



Forest School Handbook



Forest School at Stepping Stones Playgroup

Our ethos of Forest School is based upon the fundamental respect for children and 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 vibrant reality of the natural world.
- The right to experience a healthy range of emotions, through social interaction.
- To build resilience that will enable continued and creative engagement with their peers and their potential.

Forest School sessions at Stepping Stones Playgroup provide increasingly diverse opportunities for children to benefit from a supportive curriculum that can help children build positive values and attitudes about themselves about learning, and the environment in which they live. Children are given appropriately challenging and achievable tasks that build their confidence, develop skills and independence, and are given the time to thoroughly explore their thoughts, feelings and relationships. This time and reflective practice develops inter and intra-personal skills which are well documented as being directly linked to learning skills.

Forest School is based more on the process of learning than it is on the content – more on the 'how' than the 'what'. Children are given encouragement to direct their own learning this often requires catalysing on the part of the Forest School leader. Significantly, and on many levels a woodland environment is central in supporting this very dynamic approach to learning: the passage of time from the changing of the season, to the contemplation of an ancient tree. An infinite source of smells, textures and sounds. A range of visual stimuli from near to far, high to low, very big to very small.

Forest School Rules

Children are encouraged to be involved in the decisions about their environment and safety; however there are fundamental rules that the children will be made aware of at the beginning. Behind each rule there is a range of learning opportunities that will encourage children to engage with and understand these rules.

Caring for the natural environment

This will involve learning about sustainability, how our actions impact on the Forest School and how we can look after it to make sure it is around for others to enjoy in the future.

- Encourage children to distinguish living things from dead things and agree that anything growing shouldn't be picked.
- Children will also be encouraged to consider the impact of their actions and be mindful of what they are bringing to the site and if they need to take it home.

Use of tools

- Tools to be used if there is an adult present and they have said it is OK to use them.
- Children will be encouraged to develop a respect for tools and understand their potential and uses. However even if children feel confident in using them independently they must never help themselves.

Children will begin to learn and understand that whilst there are risks involved in Forest school careful steps have been taken to make them manageable. In many cases, children will be involved in recognising these hazards and thinking about what action may need to be taken.

However this is only the case in the agreed boundary. Children will be involved in setting the boundaries as when appropriate.

It is important that the adults involved try to help children understand the importance of these rules and support children in understanding that Forest School will become too dangerous if these rules aren't followed, which may mean Forest school sessions have to end.

The responsibilities of the Forest School leader and assistant

- Create an environment that is as safe as it can be and without undue risk to health.
- Use, maintain and store equipment safely.
- Ensure that all staff are competent in the work in which they are engaged.
- The identification, assessment and control of hazards within the Forest School is vital in reducing accidents and incidents.
- The Forest School leader holds ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the Forest School operates in a safe and minimally hazardous manner.
- All accident/incidents to be recorded in the Accident or Incident book and keep parents fully informed of any incidents that may occur during a session.

The Forest School leader will provide and be responsible for the 'Essential Equipment' kitbag containing the First Aid kit and well-being pack. Children and adults should not use anything from the kitbag unless instructed to do so or if implementing emergency procedures.

The kitbag will always include these items:

- First Aid kit
- Drinking water (labelled with the date)
- Medication / Medical forms
- Register with emergency contact numbers
- Spare children's clothes and carrier bag (in case a child gets wet)

During Forest School sessions the ratios half meaning:

- 3-4 year olds need 1 member of staff to every 4 children
- 2-3 year olds need 1 member of staff to every 2 children
- Children who need 1:1 support will be accompanied by their keyworker.

Stepping Stones Forest School activities

Activities are planned the week before in order to follow the children's interests and abilities.

Some of the activities include:

- Collecting
- Colour matching
- Making potions
- Threading leaves
- Making bug houses



- Bug hunts
- Wildlife bingo
- Making dream Catchers
 - Mud Kitchen
 - Role playing
 - Story telling
- Building shelters/dens
 - Clay animals
 - Mud faces
- Using the Bow saw
 - Using the drill
 - Whittling
- Sing the storm (Kelly) kettle to make hot chocolate
 - Cooking on the fire

Risk management of tools, Fire lighting and Equipment

General rules for tools:

- Children must only use tool under the supervision of the Forest School leader.
- Always sit down when using tools.
- Ensure that penknives are closed when not in use and kept in the lockable box.
- Ensure guards/sheaths are in place when tools are not in use.
- Children do not help themselves to tools.
- Always return tools to the tool box after use.
- Do not walk around with tools
- Ratios must be no more than 1:2 when using tools.
- Before starting any activities using tools children must be reminded about safety and rules.

General rules for fires :

- Children may only take part in a fire lighting activity when the Forest School leader feels that the group is ready.
- Before lighting a fire children must be reminded the rules of how to stay safe.
- One person must stay by the fire and be responsible for the fire at all times.
- Children must always be sat/stood 1.5 metres from the fire this will be marked with a ring of flour as a visual reminder.
- Children may only be closer than 1.5 metres when accompanied by an adult.
- Only the Forest School Leader or trained staff can light the fire.

Clothing requirements for Forest School

During the winter months, children and adults should come prepared to each session with:

- Jacket/ Waterproof coat
- Waterproof trousers
- Fleece/ jumper
- Woolly hat
- Gloves
- Wellies/ walking boots
- Spare socks
- A complete spare set of clothes and carrier bag for wet or dirty clothes

In the summer months children and adults will need to come prepared to each session with:

- Sun hat
- A thin long sleeve top
- Trousers
- Wellies/walking boots
- Waterproof coat
- Sun cream to be applied before the session
- Spare clothes

This clothing list applies to everybody involved in Forest School sessions.

We have all in ones for the children to wear over there own clothes/coats.



Forest School Policy

Introduction

Forest school is a unique method of outdoor education that allows children to develop confidence, independence, self-esteem and awareness and knowledge of the natural environment.

This is achieved by setting small achievable tasks. The child is never put in a position where he/she will fail so success is attained. It is a child centred and child led programme that provides the opportunity for the children to use their personal learning style to complete their chosen tasks. We are very fortunate to have the use of the wooded area on the Stoberry Park School site.

Aims of Forest School

- To provide children with experiences that encourage an appreciation, awareness and knowledge of the natural world.
- To learn to respect and care for the environment.
- To abide by rules and set standards of behaviour, to work cooperatively in group and to respect each other.
- Develop children's self-esteem and self confidence through the setting of small achievable tasks, embracing the characteristics of effective learning within the early years foundation stage.

Characteristics

- The Forest School takes place in term time only and in most weather conditions.
- The playgroup will request that a detailed Forest School health and consent form is completed.
- The leader will ensure that all children are suitably clothed with waterproof coats, trousers and boots
 - The session will vary in duration according to the age and

experience of the children.

- The children are taught a variety of woodland skills through practical hands on activities.
- The children learn the care and safe use of a wide range of tools. This is a tightly supervised activity and is introduced gradually in small steps.
- Children are encouraged to listen attentively to instructions and to take responsibility for their actions. This achieved by games that also encourage respect for the environment.
- The Forest School leader will keep parents informed and updated regarding all aspects of Forest School.

The Forest School leader is highly trained and experienced and holds an up to date First Aid certificate. They are responsible for organising and running all Forest school sessions.

The Forest School leader has the safety of the children uppermost at all times. The leader will carry out a detailed safety check before each session and comply with health and safety risk assessments.

The leader will ensure that all documentation is relevant and up to date.

Environment Impact

Forest School has environmental awareness at the heart of its ethos. Wherever possible environmentally friendly products and recycled materials are used when appropriate. Good practice is modelled by adults showing that the world in which we live in should be cared for.

Child Protection

Forest School sessions are led by a trained Forest School leader, supported by members of staff and committee volunteers. Everyone involved in Forest School is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of site and activities. Staff and volunteers are made aware of the relevant playgroup policies and procedures and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them. All playgroup staff and committee have current DBS checks. Any concerns about a child's physical or mental well-being should be shared with the playgroups named safeguarding lead, so that the playgroups safeguarding policy can be followed. Confidentiality should be maintained at all times. Any concerns should only be shared with those who need to know.

Equality and Inclusion

In the Forest School sessions all persons should be treated equally. We aim to provide a secure environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued.

Behaviour

At Forest School we operate within the Behaviour Policy of playgroup. When a child's behaviour threatens the well-being of him/herself or others and he/she does not respond to verbal warning he/she may be returned to playgroup.

Toileting Policy

We will ask the children to use the toilet before leaving the setting, and we will change the younger children's nappies.

If the children need the toilet whilst in the woods, 1 member of staff will take them back to playgroup.

After toileting we must wash our hands and walk back to the woods.

Clothing Policy

To ensure that the children and staff are sufficiently protected from the weather and the woodland environment we require children/staff to wear appropriate clothing and foot wear.

Clothing will get muddy so old home clothes are required. We require children to have long sleeves and trousers in both winter and summer. This is particularly important in the summer to protect from sun burn, stinging nettles, thorns and tick bites.

Forest School leader and staff will ensure all the children are appropriately dressed before leaving for the woods.

Cancellation

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

- Staff illness.
- Adverse weather conditions.
- Any situation that poses a health and safety risk.

Poor weather and Shelter Policy

Forest School sessions will go ahead in all weather conditions with only a few exceptions:

- Strong winds that make the woodland areas hazardous for use due to falling debris.
- Very wet cold conditions where hypothermia is a real possibility.

Exposure to the elements is part of the magic of nature and therefore an integral part of Forest School.

In inclement and or cold weather we will erect temporary shelters to enable us to take shelter. These shelters will consist of large and small tarpaulins and suitable rope for securing. These are part of our general Forest School equipment. These can be erected quickly and easily. We will

also have ground tarpaulins to provide comfort in cooler months.

Health and Safety

The Forest School programme will support young children to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will even encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others. A site risk assessment has been carried out and a copy is held in the Forest School file in Playgroup.

The Forest School leader has an up to date certificate in First Aid and is in charge of first aid arrangements. All staff have first aid training. A first aid kit is included in the kitbag.

Missing Child

On discovery of missing child use '1,2,3, where are you?' procedure and recall rest of the group.

Commence immediate search of vicinity.

Immediately notify playgroup leader back in the setting.

A decision will be made on whether to notify the police, then the parent or guardian.

Hand Tools Policy

Using hand tools is an important part of Forest School as it enables children to develop new practical skills that help them develop confidence. Hand tools are maintained in good order by the Forest School leader and will be inspected before each session to ensure safety. Children and adults will be taught how to handle tools properly and to treat them with respect. Whilst using hand tools the staff to child ratio is increased. This will be achieved by the following guidelines:

- Staff to child ratio 1:2 for bow saws, knives and all hand tool work.
- Tools will be kept in the Forest School Tool box and only removed by the Forest School staff.
- Adult and child sized gloves will be available and are only to be used for the none cutting hand.
- Running with tools is prohibited.
- Pointing with tools is prohibited.
- Children will lose permission to use tools if the guidelines are not followed.
- Bows saws must have a blade guard on them when not in use.
- Wood being sawn must be supported on a natural saw break or on a saw horse – none sawing hand must be kept by the child's side and away from the blade.
- When using penknives to whittle this must be done sitting down elbows on knees and downwards of the body.
- All tools will be counted back into the tool box at the end of the session.
- Volunteers must receive basic training on the use of individual tools before being allowed to use them with the children.

Fire Safety Policy

Fires and the use of storm kettles are an important part of Forest School and are used in many sessions. Stepping Stones Forest School aims to ensure that all children and adults participating in Forest School sessions with fires and/or storm kettles will do so safely and with little risk to their health as possible. Only previously agreed areas will be used for fires. Storm kettles are only used on flat ground and any wood chips and leaves must be brushed away before use.

Children must be seated at least 1.5 metres from the fire. When the fire is in use, children are not permitted to access the area without permission and guidance of an adult. Children must remain seated whilst the fire is lit. If children need to move they must walk around the outside of the flour circle. They must never cross the inner area.

Children are not permitted to throw anything on to the fire (unless helping to put wood on). Advice on the proper way to deal with smoke will be given to the children; they are advised to turn the heads to one side, placing their hands across the face, to close their eyes. If there is a clear wind direction the children will be seated so that smoke is avoided.

Safety and Responsibility

- Only adults are permitted to light fires, unless children are under the direct supervision of a Forest School leader.
 - Fires will not be lit without a bottle of water in place.
 - Fires are lit using cotton wool, flint strikers and matches.
 - No flammable liquids are used to light or accelerate fires.
 - No plastics are to be burnt.
 - If sessions involve children adding fuel to the fire, this must be done with one on one adult supervision.
 - Sticks must be placed not thrown from the side of the fire. The hand should never go over the fire.
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- All fires must be extinguished at the end of the session.
 - Water should always be on hand during fire sessions.
 - Whenever possible all fuels should be burnt to ash.
 - Forest School leader should ensure the fire is doused down with water and stirred until smoke has ceased.

Storm (Kelly) Kettle

- Only adults are to light the fire in the fire pan unless children are under the direct supervision of a Forest School leader.
- The storm kettle must be placed on a flat clear ground.
- Children must be seated at least 1.5 metres away from the storm kettle.
- Children can feed the fire with one to one supervision but they must have been shown how to do it safely.
- Fuel should burn itself out, but if it doesn't extinguish with water.
- Storm kettles should never be boiled with cork in.
- Long hair should be tied back and loose clothing tucked in.
- Kettles must be placed on, and removed from, the fire pan, using two hands holding the wire handle at 90° to the kettle chimney.
- Ensure that the spout is opposite to the fire pan air hole.
- Ensure that the handle is opposite to the spout.
- Water should be poured by holding the wooden handle and tipping using the chain.
- Cups should be placed on a flat level surface before pouring water into them from the kettle – never into a cup held in the hand.

A trained member of staff will take responsibility for the fire. This will be their sole responsibility for the session. They shall be responsible for lighting it, manning it whilst burning and putting it out at the end of the session.

Emergency procedures

The Forest School leader must ensure that the adults are familiar with current risk assessments and emergency procedures at the start of each session. Groups must stay within the agreed boundaries which will ensure they are within earshot of each other.

All minor injuries must be recorded by filling in an accident form. First aid (including plasters) must only be applied by a member of staff with a current First Aid certificate.

Emergency action plan

In the case of an injured child:

- Secure area and make safe
- Forest School leader to carry out first aid and remain and monitor casualty.
- Forest School leader to send an assistant back to playgroup to call emergency services and let playgroup leader know.
- A Forest School assistant should gather all other children do a head count and keep calm.
- Playgroup leader to call child's parent and send staff back to collect other children.

In the case of an injured adult (staff / parent)

- Secure area and make safe
- Forest School leader to carry out first aid and remain and monitor casualty.
- Forest School leader to send an assistant/adult back to playgroup to call emergency services and let playgroup leader know.

- A Forest School assistant should gather all other children to do a head count and keep calm until a member of staff comes and returns the children back to playgroup.
- Forest school leader waits and monitors casualty until emergency services arrive.

In the case of injured Forest School leader

- Assistant Secure area and make safe
- Assistant to carry out first aid
- Send adult back to playgroup to call emergency services and let playgroup leader know.
- A Forest School assistant should gather all other children to do a head count and keep calm until a member of staff comes and returns the children back to playgroup.
- Assistant waits and monitors casualty until emergency services arrive.

Emergency Telephone numbers

Stepping Stones Playgroup 01749 677011
Emergency services 999

Location of the Forest School

Playgroup garden and mud kitchen
Stoberry Park School site woods