

Early learning Woodwork



What does woodwork at nursery actually entail, and what are the benefits to young children of taking part? **Annette Rawstrone** explains



If the thought of your pre-school child hammering nails into wood brings you out in a cold sweat, you're not alone. There are plenty of panicked posts on parenting forums about children doing woodwork in nursery.

However, across Scandinavia and in countries such as New Zealand, it has long been commonplace to introduce children to real tools, and woodworking is regarded as a valuable play activity.

Woodwork was once popular in UK nurseries too before health and safety worries took

over in the 1980s and 90s. But attitudes are changing, and the Department for Education now advises, 'Children should be able to experience a wide range of activities. Health and safety measures should help them to do this safely, not stop them. It is important that children learn to understand and manage the risks that are a normal part of life.'

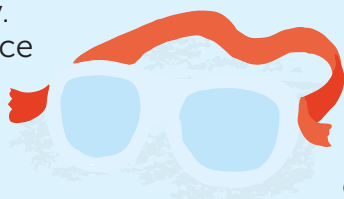
Increasingly early years settings are investing in work benches and carefully chosen tools and encouraging children to be creative with wood.

WHAT IS INVOLVED

Introduction Rather than being let loose with a saw, small groups of children are introduced gradually to the ergonomic woodworking tools to enable them to become familiar with how to use them safely, master the skills needed and gain confidence.

Often children are first shown how to use a hammer and nails before graduating to screwdrivers and screws, then saws and hand drills.

Health and safety is a key feature of sessions, with lots of conversations about how to hold, use and carry tools safely, about always looking at



what they are doing and being alert to potential dangers, such as sharp edges. Children are also taught to always wear safety glasses to protect their eyes.

Staff ensure individual children are confident to use the tools independently and know how to stay safe before they are encouraged to explore the materials and tools by themselves.

Many practitioners comment on how focused children are while woodworking and that accidents, such as small cuts and banged thumbs, are rare.

Materials Soft wood, such as balsa, is often used at first, and rough or splintered wood is avoided. Interesting resources, such as corks, beads and fabric, may also be provided for your child to experiment with.

Don't be surprised if your child excitedly brings home an unrecognisable creation, rather than a model aeroplane or bird box. Children need to be able to use their imaginations and experiment.

The process of making is more important than the end product.

BENEFITS OF WOODWORK

By engaging in woodwork, your child can:

- learn to problem-solve, experiment, persevere, concentrate and think critically
- experience controlled risk, self-assess and make judgements
- gain self-esteem and confidence by being trusted to use real tools and gain pride and a sense of achievement in

mastering them and accomplishing tasks

- develop an interest in building, engineering, creating and constructing
- develop physical skills such as greater hand/eye co-ordination, dexterity in handling tools and improved gross and fine motor skills
- be creative as they practise and refine techniques, use their imaginations, plan and design projects
- learn about maths concepts as they measure size, shape and weight or consider how many items are needed
- develop communication and language skills as they listen to instructions, discuss plans, learn new technical words and simply engage in excited conversations
- learn about the environment as they find out about the properties of wood and where it comes from, consider sustainability and learn how to make and mend.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

- It's only natural to feel apprehensive as your child develops new skills. Speak to the nursery staff about any concerns and ask to see their risk assessment forms.
- Be enthusiastic about your child's creations and show an interest in how they made them: What tools did they use? How did they design it? What are they planning on making next?
- Encourage your child to use their skills at home, such as helping to assemble flatpack furniture or repair things.
- Discuss tools and how objects are designed or made, and share books about construction and engineering.

story time



Not a Stick by Antoinette Portis

Celebrating the power of the imagination to transform even ordinary objects into magical ones.



Tap Tap Bang Bang by Emma Garcia

Investigate a range of tools and the sounds that accompany them.



Eddie's Toolbox by Sarah Garland

Eddie helps to put up shelves and is soon making and mending lots of things around the house.



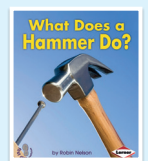
Harvey the Carpenter by Lars Klitting

Join Harvey as he designs and makes a box to store all his tools so that his workshop is no longer messy.



Rosie Revere, Engineer by Andrea Beaty and David Roberts

Rosie may seem quiet but she is actually a brilliant inventor of gizmos and gadgets who dreams of becoming a great engineer.



What Does a Hammer Do? by Robin Nelson

This series of books explains how tools work and what they are used for.