



An Introduction to Forest Schools

Ethos

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.

Forest School is based more on the process of learning than it is on the content - more on the 'how' than the 'what'. This means that genuine Forest School practice steps boldly out of the shadow and limitation of 'planned activities' and ventures collaboratively into the realms of the unplanned, unexpected and ultimately unlimited. Children and young people are given encouragement to direct their own learning - this often requires catalysing on the part of the Forest School leader either through stimulating play in the outdoors or through 'scaffolding' a child's learning, but mostly through simply observing how children are in the outdoors.

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 seasons, to the contemplation of an ancient tree; the dynamic nature of an outdoor environment - an infinite source of smells, textures, sounds and tastes; a range of visual stimuli from near too far, high to low, very big to very small; and the infinite layers of historical, cultural, spiritual and mythological significance that speak of our deep relationship with trees and woodland through the ages.

The Benefits



Research now backs up what forest school practitioners have known all along – that children and young people are stimulated by the outdoors and typically experience, over time, an increase in their self-belief, confidence, learning capacity, enthusiasm, communication and problem-solving skills and emotional well-being.

Enjoy and Achieve

- Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation

Forest School sets learning in a different context for children where they can undertake a range of practical activities and carry out small achievable tasks. At Forest School children can develop their team working skills and also learn to become more independent. Those who are unfamiliar with woodlands and green spaces can become confident in using them and this can form the basis of a life-long relationship with natural spaces.

Be Healthy

- Physically healthy
- Mentally and emotionally healthy

Healthy Lifestyles

At Forest School children are physically active a lot of the time and their stamina improves as they go through their Forest School sessions. Their experience can also help to lead to the development of healthier lifestyles as children ask parents to take them on trips to woodlands and green spaces outside of pre-school times. As the children gain confidence and improve their self-esteem this can impact on their emotional and mental well-being.

Stay Safe

The 'wild', and yet controlled, safe environment of Forest School ensures that children taking part naturally learn to assess risk and are encouraged to make sensible and informed decisions about how to deal with unfamiliar and unpredictable situations (such as exploring



or climbing trees, using tools to build shelters and dens). Much of the learning for a child comes as a result of the opportunities they have for testing their own abilities in a real-life context.

Make a Positive Contribution

- Develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges
- Developing enterprising behaviour

Forest School helps children to develop their confidence. As they become familiar with Forest School they can take their new-found confidence into school and into other areas of their lives. Forest School can be particularly effective for children who do not do well in the classroom environment. Children learn to solve problems and be creative and imaginative at Forest School thus showing enterprising behaviour.

The Learning Process

The Forest School approach to learning in the outdoors is rooted firmly in the key progressive education theorists of the past one hundred and fifty years - from Froebel to Steiner, Vygotsky to Montessori, Dewey to Gardner – all of them put the child at the centre of their own learning; all talk of the importance of children being allowed to explore the world with appropriate support. Interestingly, many were themselves significantly influenced by the great outdoors. Forest School encourages children to explore their own innate learning in the richest classroom we have – the outdoors.

- Forest School Ethos
- Children need more risk
- need to be more active
- need more independence in own learning
- need more play
- thinking outside the norm



- real life experiences

Environmental Impact

Every activity carried out in the outdoors will have an impact on the immediate environment. We plan to keep this impact to a minimum.