

What is Forest School?

Forest school is a programme of weekly sessions held in a woodland setting with a trained facilitator. This is an ideal venue for outdoor learning as it is rich in natural resources. It is a multi-sensory environment full of sights, smells and textures. It can also be a calming place as well as having no noise limits. There are many benefits of having a programme of sessions:

Continuity – where children can continue a theme, going back to something, improving their skills;

Individualised learning – having a maximum of 15 in a session means it's easier to facilitate;

Flexibility – no targets provides freedom of choice;

Child-centred – it is not necessarily about the Forest School leader 'leading' the sessions, more facilitating them;

Relationship building – between peers and adults, where children can find out what kind of learners they are for themselves;

Confidence building – by having small achievable tasks where children can see progress, raising self-esteem

Forest School encourages ownership of the learning environment, maybe introducing them to a natural environment for the first time, where they can take a love and respect for nature and conservation into adulthood.

The Key elements of the programme are concerned with ‘the process not the product’. There is a higher adult to child ratio, an opportunity for challenge and risk, helping to build self confidence, enabling positive and purposeful skills and relationship building.

Forest school is a vehicle for positive social interaction, language building and promotes physical activity. The nature of the learning provides time for play, reflection, repetition and plenty of opportunities for speaking and listening, involving real learning

(talking for a reason). It is a stimulating environment that gives an enjoyable experience where they can find things of interest.

A trained leader is essential, not only to develop relevant policies and procedures but to offer guidance for the children to develop practical skills such as tool use and development, to assess their learning, exploring the best way for an individual to get the most out of the sessions. It is child centred learning, giving them a chance to learn from their mistakes, helping them gain resilience and a growth mindset.

Establishment and delivery of a Forest School programme

Plan a programme of Forest School sessions

A.C.2.1 Policies and procedures

Child Protection:

- See school child protection policy

Risk Assessment:

- Daily risk assessment to be carried out at the beginning of each session
- Risk assessments will be checked and amended before the start of each academic year
- Forest school leader will supervise adult helpers reading the risk assessments
- Signs to be put up near the entrance of the site making the public aware that Forest School is in session (polite notice for dogs to be put on a lead)

Behaviour:

- Children with a statement or specific need will have 1:1 with an adult
- Use distraction to draw them out of negative behaviour
- There are different behavioural expectations at forest school e.g. no noise limits
- Instil ethos of respect to the environment and each other
- Discuss with each client group what these behavioural expectations, boundaries and rules could be to keep us all safe and happy
- Staff and volunteers to model respectful behaviour and follow forest school ethos, policies and procedures
- The behaviour one sees in the classroom setting may be completely different from that where the children have created their own boundaries
- If unsafe/unreasonable behaviour continues, child may have to stay at school on following sessions (this is a last resort)

Tool use:

- Tools to be kept in a padlocked bag in a designated 'tool area'
- When not in use these are kept in a locked cupboard on school grounds
- Numbered and counted in and out

- Tool safety check before each use
- Children taught how to carry and handle tools appropriately (walking only, only open when seated, never leave on the ground after use)
- Forest school leader to ensure correct child to adult ration when using specific tools (e.g. peelers 5:1, knives 1:1)
- Children must be seated when using hand tools
- Elbows on thighs, point blade down away from body, in one direction
- Glove on non-working hand
- Adult collects tools and puts them away

Fire Safety:

- Permission from land owner
- Establish a specific and suitable area for a fire circle
- Always use fire bowl in the centre of the ‘fire circle’
- No-one is to enter/cross said area unless invited by the forest school leader or designated adult for fire lighting or toasting marshmallows etc
- This will be reiterated at the beginning of each session, even if not using a fire (promotes good practice)
- Seating around the fire should be at a safe distance (far enough so as no-one can topple on the fire if they are kneeling for cooking etc)
- Volunteer to be tending and supervising the fire at all times
- Volunteer always present, kneeling in the fire circle when someone is cooking
- Someone with a level 2 health and hygiene certificate will be on site if the group is cooking
- Make sure there are no low or overhanging branches
- Wet ground beneath fire bowl or clear ground to bare earth as this doesn’t burn
- Bucket of water and clean towel (to put on burning clothes)
- Burns kit (including cling film) nearby
- Always kneel by the fire when cooking
- No dangling clothing such as scarves, cuffs or gloves (only fire proof gloves)
- Fire will be extinguished in the fire bowl using water (clear people away when doing this) then tip contents out on to bare soil (bare soil does not burn), pour more water on and ‘mix’ with leaf litter until fully extinguished

Health and Safety:

- See school code of good practice

Maintaining the environment:

- Site to be 'left as we found it' after every session
- Den building is rotated, designated areas to reduce trampling
- Retain some areas as 'no go' to reduce disturbance to flora and fauna
- Make designated pathways to be moved every so often
- Coppicing in five year cycles to maintain area

Toileting:

- Children to be encouraged to use the toilet before leaving school site
- A spot at the edge of site, screened with a wind break, can be used in emergencies
- There is a designated toilet bucket
- Toilet tissue, anti-bacterial hand sanitiser and 'doggie bags' will be available
- Children are to be accompanied by a member of school staff

Resources (kit list):

- First aid kit
- Burns kit
- 'Tick twister'
- Mobile phones (preferably on different networks. Signal check upon entry of site before session starts)
- Copy of risk assessments, policies and procedures
- 2 x Tarpaulins
- 1 x Hammock
- 6 x Ropes
- Locked tool bag containing numbered tools:
 1. Axe
 2. Loppers
 3. Loppers
 4. Little red pruning saw
 5. Little red pruning saw
 6. Orange sheath knife

7. Secateurs
8. Secateurs
9. 8cm wooden handle knife
- 10.8cm wooden handle knife
- 11.8cm wooden handle knife
- 12.Large bow saw
- 13.Large bow saw
- 14.Adult palm drill
- 15.Small palm drill
- 16.Small palm drill
- 17.Small palm drill
- 18.Small palm drill
- 5 x Peelers
- 2 x Fire steel
- 1 x Mallet

- Gloves (10 x children's and 3 x adult's)
- Fire bowl
- Bucket and towel
- Cotton wool
- Identification book
- Trowels
- String
- Magnifying glasses
- Pots / egg boxes / containers for collecting
- Water
- 2 x Wheelbarrows
- Hand sanitiser
- Toilet paper
- 'Doggy' bags
- Wind break
- Clay

First Aid and Emergency Procedure:

- Forest School Leader has an up to date qualification in first aid in the outdoors

- Full first aid kit and burns kit on hand at all times
- Grid reference and post code of site in first aid kit
- Forest School Leader to delegate an adult to stand on the main road to direct ambulance if needed
- Forest School Leader to ensure all adults know where the first aid kit is situated on site
- In the event of an electrical storm the sessions may be postponed, cut short or abandoned

Transport:

- Site is within walking distance of the school grounds
- Car transportation can be made available for children / adults unable to walk
- With parental permission

Climbing and den building:

- Adults always by tree when children are climbing for safety and encouragement
- Group to be made aware of the nature of dead wood. To test the strength of branches as they ascend/descend
- No climbing higher than can comfortably descend unaided
- No climbing above den building area
- Large branches (taller than child) must be dragged or carried by a small group, working together
- Smaller branches must be carried upright
- Nobody is to go in the den until it is complete

Learning and Curriculum:

- The first sessions will always include safety procedures
- Group discussion to establish rules that are acceptable for each particular group
- Each session will influence the next
- With the aim of each group taking ownership and responsibility for their own learning
- Forest school leader to facilitate and research children's ideas for next session

- Volunteers to help facilitate the children's ideas (even if they think it seems 'too dangerous'!) to help them to discover their own limitations in keeping with the forest ethos