



My first task was to assess the frequency and regularity with which I visit outdoor spaces in the local area with my minded children. I concluded that approximately twice during the course of a month, I take a selection of children to visit two local parks, two school playgrounds, a stream, a cemetery with a large grassy area, and a country lane with no vehicular access.

In order to gauge the children's memories of their visits to local outdoor spaces, and also ascertain their current outdoor interests, I asked them the following questions:

1. Which outdoor spaces not at my house do you like visiting with me?
2. Are there other outdoor spaces you have been to with your family/friends in Bath and would like to visit with me?
3. What are your favourite activities at the moment in outdoor spaces?

The responses were as follows:

- Henry (5) I like it when we stay in the school playground so I can play with my friends. I like running around and chasing people.
- Elliot (7) I like that cemetery place we go to with Joe. My favourite thing is playing football.
- Erin (3) I like when you take us somewhere to jump in puddles, and going to playgrounds. I go to playgrounds with Mummy. I like climbing, jumping, getting wet.
- Henry (3) I like going with you to the stream on the way to the Paragon School. I like the water park near my house, and running round naked!
- Dylan (3) I like going to Widcombe play area with you and playing on the tyres. Getting wet is fun. I like running, and squirting water!
- Joe (8) My favourite thing is playing football in Abbey Cemetery as there is lots of space, and we have it all to ourselves usually.
- Jack (12) I like it when you take us to Abbey Cemetery as we can go in the woods there and build dens. My sister and I like going to Alice Park in Bath, but it is quite far. I like climbing trees, and playing ball games.
- Ben (2) I like going to the park. There's a fireman's pole at the park.



I also circulated to the children's parents an 'active play' questionnaire which included a question about their offspring's favourite outdoor activities. Everyone responded, including the parents of my two minded children aged 1 (who were unable to respond verbally to my survey questions).

Having analysed all the responses, I concluded that the areas of most interest to the children concerned water play, ball play, running, climbing trees, and using playground equipment. I therefore decided to increase the frequency of visits to familiar outdoor spaces, and also introduce the children to new spaces for them to explore and engage in their favourite activities. Over a five month period, visits increased by approximately 30%.

Here are some photos showing the children enjoying themselves in both familiar and new places:





Below are some of the children's comments about the outdoor spaces we visited:

- Henry (5) I liked staying in the school playground for longer, and running around with my friends. It was fun playing football on the path in the cemetery; the ball rolled down the hill, and we had to chase after it!
- Elliot (7) It was cool playing football in the Abbey place. No one else was there so we could kick the ball hard.
- Erin (3) I loved bouncing up and down in the stream near your church. It was great fun splashing through big muddy puddles as well. I fell over, but I didn't mind! I whizzed round on a spinning thing in a different park. I liked when you tried to take off my hat when I whizzed near you!
- Henry (3) Please can we take the nets to the stream again? Please, please, pretty please?! The water came over my wellies; it was fun! It was fun rolling down the field in Perrymead with Ben. We ran and ran down the field as well.
- Dylan (3) I loved jumping in muddy puddles. I jumped high and made you wet, and you laughed! I liked spinning on the tyre in Widcombe play area, and playing ball. I squirted water a long way as well.
- Joe (8) It was such good fun playing football in Abbey Cemetery after school. Elliot and I made goals using our school bags.
- Jack (12) My favourite thing was climbing trees in Alice Park. I climbed higher than I had ever done before in one particular tree. In the woods by Abbey Cemetery we found a crystal, and tried to wash it clean.
- Ben (2) It was fun at the park. I liked the castle. I was sliding down the fireman's pole, wasn't I, Jill?

The two youngest children were unable to express their views verbally. However, their parents expressed delight when I showed them photos of their particular child engaging in outdoor play alongside their friends.

The older children showed the photos of themselves and their friends to their parents, and talked about the content of each. The parents were pleased to hear of the increase in visits to outdoor spaces, and were interested to learn about some new locations. Of one familiar place a parent said, "We used to go there a lot; we really must go again."



The children have benefitted in many ways as a result of my increasing the frequency of visits to familiar local open spaces, and also accessing new ones with them. For example, I have observed increased social interaction between the children when outdoors in the form of verbal communication, problem solving and peer support. I have seen the older children help the younger ones, for example by standing them up if they fall over when playing ball, or holding their hand when walking in a stream. I have witnessed the younger children not only develop their motor skills, but also grow in confidence, for example when trying out new playground equipment or playing group ball games, often as a result of encouragement from the older children. Above all, I have observed all the children evince that joy and glow which come from having a really fun time engaging in outdoor physical activities with friends!

