

Parents, Early Years and Learning: Childminders' practice example

Visits out with
parents: A day
at the zoo



Childminders from **Avon & Somerset Police Constabulary Childminding Network**¹ use visits to local attractions to promote children's learning and development.

Network coordinator, Kim Spiller, organises this type of event for the network members, inviting parents to at least one event each year.

These events are important in helping network members become a cohesive group through socialising as well as training together. Parents have the opportunity to join in and share their children's experiences first hand, gaining a greater understanding of the 'whole child' and increasing the bond and trust between themselves and their childminder.

All families at Bristol Zoo for the day received an NCMA² 'goodie bag.' Some children were wearing brightly coloured NCMA 'tag a tot' bracelets, just in case they wandered off.

It was possible to spot the childminders with their charges at a hundred yards – good publicity for the Network on the day and a talking point for the parents at pick-up time.

A day out together provides the opportunity for parents to closely observe childminders as they engage children, extending language and thinking skills, as well as expanding knowledge and understanding of the world.

Childminders actively talk to children during the day: 'Let's see where this animal comes from' while pointing to maps and diagrams showing the natural habitat; 'Look at his long tail' or 'He's eating fruit salad, just like you do at home.' This stimulates conversation with a young child, helps them to make connections, and builds on their existing knowledge.

Parents also gain insights into their child.

“This is the first time I've been able to come along as I'm on maternity leave with Martha at the moment. I've come with Daniel (three years old). It's lovely to see him socialising with the others. I can see how he really helps to look after Zara (18 months) and William (two years).”

¹An employer Children Come First Approved Network (a formal group of quality-assured childminders with support from a dedicated coordinator) with accredited childminders spread over four Unitary Authorities.

²National Childminding Association

On the day, the childminders were very aware of the direction of the children's individual interests. They noticed what fascinated and attracted the children and followed this up, encouraging parents to do likewise.

One child showed much more interest in the stairs than the exhibit. Her childminder talked about the 'up and down movement' she was exploring, instead of continuing to try and interest her in the mice on display.

During the day, all the children enjoyed healthy snacks, including raisins, carrot and cucumber sticks, and pieces of fresh fruit – a good opportunity to talk about healthy eating.

Kim had also organised a 'mini beast' session where the children could touch as well as see. This enabled them to have a first-hand experience to extend their vocabulary and knowledge – for example, they were able to experience the difference between the snail's slimy, soft body and its hard, rough shell.

Rosemary, another childminder on the trip, explained to parents how she uses pictures of the children as a screen saver on her home PC (she has over 700 on a loop). The children are fascinated and will watch entranced. They see pictures of themselves, but also of children who have now moved on, and ask questions about all the children in the 'photo library.'

Even the youngest children were engaged and absolutely fascinated by the day out together – something both the childminders and parents will be able to talk about with them for quite a while to come.

The childminders will also share the activities and photographs they took on the day with parents who were unable to join the outing and, by doing so, will enable those parents to also share and extend the learning experiences of their children.



Lisa came with her childminder Hazell. Lisa is not working at the moment and was pleased to join an organised event and see her daughter Abbey playing with her best friend Gracie, another of Hazell's charges.

Hazell explained how Abbey's interest in taking pictures with a digital camera is followed through. They load them onto the computer at home, talk about them and print some off. Some of the photos go in the children's 'daily diaries' to share with parents who could not come along on the day.

