

News Release

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Sometimes the best things in life are FREE!

Childminders don't have to raid the bank for educational resources as there are endless free or inexpensive opportunities inside and outside the home. With a little imagination, exploration and recycling there are a host of exciting experiences to be had.

Outdoors is a rich treasure trove of free activities. Whatever the season, it's time to explore. Simple pleasures such as kicking through leaves on an autumn day and hearing them crunch and crackle form lasting memories. Provide containers to make collections so that you can count, compare and contrast. Create colourful collages from bark rubbings, grasses, leaves and petals.

Children are often fascinated by minibeasts. Go on a bug hunt, looking for creatures on leaves, walls and trees. Become minibeast explorers looking under logs and stones. Place a piece of string in a circle on the grass and look closely at what is crawling around in that little space.

Take time to literally smell the roses. Encourage children to look at the herbs growing and experience their aromas. An age old classic is obviously making rose petal perfume; its appeal stands the test of time. Children generally like making mixtures and potions, collecting things and adding water, then choosing a suitable stick and participating in the swirling and swishing.

Another timeless classic is mud pie making. Set aside an area of soil and add water using recycled containers. Watch as lovely, squelchy mud oozes through the fingers. At the same time why not 'hide' jewels in the mud and let the children dig for treasure. Draw a map on the back of a recycled piece of paper with X making the spot!

If possible make room for a vegetable patch or if there is a limit on space, get creative with your old containers. Children can enjoy watering and caring for the harvest. It is also a great way of encouraging healthy eating as you are far more likely to get them to taste it if they have taken a role in the caring of it. Decorate the area with shells and silver foil bells (covered yogurt pots) for a Mary Mary Quite Contrary garden! You can even make a scarecrow from old clothes.

Take time to lie on the grass and look at the changing clouds, feel the surface beneath you and make suggestions as to what the clouds remind you of. Close your

eyes and listen to the surrounding noises. It's good sometimes to just stop and reflect. Looking up through the tree canopy also offers another perspective. There is also something quite special about making a snow angel on a clear, crisp, wintry day. Looking for signs of Jack Frost on leaves and cobwebs enables children to see the richness and delicacy of nature's patterns. It's also good for realisation that we are a small part in a huge world.

Anyone who works with young children will see the value of an old yogurt pot, a bubble bath container, an old whisk or packaging. Get the children to create junk models. Old shoe boxes make super bricks for a castle wall, plastic containers can be made into water receptacles and bird feeders, plastic milk containers can be cut down into super elephants (look at the shape and you will see what I mean!)

One of the best tips for free play is to recycle old teabags. Simply collect lots of teabags, dry them out and empty them out onto a tray and use as play soil!

There are lots of recyclable resources that can be used to create colourful collages. Old sweet wrappers, string and packaging can easily be manipulated into the most imaginative of designs. Try looking at the inside patterns on envelopes and use these again to create designs and collages.

Jumble sales and car boot sales are good for budget ideas. One of my best buys was an old wooden bead car seat cover which I used for making bead strings, necklaces and other jewellery. Ask the children to save cards and wrappings as they can be used for a variety of fun designs. Old curtains and tablecloths often make the best dens and role play clothes. A piece of fabric is open ended so it can be a skirt, a cape, a headdress; an animal ...the list is endless. Throw pieces of fabric over a washing line to make a different outdoor room. Children also like washing and pegging clothing onto a line to dry.

Old pans can make fantastic musical instruments. Try hanging them on a fence or submerging them in the grass for a musical walkway. Add spoons, spatulas and old sticks to make unusual beaters. In fact music can come from a variety of sources; drums can be made from waste bins and plastic bowls, pan lids can be utilised as cymbals, make simple shakers from empty water bottles filled with things such as rice, stones or peas.

Plastic bottles can also make great skittles which can be decorated and numbered by the children!

Consider mark making using old squirty bottles filled with water. Paint rollers and brushes can also be used to make swirls and zig zags. Discarded scrubbing brushes, nail brushes and toothbrushes all make marks, whether in paint or puddles.

There are indeed endless possibilities for inexpensive, yet treasured play opportunities. Sometimes it is the simple pleasures of crunching snow, building dens; bug hunting and junk modelling that have the most profound effect. By taking the time to consider what is around you, you will uncover a rich collection to explore and an even richer store of lasting memories to foster.

