

CASE STUDY

WOODWORKING: STRENGTHENING PHYSICAL SKILLS AND BUILDING SELF BELIEF



MARION WALKER
CHILDMINDER AT
SOAR CHILDREN,
BISHOPS STORTFORD

Marion Walker has been a childminder for 16 years. She works with her husband at Soar Childcare in Bishops Stortford. She loves creating bonds with families in her community and provides a caring, fun-filled setting within which children grow, learn and have new experiences. She continuously strives to improve her practice so that children get the best possible start to their early years.

“ I CAN DO IT BY MYSELF! ”

As an early years teacher this is my favourite statement to hear from a child. A declaration of growth and self belief. A comment that means a child is secure in our setting and full of self-confidence - but not all children find it an easy statement to utter.

MEET HARRY...

Harry arrived at our setting a happy, playful 3 year old who was well spoken and loved learning new information. Each day he would inspect the room for anything new or different as if he was going on a treasure hunt. He wanted to talk about everything. He would get very excited about learning and his joy was infectious.

That was until you asked him to do something physical from playing a jumping game to putting on his own shoes. These requests were often met with a look of fear and a meltdown that he found it hard to come out of and that interrupted everyone's play. It was difficult to scaffold activities into manageable chunks for Harry because he would shut down the moment he knew he was being asked to attempt a new physical skill.

We tried making these activities into a game, we tried using pictures to show him the steps before attempting the skill itself. We tried reassurance and praise all the while teaching him self-regulation methods to help him calm down. Unfortunately each time we asked Harry to try a new physical skill that he determined to be tricky it would result in an unhappy, unregulated child in meltdown. We never knew which requests would trigger a meltdown and which he would be fine with, but we often had an unregulated session 2-3 times a week.

For Harry self-regulation and a willingness to try came from an unexpected source. I had always wanted to try woodworking with the children and had even started buying the supplies but didn't have the confidence to give it a go with such young children. We attended woodworking training with the Reachout Stronger Practice Hub for the East of England and it gave me the confidence and knowledge to put the ideas into practice. We used the starter pack they gave us together with our purchases and almost immediately introduced it to the children.



We weren't sure how Harry would react and a meltdown near woodworking tools was to be avoided so we started our woodworking one to one and we just let Harry watch from a safe distance. We explained that he didn't have to do it but could try if he wanted to. The first day we just worked on sawing. We had a lesson on safety and everyone had a go at sawing a piece of wood, Harry stood and watched as each child took a turn.

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He laughed when the pieces of wood fell to the ground. When it was his turn, I asked if he wanted a go and he started to meltdown so he was taken inside. As the other children became proficient they began making their own models very quickly and when Harry saw the models his face lit up. Suddenly he wanted to have a go to. He followed all the instructions using the two handed Japanese saw and was so excited when his piece of wood fell to the ground.



AS THE WEEKS PROGRESSED WE MOVED ONTO HAMMERING AND SCREWING. WITH EACH NEW STEP, HARRY WATCHED AND THEN JOINED IN WITH THE ACTIVITY.

WE PROVIDED RUBBER BANDS, BITS OF CORK, BEADS AND OTHER BITS AND BOBS THAT THEY COULD ADD TO THEIR CREATIONS.

Essentially woodworking became a mix of physical activity, creativity, art and design and loose parts play all rolled into one. Harry not only chose woodworking each time it was out but if another child added something to their creation, he wanted to have a go at using that material as well. We used lots of praise for not giving up and having a go and always gave his creations the attention they deserved.

What was fascinating about this whole process was that we were able to extend these skills into other areas of Harry's learning. When he didn't want to try something new, we reminded him how great the new woodworking was and that he might like this just as much.

When he didn't want to do things for himself such as putting on his shoes, we were able to say, "You can make things from wood and use a saw all by yourself, I bet putting on shoes won't take long to learn."

It started to give Harry the confidence to try new things. His fine motor skills also improved as the repetition of woodworking helped him build muscles and develop transferable skills. That in turn made the other fine motor tasks easier and you could see him grow in confidence with small steps of success.

We expected woodworking to develop the children's motor skills and creative thinking and we could see the amazing opportunities for speech development on the training we attended. We saw this with Harry. His core strength and fine motor skills improved. He can now jump with both feet off the ground and shows us everyday with enthusiasm. His language skills were always strong but we are able to model more creative language and problem solving language as he makes choices with the woodworking. What we didn't expect was the effect woodworking would have on Harry's self-regulation. If we noticed Harry starting to get upset, one of us would ask if he would like to saw. Taking him out and allowing him to do the repetitive motion of using the saw calmed him down and enabled him to rejoin the group quickly and without disturbing anyone.



TO OUR UTTER AMAZEMENT AND JOY WE WERE PUTTING OUR COATS ON TO GO IN THE GARDEN THE OTHER DAY AND I WENT TO SUPPORT HARRY AND HE SAID

“NO, I CAN DO IT MYSELF!”

THIS WAS UNCHARTERED TERRITORY FOR HARRY WHO PREVIOUSLY WANTED EVERYTHING DONE FOR HIM.

We hope that Harry continues to have that self-belief and willingness to try in all areas of life that began with woodworking in the garden.

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HARRY'S DEVELOPMENT WITH WOODWORK

- Harry's confidence to try things first himself has flourished and he can now put his shoes and coat on independently. He is working on doing up the zip.
- Harry's fine motor skills have developed and he happily joins in with drawing and art activities that he previously avoided.
- Harry's gross motor skills have also developed. He previously could not jump with both feet off the floor and was too scared to try, but now we can't stop him showing off his jumping skills.
- Harry's creativity and problem solving skills are growing as he works with wood and problem solves to create what he wants to make. This skill is being generalised into other areas as he sees he can problem solve other things he finds tricky.
- Harry's disregulated moments are now much less frequent and when he does have one, we have a strategy that helps him to get back on track. We are working on teaching him to recognise when he is getting upset and to ask for woodworking himself.

THE EVIDENCE

According to the Education Endowment Foundation research, rhythmic physical movement such as sawing combines physical activity with strategies to promote self-regulation and that this can improve executive function and have a positive impact on learning.

Woodworking gives boundless opportunities for teaching and modelling new vocabulary which has a positive impact on children's oral language.

Woodworking gives practitioners opportunities to use narrative speech as children explore and play with the materials. This has been shown to support children's communication language development.



REACHOUT STRONGER PRACTICE HUB OUR OFFER:

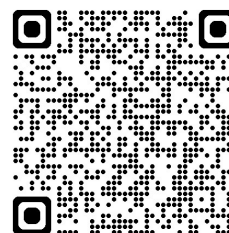
Stronger Practice Hubs are part of the DfE's Early Years education recovery support package. All support is FULLY funded and Free to access.

Each Early Years Stronger Practice Hub supports other early years settings regionally to improve outcomes for children in their local area across the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), but specifically focusing on areas of development that research shows have been most impacted by COVID-19: personal social and emotional development (PSED); communication and language, and early literacy and maths.

There are 18 Hubs - two in each of the government office regions in England.

Each Hub is led by a group-based (school-based, private, voluntary, or independent) early years provider and supports settings to adopt well-evidenced practice improvements.

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TO GET IN TOUCH



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