

Combining fun and safety

Nobody wants to mollycoddle children – and it's great to get them out in the fresh air as much as possible. Running a childminding centre in a rural part of Essex, Arthur Coote and his wife Elaine are passionate about getting children out and about – and equally passionate about ensuring they stay safe at the same time.

'I grew up in the country and I feel strongly that children need to be able to explore their environment – but in ways that are safe and promote their wellbeing,' Arthur explains.

Arthur and Elaine are constantly updating their knowledge of health and safety and child development, and attend courses regularly. They bring all this practical knowledge into their approach to road safety – and they start this training from the moment that children attend their childminding centre.



Amber, red and green...

'It's essential that we have ways of stopping children if we want to take them out and about. And we also need to have control them at other times as well. So we teach our "traffic light" system to all our children – from as young as six months,' Arthur says.

With this system the children are taught to associate the colours of amber, red and green with any

activity which requires them to slow down, stop or start moving again. Arthur explains how using games teaches children to associate the colour with the right activity. It encourages them to learn the correct answer or response – because small children get a lot of pleasure out of being able to 'get it right' when playing games.

Arthur describes a game called

Mr Crocodile which they use to teach these concepts. 'When Mr Crocodile says: "Stop because the lights are red" the children have to stand still. When Mr Crocodile says: "The lights are amber – that means we have to slow down..." the children learn to slow down. The children start associating the colour and the action, so they start anticipating the correct action as soon as you mention the colour.'

Reinforcing messages

In their centre, Arthur and Elaine and their staff also use flash cards to reinforce these messages – which they hold up during activities. “We say to the children when they are peddling their toy cars, Arthur is going to be the traffic light”. It takes a while for some children to register this learning – but after three or four months you hold up the red card and the children shout “We have to stop”. So later on when you shout out “red”, they will automatically stop – because it’s become second nature for them to do this.’

Alongside these activities, Arthur and Elaine also keep records of children’s progress in learning the key messages they are imparting. Arthur believes that learning about road safety fits well with many aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage – covering aspects such as memory, colour recognition, and vocabulary development. ‘We can ask them things like what does slowing down mean – can you show us, or tell us? Or what does walking and running mean? You can combine all kinds of safety issues within the learning process,’ Arthur explains.



The power of song

Making up little songs and jingles can be a great way to get across ideas to children. Arthur explains: ‘We have a welcome song, and songs about washing our hands – and we encourage the older ones to think about songs they can make up for themselves, for things like putting toys away. So when it comes to road safety issues it’s natural to have songs for that too.

‘We have a song called **Watch out, watch out, there are cars all about**, which encourages

children to concentrate on spotting cars. We sing this song whenever we come to a crossing and the children are waiting at the kerb, holding hands.’

To accompany the song, Elaine and Arthur give children clear messages about pavements and roads. ‘We say that cars are great things, and we like to see them, but we don’t want to be on their road. The place for cars is on the road and the place for people is on the pavement,’ Arthur says.

