

# Puddle Jumping

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In our preschool yard there is a big dip in the sidewalk. The falling leaves gather there, sand accumulates there, and inevitably a giant puddle appears after a rain. Kids sometimes slip, and bikes often skid. Our diligent parent group discussed ways of repairing it, but was stymied by the cost and time it would require. Removing a section of the sidewalk and building a new one? A big job for volunteer parents. So the sidewalk dip stayed on the agenda for months as we puzzled over a solution.

One night it rained and the next day a really good, deep, dark chocolatey brown puddle, a quality puddle had formed. Outside we all went, kids off to swings, sand and climbers. A few looked at the puddle, but it was too intimidating, too deep, and too brown. Then Louis poked his boot at the edge. Caedan did the same. Glances were exchanged and they both cautiously waded in. Louis stamped his foot and made a big splash. Caedan stamped his foot too. They looked at their spattered pants their eyes began to twinkle. Milena tested the edge with her boot, and slowly waded in. Louis and Caedan jumped as hard as they could with both feet, sending thick brown water all over all three of them. We looked at Milena, would she like it? Oh yes, she liked it. The three of them grinned, and began to jump as hard as they could, brown water splashing on their pants, jackets, in their hair and all over their beautiful smiling faces. They ran a few feet away, stopped, and raced back to the puddle to get a stronger, higher jump. Caedan took a flying run and jump and tripped, landing face first in the puddle. I picked him up and, using the inside of his jacket, the only dry bit of him left, dried his face of mud and tears. I asked "Would you like to do a different thing now?" Caedan pulled his little self together, shook his head No, and jumped back in the puddle. And there the three of them jumped and jumped and jumped, blissfully, gleefully, and with the greatest gusto.

As parents began to arrive it occurred to me that this might not be every parents idea of a good preschool day. But the absolute joy on those muddy faces was enough. No, it was more than enough, it was infectious, and we adults caught the joy. We laughed with them and at them, and no one thought to be concerned about wetness, colds or dirt. We watched and laughed until the kids had finally worn themselves out, and were helped into dry clothes.

I salute those wise parents for recognizing the joy of mud, and for raising kids who know it's ok with mom and dad if they get dirty. And I salute the courage of those kids to try something messy, and a little intimidating, and for showing us a moment of pure joy. And that dip in the sidewalk? It's off the agenda now, and I'm wondering how to create a few more.