



Series 1. Episode 5
Turning *Little Stones* show notes
Listen to a conversation about woodland adventures with Kirsten.

Woodland Adventures
with Kirsten McGuire
from Muddy Bugs

Children LOVE to be out and about...

For most of us, our earliest memory will be something that happened outside. In this podcast, we take a fresh look at being outdoors with our children - in woodland spaces. We think about why children love the woods, how they benefit from spending time there and discovering some of their fascinations.

For Kirsten, the experiences she enjoyed outside as a child and teenager have informed her adult enjoyment of being outside. Her working life and family life (with a two-and-a-half year old and a 5 year old) reflects her love of being outdoors. Not all of us are as comfortable or confident, but we will still want our children to benefit from forest fun and woodland adventures.

Forest Schools (such as Muddy Bugs in Farnham) are becoming increasingly popular across the UK and further afield. Those leading Forest Schools are highly trained, a much-needed reassurance for many carers.

At Muddy Bugs, carers come with their young children for a 'stay and play' session. Parents, grandparents and carers were learning alongside their children. They were clearly 'catching the vision' and many explained how they are inspired to share some woodland adventures with their young children at home.

Amazing transformations just 'happen' in the woods...

Kirsten reminds us in the recording that children's **confidence, behaviour** and **social** development are all linked.

As children enjoy being in the woodland (which they do!), they become more confident in the space. The happier and more confident they are in the woodland, the greater the impact on their behaviour. And... they spontaneously become more socially aware in this space. This amazing cycle continues...



It was lovely to simply notice how children respond differently in the woods... confident children can enjoy quietness and stillness... Timid children surprise us with a new confidence. (After the session had ended, confident Caitlin sat quietly in the woods eating her lunch. She enjoyed being still and noticed new sounds. After listening to the birds for a while, she spontaneously sang a song back to them).

Another grandparent attending for the first time, could not believe "how different he (one-year-old) is here... he's so confident..."



Example - mud painting on a 'different' canvass...



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A sheet is suspended between tree trunks, just lightly weighted down with a log so the 'canvass' moves.

A selection of sticks and brushes are set out with buckets of mud. As children discovered this option, it was clear that they were happy to have a go and then share the canvass and the tools with other children and their carers. The resulting artwork was a collaborative effort, and *no-one* used the sticks improperly. The sheet can simply be washed for its next outing. No mess!

Change the environment, not the child...

At Muddy Bugs, Kirsten and Ann had prepared the space, so that children could wander around and choose the thing they are drawn towards. This way children's behaviour was focussed on the many good choices and possibilities on offer. Each child was busy and engaged.

Kirsten and Ann adapt the environment each week, keeping some activities the same and adding new possibilities as the children reveal their interests and new fascinations.

All the carers (including leaders, Kirsten, and Ann) could relax and notice what their children were drawn towards.

Woodland adventures that capture and release children's imagination and creativity

Kirsten reminds us that the simplest natural resource – sticks – have endless possibilities. She has seen children using them as a magic wand, a walking aid ("for a really long hike!", a log dog, a stick man, a broom, frames for willow weaving... With these possibilities, there is no need to use them as fighting tools. Together, even young children can move large logs into different positions!



Example - a leaf litter kitchen

Loads of children busied themselves making 'delicious' food and drink. (I love the fact that this was set up near the fire pit, where children could see their real snack was being prepared).

Over recent weeks, Muddy Bugs have been focussing on birds. Bird seed was an added 'ingredient' on offer. At the end of the session, the kitchen and utensils were quickly put away – leaving the birds to feast on anything that had been dropped. No mess!

Carers delighting in their children's woodland adventures

At Muddy Bugs, it was clear that the carers were also impacted by their children's woodland adventures. They took their lead from whatever the children were drawn to. They were relaxed and astonished by how independent and confident even very young were in the environment.



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Kirsten talked about her few minutes of peace in the adult sized hammock. This genuine moment of peace was a shared experience with her daughter who had climbed into the child-sized hammock. Such shared moments of joy are so precious.

One parent told me that how this term's theme of 'birds' had led them to continue this at home. They have made bird feeders have begun to watch the birds, learn to identify and record them. The whole family have enjoyed this.

The power of words...

The subject of another podcast and Kirsten reminds us how to limit our use of the word, 'careful!' As we adopt different phrases, children begin to manage their own risks, an important life skill.

Examples of alternatives to "careful".

How might it feel if... (we slipped off the log because it is wet and slippery today?)

What might happen if... (you swing the rope? Is there anyone in the way?)

Forest school... so what about the learning?

The woodland is a rich learning environment. The children at Muddy Bugs were learning SOOOOO much but there was no formal 'teaching' happening. The preparation before the session was the most important thing, meaning that children learnt through absorbing from the rich experiences on offer in this woodland space.

And Kirsten (who is a teacher) tells us that she continues to learn from the children every time, "it's an adventure... every session!"



A few examples of the many activities on offer at Muddy Bugs...

Long lengths of guttering propped against branches at different heights with a set of balls to run down the guttering. They experimented with both balls and other objects. Another time, there may become water shoots. These experiences will help them to grasp related learning, such as the physical rules of gravity, speed, gradient, shape, resistance... and mathematical rules of angles and length.

RSPB birds that sing the song of their species. An 11-month-old was wide eyed and smiling as he watched the bird 'singing' to him from a branch.

Managing hand washing and hygiene. Today, children scooped clean water from a bucket into a suspended carton (with holes) which acted as an outdoor tap before and after soaping their hands. So resourceful!



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Children experienced 'history' through the changing of seasons. Not so long ago, the children were looking for bird prints in the snow. Today, they listened to bird song and squirrels chattering. Soon the leaf canopy with mean they can no longer see the sky.

From a hammock (suspended between adjacent trees - one low enough for children to safely climb into), children can watch these seasonal changes in the tree canopy

Treasure hunts... Kirsten tells us that she has adapted this, so that non-writers can be involved. They can peg together their finds that match or can be grouped together. Brilliant!

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

Turning Little Stones

Delving a little Deeper

See website for details.

Also... check out Kirsten's website www.muddybugsforestschoo.co.uk