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Creative approaches: The outdoor classroom

TITLE SLIDE

My presentation will focus on the benefits of outdoor learning and the natural environment on the wellbeing of children and young people, with particular focus on its effects on children and young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

I will look at the benefits of using the outdoor environment as a creative approach to supporting children and young people, and especially those with a diagnosis of ADHD.

SLIDE ONE

It's vital we define what a creative approach is. The following points sum up what a creative approach is and how it can be practically outworked to benefit children and young people.

(READ POINTS ON SLIDE).

SLIDE TWO

It is widely thought anecdotally that childhood is not what it was in the "olden days" - many a Facebook post or meme recalling what toys were played with back then in comparison to now highlight this, but in fact, many parents and others in society worry about the effects that modern childhood has on the wellbeing of our children and young people. Has modern childhood become the following...(READ POINTS ON SLIDE).

SLIDE THREE

What do we think about this picture? Too risky? Scary? This image would likely have many in the Health and Safety Executive choking; young children with saws in the woods! This however, is a common sight in Scandinavian nations who have adopted a more outdoor learning perspective. Much of the learning in outdoor schools happens whatever the weather, and they have seen great results when it comes to childhood wellbeing. (READ SLIDE).

SLIDE FOUR

The quote on this slide sums up why outdoor learning and being immersed in nature is so beneficial to children and young people's wellbeing (READ SLIDE).

SLIDE FIVE

There have been several attempts within the UK to replicate the success of the outdoor learning environment that has proved so popular in Scandinavia. One of these approaches has been Forest School. The concept of Forest School is to encourage greater involvement in nature and facilitate the following points (SLIDE SIX).

SLIDE SIX

There are clear benefits to the outdoor classroom, with children and young people, parents and guardians and those who work with them citing the positive effects that the outdoor learning environment has on those with mental health issues, behavioural issues, and those with learning disabilities. It could be strongly argued that the positive effects of being in the outdoors is not just beneficial to those classed as vulnerable, but to everyone, with research evidencing how being in nature lowers cortisol (a stress hormone) and blood pressure.

SLIDE SEVEN

I want to show you a very short video about an outdoor kindergarten in Norway. I appreciate this eats into my presentation time so I will limit the length of the video, however, I really feel that showing you can be a more effective way to communicate my point than just me standing here talking at you.

(VIDEO)

SLIDE EIGHT

So if we recap on the video, the strong suggestion here is that outdoor learning and being in nature leads to children becoming more...(READ POINTS ON SLIDE).

SLIDE NINE

This quote sums up the value that outdoor learning can have on wellbeing (READ QUOTE)

SLIDE TEN

I mentioned earlier in my introduction about how the outdoor learning environment can benefit children and young people who present with ADHD. There are misconceptions about what ADHD is, with many citing bad parenting, boredom, lack of self control, bad diet, as some of the causes of ADHD. We refrain from delving into the potential causes today, but we will look briefly at what it is; the symptoms. (READ SLIDE).

SLIDE ELEVEN

Researchers have found the outdoor classroom to be very beneficial to those with ADHD. In fact, as we read earlier, it is as if ADHD disappears when learners find themselves in nature and in the outdoors. (READ POINTS ON SLIDE).

Interestingly, to understand why the outdoors benefits those with ADHD so profoundly, is due to the brain activity of those with ADHD. The right prefrontal cortex of the brain is implicated in ADHD. It is less active, and smaller in children with ADHD, and the severity of ADHD is proportional to the asymmetry of the left and right prefrontal cortex and the cerebral blood flow. These biological factors could explain some of the attention fatigue and other associated symptoms of ADHD. The greenness of the play setting is directly linked to the severity of the ADHD symptoms. Those who spent time in nature and the outdoors showed a vast improvement in hyperactive tendencies and attention fatigue, (Kuo and Taylor 2004).

Is ADHD really on the rise? Or should we be shifting our learning environments to the outdoors? Are our learning environments too stuffy, stifled and protected? That is a matter for you to decide.

Thank you for listening!

SLIDE TWELVE

REFERENCES