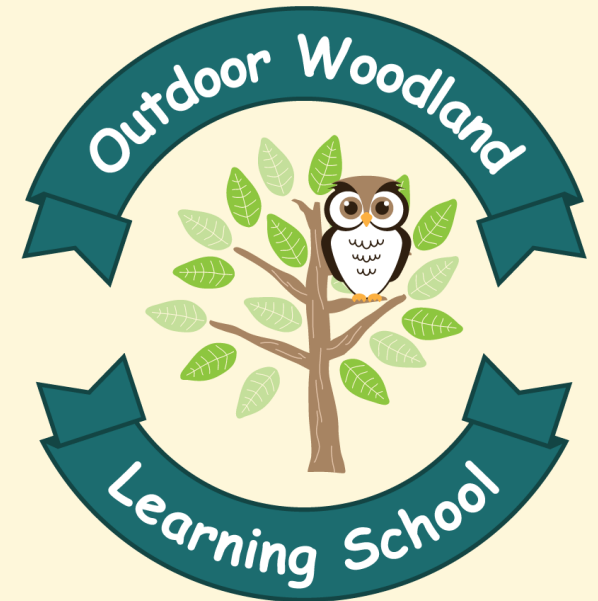


Innovative education using PACE outdoors with autistic children

Esther Gooch

Outdoor Woodland Learning School CIC
(non-profit)

esther@owls-learn.co.uk
www.owls-learn.co.uk



Aims

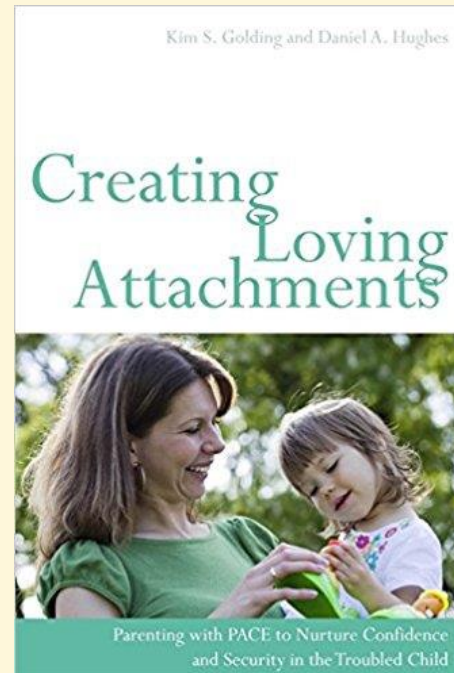
- Collaborative and nurturing approach using PACE (Golding & Hughes 2012)
- Outdoor environment reduces anxiety
- Simple ideas to try
- Changes to a school ethos and approach
- Strengths-based curriculum
- Leave inspired



What is P.A.C.E?

Creating Loving Attachments
Written by Golding & Hughes 2012

- Playfulness
- Acceptance
- Curiosity
- Empathy



What we do...

Enthuse Enjoy Challenge Inspire



Have fun

Get wet and muddy

Make fires

Explore

Fun
Safe
Learning



Positive
Challenging
Exciting





Skills
Engagement
Care

So why outdoors?

No walls

Lower sensory
challenge

Collaborative
purpose



- 100 studies +
- Mental restoration
- Eases acute emotions
- **Lowers stress and anxiety**

(including systolic blood pressure and noradrenaline and cortisol levels).

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/news/englands-largest-outdoor-learning-project-reveals-children-more-motivated-to-learn-when-outside>

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/cfe-through-outdoor-learning.pdf>



Methodologies

Therapeutic forest school

Therapeutic horsemanship

iRest yoga nidra

Outdoor sensory diet

Intensive interaction

Effective support strategies

Mindful interactions



A Short Story

- School refusal
- Unwanted behaviours
- Ed. Psych.
- OWLS CIC



What we did

- Planned the day together
- Chess and other games
- Outdoor play
- Tree climbing
- Informal social stories



The defining moment

- Major meltdown
- What we did
- Why it worked



Perseverance

- Reduced fear of failure
- Determination
- Laughing with others
- Tolerance of failure



Success

- Relaxed
- Communicative
- Low anxiety
- Responding to requests
- Displaying his humour
- Open to trying new things



Strategies we use

We develop a secure and unconditional safe connection.

Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy.
(PACE Golding and Hughes 2012)

We stay open, engaged while remaining calm and non judgemental.

Real autonomy - strengths based.



Building bridges

We smile and actively listen!

We reduce our demands.

We reduce our body language.

We use structure, boundaries and routine within a relaxing environment.



More strategies we use

We use collaboration not power!

We model, model, model!

We follow the child's pace and interests.

We show empathy and not anger.



Final ideas for strategies

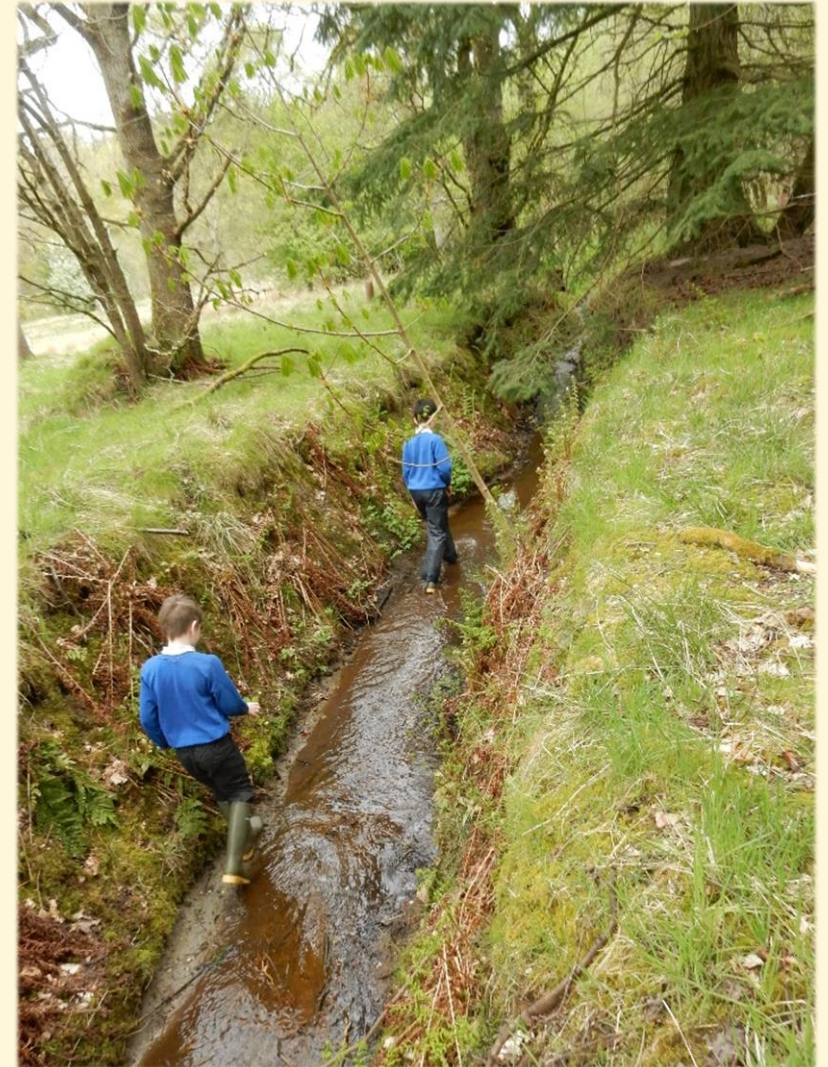
We reduce our controlling and demand language.

We try to be non-directive.

We work with the child to find a solution that is acceptable to everyone.

We avoid imposition.

We review to enable transition.



What we have found

This approach works for many autistic young people.



What the young people say

“I need it, it helps me to not feel so wobbly.” P4 learner

“I like the hammock, it is so relaxing.” P6 learner

“OWLS gives me the chance to not think about all the other stuff at school. It gives me a break from everything else. Being outside helps me to feel calm.” S3 learner

“Being at OWLS makes the rest of school much easier to handle. I always feel less anxious after OWLS.” S4 learner

“I like doing the clay at OWLS. Finding out about bugs is fun. When I did the bug hunt I enjoyed making the giant spider web and swallowing a bug in my drink.” S2 learner

The Future for autistic learners?

- More schools to actively seek the benefits of outdoor learning
- Strengths and interest focus
- PACE and understanding
- Collaboration rather than power

