

Forest School Policy



Intent

At Delph Side Community Primary School, we aim to provide children with experiences which enrich and enhance their education. Forest School enables children to learn mentally and physically outside the classroom. Children are able to be themselves, explore their own interests and ideas and develop fundamental social skills in an environment that is very different their classroom and one that has a much more open and loose structure.

The ethos of Forest School is 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 (and in particular a woodland environment); the right to access risk and the vibrant reality of the natural world; and the right to experience a healthy range of emotions, through all the challenges of social interaction, to build a resilience that will enable continued and creative engagement with their peers and their potential. It is an approach to education that makes use of the outdoor environment to create a unique learning tool.

We want children to:

- be curious, fascinated, interested and inventive
- have the freedom to explore different ways of 'being', feeling, behaving and interacting as participants are given the physical, mental and emotional space to be active and interactive
- have opportunities to meet challenges and learn to assess their own risks
- have the opportunity to develop imagination, resourcefulness and inventiveness

Implementation

Forest School sessions are delivered in two ways:

- As an extra-curricular activity (parents can sign children up to attend)
- As an afternoon session during the school day

Forest School Rules

Participants are encouraged to be involved in making decisions about their environment and safety; however, there are a few rules that the learners will be made aware of at the start of their involvement in Forest School sessions. Behind each rule, there is a range of learning opportunities that will encourage learners to engage with and understand these rules. They are:

Respect the environment

This will involve learning how our actions may affect the living things around us. This may be achieved by encouraging participants to distinguish living things from dead and agree that nothing alive should be picked or destroyed.

Stay within the Forest School boundary

Boundaries will be identified during the first Forest School session and participants will be guided around the site to ensure they are aware of where they are permitted to play, explore and investigate.

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Respect other people

At Forest School, we aim to create a feeling of belonging and unity. We expect all individuals to respect their peers, their belongings and their creations. Many activities delivered at Forest School aims to promote team building, communication and social and emotional development. Verbal or physical abuse is not tolerated at Forest School and individuals who behave in such a way will be asked to leave the session and may be excluded from the programme.

Looking eyes, Listening Ears

As our Forest School sessions are delivered in school grounds, there are numerous natural hazards. Each site and activity is risk assessed but individuals are encouraged to risk assess their surroundings and activities themselves. Using their eyes to watch where they are going and their ears to listen to safety guidelines will ensure they have a fun and safe experience at Forest School.

Snack and Drink provision

Only snacks and drinks provided by Forest School Leaders may be consumed on site. Wild fruits, berries and / or fungi must not be picked or consumed at any time. Participants will be encouraged to successfully identify such items and discuss why they should be avoided.

Session Routine and Procedures

Each session will undoubtedly differ in many ways from each previous session in relation to experiences, learning, journeys, the environment and so on, but generally we follow the same structure for each session. This structure helps ensure that children (and adults) are physically safe and also creates an environment in which children are comfortable and secure to learn with confidence.

Procedures to be carried out by the Forest School Leader before each session:

- A thorough safety sweep of the Forest School site will be conducted to identify and remove or restrict access to any hazards that might cause injury or illness
- A site sweep form will be completed, on which any hazards that were identified will be documented, and how they were dealt with or will be managed
- Existing boundaries will be checked
- Check that trees, bushes and other foliage is safe, including the potential for falling branches or dead wood, thorns, protruding sticks at eye level and hazardous berries or fruits
- Check the weather – If the weather is, or has the potential to become a risk, such as high winds or storms, the session will unfortunately be cancelled

Session Routine:

- The Forest School Leader will meet the children at the allocated collection point. A head count/register will be taken and any absences noted.
- Individuals will be given the opportunity to use the toilet facilities and change into appropriate clothing (water proofs, wellington boots etc)
- Brief discussion with participants to ensure they are aware of any safety considerations when walking to the Forest School site. Ensure that there is an adult at the back of the group and the remaining adults are distributed evenly amongst the group.

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- Arrive at the Forest School site and make our way in to sit around the Fire Circle.
- Re-cap on the previous weeks' activities and discuss the Forest School Rules
- Discuss the day's activities and any new and / or specific safety issues.
- Complete a short directed activity
- Free Play / Individual directed activities: Play group games / re-visit previous activities / sit in the hammock / story-telling etc
- Gather round the fire circle to discuss the session and recommendations for the following sessions.
- Gather and tidy away resources, make sure the area is left safe and as it should be
- Walk back to the collection point, use toilets and change out of outdoor clothing.

Procedures to be carried out at the end of each session:

- Clear everything away
- Ensure the fire is completely extinguished (if applicable) and the fire site is left safe.
- Check all the tools against the tick-list and store them away.
- Check any other resources (books/ identification sheets etc.)
- Knives should be logged back in and stored in a lockable container.

Equipment

The Forest School leader will provide and be responsible for the 'Essential Equipment' rucksack containing the First Aid bag, wellbeing pack and so on. Other children and adults should not use anything from this bag unless instructed to do so, or if implementing emergency procedures. The rucksack will always include these items:

- First Aid kit with emergency survival blanket
- Emergency File including :
 - A copy of all risk assessments
 - Register and mobile phone (access to CPOMS for emergency contact details)
- Tissues and hand wipes
- Spare gloves
- Anti bacterial hand gel

First Aid Kit

- Contents will be in line with HSE recommendations:
- Will cater for above the number of participants expected on site. Additional items may be supplemented.
- All kit will be regularly checked for expiry dates, and replaced when needed
- Depleted stocks will be replenished from an existing back up kit before next session

Clothing

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

- Woolly hat and scarf
- Gloves
- Thick jacket/ Waterproof coat
- Waterproof trousers/ salopettes, if possible
- Fleece
- Long sleeved sweatshirt
- Spare socks

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- Wellies/ walking boots/ sturdy shoes

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

- Sun hat
- Sun block
- A thin, long sleeved top and jumper
- Trousers
- Sturdy shoes/ walking boots or wellingtons
- A waterproof coat

* A complete spare set of clothes and a carrier bag for wet or dirty clothes may be necessary.

This clothing list applies to everybody involved in Forest School sessions, and is important for a number of safety reasons. Please be aware that sandals/ flip flops are never suitable for Forest School sessions, and that not wearing appropriate clothing may be a barrier to participation.

Roles and Responsibilities

Requirements of the Forest School Leader

It is the duty of the Forest School Leader to:

- Provide users and staff with the relevant information relating to Forest School before sessions are implemented
- Ensure that all equipment and resources are safe to use, with the accompanying personal protective equipment
- Undertake a risk assessment and safety sweep before each session
- Brief the adults involved on the health and safety considerations before each session
- Come prepared with a First Aid kit and the other items listed in the 'Essential equipment' section of this handbook

Role and Responsibility of Teachers, Teaching Assistants, School Staff and Helpers

- It is the responsibility of the group leader to see to toileting, ensuring that ratios are maintained if any individuals need to walk back to the setting to use the toilets. Please see our Toileting Policy.
- Ensure that parental consent forms, medical information and emergency contact forms are available on site (either given to the Forest School Leader beforehand or carried on the group leader's person during the session).
- Only use tools if the Forest School Leader has said it is okay to do so and adhere to all safety rules when doing so. If unsure, please ask.
- Stay within the Forest School boundary. If you need to leave the site at all, please inform the Forest School leader first. (Please note that smoking is prohibited in all areas of the site).
- Look after the Forest School Site - Includes not picking things, unless the Forest School Leader has said it is okay to do so, and looking after the environment.

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- Alert the Forest School Leader immediately if anyone (adult or child) requires first aid, or has had an accident – no matter how minor.
- Ensure you are familiar with the Forest School rules and assist learners in following them.
- The behaviour of the group is the responsibility of the group leader. Reflection areas will be available for those individuals who need time to think about their actions. Individuals that express behaviour that puts themselves or others at risk will be asked to leave the session. It is the responsibility of the group leader to ensure the individual(s) are escorted off site and either collected or taken back to school.

And lastly:

Forest Schools is intended to be child led – During free play please allow them to play and learn as independently as possible, and try to resist the temptation to demonstrate or suggest ideas! Keep your distance (except when using tools, supervising tree climbing and hammock use!), get involved if children invite you, but don't feel too bad if you find yourself standing and watching for much of the session!

Notes for Volunteers/Students/Helpers

Firstly - Thanks for offering your help today – it's really useful to have an extra pair of hands! Hopefully this information will give you some insight into how you can best support the children, and also point out some of the necessary do's and don'ts!

Before the Session

- Assisting with setting up the site - Transporting equipment to the Forest School Site, erecting tarps, assisting with putting up the parachute, putting out equipment / resource boxes and any other reasonable tasks requested by the Forest School Leader.
- Helping to make sure the site is safe – Checking if existing tree trail is structurally safe, picking litter (*gloves and bags will be provided), checking the site boundary and informing the Forest School Leader of any hazards that may have been missed.

During the Session

- Look after the Forest School site (includes not picking living things and respecting the environment)
- Help to ensure that all participants are safe.
- Do not put your fingers or anything else in your mouth (to prevent disease or poisoning).
- Only use tools if the Forest School Leader has said it is okay to do so, and follow the safety rules for tools.
- Stay within the boundary (if it is necessary to leave the site, please inform the Forest School Leader first)

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Please be aware that this is a discovery opportunity for the children, where they can be in control of their learning and experiences as far as possible, so please try not to direct them too much or demonstrate how to do things, but by all means, feel free to get involved and extend their learning if they are happy for you to do so!

Medical and Emergency Contact Details

During Forest School sessions all leaders will carry a charged mobile phone with credit in which to contact emergency services. All other emergency numbers will be located at the reception. These will include the client group's setting (i.e. school reception), local emergency services and any other relevant parties.

Emergency Procedures

The following procedures should be implemented for Forest School sessions:

In case of a medical emergency (i.e., serious injury, poisoning or illness)

The Forest School Leader will co-ordinate the emergency procedure.

Stage One

Any adult who witnesses or is involved in an emergency, such as a serious injury or suspects him/herself or another person to have a serious illness, should immediately alert the Forest School Leader / delegated First Aider.

The Forest School Leader should:

- Raise the alarm to other leaders/adults
- Assess the situation – is it safe for you to approach?
- Appoint someone to take responsibility for the rest of the group.

Stage Two

The assisting adult will gather children away from the casualty but nearby so the group remains together. The assisting adult will ensure the other children are safe and then will be available to support the Forest School Leader if necessary. The assisting adult should call the school/nursery office from a mobile phone carried by the Forest School Leader to request for back up support. Any other adults will remain with the children at all times.

The Forest School leader should:

- Protect the casualty and others from danger – is there anything you need to stop/change to reduce further incident?
- In the event of a serious incident if the fire is lit, it should be extinguished by an assisting adult. Any tools will be gathered and put in a safe place. Resources and other materials will be left.

Stage Three

The Forest School Leader will decide what action is appropriate and put this into effect.

The Forest School leader should:

- Check vital signs
- Delegate person to get folder containing consent & medical information form
- Delegate group supervision and contact **emergency services – 999 or 112**
 - Speak slowly and clearly

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- Describe incident and give patient description/current status
- Advise of location

Stage Four

The assisting adult will then phone the school/nursery office to keep them updated on the situation, explaining that an ambulance has been called. The school/nursery office/staff will provide extra assistance to organise the movement of the Emergency Services.

The Forest School Leader should:

- Administer First Aid if applicable
- Delegate direction of emergency services
- Remain with the patient from the moment they are made aware of the incident so that any symptoms can be effectively monitored and reported.

Stage Five

Extra assistance will arrive and will organise the movement of the Emergency Services (if appropriate).

The remaining group should make their way back to school/nursery.

The Forest School Leader should:

- Complete hand-over procedure with delegated group supervisor before the group departs from the site.
- Delegate a person to contact the child's parents using the details on the child's consent form.

Stage Six

Incident / accident report will be completed and recorded by the Forest School Leader. This should be photocopied and given to the school/child's parents. If required a RIDDOR form should also be completed. All risk assessments should be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Missing Child Procedure

If anybody suspects a person may be missing, they should immediately alert the Forest School Leader or another member of staff.

Stage One

The activity will be stopped, the group brought together and a head count completed. The Forest School Leader will appoint staff/volunteers to look after the group. If the fire is lit, it should be extinguished and any tools collected and stored in the delegated tool area immediately.

Stage Two

The perimeter of the Forest School Site will be searched and then the inner area of the site. If the missing child has not found after an initial sweep of the site, the group should assemble in a safe place (preferably the fire circle) and establish when and where the missing child was last seen. The Forest School Leader and assisting adult will continue to

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search the site (known hazardous areas first, e.g. water, drops, mud, barbed wire) whilst this is being confirmed.

Stage Three

If after five minutes, the child has not been found, the Forest School Leader will alert the School/nursery Office. Extra assistance will arrive and volunteers will assist with the search. The group supervisor and any supporting adults should lead the group back to school. The Forest School Leader should keep in regular telephone contact with the school office.

Stage Four

If the child is missing for more than 20 minutes the emergency services will be notified. If needed, the Forest School Leader will make arrangements for the group to be transported back to School/nursery etc. A search party will be organised and the advice of the police will be followed in relation to searching for the missing child.

Stage Five

The incident should be reported in the school diary and an incident report completed.

Fire Procedure

Stage One

If you come across an unexpected fire or if your own fire gets out of control, the Forest School Leader should ensure that the group are moved away to a safe position.

Stage Two

If it is a small fire that you feel that you are able to extinguish yourself safely, use a fire blanket or water from the fire safety kit to put it out.

Stage Three

If the fire is out of control, the Forest School leader should call the Emergency Services on 999 for assistance to extinguish the fire. They should also call the school/nursery to request for additional back up to assist taking the children back to school/nursery with the assisting adult. The school/nursery office/staff will provide extra assistance to organise the movement of the Emergency Services. The Forest School leader should stay in a safe position close to the fire site to wait for the Emergency Services.

Serious Injury to the Forest School Leader Procedure

Stage One

If the Forest School Leader is involved in an accident then another responsible adult should call the school/nursery office from a mobile phone carried by the Forest School Leader/Assistant to request for back up support and the school first aider. If required they should then call 999.

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Describe the incident and give patients description / current condition
- Advise of location

Stage Two

The back-up member of staff and other remaining adults will gather the group of children and take them back to school to keep them safe. The assisting adult will stay with the casualty, following guidance from Emergency Services and will monitor their wellbeing.

Stage Three

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If the fire is lit, it should be extinguished by an adult. Any tools will be gathered and put in a safe place. Resources and other materials will be left.

Stage Four

The school/nursery office/staff will provide extra assistance to organise the movement of the Emergency Services.

Stage Five

Incident / accident report will be completed and recorded. If required a RIDDOR form should also be completed.

Serious Injury to the Forest School Assistant Procedure

Stage One

If the Forest School Assistant is involved in an accident then the Forest School Leader should call the school/nursery office from a mobile phone to request back up support. If required they should then call 999.

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Describe the incident and give patients description / current condition
- Advise of location

Stage Two

The Forest School Leader or remaining adults will direct the group of children to a safe location. Once back up has arrived/there are enough adults the children can be taken back to school to keep them safe. The Forest School Leader will stay with the casualty to provide First Aid following guidance from Emergency Services and will monitor their wellbeing.

Stage Three

If the fire is lit, it should be extinguished by an adult. Any tools will be gathered and put in a safe place. Resources and other materials will be left.

Stage Four

The school/nursery office will provide extra assistance to organise the movement of the Emergency Services.

Stage Five

Incident / accident report will be completed and recorded. If required a RIDDOR form should also be completed.

Health & Safety – Procedures & Guidance

Forest School Leaders are to adhere to the Delph Side Health & Safety Policy with particular responsibility to:

- To ensure the health, safety and welfare of all leaders, children and adults
- Provision and maintenance of safe working systems and equipment
- Ensure policies and guidelines are in place for employees/child group protection, particularly with regards to use, handling, storage and transport of articles and substances

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- Ensure site for session is safe for appropriate tasks with facilities suitable for welfare
- Ensure safety and absence of risk to any other persons who are not leaders, children and adults
- Accept a personal obligation for their own and others safety which is reflected in their conduct
- Carry out risk assessments and provided suitable personal protective equipment where deemed necessary
- Complete accident forms, records and monitoring and evaluating of systems

“Duties” of persons children and adults (to be conveyed by leaders at first session and any further sessions as necessary)

- Take responsibility for health and safety of self and others who may be affected by their actions
- To follow procedures that are put in place by the leaders
- Do not intentionally misuse, damage or interfere with any health and safety equipment
- Acknowledge own limitations and follow direction by trained, appointed persons (leaders)

Accident Reporting Procedure

Definitions:

Accident: An unplanned, uncontrolled event, which has led to injury to people, damage to equipment or the environment or some other loss.

Near Miss: An unplanned, uncontrolled event that could have led to injury to people, damage to equipment or the environment or some other loss.

Incident: A happening, event or occurrence caused by ignoring or not adhering to set rules, boundaries or laws.

Procedures and Guidance

Leaders will maintain site and working areas to ensure that risk of accidents is as low as possible.

Leaders will have specialist first aid training for the outdoors and appropriate first aid equipment will be taken to every session.

All accidents, near misses and incidents must be reported to the Forest School leader using appropriate forms in emergency folder and all major accidents to the She committee (see below). H&S / Tools talk on site before every task. Leaders will carry an emergency procedures card in the welfare bag/emergency folder.

Reporting Procedure

In the event of an accident/near miss/incident leaders to note own all relevant information and transcribe into official accident book/relevant form as soon as practical. Leader to pass completed form to the headteacher. Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) committee in line with the Delph Side health and safety policy. See the school office for the full policy if required.

Blank accident/near miss/incident sheets to be kept in emergency folder/welfare bag. To be taken out to site at all times. Accidents must be transcribed into official Delph Side accident system.

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RIDDOR Reporting Procedure

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR)

Employers/Forest School practitioners must report to RIDDOR:

- Deaths
- Major injuries
- Serious burns
- Over seven day injuries (i.e. person is unable to perform normal duties for more than 7 consecutive days)
- Injuries to members of public or people not working/participating where they are taken from the scene of an accident to hospital
- Some work related diseases
- Some dangerous occurrences (something not resulting in an injury but could have done)

How to Report:

- Call incident contact centre on 0845 300 9923 or complete a form
- Incidents can be reported online via the HSE website:
www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/report.htm
- Once completed a copy of the form will be sent to the headteacher to keep for Delph Side records.

Who Reports:

The headteacher is responsible for reporting any of the above to the incident contact centre for RIDDOR.

If working on someone else's site, the site owner is responsible for reporting to RIDDOR if the leader/group members have sustained any major injuries or over 7 day injured.

If a leader/adult/child has been injured during a Forest School session, seen a dangerous occurrence or has a disease certified by a doctor (which may be linked to Forest School participation) the Forest School leader must be informed. The Forest School leader is then responsible for reporting to RIDDOR.

Risk Management

Risk Assessments are the tool that identify and act upon hazards to people that a leader accepts a level of responsibility for. Risk Assessments are not in themselves a protection from harm but methodologies by which Forest School practitioners monitor and demonstrate their commitment to H&S.

A five step Risk Assessment will be conducted for the Forest School sites. These steps are as follows:

1. Identify the Hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed and how (particularly allergy sufferers)
3. Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
4. Record findings and implement measures required
5. Review the Risk Assessment and update accordingly.

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All of our Forest School sites, activities and tools are risk assessed and copies of these have been included. Our 'General Outdoors' risk assessment outlines some of the more commonly faced risks associated with the outdoor classroom. Those that are more specific to certain activities are included in individual activity risk assessments.

School/nursery staff must actively implement the measures outlined and remain vigilant to the potential for risk arising throughout the session.

Any considerations will be pointed out to adults and children beforehand to help manage risk. All adults involved will be given a copy of the completed Risk Assessment for that site, and are obligated to manage or report risks under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

All sites, activities and tools will be risk assessed for the suitability of the children's age range before the sessions take place. The Forest School Leader will assess the school site before each session to ensure there has been no occurrence that would affect the site or the activities about to take place on it. In the case of certain groups, individual or group risk assessments may be necessary, but the decision for this remains with the leader. The Forest School Leader is responsible for implementing precautions and reviewing and updating risk assessment forms as necessary, at a minimum once per year or if an incident/accident/near miss arises necessitating need to review practices. Seasonal changes may also require an update for some sites and activities, e.g. after high winds, storms, nettles etc.

Safety Sweep / Local Amendments

Before each session, the Forest School Leader will conduct a safety sweep to identify any hazards and reduce or remove them if possible. Occasionally, in order to encourage children's awareness of safety, the children will also walk the boundary of the site to identify any hazards or risks that they think may need to be taken into consideration. Templates of both of these forms can be found at the back of this booklet.

Impact

Following Forest School sessions, children should feel inspired, motivated and confident. Some children find the traditional classroom environment difficult to function in and Forest School allows them the time and space to learn and develop social skills at a pace that suits them. Allowing children to have their say in what they do in the next session gives them a sense of ownership over their Forest School experience. They are made to feel that they are in control of their own learning.

As a result of attending Forest School sessions, children develop:

- Self-esteem
- Confidence
- Social skills
- Their own wellbeing
- Team work
- Understanding of themselves and how they work and function best
- Emotional intelligence

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- Physical intelligence

(see Forest School risk assessments for additional risk assessment information)