

# Key Features of Forest Schools

The use of a natural outdoor environment.

Allows every child to have a voice, especially those who find it difficult to communicate in a more conventional learning environment.

Child-led approach to children's learning which is fun and unhurried.

A high adult to child ratio allows children to undertake new experiences and challenges whilst taking appropriate risks.

Long term programme that allows repetition where children come into contact with nature using all their senses.

Supports personalised learning.

Builds children's confidence and self esteem as they are responsible for making their own decisions and are carefully supported to achieve.

Trained adults and facilitators and observers rather than leaders and directors.

“Time in nature is not leisure time; it's an essential investment in our children health and also... in our own' Richard Louv

## Brief History of Forest School

*“Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.”*

*(Forest School Association)*

The philosophy and roots of the Forest Schools movement can be traced through a number of sources as far back as the 19th century. These include the ideas of progressive educationalists such as Pestalozzi, Rousseau and Froebel, the woodcraft movements, the Native Americans and the Quakers. In the UK in 1928 a Forest School was formed in the New Forest; ‘Woodcraft Movement’ and ‘Forest School Camps’ still exist today. In the 1950’s it was developed in Sweden, building independence and self-esteem through hands on play in a woodland setting. The Swedish concept was then further developed by Scandinavia and other European countries and established in Denmark in the 1980’s. In the 1990s it was brought to the UK after a visit by Nursery Nurses from Somerset and Early Years Professionals from other parts of the UK. A 13 month study of Swedish children found the Forest School children far happier to their urban cousins; more balanced with greater social capacity, more able to concentrate, better coordination, higher self-esteem and self-confidence and able to work better as part of a team.

## Aims and Ethos of Forest School

Forest School aims to develop children who will:

- Enjoy learning, be independent and life long learners
- Be confident, capable and competent learners
- Investigate, explore and experiment
- Take appropriate risks and engage in new experiences
- Form positive relationships
- Respect others and the environment
- Collaborate and solve problems with others
- Be resilient
- Persevere with challenges
- Make informed choices
- Talk and ask questions
- Use their imagination
- Be reflective learners
- Feel valued and included
- Keep healthy and take responsibility for their own safety
- Understand and appreciate their natural environment
- Be proud of their learning
- Be responsible citizens
- Share their knowledge with others
- Think for themselves
- Develop their LOVE of learning!

## Example of Forest School activities

Activities for Forest Schools are diverse and numerous but it should be reminded that we are trying to create independent learners who are inspired to try out their own ideas, explore their own interests and to attempt new ideas.

Some activities might include:

- Shelter building
- Firelighting
- Tool use
- Studying wildlife
- Playing team and group games
- Sensory activities
- Tracking games
- Cooking on an open fire
- Using a Kelly Kettle
- Rope and string work
- Art and sculpture work
- Woodland and traditional craft
- Developing stories and drama, and meeting imaginary characters
- Physical movement activities

Every session will undoubtedly differ in many ways from previous sessions in relation to learning, experiences, journeys, the environment and so on but generally we will follow the same structure for each session.

This structure helps ensure that the children and adults are physically safe and creates an environment in which children are comfortable and secure to learn with confidence.

## Risk Assessment and Risk benefits

Current research suggests that not allowing young people to engage in independent mobility and environmental learning denies them the opportunity to develop the skills and resilience that they need to be able to be safe and manage complex environments. There are also indications that such restrictions have long-term implications for young people's future development, health and well-being. Teaching young people to manage risks for themselves and take sensible decisions makes them safer. It also helps them to develop as mature adults, responsible and mindful of others.

*"The challenges which young people face in many learning activities outside the classroom require the management of risk. Managing risk through appropriate planning, supervision, proper equipment and a regard for other factors such as the weather or the time of day is what contributes to making these activities safe for young people while still offering sufficient challenge. These activities not only give young people the opportunity to manage risk for themselves, but also provide wonderful opportunities for them to be actively involved in risk management planning."* Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC)

*“Exposure to well managed risks helps children learn important life skills, including how to manage risks for themselves... children, in particular need to learn how to manage risks, and adventure activities such as rock climbing, sailing and canoeing are an ideal way of doing this.”*  
LOtC Health and Safety Executive

*“You can’t teach young people about risk from a text book – they need some practical experience. That’s why cosseting children and seeking to remove all risk from their experiences ultimately leaves them ill equipped for adult and working life. When they join the world of work, young people need to be prepared to recognise and manage risk.”* RSA Risk Commission Conference, 2007

### **Risk Benefit**

The risk benefit assessment process (RBA) focuses on the benefits to children and the risks to children. The reasons (benefits) give the context from which to judge the risk. Benefits must be great enough to warrant the associated level of risk and be maximised without creating unnecessary risk. Risks should be minimised but without losing major benefits.

When writing our risk assessments for Forest School ‘Risk Benefit’ has been carefully considered.

## **Forest School Rules & Code of Conduct**

Children are encouraged to be involved in the decisions regarding their environment and safety whilst at Forest School. However, there are a rules that children will be made aware of.

### **Collecting materials**

We only collect natural materials such as leaves, sticks and flowers. children will learn plants they can and can’t pick, how much they can pick and why. Berries and mushrooms must never be collected unless under strict guidance of the FS leader, for example blackberries. There is a nil by mouth rule in the forest except food given by the FS leader. We only pick what we need and only if the materials are sustainable. Children are asked to check with the FS leader if they are unsure if they can be picked or not.

### **Fire use**

A fire must only be lit on the designated fire area agreed by FS leader. The FS leader is in charge of the fire and is the only adult that can lead a session where a fire is used. Fire must be used for a purpose and can be used with the whole class or a small group. The fire safety policy must be adhered to at all times. Fire safety equipment must be brought to site every session when there is a fire. Children will be taught fire circle rules through a game to begin with and reminded at each session.

### **Lighting a fire (see fire safety policy)**

We have been given permission to light a fire on site, however the FS leader will take the lead and be in charge of the fire. All adults will be briefed on fire rules and safety as will the children

before each session. A fire will only be lit when there is a purpose to lighting it e.g. cooking, keeping warm, heating water etc. (See fire safety policy for how to set up a fire safely).

### **Rope and string use**

Children should be encouraged to use rope and string as a way of connecting and transporting materials. They must not tie themselves or anyone else up. If a child wants to build e.g. a rope string then an adult can model appropriate knot tying.

### **Picking up and playing with stones**

Picking up and using stones is permitted however children must be taught not to throw stones at anyone else and the reasons for this.

### **Picking up and playing with sticks**

Children can carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but are encouraged to think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks will be dragged or carried with the help of another person when each person is at either end. Sticks must not be thrown. Sticks must not be pulled from living trees.

### **Digging, carrying and transporting materials**

Children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag, pull and push as these movements develop their gross motor skills. Adults should model safe lifting such as straight back, bent knees. Heavy objects can be carried by more people. Digging is permitted on the Westdean woods site.

### **Collecting wood**

Wood can be collected for fire lighting purposes. It is collected in four thicknesses – matchstick sized, pencil sized, thumb sized and wrist sized. This is a good mathematical activity involving sorting and matching. Sticks may be collected for creating pictures and patterns but should be collected sparingly so as not to disrupt creature habitats.

### **Eating and drinking**

We have nil by mouth policy in the woods or schools outdoor spaces unless specific to a lesson or permission is given by the FS leader. Children will be made aware of the dangers of berries, fungi and other things that could make them poorly. Children are to be reminded not to put fingers and hands in their mouths. For drinks, snacks and lunch to be consumed children must wash their hands using the manmade sink or use antibacterial gel before doing so.

## **Tool safety**

### **Tool use**

The FS leader is the only adult that can lead a session where tools are used however supporting adults able to use tools with a small group of children under the supervision of the FS leader. Children will be reminded that they do not use tools unless they have been given permission and adult is close by.

Below are instructions of safe tool use with specific tools:

### **Vegetable peelers**

Vegetable peelers can be used for peeling or sharpening sticks. An adult ratio of 1:2 for reception children and children will be observed at all times. The adult will model the safe use of a peeler. When a child is deemed competent with a peeler they may be allowed to move on to whittling using a knife. The tool must be used in a seated position, where the blood bubble (safe zone around them) is adhered to. Elbows placed on knees and knife used in a down and away action or the tool to the side of their knees but in a downward motion. Glove worn on helper hand.

### **Bow saws**

Children must be taught how to use a bow saw with 1:1 supervision. You may use a 'buddy' to help in a 'push and pull' fashion. When using a bow saw ensure that your body/legs/knee are not underneath the blade. Adults should supervise closely. The safest method is for the adult to brace the wood through the bow saw itself. The saw blade must be covered when not in use. When being transported the bow saw should always have its cover on and pointing down. They must also be counted in and out and the blood bubble adhered to at all times. Glove must be worn on helper hand.

### **Palm drills**

Palm drills may be used with reception aged children with a ratio of 1:2 and close supervision. A ratio of 1:4 applies for older children. Children must have a glove on their helper hand (non-writing hand) and blood bubble principle applies. Children must push and turn holding wood with their gloved hand.

### **Loppers and secateurs**

The Forest School leader and assistant are required to use a lopper and secateurs for cutting small branches and twigs from overhanging trees. If older children are using them they will be taught with a 1:1 ratio and close supervision. Loppers must be carried at the side holding on to the bottom handle, making sure that the blade has a smiley face. The loppers should be transported in a sturdy bag of appropriate size and the secateurs in a toolbox. Always have both hands on the handles and the 'blood bubble' principle applies.

## **Clothing**

- It is essential that all adults and children who attend Forest School are dressed appropriately for a number of safety reasons. We follow the principle of 'there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing'. We do have a selection of spare clothing but this will need to be checked for suitability and matched to the child prior to the session.

- No person will be permitted to go to Forest School without appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of heat or cold, keep them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes, and that fits appropriately for comfort.
- Parents will be informed of appropriate clothing for Forest School and encouraged to dress their child for appropriate weather conditions. Parents will also be informed that clothing may return wet or muddy after each session. On some occasions clothing may not be suitable to wear again.
- Please be aware that sandals/flip flops/high heels are never suitable for Forest School sessions. Long sleeved tops and trousers must be worn in all weathers to prevent ticks.

## Fire Safety

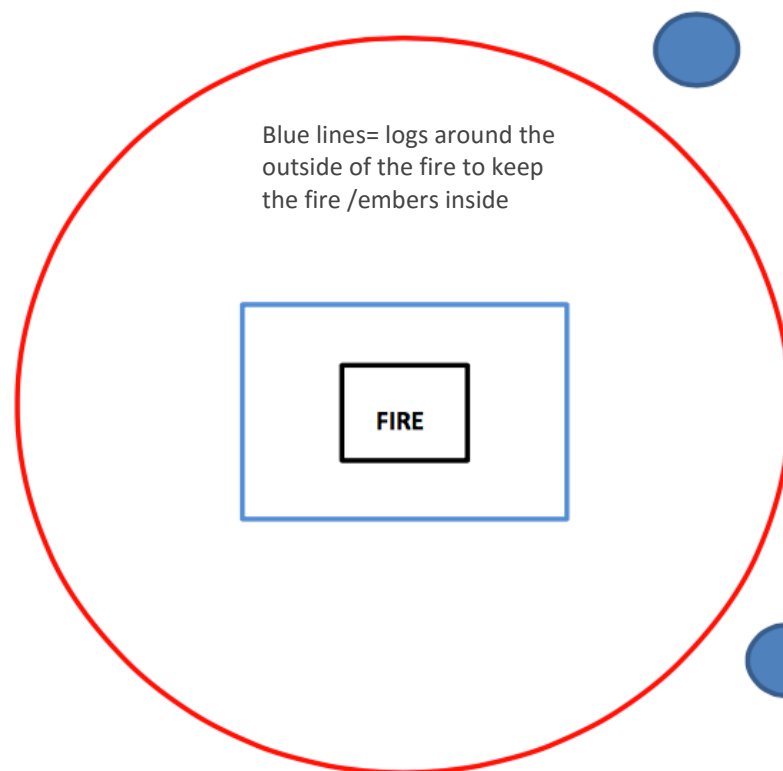
Fires are a valuable and integral part of Forest School. If cooking, food hygiene precautions must be adhered to. The forest school leader is in charge of lighting, watching and putting out the fire at each session.

All adults and children will be briefed on fire safety. A fire will only be lit for a purpose such as cooking, keeping warm or boiling water.

The fire safety equipment taken on site each time include: orange fire bucket, first aid kit including a burns kit, fire retardant gloves. Fire lighting equipment such as fire steels will be kept in a zipped bag.

**The fire will follow the format below:**

Red circle line= fire circle or seating area is 1.5 metres away from the blue lines. Learners walk around the outside of the fire circle. The seating area is logs with spaces in between to enter and exit the space. This ensures safety for all



Blue circle= fire safety equipment kept outside the fire circle and taken to every session

Blue circle= fire wood collected and kept outside the fire circle

The fire will be built in an area marked out/enclosed with logs to prevent the spread of fire. The ground underneath should be checked and cleared of roots/foliage before building a fire. Upside down fires are quick to light, slow burning and need little adding to once lit. Criss-cross fires are used to provide a large amount of heat and light and are fast burning. Long log fires are good for cooking as they are slow burning and require little fuel. Fires will be lit using a fire steel by the FS leader with the safety equipment in place. Cotton wool may be used with vaseline to light the fire. Fire lighters and natural resources such as birch bark may also be added to the fire to light it quicker. Sticks and twigs should be placed onto fire and not thrown. No plastics should be burnt. Gloves should be worn if removing or adding things to the fire.

If there is a clear wind direction, seating in the line of smoke is to be avoided. If the wind direction is variable, seating may be rearranged if possible.

The fire will always be put out at the end of each session unless it is required for the next group, the FS leader will use the fire bucket filled with water to put the fire out and ensure smoke and steam has ceased. The FS leader will then use her hands to check whether the ground is hot, if so more water is applied to the fire. Once happy the fire is out, when appropriate, effort is made to cover with foliage to ensure our policy 'leave no trace'.

In an event of a child or adult being burnt then the FS leader and assistant will carry out necessary actions following first aid guidelines.

## **Cooking at Forest School**

Cooking at Forest School is great fun and extremely rewarding if the children have built the fire themselves to cook the food!

When preparing, transporting, storing, cooking and serving any food eaten whilst at Forest School the same guidelines apply as if you were in a kitchen or dining room.

A cool bag or similar storage facility kept specifically for food will be used. Food that contains:- meat, fish, dairy products, cereals, rice, pulses, vegetables etc. will be kept cold (at or below 8° C). Food to be cooked will be kept cold until required and cooked to a temperature at or above 63° C. Raw meat and fish will be stored cold separately from cooked meats, cereals, dairy products etc. Sensible precautions will be taken to follow basic hygiene regulations by ensuring all who handle food for preparation or consumption must wash/clean their hands before doing so. This follows the guidelines *Food Safety Regulations 1995* ([www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk))

There are different ways to cook food on a campfire. If the children are using sticks to toast marshmallows these should be long enough that the children can sit slightly back from the fire. Bark should be removed from the stick before using to cook. Food should be placed on and removed from a grill using a protective glove, and should be done by an adult. Hands should be washed or rub hands with antibacterial gel before eating. Food will be in date and stored in a air tight container. An adult should check that food is properly cooked. Food will not be reheated. We will ensure allergies have been considered and dietary requirements be adhered to.