Forest School

Forest School is a concept of learning and discovery that is in tune with nature, the outdoors and the working human mind. Open to all ages and abilities, the process exposes the participant to many aspects of the natural world by way of changing the learning setting from man-made buildings to naturally evolved woodland. Forest Schools have been developed and adapted from the original concept implemented in Sweden in the 1950s and developed throughout other Scandinavian and European Countries. Part of the Forest Education Initiative set up by the Forestry Commission, the ultimate goal is to increase the understanding and appreciation of the environmental, social and economic potential of trees, woodlands and forests and of the link between the tree and everyday wood products.

Ethos

The ethos of a Forest School is distinctive and captures the character, spirit, and attitudes of all that participate. Social skills are improved and inspiration sparks as bonds are forged between participants who undertake in engaging, motivating and achievable tasks and activities in a woodland environment that promotes confidence and self-esteem. The ethos is also based on a fundamental respect for children and young people and for their capacity to instigate, test and maintain curiosity in the world around them. It believes in children's right to play, the right to access the outdoors, the right to access risk and the right to experience a healthy range of emotions through all the challenges that occur.

Practice

A Forest School is based more on the process of learning than it is on the content - more on the 'how' than the 'what'. This means that genuine Forest School practice steps boldly out of the shadow and limitation of planned activities and ventures collaboratively into the realms of the unplanned, unexpected and ultimately unlimited. Children and young people are given encouragement to direct their own learning which sometimes requires catalysing on the part of the Forest School leader either through stimulating play in the outdoors or through building on a child's learning, but mostly through simply observing how children are in the outdoors.

Significantly, and on many levels, a woodland environment is central in supporting this very dynamic approach to learning. The changing of the seasons; the contemplation of an ancient tree; the dynamic nature of an outdoor environment; an infinite source of smells, textures, sounds and tastes; a range of visual stimuli from near to far, high to low, very big to very small; and the infinite layers of historical, cultural, spiritual and mythological significance of woodlands all play an integral part of the learning experience.

Tool use and campfire based activities are integral parts of a Forest School and all safety considerations are addressed such as designating areas, providing adequate supervision and ensuring safety. Children are able to use full sized tools, to play, to learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, and establish and grow in confidence and self-esteem and become self motivated in the process.

Forest Schools have demonstrated success with children of all ages who visit the same local woodlands on a regular basis and who have the opportunity to learn about the natural environment, to learn how to handle risks and most importantly to use their own initiative to solve problems and co-operate with others.
Logistics

When selecting a site for a Forest School, many aspects are taken into consideration such as how far the site is from the drop off point, whether there is any open water and the general topography as hilltops are exposed to cold windy weather whereas valleys can be damp and liable to heavy frosts. A school's own grounds can also be developed into a Forest School area and can be assessed for suitability by one of our Forest School leaders.

Our Forest School programme can also be linked to the National Curriculum at all key stages and can be adapted to accommodate pre-school learning, further education and Scout or Guide groups. All our Forest School Leaders are trained in First Aid and have attained the Open College Network (OCN) Level 3 Forest Schools Practitioner Award. Leaders are also insured with Nottingham City Council's Employers and Public Liability insurance and also with Transport insurance.

Forest School programmes operate all year round whatever the weather. However, the Forest School leader will make a continuous, dynamic risk assessment based on any extremes of weather for each individual session and act accordingly. There may be no toilet facilities available on site, so participants are encouraged to use facilities before they head out. Where appropriate, a woodland toilet may be set up temporarily just for the session. The Forest School leader will have available a mobile phone, consent forms, contact details and any medical forms, bin bags, water for washing hands and also for fire safety and a first aid kit.

The following sections detail what participants need to bring and to wear in order to get the most out of the session.

**What to wear?**
- Old, comfortable clothing
- Long sleeved shirts and long trousers
- Comfortable shoes or trainers
- Hat (either woolly or sun)

**What if the weather is bad?**
- Waterproof jacket
- Waterproof trousers
- Wellington boots

**What else is needed?**
- Packed lunch (if the session requires it)
- Hot drink (if the session requires it)
- Bottle filled with drinking water
- Any medication or environment protection products you require

**What not to bring**
- Money
- Mobile phones
- Valuables of any other kind
- Knives or other personal tools

A consent form must be completed and be handed to the Forest School leader or accompanying adult before any child takes part in a Forest School session. A template form can be found at the back of this information pack. Permission is required for application of sun cream, insect repellent or antiseptic cream for stings, bites or scratches. Parental permission is also required if photographs are to be taken and used later for displays. Initial meetings can be arranged with teachers, parents or carers to ease any concerns that may be present.
Roles and Responsibilities

The Forest School practitioners will plan and run sessions, taking into consideration all the health and safety issues that could arise and inform teachers, group leaders or parents clearly of their role. Forest School leaders will always take into consideration the specific needs of a particular group or individual. The leader will ensure that every child is respected as an individual, that bullying is not tolerated and that the rules and guidelines are followed. In the event of an emergency they will direct the group to safety.

Nottingham City Council Park Ranger Service will;
• Provide operating policies.
• Provide pro-forma risk assessments for activities and locations.
• Appoint suitably qualified staff as Forest School Leaders.
• Ensure DBS checks are in place for staff and volunteers.
• Provide the equipment necessary for the operation of the school and manage the maintenance of that equipment.
• Provide Personal Protective Equipment as identified in the risk assessments.
• Review operating policies at least annually and process feedback on these policies within 2 weeks of receipt.

The Forest School leader will;
• Follow operating policies and procedures.
• Ensure accompanying adults are aware of the operating policies and provide a good model of their use.
• Be responsible for the safe running of the Forest School.
• Sweep the area for safety before each Forest School session.
• Suggest small, manageable tasks and ensure that participants have time and freedom to learn at their own pace without pressure.
• Model appropriate behaviour at all times and encourage children to develop a greater awareness of their own and other’s emotional needs.
• Administer any first aid where necessary and maintain the first aid kit.
• Carry out risk assessments to ensure the site is safe and easily accessible identifying hazards and implementing actions needed to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.
• Tailor the risk assessments to suit different activities and Forest School groups.
• Ensure that all adults have access to this information, as it could be the leader that is injured.
• Ensure that the adult to pupil ratio reaches the minimum standard laid down by the authority.
• Ensure that activities involving tools are kept to small groups depending on the behaviour and ability of the group.
• Attempt to ensure both male and female adults are present for a mixed group.
• Encourage assistance from teaching staff, volunteers or other Forest School trained leaders.

Adults will;
• Take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others around them.
• Co-operate with the Forest School Leader on matters of health and safety.
• Follow the direction of the Forest School Leader.
• Follow operating policies.
• Use work equipment correctly.

Participants will;
• Follow the direction of the Forest School Leader.
• Take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others around them.
• Co-operate with the Forest School Leader on matters of health and safety.
• Use work equipment correctly.

Parents will;
• Support the Forest School Leader in helping their children engage with the activities.

For simplicity, ‘Parents’ will be taken to mean those with parental responsibility for the purposes of this document.
Children and Vulnerable Persons

Forest school leaders regard their duty of care when working with young persons as extremely important.

In order to make sure that all individuals are safe and protected we will ensure that:

• All children are accompanied by responsible adults.
• We liaise with parents and other agencies when applicable to promote good practice in the area of child protection.
• We always seek to work with others in a clear, positive and open way, bearing in mind the welfare of the child is paramount.
• Members of staff will have been briefed in any specific child protection concerns and will attempt to find out who any named child protection officer is.
• Confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
• Forest school leaders are all DBS checked.
• If any volunteer does not hold a current DBS check, they will not be left unsupervised with children.
• Equality of opportunity for all is offered and discrimination of any type is tackled and will not be tolerated.

Ground Rules within the Forest School site

A Forest School experience is all about child-centred learning. However it is important to set ground rules with the group so that everyone is safe. In some cases, it may be worthwhile encouraging the children to decide their own rules.

Rules that will be observed and that children need to be aware of.

• Fire safety rules. The rules surrounding the fire area should always be carried out even when there is no fire.
• Tool use. Tools should be used in the way children have been shown and in no other way.
• Tool safety. Tools are to be returned to the box or bag when not in use.
• Potential injury. If a leader asks any participant to stop what they are doing, that must happen immediately.
• Environment. Trees and all living things in the woodland should be respected.
• Allergies. Nothing found in the woods should be eaten unless approved by an adult.
• Poisoning. Fingers should not be put in mouths.
• Cleanliness. Hands should be washed or sanitised using hand gel or wipes before eating.
• Respect. Fires should always be extinguished by a responsible person and all litter must be cleared.

The following can be discussed with the group and be more like guidance rather than rules.

• Boundaries. How far are they allowed to go?
• Awareness. Be aware of yourself and others at all times.
• Hazards. Look above, below and around for hazards.
• Safety. Always think of the consequences of actions.
• Biodiversity. Take care when picking from trees or plants.
• Care. Be mindful that no one is in the way before starting a task.
• Horseplay. Behave sensibly during games and play.
• Knowledge. Be sure what you need to ask an adult for e.g. use of tools, going to the toilet.

We encourage the children to think of appropriate actions and behaviour and as the experience grows it is important that the group is aware of acceptable behaviour that it will help everyone to enjoy their time in the woods.
Health and Safety

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 imposes obligations on an employer to take all actions as are reasonable to safeguard the health and safety of their employees, but also to be able to show that they are doing so, by producing adequate written policies and procedures. Any employee of Nottingham City Council, regardless of their role within the organisation has a legal duty under the Health & Safety at Work Act and other safety regulations to work in a reasonably safe manner. The Park Ranger Forest School fully accepts its responsibilities under the Act.

A Forest School allows people to engage in potentially hazardous activities such as using tools and open fires in a safe way, by following generic Forest School procedures under competent leadership. It encourages children to manage their own risk and to investigate and develop their own possibilities. The Forest School leader is a key person in this regard and will be qualified to OCN level 3 in Forest School Leadership with responsibility for running Forest School activities.

Nottingham City Council considers matters of health and safety to be of great importance. Though it is not possible to detail here all the health and safety matters that may arise during Forest School activities, Forest School leaders and staff are constantly mindful of their responsibilities individually and collectively for the safety of themselves and of all other assistants and participants.

Normal operating procedure

The Forest School leader will:

- Risk assess the forest school area.
- Have written health and safety procedures.
- Ensure that the learning area satisfies health, safety and welfare requirements.
- Ensure that all equipment is suitable for its intended use and is properly maintained and used.
- Ensure that all members of staff are aware of the procedure in case of accidents.
- Ensure that all members of staff are aware of and carry out their health and safety responsibilities as set out in their job descriptions.
- Provide appropriate protective clothing.
- Ensure that fire making and tool use are carefully introduced by demonstration and are supervised.
- Ensure that children are encouraged to think about and assess their actions and become aware of safety issues in order to minimise risk.

Emergency action plan

In the event of an emergency, the Forest School leader will deal with the given situation accordingly.

The assembly point will be advised before a session starts and the Forest School leader will make sure everyone gets there and is accounted for.

The first aid kit will be on site at all times and the location identified to all and water will always be available to deal with any fire emergencies.

Forest School leaders will have a mobile phone to contact the emergency services should they be required and will have the contact numbers for all group members on the consent forms that will be completed before the session.

A head count will be taken regularly to make sure it tallies with the consent forms for that day’s session.
Forest School Consent Form

Parent or guardian should complete and return this form before the Forest School sessions start. The form will be held in the strictest confidence.

Name of participating child

Date of Birth

Emergency contact name, address and telephone number for child’s parent/guardian

Name

Address

Phone

If your child suffers any illnesses, disabilities or allergies or requires the use of any medication, please give details and appropriate instructions below.

Please note if your child needs to take any medication during the activity this will need to be self-administered or given by an appointed school member of staff.

Name of appointed person

Phone

Agreement

I undertake that my child will be adequately and safely equipped and clothed for the activities planned.
I accept that he/she may not be allowed to take part if the leader considers it unsafe.
I understand that every effort will be made by the Forest School leader to ensure the safety of my child.
I agree to be contactable at all times during the session in the event of an emergency, illness or an accident.

During the course of the forest school programme photographs may be taken to record progress. These photographs may be used for promotional material but will never be distributed in any other way.
By signing this agreement it is assumed that you consent to your child potentially being on any photographs that may be used later.

Signed

Print name

Date
Contact

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Woodthorpe Grange, Woodthorpe Drive, Nottingham, NG5 4HA
Telephone: (0115) 915 2733 between 8.30am and 4.50pm Monday to Friday
Fax: (0115) 915 2766
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