

Unleashing the Potential of Outdoor Spaces: Early Years' Communication and Language Development in Childminding Settings



Leona Smith has been working in childcare for 26 years, with the last 10 years working as a childminder. Communication and language play an integral role in the development of young children. As a childminder, one of the best ways to give children in the Early Years fantastic outdoor opportunities to build these skills is to make use of the space around them. This blog post will explore how childminding settings can unleash the potential of outdoor spaces to develop communication and language in the Early Years.

Benefits of Outdoor Spaces in Childminding Settings

As children engage in the world around them, it is the outdoors that generates a place of awe and wonder. Children find a place of freedom and imagination. It is a place where there is no right or wrong answer, just a sense of being and exploration.

The outdoors allows children to express themselves in a variety of ways, whether it be running, jumping, hiding or climbing or sometimes just sitting and taking in the sights and sounds of nature. Children are free to ask questions and take observations about their environment and take their own risks as they delve into a world full of curiosities.

Over the 10 years of being a childminder, I have found the children in my setting to be more relaxed, eager to learn, independent, and excited and their imaginations seem to come alive as they explore the world's natural treasures around them.

Outdoor Activities that Foster Communication and Language Skills Development

The use of the outdoor environment creates a fantastic space for a variety of activities. With many children, interests change from day to day and activities are not always planned in advance. This is when the outdoors creates a huge advantage to children's learning.

Whether you are taking the children in your garden, to the park or are fortunate enough to take them to a forest, there is plenty of natural resources that can spark conversation and curiosity amongst them all.

You may wish to take a book with you, children will enjoy sitting amongst the trees or on the grass as they engage in the story. A particular favourite is the Gruffalo, this story can be followed with the children retelling their favourite parts and rustling up a Gruffalo crumble or owl ice cream with pine cones and leaves and encouraging them to tell us about their creations as they go.

Strategies for Engaging Children in Meaningful Outdoor Conversations

The pure joy and excitement on the children's faces when outdoors leads to an array of meaningful conversations. Looking around and spotting a daffodil sprouting in the spring or a robin whistling in the trees are all huge conversation starters amongst even the smallest of children. Children thrive when they are engaged and listened to and the outdoor environment provides a host of possibilities to share new words and explore special sounds.

Many children will only see some wonders of nature through books or a screen, providing children with opportunities to touch, hear or smell the world around them will amplify their intrinsic motivation to learn and discuss, developing rich and meaningful conversations among adults and their peers.



The Department for Education Help for Early Years Providers website offers resources, activity ideas and advice for teaching communication and language to early years children.



Department for Education

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Evidence Store provides evidence informed approaches and practices to support communication and language development in the early years.



Education Endowment Foundation