

# Nature of learning

## Forest School Handbook



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### ***What is Forest School?***

The Forest School ethos supports children to develop self-esteem, independence and confidence through outdoor child-led play in nature. Forest School takes a holistic approach to learning and development and offers a mixture of learning the skills of problem solving and creativity as well as some more specific bushcraft style skills (e.g. knot tying, tree climbing, fire lighting and tool use). At Forest School we foster a deep connection and love of nature, through play and observations through the seasons in our beautiful woodland. The children are given time and space to explore and discover things for themselves alongside 'knowledgeable others', including our specialist Forest School facilitators who are always close by, to guide and reassure. Our Forest School sessions are child-led and designed to meet the needs of individuals to ensure that children grow in self-confidence, as well as developing their physical, emotional, cognitive and social skills.

### **The Forest School ethos and principles**

The Forest School ethos has 6 principles (reviewed in 2011 and published by the Forest School association <https://www.forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school/>) and these are:

- FS is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visit; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
- FS takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- FS uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
- FS aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- FS offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- FS is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice

More details about the Forest School ethos and the 6 Forest School principles can be found here:

<https://www.forestschoollassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/>

Our aim is to advance the education, and promote the wellbeing of children in a safe, secure and stimulating outdoors environment.

**We offer your child:**

Sessions are planned around the individual's and group's needs, and built upon each week. All Forest School Leaders are qualified through nationally recognised and accredited training, therefore ensuring Forest School is a high quality learning experience. The earlier sessions will concentrate on safety; establishing boundaries and routines and allowing time for the children to become comfortable and confident in our setting. As the children develop in confidence and familiarity with the environment the sessions focus on developing and reinforcing skills, promoting nature connection and developing relationships within the group.

We will regularly share your child's experiences at Forest School with you and always love to hear what they say about the sessions.

*"Forest School is an inspirational process that offers children and young people opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self esteem, through hands on learning experiences in a local woodland environment."*

National definition: by Forest School (England) Network

**Adult supporters at Forest School**

The role of the Forest School leader is to allow the children to meet risk and challenges appropriate to their age, personality and stage of development and to ensure their safety. Our sessions aim to foster a supportive and encouraging community, where children feel their contributions are valued and listened to. We support and encourage the children as they build a meaningful connection to nature, igniting their natural curiosity and extending their learning by providing opportunities and guidance skilfully and sensitively, to support all children to reach their full potential.

As Forest School facilitators, we always have a flexible plan for an enjoyable and child-centred session. We take into account and respond to children's needs and interests along with the changing seasons and all they have to offer.

### ***The management of Nature of Learning Forest School***

Sarah Allington and Hev Nedzynski are qualified L3 Forest School practitioners who run a range of sessions from parent and pre-schooler, groups for home educated children and family Forest School sessions at a number of woodland sites in the Saffron Walden area. The main site is a small piece of woodland bordered by farmland in the village of Ashdon.

### ***Session information***

We use a number of sites local to Saffron Walden, details of our sessions can be found on our website ([www.natureoflearning.co.uk](http://www.natureoflearning.co.uk)) and updates and useful information for parents is available on our Facebook page (called Nature of Learning Forest School), here we share information and photos about our sessions and we recommend parents follow this page. To book a session parents can either send an email ([sarah@natureoflearning.co.uk](mailto:sarah@natureoflearning.co.uk)) or use our booking site (<https://bookwhen.com/natureoflearning>). When booking you will need to provide contact details, name, age of child/ren, an emergency contact number for when you are in the woods and details of any further requirements, dietary, medical or behavioural needs. When you arrive at the session to sign your child in, we will require confirmation of emergency contact number/s for that session, any medical requirements/ conditions to be recorded, and dietary requirements/ allergies and a request to give permission to take and use photographs from the session.

### ***Where we meet***

For sessions in our main site in Ashdon we meet at the large gate to All Saints Church in Ashdon and take the short walk down the public footpath to the entrance to our woodland. The fence on the way down to the site does have barbed wire in places and we remind children to take care of themselves and each other. The walk to the site is included in our risk assessment for sessions.

For other sites, specific risk assessments are written and updated according to the individual

features of the site.

### ***For unaccompanied sessions***

We ask parents to arrive promptly, if for any reason you are running late, and arrive after we have left the church yard, please bring your child/ren down into the woods to meet us. Our Forest School leaders will take a register at the top of the hill, closely supervise and accompany children to the entrance to our site and ensure a headcount is completed at regular intervals. For security purposes the Forest School practitioners will only release children to adults known to the setting and if not those with parental responsibility we will require your advanced permission via text or email please. Please do try to ensure you collect your child promptly.

## **Nature of learning Forest School policies**

### ***Forest School Clothing guide***

“There is no such thing as bad weather, just unsuitable clothing!”

**Parents/carers** – We value and recognise the effort it takes to ensure your child comes prepared, so that they can get the most out of Forest School sessions. In particular, this means making sure they are appropriately dressed. It can be hard to predict just how many layers a child will need but it is always colder in the shaded woods. Please see below for our recommendations. Your other crucial role is to embrace the mud! Please do not send your child in their best clothes as they will almost certainly get dirty during the session!

#### **Layers!**

- THE best way to keep warm.
  - add one more than you
- (We can always remove a layer but once cold, it can be hard to warm up)

#### **Waterproof trousers**

- Essential!
- Standard ‘thin’ pair in summer for protection
- Ski trousers ideal in winter OR extra layer under trousers
- All-in-ones not advised for potty/toilet users

### **Trousers**

- Full length for protection
- Extra pair of leggings/tights/thermals under normal trousers in cold weather

### **Warm socks**

- Wellies get very cold!
- Extra pair of wool/ fleece/ fluffy socks inside wellies  
(Normal socks in wellies are **not** warm enough for cooler weather)

### **Waterproof coat**

- Preferably with a hood
- Thick and warm in winter (or use an extra fleece layer)

### **Warm hat**

- Preferably covering ears.

### **Mittens/Gloves**

- Thermal and waterproof  
(Knitted gloves get damp and do not keep little hands warm enough during the colder months. Don't worry about mittens limiting finger movement as the cold is much more limiting!)

### **Tops**

- ALWAYS long sleeves (to minimize risk from stinging nettles and biting insects etc)
- At least 3 layers under coat in winter  
(eg. top, jumper, fleece and coat, or 'base layer', top, warm jumper and coat)

### **Waterproof boots**

- Wellies are essential!  
(Alternatives include snow boots and walking boots)

Please Note! In summer, wellies, waterproof trousers and light long sleeves are still essential, to protect from thorns, nettles, ticks, insect bites etc. Please also send a sunhat in hot weather, particularly for the walk to and from the site.

### ***Toileting***

In the Forest School we have an outdoor 'tree bog' toilet where toileting and nappy changes take place, accompanying parents are also welcome to use this facility.

During unaccompanied sessions children are supervised as appropriate when going to the toilet, we support their independence and are respectful of their privacy. If your child wears nappies, please provide spare nappies in their rucksack.

### ***Ticks***

The Forest School does have a local population of deer visitors therefore ticks may be present. We recommend checking your child for ticks after each Forest School session. These appear like small pin-heads on the skin, dark brown or grey in colour, they may grow to the size of a small wart. The safest way to remove them is to use a tick twister which we have in our First Aid kit or can be bought from the local vets for a small charge.

### **Dogs on site**

Despite the sessions being held on predominately private land, occasionally dogs may appear on the site, children are reminded not to approach unknown dogs and to “be a tree trunk” by putting their hands by their sides and looking at their roots (feet) the Forest School leader will approach the dog and request the owner puts the dog on a lead, and keeps them on the lead whilst walking nearby during sessions.

### **Uninvited guests on site**

The main site at Ashdon is private land, however, there are public footpaths surrounding the site and occasionally walkers get lost. The Forest School leader should, after ensuring children are fully supervised, approach the uninvited guest and explain that there is a Forest School session in progress and ask them to leave the site. If they refuse or become aggressive or abusive the police should be called.

### ***Use of fire***

Fires are an important part of our Forest School sessions, we aim to ensure that everyone participating in sessions with fires will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. During unaccompanied sessions fires will only be used in sessions once the children are familiar with the setting and the Forest School leaders feel they are able to adhere to agreements regarding fire safety. For parent and toddler sessions we explain our fire safety agreements at the start of the session and ask parents to closely supervise children when in the fire circle. We have a specific risk assessment referring to the use of fires which details the procedure.

### ***Eating, drinking and cooking***

We talk to the children about keeping themselves safe in the woods and this means we shouldn't eat or drink anything unless told by an adult it is safe to do so (restricted to snack times usually). We also explain to the children that there are things in the woods that are poisonous and so we remind them not to put their fingers and hands near their mouths and noses where possible.

At snack time we recommend hands are washed with running water and mild soap and we explain to the children why this is important.

We often cook our snack on the open fire, this could be items such as pancakes, popcorn and damper-bread, these are cooked by the adult leaders, children may be involved in the cooking process under close supervision, this could be using our specially adapted popcorn popper (two sieves wired together) to cook the popcorn in the fire (at a safe distance) or cooking damper bread or crumpets on sticks. These activities are individually risk assessed and are only carried out with additional adults where necessary to maintain high ratios. The procedures for these activities are detailed within the specific risk assessments.

We make snacks a social time during which children and adults eat and drink together. Forest School activities are energetic therefore each session we will provide a healthy snack such and a piece of fruit and usually a flapjack or biscuit or similar, and we will provide hot chocolate –perfect to warm us up in winter! Please provide your child with a named water bottle for each session.

### ***Boundaries***

We will always point out the boundaries to the children and explain that they are for their safety, there may be unseen hazards that mean we can't allow the children to explore beyond certain points. We use hazard warning tape to highlight the boundaries for the children. If children explore hidden areas, an adult should also go into the cover, deep enough to be able to see or hear the children. If an adult loses sight of them, they should call out and await a response.

### ***Playing with stones and sticks***

Making patterns with pretty stones and throwing stones and sticks is great fun, we ask children to think of others and use the phrase “throw into a space”. Throwing is an important developmental stage and we allow items to be thrown under supervision with careful guidance from leaders. We encourage children to carry sticks if they wish (ideally - shorter than their arm’s length but we make sure they think about how close they are to other children). Longer sticks can be dragged or carried with a child at both ends. We discuss agreements with children and ask them to agree not to throw sticks at others and to lay them flat when sitting close to others in the log circle.

### ***Tree climbing***

We encourage and support tree climbing when it is safe to do so and with adult spotters. We check ground cover for sharp objects and check ‘climbing trees’ for loose and rotten branches, suitable trees for climbing are pointed out to children/parents. Children are encouraged to explore to their own limits but adults are near enough to guide and support if one should get into difficulty.

### ***Tool Use***

Once it is felt that the children are settled and confident in the setting and are able to adhere to safety agreements tools can be introduced. Tool use (bow-saw, vegetable peelers, knives, hand-drill, hammer, loppers, and secateurs) is taught on a 1:1 basis and tools kept in suitable containers in one designated spot. Tools are given out for a purpose and all adults model their correct use, storage and transportation at all times. We use tools in a safe space, away from other active children, and only walking is permitted when carrying them. We have detailed Benefit-Risk Assessments (BRA’s) for all Forest School activities including tool use and these are available for parents/carers to access and read on request. The specific BRA for each tool includes specific details on the procedure for using that tool.

### ***Carrying & transporting materials***

The children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag and pull materials, either by hand or using ropes. Heavier objects can be rolled, dragged or carried by several people.

### ***Around the log circle***

We have a permanent log circle around a fire pit in our woodland. We have safety agreements in place regarding the fire-pit area. We explain and model that the safe way to behave around the log circle is to walk around the outside and to enter the circle through the entrance or step over the logs to sit down. We will always practice this as if a real fire were being lit. A fire will not be lit until our Forest School leader is satisfied that all children understand this process.

### ***Sun exposure during summer months***

Every care is taken to ensure that children are not over exposed to the sun; we work in partnership with parents to facilitate this.

- To protect children from the sun we ask parents/carers to provide a sun hat for use during the Forest School session.
- Notice will be taken of maximum exposure times during weather forecasts
- For unaccompanied sessions we require parents/child/ren to apply high factor sunscreen before the Forest School session.
- Play activities are monitored, and water bottles made accessible, to ensure that children have periods of time in areas of shade so as to prevent them becoming overheated or dehydrated.

### ***High winds***

Wind speeds are monitored and risk is assessed according to the features of the specific sites (woodland/ school playground). If appropriate sessions may be cancelled due to high winds.

### ***Unwell children***

While it is not our policy to care for sick children, who should be at home until they are well enough to return, we agree to administer medication as part of maintaining their health and well-being or when they are recovering from illness, if necessary.

- Children taking prescribed medication must be well enough to attend the setting
- Only prescribed medication is administered. It must be in-date and prescribed for the current condition.

- Children's prescribed medicines must be stored in their original containers, clearly labelled and be inaccessible to children.
- Parents must give prior written permission for administration of medication.
- Any medicine handed to a member of staff will be locked in our Forest School shed.

If your child becomes ill during a session the staff will give appropriate first aid or care until the parent/carer arrives to collect the child. It is therefore very important to ensure all contact numbers you have given us are up to date.

In the unlikely event of a more serious incident, our first-aid trained staff will take appropriate action, seek medical attention and arrange for your child to be taken to hospital if necessary. Consent is sought on the session sign-in form to allow Forest School leaders to deal with such incidents.

### ***Allergies***

We will identify allergens that may be present in food stuffs or that children may come into contact with at Forest School and prevent allergic children from coming into contact with these materials where possible.

- Parents will record details of any allergies your children may have on our sign-in form, please provide as much detailed information as possible about the nature of the allergy/ies.
- We don't allow children to eat or pick anything in the woodland without an adult being present.
- All snack food provided by Forest School will take into consideration any allergies that a child might have and if necessary, we will exclude nuts or other allergens from the setting, so please discuss this with us.

### ***Volunteers at Forest School***

Volunteers are welcome, to be a part of Nature of Learning Forest School and their contribution is valued and appreciated. Volunteers enable us to share this ethos more widely as well as increasing our group knowledge and skills and keeping the adult to child ratios high. Volunteers are usually parents, carers or other relatives of the children attending, but we would welcome anyone who has an interest in helping or learning more

about Forest School. Volunteers are given information about their role within the sessions including any safety elements and are inducted to the site. If you would like to become a Forest School Volunteer or know someone who may, then please email Sarah ([sarah@natureoflearning.co.uk](mailto:sarah@natureoflearning.co.uk)).

We maintain a high ratio of adults to children; additional adult volunteers can complement these ratios and this helps us to:

- give time, attention and focus to individual children
- plan and carry-out activities such as cooking or tool use
- help children to experience and benefit from the activities we provide
- encourage the children to explore and be adventurous in their play through activities that require greater adult supervision such as tree climbing.

We ensure new volunteers are introduced to all staff and existing volunteers. Volunteers will be supported in their role by our Forest School leaders. All regular volunteers are required to have a DBS check.

All volunteers complete a 2-week induction period during which time the Forest School leaders will:

- Introduce the volunteer to parents
- Provide information about where important items and documents are kept
- Familiarising the volunteer with procedures for managing confidential information
- Provide details of the tasks and daily routines to be completed

We require volunteers to:

- Familiarise themselves with the woodland, the health and safety and the emergency and missing child procedures,
- The Benefit-Risk- Assessments for all activities, must be read, and signed and dated prior to completing their induction period.
- Read the policies and procedures and adhere to the information contained within them

Once the induction period is successfully completed the volunteer is able to be a fully involved member of the team.

### ***Equal Opportunities and Inclusion***

Nature of Learning Forest School is committed to equal opportunities for all and we wish to provide an environment in which people feel equally valued. We promote the individuality of all, irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, age, disability, gender or background.

We will adapt activities to ensure that everyone can participate, where necessary will seek expert advice to allow us to fully support children with additional needs of any nature.

Where possible, we will keep spare sets of waterproof clothing to ensure that bad weather is not a barrier to taking part. We take our duty of care when working with children extremely seriously. To ensure all individuals (children, workers, and volunteers) are safe and protected we undertake the following: -

- Everyone involved in Forest School is briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities.
- Forest School leaders and volunteers should be aware of the relevant policies and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them
- Forest School Leaders have a DBS check. We also require any regular volunteer attending Forest School to have a DBS.

### ***Safeguarding***

#### **General principles**

At Nature of Learning Forest School we will adopt the following general principles in order to keep children safe and adults safe from accusations:

Physical boundaries will be explained to children at the beginning of a session and games and activities will be used to help them develop their understanding of the boundary area. Boundaries will be clearly marked and children will be told that they should not leave the area unless an adult has given them permission.

- Children will be advised of what to do in the event that a stranger enters the woods to ensure that that no unauthorised person has unsupervised access to the children.
- Volunteers/ supporting adults should always work in a minimum of two; there will never be sole working with a single child.
- Volunteers/ supporting adults should always stay within sight or sound of other adults (see also 'Toilet Procedure' below).

- Volunteers/ supporting adults should never be left alone with the group. The Forest School leader should always be present.
- All Volunteers/ supporting adults should receive a safeguarding induction (this is the responsibility of Nature of Learning Forest School for any adults who work/ volunteer for this organisation)
- Children should be supervised at all times: ‘supervision’ means that at least one responsible adult can see or hear a child.

### **DBS**

All Nature of Learning Forest School staff will be DBS checked. Volunteers may assist for up to 6 sessions without a check but always working under direct supervision of a member of staff and having signed the Unaccompanied Child safe guarding policy

### **Disclosures**

These general guidelines should be followed in the event of a child making a disclosure.

- Listen, do not interrupt, give them time and don’t ask any leading questions.
- Respect a young person’s confidentiality but don’t promise to keep the information a secret.
- Make a written record of what the young person has said on a child protection form (Appendix 3). This should be exactly as the young person has said in their language. Do not put your interpretation on it.

### **Toilet Procedures**

Nature of Learning Forest School has a ‘tree bog’ toilet that can be used during sessions. The leader will ensure all children know where the toilet is and how it works. All children will inform a member of staff or volunteer if they need to use the toilet facilities and this person will monitor their safe use, or for older children they can use facilities as and when they need without adult supervision. If an adult accompanies a child to the toilet, they must not enter the toilet with the child and must remain within sight of other staff at all times.

Forest School leaders are committed to protecting children from maltreatment, preventing impairment of children’s health or development, ensuring the children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

- All Forest School leaders have been DBS checked
- Sarah Allington has undergone Safeguarding training.
- Any regular volunteers will be required to hold a DBS check
- Any concerns about a child’s physical or mental wellbeing should be shared with

Forest School's Safeguarding Person (the Forest School leader) as soon as possible (but within 24 hours). The Forest School leader will report any incident or concern to the relevant body as soon as possible (The Essex Safeguarding children board reporting number is 0345 603 7627).

- Should any member of staff, volunteer or adult helper have any disclosure made to them that is potentially a safeguarding issue this must be immediately reported to the Forest School leader and notes should be taken by the adult as soon as possible after any disclosure is made.
- Any concerns should be kept confidential and only be shared with those who need to know, such as the Forest School Leader who can then ensure the correct channels are then informed.

### ***Risk management***

Our Benefit- Risk Assessment (BRA) procedure ensures that all children (and adults) at Forest School remain as safe as reasonably possible, whilst allowing the children to experience some degree of appropriate 'risk', which is important for their learning, development and enjoyment! We plan our activities and write our BRA taking into account the benefits of the activity for the children. Our BRA's are working documents and a copy of these is available on site during the sessions.

### ***Health and Safety***

The health and safety of all participants is central to everything we do within a Forest School programme. We encourage children to play an active part in undertaking risk assessments in the language we use and the discussions we have. The ethos of Forest School instils in our children, the ability to take measured risks, appropriate to their age and developmental stage, and to carefully consider the repercussions of their actions.

All our Forest School leaders are fully trained in risk assessment and emergency outdoor first aid. Risk assessments are maintained and evaluated at regular intervals throughout the year. Our site is assessed seasonally, prior to every session and risk assessments for activities are completed and available as working documents for use by all staff and volunteers; we keep first aid equipment at the site. Any accidents that occur will be dealt

with by a qualified first aider and recorded appropriately on the appropriate accident form. The First Aid box is located in the red safety bag and a second in the large shed and any treatment necessary is to be carried out a Forest School leader (who are trained in outdoor first aid) who would then record it on the accident form. The contents of the first aid kit are maintained by the Forest School leader.

Any accidents or incidents are investigated by the Forest School leader and information that is gathered is used to inform future risk assessment and policy making. The Forest School leader/s will carry a charged mobile phone which will remain switched on throughout the session. The mobile phone signal is checked at the start of each session.

Some of the activities the children may participate in are 'higher-risk' activities (such as tree climbing, low-ropes, campfire cooking or tool use) and these are done under controlled conditions with close supervision and are only available to the children once it is felt the children have a good understanding of the risk and benefits and are able to adhere to safety agreements. Children are encouraged and supported in recognising and managing risk for themselves, through real life situations and experiences.

For unaccompanied sessions we ensure we have the correct ratio of adults to children before setting out to our woodland. The same goes for some of the activities, e.g. the rope swing is for single use (only one child may use the swing at any one time). Tool use such as sawing and whittling are taught on a 1:1 basis and once the child gains a level of competence this can be reduce based on the age of the child and experience level. Parental/emergency contact details for each child (or child and adult if a parent and child session) are recorded on the sign in sheet for each session should we need to contact parents/emergency contacts.

### **Emergency and First Aid emergency procedure**

The following procedure will be followed in the case of an emergency situation:

- Forest School leader alerted
- Secure safety of whole group from further danger and stop all activities
- Call together the group promptly (using emergency whistle)

- First Aider to attend to any casualties with Forest School leader/ parent helper/volunteer as appropriate and with regard for maintenance of required supervision ratios for the rest of the group.
- A record of changes in casualties' state and anything administered to them to be made if possible.
- Emergency services contacted as necessary, ideally by an adult helper. Charged mobile phones are carried by Forest School leaders.
- Despatch an adult to meet emergency vehicle at the entrance where possible/necessary.
- Give grid references to 999 operator: CB10 2HG Grid ref. **52.049820,0.308135** or what three words **pigtails.charcoal.horses**
- Informing emergency contact as soon as practicable after the incident if not present at the session.
- Safety of the rest of group will be maintained by the remaining staff and adults away from the scene of the incident if possible, staff or volunteer to return children to the Church Yard and contact parents to collect children if necessary, if parents are in attendance, they can take the children home.
- Incident report should be written by Forest School leader and/or First aid/ incident form completed. Children's safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times in the Forest School.

In the unlikely event of a child going missing, our missing child procedure is followed.

### **Missing child procedure**

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, parents, staff or helpers inform the Forest School Leader
- Children are called back to the circle using the emergency whistle. A head count is taken and register checked, to confirm all other children are present.
- The site is thoroughly checked by the Forest School leader the other parent/helpers stay near the fire circle with the other children.
- If the child is not found after 5 minutes, report the missing child to the police via 999 number and provide grid reference CB10 2HG Grid ref. **52.049820,0.308135** or what three words reference **pigtails.charcoal.horses**
- Contact emergency contact if an unaccompanied session

- Upon arrival of parents/carer and or police the Forest School leader is responsible for relaying information regarding the circumstances in which the child went missing and the action that has been taken so far.
- Staff to return children to the Church Yard and phone parents to collect if an unaccompanied session.
- Forest School leader (and another adult if possible) to continue search until help arrives.

Forest School leader writes an incident report detailing the events that occurred. The incident would be fully investigated by the Forest School leaders taking written statements a

### **Unwell Forest School leader procedure**

Should the Forest School leader become ill or injured during a Forest School session, during an accompanied session, the second Forest School leader/parent helper would be available to administer first aid and to end the session, since parents are present, they would be able to take their children home and the session would end early. If this was an unaccompanied session, the second Forest School leader would administer first aid. The children would be called to the log circle using the emergency whistle, the second Forest School leader would contact the emergency services if necessary and contact the parents to collect the children to end the session.

### ***Behaviour management***

Forest School aims to promote and develop in all participants:

- a recognition that all behaviour is a form of communication
- self-esteem, independence and the motivation to learn
- an awareness of, respect and care for self, for other individuals and for the natural environment
- an understanding of the value of collaborative behaviour
- the confidence and ability to meet risk whilst feeling supported to remain safe
- a recognition of and sense of pride in individual strengths and achievements

Forest School environment is, by natural design and planned intention through the Forest School Principles, an environment that offers greater freedom through the avoidance of unnecessary rules and boundaries, with a primary focus on keeping ourselves and others safe, in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and respect.

Our Forest School Leaders will:

- agree necessary and appropriate boundaries with all participants, in line with risk assessments and appropriate policies, and ensure participants are reminded of these at the start of each session and additionally as required.
- Lead by example, ensuring safety and learning through care, respect, and positivity
- Create a positive environment which encourages and reinforces caring, nurturing and respectful behaviour between all participants as well as towards the natural environment and equipment.
- Promote and foster effective relationships through observation and interaction, in which all are accepted, valued and treated fairly.
- Be mindful of the need to maintain safety at all times.
- Place the needs of the children, including needs linked to their developmental levels, preferred learning styles, social, emotional and behavioural needs at the centre of the Forest School experience to maximise individual success and promote positive outcomes.
- Give specific feedback and praise to children when demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviour, to promote understanding of the ethos and to encourage self-regulation through self-awareness.

Our Forest School practitioners embrace the motto “presume a cause” and in the event that a child is exhibiting “challenging behaviour” we take an empathetic approach whereby we seek to support the child and help them to feel heard and valued. We adapt our approach to suit the children and monitor closely noticing particular areas that might present a challenge for them and then pre-emptively seek to support them through it, providing a voice if appropriate.

## **Bullying**

Bullying is a deliberate, aggressive and repeated action, which is carried out with intent to cause harm or distress to others. Young children are keen observers and more likely to copy behaviours, which mimic the actions of others, especially the actions of people they have established a relationship with. These are learnt behaviours rather than premeditated behaviours because pre-school aged children do not have sufficiently sophisticated cognition to carry out the type of bullying an older child can do. However, this behaviour does require addressing and the Forest School leader would approach the situation calmly, stopping any hurtful actions, acknowledging the feelings of those involved, gathering information, restating the issue to help children reflect, regain control of the situation and resolve the situation themselves.

With older children, who may be cognitively capable of bullying the approach will remain similar, the Forest School leader will approach the situation calmly and with empathy, bearing in mind our motto of “presume a cause”. If necessary, children can be accompanied and removed from the group in order to calm down and if appropriate helped to reflect on what has happened.

Any aggressive behaviour by children towards other children will result in a Forest School leader intervening immediately to challenge and prevent escalation. Should any behaviour become a cause for concern regarding bullying, or should any child make an allegation of bullying this will be investigated by the Forest School leaders who will listen to the child/ren, keep factual records of incident/s, arrange to have a restorative conversation with all children involved (if appropriate), continue to monitor the situation and inform the parents of the children involved.

### ***Environmental Considerations and sustainability***

Forest School has environmental awareness at the heart of its ethos. Wherever possible, and appropriate, environmentally friendly products and recycled materials are used.

Environmental good practice is modelled by adults, showing children that the world in which we live in should be cared for. Involving children in site checks, recycling of waste and considerations of how we leave our site will help to support this.

We bring in materials such as logs and kindling for the fire, and remove waste and dispose of fire remains with care and consideration for the environment.

- The fire pit is in the same location to reduce our impact.

- We bring in water to reduce our ecological impact
- We will monitor the site to identify any impact we are having on the environment.
- Any rubbish will be removed after each session.
- The site will be rested over the summer to help with regeneration.
- We will create log pile habitats to encourage insect life.

### Assessment of impact of Forest School activities

There are many ways that running a Forest School programme can affect the ecology of the site these can be in a negative or positive way. Firstly the biggest positive way is the impact of fostering a love of nature in our next generation, through their knowledge and love of nature, the ecological impact of the next generation can be a gentle one.

This is a summary of our ecological assessment, a more detailed assessment of our site is contained within our woodland management document which is available on request.

Activity	Impact	How can this be reduced/managed?
Walking/ running and playing in the woods	Compacted earth/ creating pathways  Reduction in biodiversity/ fauna and flora growth	Ask all attendees to tread carefully, follow the existing path if there is one.  Rest areas of woodland/ routes when possible.
Fire	Damage to soil or heat damage to trees  Change in pH of the soil (especially if ash is left behind) which can be harmful to plants, and can cause mineral depletion.  Risk of fire spreading if left or not properly extinguished	Consider the frequency of fires, choose the position of the fire pit carefully, in areas that are not of ecological significance, avoiding overhead tree branches and also distance from large trees to mitigate root damage.  Dispose of ash – remain in fire pit  Extinguish thoroughly and carefully

Cooking/ eating	Litter dropping from food remains or packaging may attract animals to the site that aren't usually there	Take all litter away with you – leave no trace. Be careful of food waste/ spills and remove from site when you leave.
Collecting natural materials/ deadwood	Damage to plants and or habitats/ loss of food for wildlife if acorns/ seeds collected and removed  Damage to plants/ trees if branches/ leaves/ flowers removed  Deadwood important habitat for many creatures and bed for fungi	Make agreements about the collecting of natural materials, limits on number of leaves from one tree, only flowers from the ground or seeds etc. where there are a large number of them and impact will be negligible Inform about plants and any rare species or protected plants. Limit collecting and picking activities
Climbing trees	Damage to tree branches/trunk or plants on the forest floor	Restrict to suitable trees-identify to attendees
Making shelters/ rope swings	Trampling on flowers and plants on the forest floor Damage to trees by use of ropes/ risk of breaking branches	Ask attendees to take care when walking especially in the Spring when flowers are emerging on the forest floor – e.g. bluebells  Take care when placing rope swing to minimise damage to trees and use only suitable trees that can withstand the forces.
Toilet	Used toilet paper will have an ecological impact.  Wetwipes contain plastic and are not provided for use at our	We have installed a “tree bog” self composting toilet on our site to reduce our ecological impact.

	sessions but may be brought onto site by parents and require careful disposal	
Recycling and waste	Litter could be a hazard to wildlife, chemicals from waste could affect the soil and damage plants. Waste materials have a negative ecological impact	We separate our rubbish at FS into recycling, compost and landfill waste. Children are aware and we explain the benefits of recycling and which type of rubbish goes in which bucket. All types of waste are then removed from site for appropriate disposal

### ***Cancellation Policy***

There may be times when Forest School sessions have to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. These may be: -

- Forest School leader illness (or illness of a Forest School leader's child/ren) – which prevents staff / child ratios being met.
- Severe weather conditions, including high wind.
- Any situation that poses a health and safety risk.

In the event of this situation arising:

- Cancellation decisions are made as soon as possible and we will inform parents and volunteers via telephone/email and or Facebook page.

We will endeavour to run Forest School sessions whenever possible; however, we reserve the right to cancel on the day, and will aim to inform all parents as soon as possible.

### **Confidentiality**

It is our intention to respect the privacy of children and their parents and carers. We aim to ensure that all parents and carers can share their information in the confidence that it will only be used to enhance the welfare of their children.

'Share with informed consent where appropriate and, where possible, respect the wishes of

those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is good reason to do so, such as where safety may be at risk. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case.' Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers (HMG 2015).

The Forest Leader will maintain all paperwork and sign-in sheets relevant to Forest School. Sign-in sheets contain names and addresses and potentially information about medical conditions, at the end of the session all confidential paperwork is stored in the office area at the registered address in a designated box. Any discussion within Forest School about a child's learning or medical conditions is to be kept confidential at all times.

We treat any personal information (which means data from which you can be identified, including your name, address, e-mail address, etc.) that you provide us, or that we obtain from you, in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Under this Act, we have a legal duty to protect any information we collect from you. Any amendments to this policy will continue to be in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. For further information please see our privacy policy which can be found on our website [www.natureoflearning.co.uk](http://www.natureoflearning.co.uk)

### ***Photographs & Videos***

Forest School staff often take photos of the children at play, to support our planning and assessment and for promotional reasons.

Permission to take photographs during sessions, and for these photographs to be used on social media and in marketing materials, is sought via the sign-in sheet prior to each session and children for whom we do not have permission to include in photographs will not be included. All photographs are stored securely and anonymously in line with our GDPR policy, if parents request that their data is removed all photos will be deleted. Any identifiable (photos of the front of faces) photographs are not stored elsewhere and subsequently deleted.

The photos may be shared with parents or in various promotional materials including on our website and social media sites, for our Forest School. Children's names will not be given in

any publication.

### **Complaints procedure**

If a parents/carer/volunteer wishes to make a complaint about any occurrences concerning Forest School, they can talk to the Forest School leader/s in the first instance.

We take complaints seriously and investigate all complaints thoroughly. Based on the findings of the investigation the procedures, policies and risk assessments will be reviewed if appropriate.

The details will be recorded carefully by the Forest School leader (including the date, time and how the complaint was received, by whom and the words used by the person making the complaint). The Forest School leaders will consider if the complaint requires reporting to outside bodies. The complainant will be contacted to explain the process and the outcome of the investigation (e.g. if procedures, policies or risk assessments require reviewing that this has been done).