get their attention, previously he avoided it. He engages with other children by patting them for their attention, previously he played alone. Adam frequently uses jargon to converse whereas he previously remained silent.

New adventures

We've recently been visiting our community gardens - Adam keenly explores. The wet and dirt don't hold him back, quite the reverse. He giggles and squelches through the mud and is keen to touch worms and insects. He loves fishing for snails and frogs.

The journey continues...

Adams parents are extremely supportive and happy with his development. They now regularly take him to the Community Gardens.

Being outdoors can help young children find contentment and engage in plenty of learning... no matter what the weather.

By Honey Kaur