

Forest School

What is Forest School?

Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.

At Forest School all participants are viewed as:

- equal, unique and valuable
- competent to explore & discover
- entitled to experience appropriate risk and challenge
- entitled to choose, and to initiate and drive their own learning and development
- entitled to experience regular success
- entitled to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people
- entitled to develop a strong, positive relationship with their natural world

This learner-centred approach interweaves with the ever-changing moods and marvels, potential and challenges of the natural world through the seasons to fill every Forest School session and programme with discovery and difference.

(Forest School Association)

Forest School Rules and managing risk

We, and especially politicians and the media, are all taking part in something of a deceit because we are teaching the next generation that risk doesn't exist'. 'When they leave school they are going to get the shock of their lifetime because out there in the big bad world risk exists every day. Unless we educate children about risk, get them to understand it, to embrace it and exploit it, then we will fail as a nation.' Sir Digby Jones at NAHT conference

"It is argued that taking risks can have positive implications in terms of children's developmental, social and emotional needs, as well as their overall health. By providing the opportunities for children to manage their own risks in a controlled environment, they will learn vital life skills needed for adulthood, and gain the experience needed to face the unpredictable nature of the world." (Gill, 2007)

Children recognise that knowing about risks and how to manage them is an essential part of growing up... Through play, children are able to learn about risks and use their own initiative. If children and young people are not allowed to explore and learn through playing and taking part in positive activities, they will not learn how to judge risks and manage them for themselves. These skills learnt through play and other activities can act as a powerful form of prevention in other situations where children and young people are at risk.' (Play England, 2007)

Forest school leaders produce risk assessments and constantly review the balance of risk during a session but a vital part of Forest School is allowing children to begin to manage risk for themselves e.g. asking a friend to help because a piece of wood is too heavy to carry by themselves, reviewing structures they are making with a view to safety, using a range of tools correctly, being allowed to climb a tree. During Forest School sessions children/learners are partners in the risk management process and take this role very seriously.

Forest school sessions aim to provide time for play and exploration but also offer a range of focussed activities to build skills in the following areas:

	Use of tools-designing & making	Fire lighting & cooking	Shelter building & structures	Science and the natural world
Year R	Use of bow saw with adult support to cut wood discs. Use of discs to make decorations/fridge magnets etc Use of peelers to begin to whittle sticks. Use of peeled stick to make wand or FS journey stick.	Use of flint & steels to make sparks & introduction to using this method to light a fire. Collecting and ordering wood by thickness for fire. Cooking using stick-marshmallows & waffles Observe cooking using baking, frying and other methods	Discussion-why we need shelter & what we can use to make shelters. Opportunities to make shelters using natural materials and/or tarps as a group supported by an adult or independently. Practical exploration of structures and forces.	Observation of signs of season in weather, plants, trees and pond life. Running treasure hunts, scavenger hunts, Autumn crowns, woodland potions, clay hedgehogs, sticky pictures Identification of nettles, brambles, sticky weed and flowers if in season.
Year 1	Stick man story by Julia Donaldson-designing & making own stick people. Tying knots. Use of bow saw & palm drills to create wood disc name badges.	Beginning to use flint and steels to light cotton wool which in turn is used to light the fire. Collecting wood and use of snap test to check suitability for burning. Cooking popcorn, s'mores, pancakes	Mini-shelters and elf houses.	Making sticky wing butterflies and/or stick dragon flies. Making bird feeders. Leaf prints, ordering leaves by size & observing shapes.
Year 2	Use of bow saw and palm drills to make Christmas decorations or their own designs.	Fairly independent use of flint and steels to light cotton wool.	Recognition of different properties of materials and their uses in construction of shelters	Beginning to name trees in FS area including-oak, elder, ash,

	<p>Making bug hotels/ ladybird feeders. Depending on season-making birds, nests/looking for "worms" thinking about food chains.</p>	<p>Cooking sausages and independent use of open fire toasting tool for waffles etc. Baking e.g. chocolate bananas or cakes cooked in orange skins.</p>	<p>e.g. tarps being waterproof and so making good roofs or floors, wood or tree trunks for strength /height.</p>	<p>hazel, holly, apple. Collecting tree fruits. Autumn leaves, discussion on evergreen and deciduous trees and observation of these in FS area. Thinking about bird migration. Recognising parts of plant-leaf, stem/trunk, leaf, root and beginning to be aware of their functions. Observation of pond and beginning to recognise pond life.</p>
Year 3	<p>Elder bead to make necklaces. Whittling cooking sticks. Making bows and arrows. Stick weaving</p>	<p>Independent use of flint and steels to light fire. Greater awareness of difference between green (wet) wood and dead (dry) wood and where to find these. Cooking sausages without use of frying pan. Pitta bread pizzas & damper bread. Making & using charcoal</p>	<p>Independent use of a range of materials to create a variety of shelter structures. Free standing shelter challenge. Who can build the tallest free-standing tower?</p>	<p>Depending on season-beginning to recognise life cycle of trees and functions of parts of tree. Observing seed dispersal. Conker crafts. Thinking about why not all saplings survive-overcrowding, impact of FS etc. Understanding properties of different trees- e.g. soft almost hollow inside to elder making it useful for bead making, pea shooters etc. Hazel being good for coppicing and so good for whittling. Understanding that some tree fruits/seeds are good to eat e.g. blackberries & apples and others are not e.g. acorns. Observation of pond life-being able to recognise dragon flies, newts, water boatmen, pond skaters etc.</p>
Year 4	<p>Whittling knives-understanding use of green wood for this. Clay tree faces Mini rafts-knot tying and snake lashing.</p>	<p>Lighting own fires in groups and keeping going long enough to cook over. Exploring use of bow drill to light fire. Foraging- cooking toffee apples. Making dandelion jam or sticky weed juice</p>		