



FOREST SCHOOL HANDBOOK
St Oswald's C of E Primary School
2022-2023



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What is Forest School?

Forest School is holistic learning through play and exploration; children learn about the natural environment, how to handle risks, cooperate with others and to use their own initiative to solve problems. During Forest School, children will be given the opportunity to build shelters, light fires and use green woodworking skills to create and build natural items. They will use full size tools, learn the boundaries of both physical and social behaviour, establish and grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation.

Forest School is an inspirational process that allows learners to develop their confidence through regular opportunities to achieve. It is a process that encourages learners to become comfortable with the outdoor environment whilst in familiar surroundings. Learner's basic needs are always met before further learning and exploration can take place. Children will always be in warm clothing, have food and drink provided during a session and will feel both physically and emotionally safe. St Oswald's C of E Primary School's safeguarding and child protection policies will be adhered to as part of our duty of care. All sessions will be designed around the needs and interests of the group, setting small achievable tasks and within the capabilities of all learners.

Where?

The Forest School site is located on the grounds of St Oswald's C of E Primary School.

Who?

The Forest School Leaders are Mrs N Stout and Mrs L Barlow. They are both teachers, hold a Level 3 Certificate in Forest School Leadership, Forest School First Aid qualification and a Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate.

Forest School Leaders will be assisted every session at the Forest School site by a member of staff who is well known to the children. The same member of staff will go out with the children to ensure continuity and to allow staff to observe progress and document the full impact of the Forest School sessions. On some occasions we may also take a college/higher education student or other staff members to allow them to see how Forest School operates and the benefits of the programme. All staff will be DBS checked.

Prior to adults accompanying the Forest School Leaders they are asked to familiarise themselves with this handbook. They will then clarify any further questions or queries they may have. An agreement is given verbally by the adult to adhere to this.

Forest School Leaders will document the group's achievements through a learning journal demonstrating their progression of skills through photographs, observations and evaluations.

Daily Procedures to maintain Health and Safety

A site sweep will be carried out by a Forest School Leader to identify any natural or foreign hazards/potential risks in the environment prior to a session. These will be documented on our daily site sweep records and any action that needed to be taken. Children will be reminded of how to keep themselves and others safe during their session and will be given the opportunity to carry out their own site sweep.

Before each session, Forest School Leaders will monitor the weather to ensure the planned activity remains safe. Messages will be sent via Class Dojo if additional clothing is required.

Prior to the session, boundaries will be clearly marked out by Forest School Leaders and children will be aware that they are to remain within these markers. All children at St Oswald's C of E Primary School know that these markers indicate a session is taking place and that they need to stay away from the site. A 'call back' signal will be used to enable speedy return if needed or wanted by the Forest School Leader.

The recommended ratio is one adult to eight children. This is typically the Forest School Leader, a teacher and two support assistants. During tool use, this ratio will increase. Individual risk assessments will be made for children whose medical condition or whose behaviour requires it.

Children will be encouraged to use the toilet before the session starts. They may go to the toilet by safely leaving the site and entering the school building. Younger children will be supervised leaving and returning to the site.

Any accidents that may occur during a session will be dealt with by the Forest School Leader. A record will be kept of any injuries (in line with RIDDOR) that require first aid and parents/carers will be informed of any injuries and treatment given. Near misses will be reflected upon and actioned in the risk assessment. Forest School Leaders will be aware of allergies and medical information before sessions take place.

Personal Protective Equipment Information

This is a guide. All children are different and your child may get cold easily and therefore require more layers. Please go with what is right for your child but remember it is better to have too many clothes than not enough. WARM AND WATERPROOF IS ESSENTIAL.

- Long trousers
- Long sleeved top
- Sturdy boots/wellies
- Warm, waterproof coat
- Gloves/Hat

During the summer months, a message will be sent out regarding sun cream/hat.

Procedures for unexpected events

Sessions take place within the school grounds so members of the public/loose dogs cannot access our site. As part of our daily site sweep, the school gate will be checked to ensure it is locked. In the unlikely event of this happening, the call back signal will be used to safely gather the children and to carry out a head count. The Forest School Leader will decide upon the action that needs to take place before the session resumes.

If the fire alarm within the school building sounds, we will be contacted using our Walkie Talkie device and the children will be safely removed from the site and will follow the school protocol by walking sensibly up the hill to line up on the playground to be counted.

Equipment

The Forest School Leader will organise an emergency bag and kit bag for each session. The contents of the bag may vary depending on the group, activity, time of year and weather conditions.

Emergency Bag – first aid kit (regularly checked and restocked as necessary), burns kit, walkie talkie, mobile phone, medical details, accident sheets, medication for individuals, drinking water).

Kit Bag – wet wipes, hand gel, spare clothing, sun cream, parent consents, flask of hot water, hot chocolate sachets, roll mat, blankets, emergency shelter and torch.

The Forest School Leader will organise equipment and tools needed for each session including tools, ropes, tarps, food, kitchen utensils and fire lighting kit.

Hand Tool Policy

The children will have the opportunity to work with tools and natural resources. Using small hand tools are an integral part of Forest School and we are committed to providing children with access to a wide range of tools. Benefits of tool use in a Forest School session include; developing confidence, communication skills, hand eye coordination, fine motor skills, risk-assessing and risk taking, responsibility and most importantly a sense of achievement!

To enable the use of tools these safety measures **must** be adhered to:

- Hand tools are to be checked each session and maintained by the Forest School Leader to ensure a good working order.
- Tools will be counted out and counted back in.
- All adults and children to always model correct and safe tool usage, transportation and storage at all times. Children will have adult supervision at all times.

- When not in use, all tools are to be kept in a tool designated area and to be returned straight away when finished with. Knives and potato peelers will be kept in a lockable tool box.
- Children and adults to only wear a glove on their 'helping hand' and **not** on the tool operating hand.
- Tool users should be 'two arm's length and a tool' away from other children.
- Whilst using the hand tools the staff to child ration will increase depending on the tool in use. This will vary between 1:1 to 1:3.
- The Forest School Leader will carry out a 'tool talk' every time a tool is used.

Potato Peelers and Knives

These tools are used for peeling or sharpening sticks (whittling).

TOOL TALK - "This is my potato peeler. I use it to whittle wood. I carry it down and to the side of my body. This is the handle, this is the blade and this is the cutting edge. I use it in a pistol grip. I use it to the side of my body and push the peeler away from myself. I use it 'two arm's length and a tool' away from anyone else. When I have finished using it I put it back in the **lockable** tool designated area."

Once a child is deemed competent by the Forest School Leader they may be allowed to use a bush craft knife to whittle. The same rules as above still apply. When carrying a bush craft knife it must be kept in its sheaf around their neck in a lanyard. It must always be put back in its sheaf when not in use and then returned to the **lockable** tool designated area.

Bow Saws

This tool is used to cut green and dead wood the diameter of a 2 pence piece or smaller.

TOOL TALK - "This is my bow saw. I use it to cut green and dead wood. I carry my bow saw to the side of my body and pointing downwards. This is the handle, and this is the blade cover. I wear a glove to take the blade cover off. This is the blade. I always wear a glove on my helping hand. I always work to the side of the tool in a kneeling position. I make 3 back cuts like this, and then continue with a forwards and backwards motion. The 'non-glove hand' controls the saw. If I need to put the bowsaw down (temporarily) I place it on the ground with the blade facing away. I use it 'two arm's length and a tool' away from anyone else. If I need to pass the bowsaw I pass the handle to my friend. When I have finished I return it to the tool designated area."

Carpenter's Brace

This tool is used to make holes.

TOOL TALK - "This is my carpenter's brace. When I am carrying it I carry it to my side with the drill bit facing downwards and remembering to always walk. An adult will always hold down

the item to be drilled using a glove on a firm, flat surface. This is the handle. This is the drill bit. I make a hole by turning the handle like this. I use it 'two arm's length and a tool' away from anyone else. When I have finished with the tool I return it to the tool designated area.

When not in use all tools will be securely locked away in the tool shed. Tools should be checked and cleaned before they are put away. The Forest School Leaders will ensure that thorough maintenance checks are carried out regularly and that each tool will be cleaned and oiled. These checks will be logged.

Fire Safety Policy

An important (and popular) element of most Forest School sessions is the lighting of a fire. We will ensure that the learners can enjoy this part of their session in the safest way possible. All staff and children will be made aware of fire safety procedures set out in this policy.

The fire will be lit in the fire pit within the seating circle. It will have a 1m² area and the seating circle will have definite entrance and exit points for safety. The fire pit will be enclosed by logs or large stones to prevent the spread of fire and particular attention will be paid to the forest floor. If there is a clear wind direction, the seating arrangements will be altered to keep all learners safe and comfortable. Children will be taught how to change seats by stepping over the log and walking around the outside of the seating area. They must never cross the inner area. Once seated around the campfire, children must remain seated until directed by an adult to move.

Fires will only be lit with the safety equipment in place and close by - bucket of water, fire blanket, burns equipment and gauntlet.

- Fires will be lit with fire steel.
- No flammable liquids will be used to light or accelerate the fire.
- Children to be taught that sticks are to be placed onto the fire and not thrown.
- Fires will be extinguished properly with water poured onto it (from the outside and working in) and then the ash stirred until all smoke has ceased.

Hygiene/Handling of Foodstuffs

If food is to be cooked and eaten at the site, the Forest School leader will ensure that it is stored, transported and cooked in a 'safe to eat' manner. The Forest School Leaders hold a Level 2 Food Hygiene Qualification.

Prior to cooking/eating, the group will all wash their hands using warm water and soap.

Any litter created from cooking on site will be collected in a bag and disposed of upon returning to the school building. No trace will be left in the woodland area.

Consent

Prior to a block of sessions taking place, parents/carers will be asked to complete a Forest School consent letter and a Forest School medical consent form. The details of these will be kept confidential (in line with GDPR) and staff will be made aware of medical details/allergies on a need to know basis. See appendix 1.

Policies

All of our school policies can be found on our school website - <https://www.st-oswaldscofe.lancs.sch.uk/>. We adhere to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and from this, we have added further risk assessments/policies and procedures to ensure a safe environment.

Risk Assessments

Please see Appendix 2-8 for detailed risk assessments for the Forest School sessions.