

Risk assessment: involving children in their own risk assessment

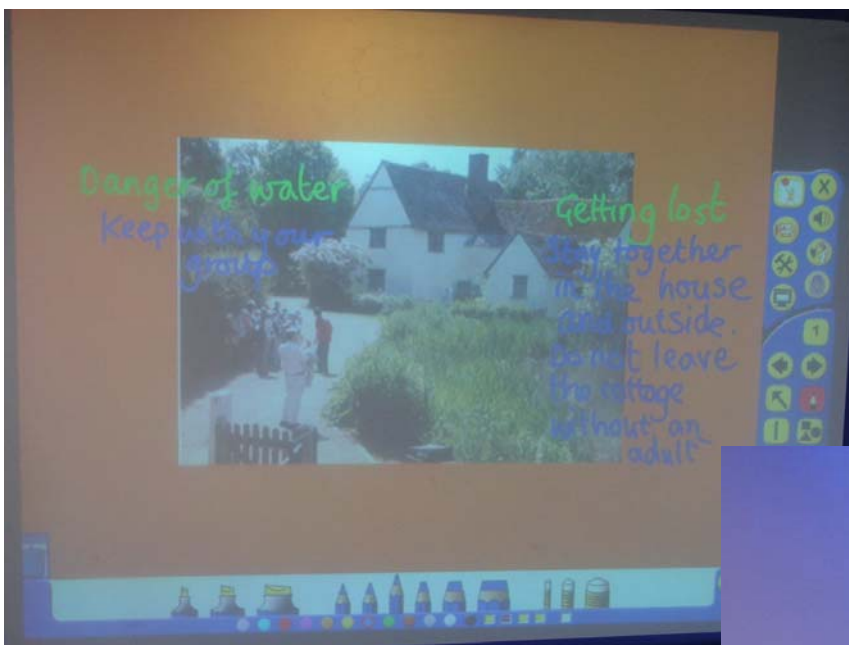
Taking children on field work and residential trips is a fantastic opportunity for geographical learning and social interaction. Children return from residential trips having changed within themselves and having tried new foods, new skills and make new friends. As teachers, it is our role to support children in these experiences and make the trip as safe as we can.

Being prepared yourself- know the trip.

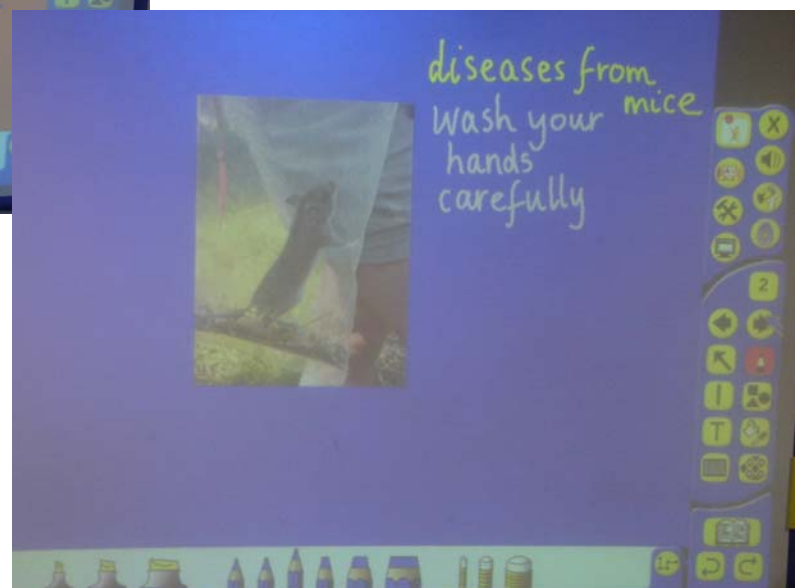
Involve the children in the group within their own risk assessments. If you haven't been to the site before, you must visit before the trip and talk to the organisers and other teachers who may be there when you visit. If it is a residential trip, try to stay the night at the centre. Take digital photographs of the site. These should include all of the areas that are mentioned on the centres own risk assessment forms. Take some extra photographs for the children in your group who find change difficult. These may include the toilets, bedrooms, showers, the room that they will eat in and the rooms where the staff can be found in an emergency. Take photographs of the site during the day and in the evening.

Involving the children

Take these photographs back to school and display on your Interactive Whiteboard. Discuss the photos with the children and get them to "spot the hazard" and how it might be reduced or "controlled". Add the hazard and control onto the photo on the IWB and, if appropriate, get them to come up to the IWB and mark on the hazards and controls using colour coding to differentiate between types of risk, their likelihood of occurring and their potential severity.



"Spot the hazard" and mark it on the photo along with a suitable control using colour coding



Talk about the need to be safe. Be open and honest about the children's involvement in being safe. All primary age children will understand this and be able to think about staying safe. Relate it to their experiences on journey to school and other trips they've been on with family and friends. With older children, talk about the risks and ask the children to write their ideas down around each picture (starting together on the board and then in pairs on a photocopy or on laminated photos or PC's accessing the photos from a shared document). Bring all of these risks together so every group has a full list on their sheet. In a different colour, ask the children to add control measures to minimise the risk. If you have already completed the trip you will be able to lead children with some of the previous experiences. The centres' information will also be able to support you in these ideas. Make sure you come back to these thoughts before the trip. Keep these sheets to show that you have fully prepared the children in your group.

Always be prepared for everything!

Use the risk assessments to plan further preparation for your trip. Spend some time practising some of the skills that you may need on a trip. This can include:

- Putting on sun cream. Do they know how to do this? Do they know how often to do this?
- Wearing a hat. Do the children know why they are wearing a hat outdoors? Do they know to keep the hat on even if the sun goes in?
- Tie their walking boots. Many children do not know how to tie walking boots properly. Practice before you go and make sure that all staff check their groups feet before setting off each time. Children also need to know the sort of socks that are vital with walking boots.
- Taking a photograph. Many children take photographs whilst walking! This is unsafe and they take their eyes away from the path. It also makes a poor photograph. Teach a lesson in good photography before you go. You can recall this once you are in the field.
- Lifting a large bag. Can the children lift their own case/bag? The first time they may have lifted the bag will be at the centre.
- Get them to think about what they will need to bring on the trip and devise their own kit list using illustrations or words.
- Take spares! Take spare socks, toothbrushes and camera films!
- Take mobile phones with plenty of charge and credit. If you are walking around a busy city with children, even if you are all staying together, give the children your mobile phone number on a piece of paper. Tell them that if they lose the group, stand still and someone will soon come back to them (count your group at every junction or crossing); failing that they should go into the nearest shop and ask to ring your mobile number.

Take enough staff to control the hazards successfully.

Make sure that you always have enough staff with you to be safe in case of an emergency. Make sure the children know who is going and who they can talk to. The children should know who will support them at all times medically and emotionally. If you are taking children with Autism or Aspergers, make a visual timetable from your photographs. Make them into a pack of laminated cards that can be carried in the child's pocket and put together in the right order for each day. Make sure that all staff that are going on the trip have a full pack of information prior to the trip.

If they are going on a residential trip, ensure that the children are aware of sleeping arrangements before they leave and sort out any potential clashes of personality. This will reassure them and prevent them worrying unnecessarily before the trip.

Whenever possible, do get the children involved in the risk assessment and allow them to take responsibility for their own and others' safety and care. They will be far more wary and conscious of potential problems and will have much better resources for dealing with them in a rational way. It will also prove to help them develop real and vital life skills which they will use in a whole range of different situations for the rest of their lives.



"We will go pond dipping for one hour.
Stay near your helper.
Work with your friend"

Supporting children with Aspergers with a visual timetable.

Helen Martin