

Small steps to resilience

An early years' perspective

Monday 24th Nov 2025 2-3pm

With Mel Warren & Ruth Toop

Welcome

We want people to participate but please use the 'raise hand' facility to ask questions and contribute when others are talking.

Please be considerate to others - together we want to create a safe, open and reflective space to learn.

You can turn on live captions on by clicking on the 3 dots at the top of your screen if you need this.

The link to the feedback form will be put in the chat.

Please do take the time to complete it after the session.

Thank you!



What does resilience look like in early childhood?

Many of you will have noticed resilience in a young child you know, or have worked with. What does it look like?




What does resilience mean?



Resilience is the ability to cope with difficult situations, learn from experience and develop the strength to take on future challenges.

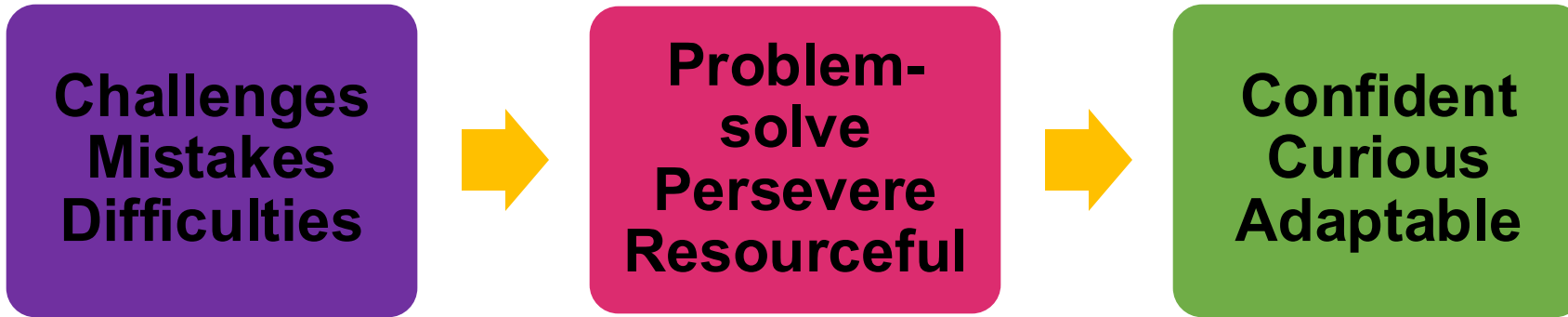
“Children are not resilient, children are malleable”

Bruce Perry



**How can we
help young
children
develop
resilience?**

Why is resilience so important?

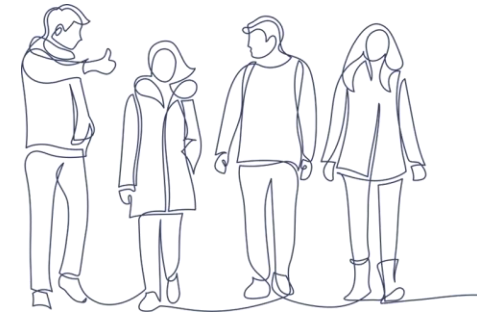


Statistically, resilient children are likely to be; **healthier** and **live longer, happier** in their relationships, more **successful** in school and work, less likely to get depressed

Building resilience can help to mitigate mental health challenges, low confidence and lack of self-esteem, as it equips young people to handle emotional distress in a healthy way:

- Coping with adversity
- Building confidence and self-esteem
- Developing problem solving skills

Curriculum & learning context



Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – statutory framework

Four guiding principles should shape practice in early years, including; *‘Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured’.*

Characteristics of Effective Learning intentionally embed:

Playing and exploring, Active learning, Creating and thinking critically

Early Learning Goal: *‘Managing Self - Children at the expected level of development will: Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge’*

Resilience in the National Curriculum (KS1, 2, 3, 4): *‘developing resilience to write at length’*

Curriculum & Assessment Review – final report Nov 2025 ‘Building a world class curriculum for all’:
‘build confidence & resilience so that learners are ready to take the next step’

Norfolk Flourish framework: *‘Children and young people have the confidence and skills to make their own decisions and take on life's challenges’*

Building resilience is fundamental in the commitment to **prevention**

Early learning context



EYFS Characteristics of Effective Learning intentionally embed resilience

Playing and exploring *Engagement*



Finding out & exploring
Playing with what they know
Being willing to have a go

Active learning *Motivation*



Bring involved & concentrating
Keep trying
Enjoying achieving own goals

Creative and critical thinking *Thinking*



Having own ideas
Making links
Working with ideas

Resilience in infancy

Around 0-18 months

Developing secure attachments and emotional regulation

Responsive caregiving to infants' needs, developing trust and a secure base. Engage in nurturing routines (feeding, soothing, eye contact) to build emotional bonds and calm physiological stress responses.

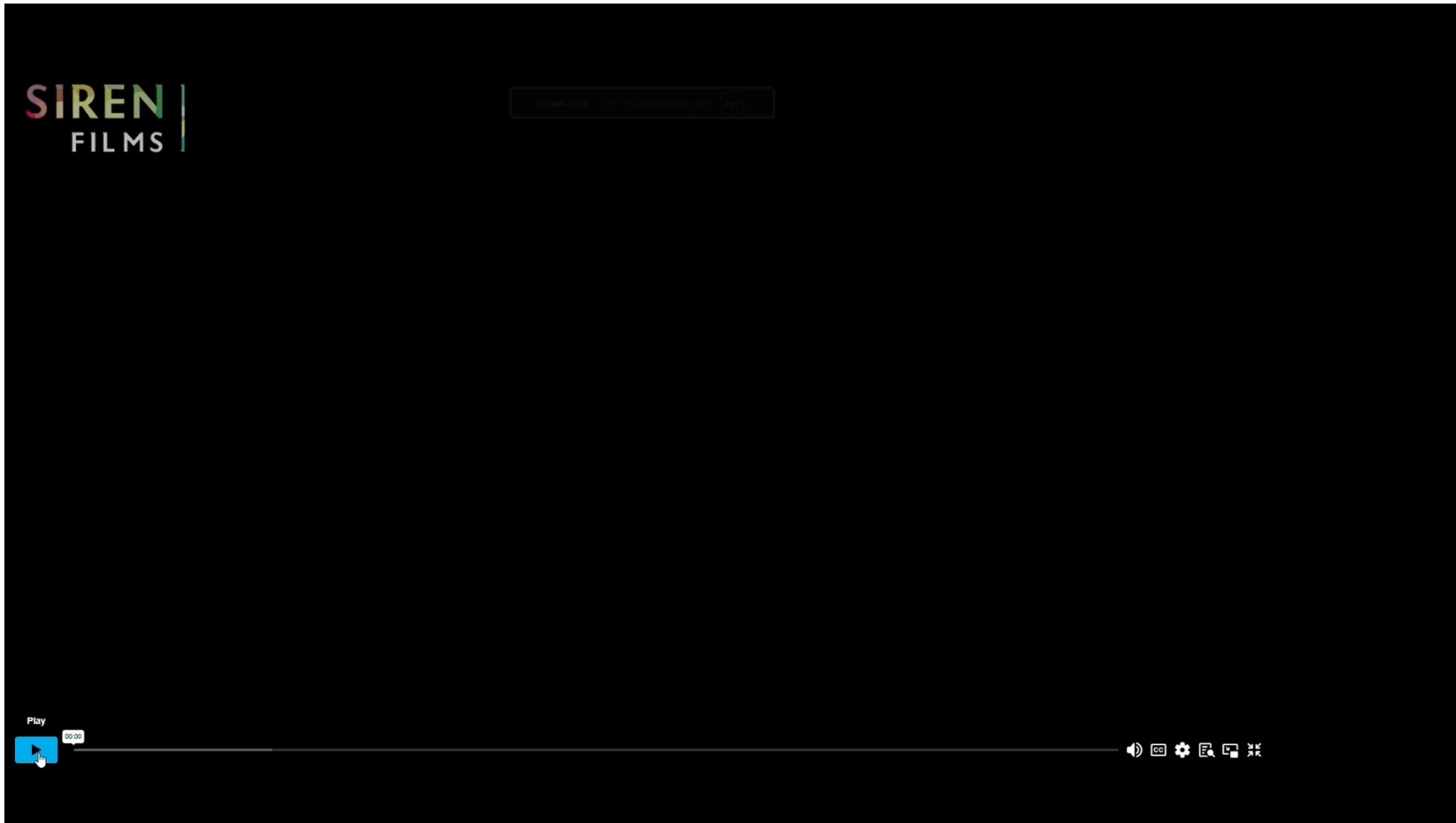
Understand child strengths and use back and forth caregiver-child interactions to empower early emotional regulation

Adopting **trauma-responsive approaches** to strengthen infants' developmental trajectories—even when adversity is present.

Secure attachments foster self-regulation and a positive self-perception, enabling infants to handle everyday frustrations and adapt to new situations.



Resilience in infancy



Around 0-18 months - Developing secure attachments and emotional regulation

[Understanding attachment - Emotional regulation — Siren Films](#)

Resilience in toddlerhood

Around 18-36 months

Developing initiative and emotional competence

At this stage, toddlers typically start to assert independence. Synaptic pruning rapidly informs the way the brain is shaped. Toddlers learn to regulate powerful emotions.

- **Embrace safe opportunities that nurture independence**
- **Model coping by labelling emotions & showing empathy**
- **Guide calming strategies like deep breathing, physical movement**

Continued responsiveness from adults, combined with affirming toddlers' attempts at autonomy, supports self-efficacy and resilience.



Resilience in toddlerhood



Around 18-36 months - Developing initiative and emotional competence [Attachment Siren Films](#)

Notice how the child responds to boundaries held by the caregiver

Resilience in pre-school

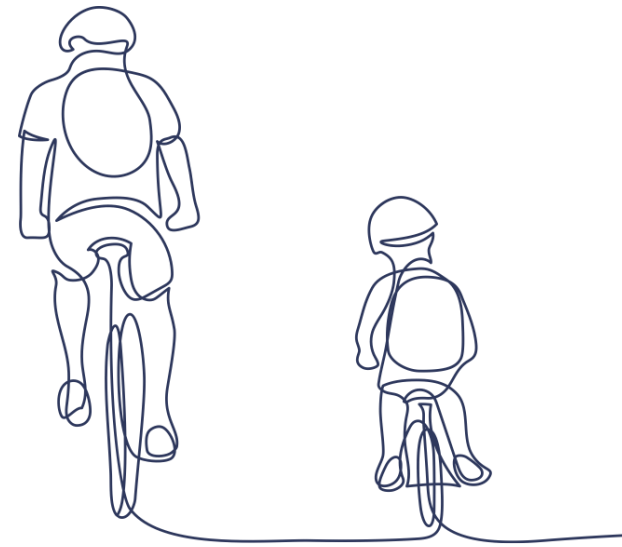
Around 3-5 years old

Cultivating self-efficacy & growth mindset in play

Foster **peer learning and collaboration** to help each other and celebrate teamwork and persistence, not just individual success. Use encouraging language that focuses on effort rather than innate traits **Celebrate children's attempts**. Break tasks into small, achievable steps and scaffold for success.

Model mistakes as learning opportunities – adults making mistakes and responding positively, promoting reflective talk with children

Problem-solving, choices and co-operative play, such as building, drawing, small world & role play nurtures empathy, prosocial behaviour and ability to coping.



Resilience in pre-school

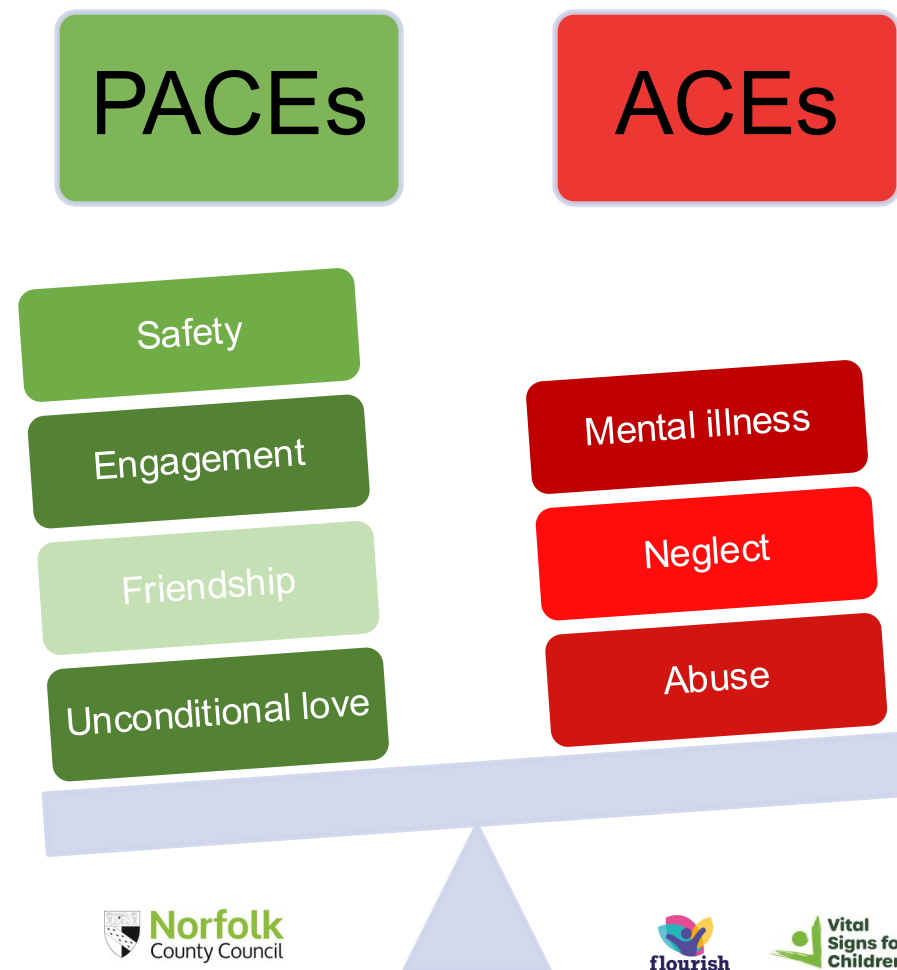


Around 3-5 years old - Cultivating self-efficacy & growth mindset in play
Notice the characteristics of resilience in this child during the play scene

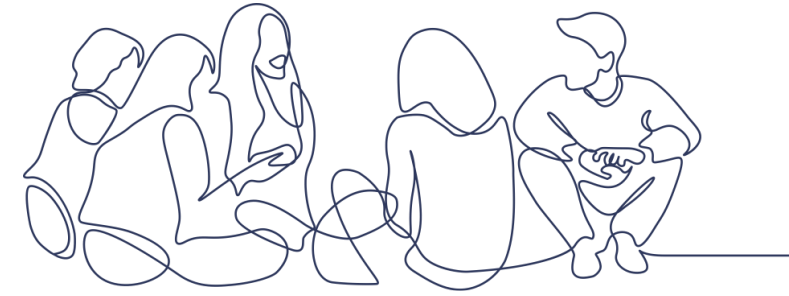
Resilience through early trauma



- Kate Cairns '*Five to thrive*' Trauma sensitive practice
- Tuning in, connecting for processing time and co-regulation
- Welcoming children to communicate their feelings and their truth
- Giving children agency to enhance self-esteem



What does this mean for practice?



The Power of Supportive Relationships

Enduring across all early childhood stages: having at least one reliable, emotionally attuned adult is essential

Practice and environment

Building resilience is dynamic: children need opportunities to practice emotional regulation, problem-solving, collaborating and coping in their play and everyday experiences. Safe and familiar routines, celebrating effort and perseverance in stable, welcoming environments

Systemic Influences

Resilience thrives in supportive ecosystems—families, schools, communities, secure settings and attuned adults

Trauma-informed

Awareness of stress levels (positive, tolerable, toxic) helps adults provide protective layers—like steady relationships—to buffer adversity.

Practice take-aways

- **Build from the beginning:** Unconditional love, secure attachment and responsive interactions lay vital nurturing foundations for resilience
- **Developmentally appropriate:** Foster initiative and emotional regulation progressively, with appropriate personalised expectations
- **Engage:** Provide sensitive and attuned connections to build and model healthy and trusted relationships
- **Friendship:** Intentionally embed practices and experiences that prioritise social & emotional development in safe learning environments
- **Support caregivers:** Training in trauma-sensitive, resilience-enhancing interactions, and collaboration between caregivers for consistency
- **Model resilience and don't give up:** The brain is continuously developing



Resources

Books to share

- “The Dot” by Peter H. Reynolds
- “Beautiful Oops!” by Barney Saltzberg
- “I Can’t Do That YET” by Esther Cordova

Articles

- [Building Resilience in the Early Years](#) a supportive resource for families
- [Bruce Perry: “Children are not resilient, children are malleable” - Living Ubuntu](#)
- [How can we support children’s resilience? | early years alliance](#)
- [Nursery World - Health & Wellbeing: Understanding resilience](#)
- *Think Feel Do: A Wellbeing Handbook for Early Years Staff* by June O’Sullivan and Lala Manners

Professional Development

- [Norfolk Early Years ‘Let’s Talk’ Podcast](#) to hear more from **Kate Cairns** & other episodes
- If you support children in care, the Virtual School offer ‘**The Power of Play**’ and ‘**Developmental Wellbeing**’ training which can be accessed by emailing virtual.schoolscwsw@norfolk.gov.uk
- [Norfolk SEND Forum Autumn 2025](#) Padlet – **Building a resilient curriculum** slide 38 & **EPSS Resilience & SEMH** slide 39





Norfolk County Council

Portage and the small steps to resilience

24.11.2025



FLOURISHING



"When a flower does not bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower".

Quote by Alexander Den Heijer

Portage and building resilience



Life is full of ups and downs, and it's important for children to develop resilience to navigate the challenges they may encounter. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, adapt to change, and thrive in the face of difficulties.

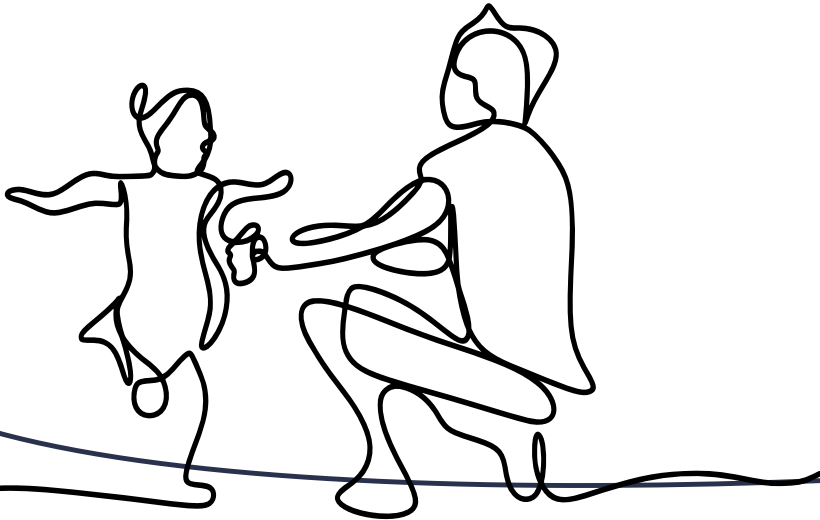
As parents and educators, we play a vital role in helping children build resilience and develop the skills they need to overcome obstacles. We will explore effective strategies for building resilience in children, equipping them with the tools to face challenges with confidence and strength.



The Benefits of Building Resilience

Building resilience in children has numerous benefits. Resilient children are better equipped to handle stress, adapt to change, and maintain positive mental health. They develop a sense of self-efficacy, optimism, and perseverance, which contributes to their overall well-being and success in various areas of life.

This is even more important in children with SEND.



Portage and resilience



- The Portage service delivers interventions that support resilience to parent/carers of children aged 0-5 years with SEND, plus the extended family, through a holistic, home-based early years education model, that empowers families and supports child development.
- In this module, we meet Edith, who received Portage from her earliest days – how this has supported her development – and built the resilience of both her and her family, who have loved, cared, nurtured and provided Edith with absolutely everything she has ever needed. The responsive caregiving, working with Edith's strengths and an innate secure attachment style has been paramount to her success.
- Please enjoy her journey so far.



The earliest (and trickiest of) days

- Edith was born with Trisomy 21, or Down Syndrome.
- She also had a catalogue of cardiac issues that needed addressing urgently and received open heart surgery at 3 months of age.
- She keeps smiling though, as always...





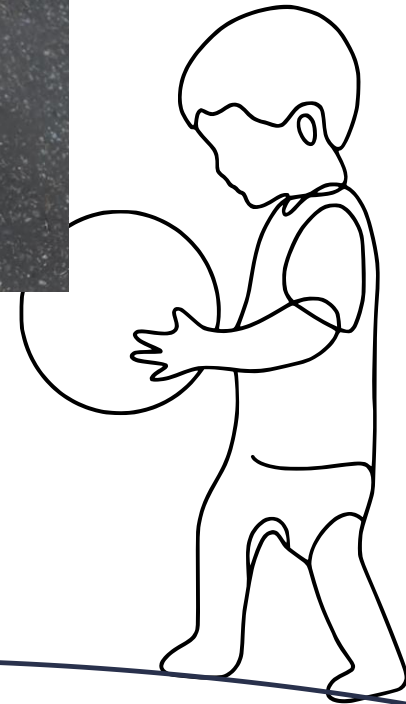
Developing a love of reading and independence



.... and off to school !

Following a comprehensive transition process, Edith started mainstream school ... where in Yr 1, she won a Sir John Leman school partnership Award - they said;

"Edith has shown no barriers when it comes to her learning. She radiates joy, kindness and is a wonderful friend to everyone".



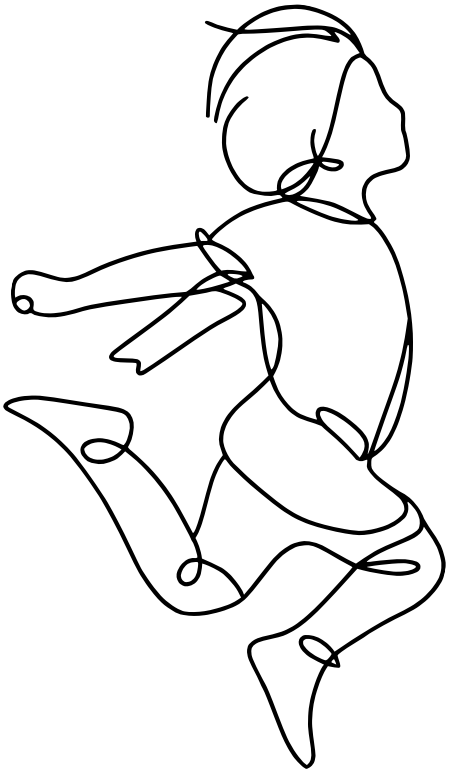
Into Year 3

Here is a quote from Edith's Teacher :

"Edith has made a truly lovely transition into Year 3. she arrives each morning with a glowing smile that brightens up the classroom and sets such a positive tone for the day. It has been a joy to see her growing in confidence and independence over the year"



A future contestant for Strictly...?



"... The moment the music starts, she lights up the room with her enthusiasm and passion for movement. She has a brilliant sense of rhythm and really connects with the music, often adding her own to routines with a lovely touch of creativity. She listens carefully during lessons and works hard to learn new steps – you can see the pride on her face when she masters something tricky...."



A love of Brownies, adventure and the outdoors







Portage point

Some final thoughts – and a little reminder



**Thank you for
listening.
Any questions?**

**Please provide
some feedback**

