

Forest School Information Guide



*This is the best kind of classroom,
It's a journey through time and space,
From the smallest seed to the largest tree,
This is a forest and a learning place.
This is the best kind of classroom,
Where the seasons don't happen in books.
Where the learning is watching and thinking and talking,
And everyone notices, everyone looks.*

ian MacMillan



What is Forest School?

All children benefit from having extended opportunities for learning out of doors. Many find their voice when they are engaged in more physical, active learning outdoors. Children can fine tune their listening skills outside, and the outdoor environment can be a highly motivational place to stimulate the use and development of communication skills. With more space to stretch more physically and imaginatively children thrive, needing to move in order to learn as their brains and bodies grow together. Outdoor play encourages collaboration since children need to work as a team, communicate ideas and work together for e.g., den building. The changing cyclical nature of the outdoor environment gives a rich context for exploration and building vocabulary. Children learn best through activities that engage all the senses outdoors with more opportunities to experiment and be messy – great for mark making and emergent writing.

The Forest Schools concept of outdoor learning and play originates from Scandinavia where work and play in the great outdoors is part and parcel of daily life. The UK is embracing the Forest School ethos and now there are several hundred Forest School settings over here. Forest School enables children to explore and learn in a hands-on sensorial way. Its philosophy is to nurture and inspire individuals through positive and regular outdoor, mainly child led experiences. By participating at their own pace in engaging, achievable activities in a natural setting each child reaps the benefits. Forest School enables children to express themselves, to let off steam, to be in awe and wonder about nature, converse with others more confidently, to be more empathic towards others and the natural world and lead their own play responsibly and safely. Use of tools and bush craft is taught to help children explore the use of natural materials and gain a sense of achievement through small achievable tasks.

Cross curricular links-

Personal, Social, Emotional Development - Builds self-esteem, positive behaviour, independence, co-operation, teamwork, and self-confidence. Respect for others and living things, communicating their experiences with peers and adults, health and safety.

Maths- counting, sorting, assessing size of natural objects, looking at shapes and patterns, measuring, calculating, problem solving.

Physical Development- balance, co-ordination, spatial awareness, negotiating objects, use of tools, fine and gross motor development, climbing, pulling logs, tying knots, exercise.

Communication, Language and Literacy- listening and understanding instructions, discussing findings, sharing ideas, hearing new words, storytelling, singing songs, mark making.

Knowledge and understanding of the World - investigation, comparing, growing, sensorial experiences, life cycles.

Expressive Art and Design- natural art, mud creations, making musical instruments, dancing, singing, role play, imaginative play.



What are the sessions like?

Sessions are child-centred and child-led. The Forest School Leader will have activities prepared but sessions are flexible and adaptable and directed by the children's interests. Adults support the children in their learning and explorations. The pace is unhurried, unpressurised, and free of failure with children not forced to join in or participate. Through routine, rhythm, and repetition - starting and finishing at the circle for example, the children gain a sense of security and community, and as time goes by, they gain a sense of belonging and guardianship towards their outdoor setting and each other.

Sessions are linked to the Curriculum and EYFS. Links are made between the Forest School programme and experiences to home/school/life. The physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of the learner are developed at Forest School.

A typical session in the outdoor area- Welly Boot Wood or on the school field

Children wear clothes appropriate for the weather, so they are comfortable and protected from the elements- hot sun, showers, cold etc.

We sit at in a circle, and we listen to whoever holds the 'talking stick'. Children contribute towards making the rules for the session.

The Leader introduces an activity and children can choose to do that or choose to do something else whether it be digging, exploring with magnifiers, imaginative play etc.

We come back together at the circle and talk about the session and children feedback.

Using the observations and feedback the Leader plans the next session

The smaller the group the more benefit children will get from the sessions. The Leader can mentor the children and work on small achievable projects with them that way they all get an opportunity to have a go and be nurtured and mentored.



Session information

Led by a Level 3 trained Forest School Leader and a First Aider. The Forest School Leader's role is to ensure a risk- benefit session where the site is as safe as possible without removing all reasonable risk. The Leader is there to equip and support the child with the knowledge of how to manage their own risks i.e., the child CAN climb the tree, but the adult needs to help the child assess how high they can go. The Leader is there too to support, challenge, encourage, guide, and listen to the children, to model positive behaviours, empathy and caring for the environment and each other. Positivity at all times- there is no failure.

Sessions are held throughout the year giving children the opportunity to over time develop new skills and knowledge, observe the seasonal changes, and gain a feeling of ownership and affinity for the setting's outdoor space and countryside on our doorstep.



How adult helpers can guide Forest School learning

Volunteers are a very important part of the Forest School team as extra pairs of eyes, ears, and hands, sharing their own expertise, ideas, and enthusiasm.

Helping wake up the child's senses, encourage them to explore and question and be curious about the world around them.

What you do anyway! - be friendly and approachable

Encourage independence in the children - dressing themselves in and out of wet weather gear, helping to tidy up etc.

Stand back and observe, try not step in or direct, and do encourage them in their exploring unless you feel they are at risk

Get to know the children - their skills, learning styles and characters

Encourage children to express their feelings but do not allow a lowering of behaviour standards. Please help with control and discipline where applicable.

Encourage the children to help each other, share and work together

Support children who may need a little extra encouragement or lack confidence

Please report any concerns to the Forest School Leader re health and safety, or if you need to take a child back inside and ratios are affected.

Encourage children to direct their own play and lead their own learning

You are additional eyes and ears on site, please feedback from your observations so I can tailor make the sessions and see what sparks an individual's interest

Point out things you have noticed like plants, flowers, birds etc that the children may have missed

Use open-ended questions and offer choices not answers

Use positive language and role modelling

Use role modelling to reinforce safety messages

Model respect for flora and fauna for e.g., putting mini beasts back where you found them, not trampling, or picking wildflowers

Remind children that they should not pick or eat berries or fungi

Use positional language and names of equipment to help children expand their range of vocabulary

Reinforce our Forest School agreements i.e., listening to instructions, adhering to the rules when using tools, staying in sight of an adult.

Celebrate children's achievements



And find the child in you and have fun!



Health and Safety

We want Forest School to be a fun, enjoyable and positive experience and for children to be able to develop a responsible attitude to risk and hazards in a controlled safe environment.

Site and activity risk assessments and health and safety checks will be done regularly and thoroughly by the Forest School Leader. We identify any hazards and action needed to reduce the risks from things like trip hazards, overhanging branches, poisonous plant growth, litter etc. Any incidents or accidents are recorded. Please see the Forest School Leader's Risk Assessment and Emergency Procedures file for all paperwork.

The sessions are led by a trained Forest School Leader/ First Aider. We work with the children to together set ground rules and boundaries, so they have a sense of ownership and are aware of hazards. Children are given the freedom to explore but are taught to stay within sight of an adult and to return to the log circle on the shout of '123 Where are You'.

The staff: child ratio is high not only for a safety perspective but also to enable staff to observe learning styles and plan accordingly. With tool use the adult to child ratio is 1:1.


Forest School is all about risk versus benefit; children have the opportunity to challenge themselves, become more confident and make judgements that keep themselves and others safe. With your help we can create an atmosphere that is encouraging, friendly and secure.

How adult helpers can help the Leader regarding health and safety

Please read the Leader's risk assessment before the sessions.

- Checking children are comfortable -basic needs covered before we start- appropriately dressed for the weather, have been to the loo before the start and are fed and watered!
- Model use of tools and support children in their use on a 1:1 ratio
- Ask children to notify an adult if they find glass, poo, rubbish, etc.
- Children can climb trees on a 1: 1 ratio but adults are to monitor and to discuss with the child the maximum height they can climb to. This is for safety reasons and insurance purposes.
- Reminding children that sticks should be carried pointing down, away from bodies and faces. Children should drag heavier sticks in pairs and drag sticks behind them
- We can look at wild animals at a distance, but they should not be touched. The same with any dogs on the loose. Advise children to fold their hands and keep still.
- Remind children to stay in sight of adults and stay within site boundaries and at the call of '123 Where Are You' please help 'round up' children to return back to the log circle
- There will be additional instructions given regarding fire lighting and tool working safety.





Kit List

'There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing'

Sessions will take place in all weathers unless the Forest School Leader deems it unsafe for example in high winds and thunderstorms. When we go to Forest School, we can get muddy and messy. Children will need appropriate clothing for wet, cold, hot, and sunny weather.

- Waterproofs ideally mac and trousers or dungaree style so children feel more able to play in puddles, mud and explore
- Welly boots or old trainers
- Lots of layers and gloves and hats in cold weather
- Sun hats and sun cream (parents are asked to apply at home)
- Long sleeves and long trousers for protection at all times
- Insect repellent (parents apply at home)

Food and Water

We will bring drinking water and there may be campfire cooking scheduled. Allergies noted.

First Aid

The Leader is a trained First Aider (outdoors/paediatric) and a fully stocked first aid kit is always on hand. Any pre-existing conditions/allergies should be made known to the Forest School Leader. The Leader also brings a Forest School file in the kitbag and in the file will be an **Emergency Procedures / 999 Emergency Call Advice Sheet** with a grid reference and postcode on it to be relayed to the ambulance crew on request of the Leader. A First Aider will stay with the casualty, and other adults keep the rest of the group safe and calm. Our nearest A & E is Addenbrookes at Cambridge or Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford.

Tool Use

During some of our Forest School sessions the children will have the opportunity to use a variety of tools, including a potato peeler for whittling, a saw, and a drill. They will have one-to-one assistance when using these tools and will use personal protective equipment. Helpers will be shown how to use the tools. All tools should be safely stored when not in use. Children must ask an adult before they take out a tool from the tool bag. If you notice anything wrong with a tool- nicks in blade, falling apart, it is blunt etc please let the Forest School Leader know.

Rules when using specific tools

- Carry tools at a walking pace, use tools at a safe working distance, when not being used return to the tool bag - not left lying on the ground
- Saws- carry saw with blade facing down, a cover must be on saw blade. Wear a glove on non-sawing hand. Cut wood on a support. Work in 2's - push pull action. For stems bigger than 10p.
- Peelers- when whittling do it away from your body, and carry peeler facing down
- Secateurs- carry blades facing down, blades locked, use for stems no bigger than a 5p
- Loppers – carry blades facing down with loppers shut, use on stems no bigger than a 10p

NB If these rules are not followed then the tools will be withdrawn



Fires

At some sessions we may light a small fire if all conditions are assessed suitable. At all times, whether there is a fire lit or not, the fire pit is out of bounds. Children should walk not run in and around the log circle and approach the fire pit zone by stepping over the log seats. They should sit with their feet tucked in. The leader lights and feeds the fire. No one should throw anything in the fire or try to retrieve anything from it. In smoky conditions children are advised to turn their head to one side, place their hand across their face and close their eyes and count to 30 or move seats if safe to do so. With cooking on the fire

(usually marshmallows on wooden stick) safe distances from the flames should be maintained, children kneel down by the fire pit and food needs to be cooled down (suggest blowing 10 times on food and away from peers). Adults only handle cooking utensils. Further information about fire procedures and campfire cooking are available from the Forest School Leader.



Toileting/Hand Washing

The children will be able to use the school toilets before visiting the Forest School site. When at a session at the school grounds, a member of staff will accompany a child to the toilet back at the school, but the Leader will need to know they are returning to the school building. Where we are a long walk away from the school children will be accompanied by a DBS cleared person and use the portable toilet- near to the group.

There is no running water at the woodland sites we use, but we take with us a container of fresh water, baby wipes and hand gel. Check for allergies please before using skincare products.

Forest School Area

At the end of each session the site will be returned, as far as possible, to its natural state. We need to monitor for erosion and litter, and we plan to rotate our activities to sub-areas on site so as to minimise our impacts to wildlife.

The children will have a wonderful opportunity to see the Forest School area in all seasons and in all its colours. They will share in the beauty of its flora and fauna and learn from it. Nature is an amazing teacher!

Can you help us by reinforcing these messages? -

- That children must never eat wild foods, berries, or seeds without adult permission.
- Never uproot any plant and only pick flowers or leaves that are abundant.
- Ensure children are aware that they have to wash their hands or gel hands before having snack.
- Educate the children that not all flora and fauna is friendly.

Poisonous Plants Identification

Please note that poisonous plants that are found on site are not removed as they may be a rare species or an important part of the eco-system. Those present/involved in Forest School will be informed of the location of the species, and everyone is asked not to remove, touch, or eat it. The plant may be fenced off temporarily.

The plants pictured below are poisonous.



1) Fly Agaric

2) Panther cap

3) Death cap



1) Mistletoe - berries 2) Cuckoo Pint 3) Monkshood



1) Buttercup-sap 2) Cow Bane 3) Foxglove



1) Laburnum 2) Elderberry - seeds, roots, berries 3) Hogs weed 4) Ticks

There is a walnut tree at Welly Boot Wood - be aware of allergies to tree nuts. Keep out of bounds.

NB Ticks are small blood sucking mites that can live in woodland and can transmit disease though not all ticks are infectious. Wearing long sleeves and trousers will minimise being bitten by ticks. For further information see NHS website.

' Every child is born a naturalist. His eyes are, by nature, open to the glories of the stars, the beauty of the flowers and the mystery of life '

by R Search

