



Forest Schools

A Guide for Parents



"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."

From 'The best Kind of Classroom' by Ian MacMillan

A decorative border of autumn leaves in shades of green, yellow, and orange surrounds the text. The leaves are arranged in a repeating pattern along the top, bottom, and sides of the page.

What is Forest Schools?

Forest Schools has developed from the Scandinavian education system and is about children and young people building self-esteem and independence through exploring and experiencing the natural world. Forest Schools is a long term programme delivered by trained practitioners within a natural environment (not necessarily a Forest!). Each Forest School programme is tailored to meet the needs of individuals within that group and is continuously developed as the children/young people grow in confidence, skills and understanding.

The ethos of Forest Schools allows learners the time and space to develop skills, interests and understanding through practical, hands-on experiences. It also allows practitioners to step back and observe the children/young people in order to then encourage and inspire individuals to achieve through careful scaffolding and facilitating.



Where will my child be going?

Every Forest School is different, some are within school or nursery grounds and some are in woodland areas in nature reserves or private estates. Some have ponds; some have meadows; some have dense shrubs and others are more open. All sites have some natural features (some may bring in natural materials such as sticks, logs, leaves and seeds) and all sites are safe; they are thoroughly risk assessed and managed appropriately by trained practitioners.

"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

A decorative border of autumn leaves in shades of green, yellow, and orange surrounds the text. The leaves are arranged in a slightly irregular pattern, with some larger and some smaller, creating a natural, woodland feel.

What will my child be doing?

The Forest School routine varies depending on our learning, however all children taking part in Forest School must have the correct clothing. This will ensure they get the maximum out of their Forest School session. Children should have wellington boots, long trousers, long sleeved top, coat or waterproof and spare socks. During the winter months children must also have a warm hat and gloves.

Forest Schools will run all year round and in all weathers (unless weather conditions are dangerous). The child led ethos of Forest Schools means that once at the site the children can choose which activities they would like to participate in. Activities are based on learning and all children are encouraged and supported by trained adults.

Possible activities may include:

- Hunting for mini-beasts.
- Natural crafts – making necklaces from elder, crowns or dreamcatchers from willow, collages from natural materials, weaving with long grasses and tree cookies.
- Mud sculptures.
- Shelter building and knot tying.
- Tree climbing.
- Using tools for a purpose, such as peeling bark from sticks with potato peelers to make toasting forks.
- Fire building and cooking on a camp fire.



Sessions are planned around the individuals and group needs, and built upon each week. All Forest School Leaders are qualified through nationally recognised and accredited training, therefore ensuring Forest Schools is a high quality learning experience. At the start sessions will concentrate on safety, establishing boundaries and routines. As the children develop in confidence and familiarity with the setting the sessions can begin to focus on the development and consolidation of skills and understanding.

What benefits will my child get from participating in Forest Schools?

- Forest School supports the holistic development of the child:
- Health and fitness – Being active in an outdoor, natural environment.
- Increased emotional well-being – There is research available supporting this.
- Social development – Communicating and negotiating with peers and adults to solve problems and share experiences.
- Skills development – Developing fine and gross motor skills and coordination for real purposes.
- Gaining knowledge and understanding – Multi-sensory, real-life learning.
- Individualised learning – Careful observation allows adults to tailor support to children's own interests and stage of development.
- Curriculum Links – Forest Schools supports many areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and National Curriculum.



Health and Safety

The health and safety of all participants is central to everything done within a Forest Schools programme. Forest School leaders are fully trained in risk assessment and emergency outdoor first aid. Every Forest School will have policy, site risk assessment and activity risk assessments. Some of the activities the children may participate in are 'higher risk' activities, such as campfire cooking and tool use. However, these activities are not available to the children until behaviours and boundaries are established. Children are encouraged and supported in recognising and managing risk for themselves, through real life situations and experiences.