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Providing a place for children to talk: Childminder 151333

URN: 151333

Area: Devon

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Brief description

Many children enter early years settings with limited communication skills. This provider describes how she has successfully created a stimulating environment to encourage them to talk.

Overview – the provider’s message



Childminder in her 'den'

'Reducing the clutter in the play environment and providing a focused place for children to sit, talk and think has paid real dividends in terms of children's language development. Now I am much more selective about what equipment I put out each day and I have good storage so children can select the items they want. I regularly create a "special den", with items to stimulate children's imagination and interest and to give them a space to go to.'

The good practice in detail

The childminder uses her lounge, dining area of the kitchen and the downstairs hallway as well as her garden for minding. She creates dens in all these places and changes them around so that children do not know where the next one will be.

Each of the dens has something to guide the child towards it in the form of items that are simple and inexpensive but very effective. For example, in the one made under the dining table, a row of 'stepping stones' made from place mats are used, interspersed with lights



that pop on when pressed. These invite the children to follow the 'path' into the darker area under the table tent. Inside are books and various items to explore. The table is high enough for the childminder to sit with the children when invited and the children are able to enjoy exploring items and to use a torch to look at things in the twilight. Conversation and play are often very imaginative and rich in these circumstances, as shown in the childminder's assessment records of the children.

Under the open stairs is another place that makes a great play space. Here, a clothes horse, covered with a blanket, is used to create an intimate space. Along the top of the clothes horse are safe flowers and herbs (bay leaves, lavender, and honeysuckle) from the garden, and a toy snake, to give the entrance a fragrant and tactile interest. Sensory fabrics and soft toys often stimulate girls and hands-on realistic toy items and things like magnifying glasses appeal to boys. The childminder therefore ensures that she has things that appeal to both genders. She has found that boys tend to be more solitary in their play and looks carefully for things that will stimulate them to want to talk and discuss things. Her special skill in listening helps to draw them out; the environments would be less effective without her interest and dialogue. The children also have plenty of time to use these spaces independently or to invite her back in to read or share their interests. They can add items and change the den if they wish. This gives the children a sense of ownership and deepens the learning experience.

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The childminder credits a training course and her own research as the stimuli for her change in practice. 'I let children be children and I "play" alongside them', she said. 'I take this as the trigger to capture their enthusiasm, fire their imagination and encourage their exploration of an idea. I have seen first-hand that it is with making repetitive connections



that a child can learn new skills and become more able to enjoy what life has to offer. I try to recognise their different learning styles and plan accordingly. Some children prefer to work alone and occasionally need to be encouraged into more social play. Some children learn best through listening, others through seeing and through manipulating and doing. I have to hone in on what style best suits the child and plan accordingly. I have just been on a fantastic course about "communication-friendly spaces". I was blown away with the simple techniques that can be used to create environments which are child friendly. When I returned, I immediately had a serious de-clutter and made £200 at a car boot sale to reinvest in new, more appropriate equipment. I made my setting less busy by

“cooling down” the paint work, buying soft comfortable furnishings and canopies, which added to my 'natural' storage boxes and beautiful items in my setting. The course had a huge impact and encouraged me to re-evaluate what I thought I already did well!’

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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