

FoxWood Forest School Handbook

Introduction

This handbook contains information, policies and procedures relating to the running of Forest School sessions in a safe and enjoyable way. It is available to help answer any questions relating to Forest School practice. It is essential that anyone volunteering at Fox Wood Forest School becomes familiar with its contents.

Our Ethos

We believe everybody should have regular, opportunities to be in a woodland or natural environment which provides them with inspirational and challenging outdoor learning opportunities. Forest School offers a learner centred approach, where children can learn through self-directed play and exploration.

The woodland provides children with a rich environment in which to play and learn. The woodland is nature's playground, providing opportunities to climb, hide, run, swing and build. It is an infinite source of smells, textures, sounds and tastes; it offers beauty and inspires creativity. In the woodland pupils will have the opportunity to develop their curiosity, confidence, self-esteem, creativity, empathy and communication skills. They will improve their ability to assess risk and gain greater knowledge of the natural environment.

The Forest School Ethos is built on six principles developed by the Forest School Association

- Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.
- Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners
- Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.
- Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning

Our Aims

- To provide weekly play and learning sessions in the woodland.
- To build a supportive community where learning is play based and child led.
- To enable children to grow in confidence, independence, resilience and creativity.
- To support children in developing a love of the natural world

Planning & Assessment

Forest School emphasises child-led learning; the leader becomes a facilitator, a mentor and experienced companion, supporting children in exploring the things that interest and motivate them. The child-led approach has significant benefits; supporting children in developing independence, confidence, creativity, perseverance and resilience, essential life skills.

Forest School sessions focus on meeting the needs of the whole child. Weekly plans are based on observations from the previous weeks session and are therefore centred on the interests and needs of each individual group.

Activities

Activities will vary according to the age, ability and experience of participants. Examples of what Forest School might include:

- Woodland and nature exploration
- Building dens and other structures
- Fires and cooking
- Games and invitations for imaginative play
- Natural crafts
- Using tools, such as knives and saws
- Scavenger hunts and adventure
- Seasonal celebrations
- Songs stories
- Time to reflect and share with the group

The Benefits

Research now backs the importance of children spending time in natural outdoor spaces, children are stimulated by the outdoors and over time being part of a Forest School increases their self-belief, confidence, learning capacity, enthusiasm, communication, problem-solving skills and emotional well-being.

- ***Physical health benefits:*** The Forest School setting gives children space and freedom within defined boundaries. It gives them the opportunity to run, balance, jump and climb and consequently over time it helps them to become more spatially aware, physically stronger and more resilient.
- ***Mental health benefits:*** Spending time in green spaces reduces cortisol (a stress chemical) in the brain and therefore has a calming influence. The reduction in cortisol also increases receptivity for building neural pathways (learning) in the brain.
- ***Social benefits:*** When playing outside communication, team building and language skills are developed. Children's play tends to be more creative, imaginative and cooperative. Forest School provides endless opportunities for co-operation, social interactions and sharing.
- ***Risk awareness:*** Children learn about risk taking and risk assessment. Children who are exposed to appropriate levels of risk at a young age are less likely to make bad judgements in the future.
- ***Behaviour:*** Due to the calming effect on the brain and the increase in physical space outside, improved behaviour is often noticed. ADHD symptoms are not as apparent when children are playing in natural spaces.
- ***Building self-confidence:*** Forest School helps children to develop their confidence as they learn to solve problems and be creative and imaginative. They can take their new-found confidence into school and into other areas of their lives. Forest School can be particularly effective for children who struggle with the confines of the classroom environment.

Guidelines for Staff & volunteers in supporting learning

The Forest School Leader will contact/meet with school or nursery staff and parent volunteers to discuss what they can expect from Forest School and what will be expected of them. It is important that staff and volunteers are comfortable and happy in their role, they are encouraged to seek further advice or assistance from the Forest School Leader if they have any concerns or queries.

Requirements for staff & volunteers:

- Become familiar with the Forest School policies and procedures - found in handbook and on the website
- Become familiar with and promote the forest school ethos and child led approach to learning in order to raise self-esteem and confidence
- Assist groups with tasks such as using saws, knives, lighting fires, cooking (only after training given by Forest School Leader)
- Help children with getting ready and making sure they have appropriate clothing for the weather conditions
- Support the Forest School leader in observations of children's individual progress during their time at Forest School - feed back observations to Forest School leader.
- Understand that disciplining children must take place within the ethos of Forest School, (see Behaviour Policy). If children behave poorly, volunteers should seek the Forest School Leader's support.

Oct 2018

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