



What is Forest School?

Forest School works on the principle of child-centered learning where children have the freedom to explore their own preferences whilst being encouraged to take part in carefully planned activities if they choose. In essence, Forest School teaches children independence, learning through play and to love and care for nature and the environment and allows children to develop as a whole. Appropriate risk is encouraged in a safe and organized environment.

The Forest School concept originates in Denmark and was originally aimed at pre-school age children. It was found that children who had attended Forest School, entered school with stronger social and communication skills and had high self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities.

Forest School Principles

1. The natural environment is at the core of all Forest School is – using natural environments and materials to learn.
2. Appropriate risk whether this be physical, emotional, or social, enabling children to stretch themselves.
3. Child led or self-directed play and education is inherent. Children remember things they are interested in. Forest school teaching is adaptable and diverse to suit the child.
4. Holistic learning – educating the whole child, valuing all areas of development; spiritual, emotional motivation, confidence and resilience as well as cognitive and literacy and numeracy.
5. Learning must be led by a qualified practitioner – delivered by those who are trained and hold appropriate qualifications.
6. The experience of Forest School should be over the long term. Regular sessions also give opportunity to observe nature throughout the seasonal changes and for the child to understand these natural changes.

What happens at a typical Forest School session?

1. Each session begins at pre-school with the children preparing to go outside. They will put on appropriate outerwear such as waterproof jacket and waterproof trousers, wellies or sturdy boots. Depending on the weather, sun hats or winter hats/gloves are also worn.
2. Children are encouraged to use the bathroom before lining up with their water bottle, counted and then head outside.
3. There are at least two adults in a group of up to ten children – one adult will lead the children to Forest School area and one will follow behind.
4. Once in the Forest School area, the children will sit around the fire circle on log stumps. No one is to walk through the fire circle, always around the outside of the logs. This creates a good habit when a fire is lit. If someone forgets and walks across the fire circle, a code word is used to call out to remind them to stop and check where they are and to come out of the fire circle.

If there is no fire circle, we will make a circle in a designated Gathering Area.

5. We begin each session with a reminder of the safety rules. Usually, children will offer to explain these and we discuss them as a group so everyone is clear and understands the rules and what safe behaviour is expected.
6. The planned activity will be explained, and a reminder of continuous provisions will also be mentioned so the children understand their options.
7. The children can choose to participate in the prepared activity or choose free play.
8. The children are given a five-to-ten-minute warning that it will soon be tidy up time.
9. Wooden whistle is blown, and the children will stop what they are doing and listen for an instruction from an adult to tidy up.
10. We finish the session by gathering back around the fire circle (or gathering circle) to think about and then discuss and reflect on the session. Each child can say what they particularly enjoyed doing or found challenging. If a child does not want to speak, they can pass. We then line up, count the children, and then head back to pre-school.
11. We all wipe our feet, wash our hands, and change out of outerwear.

Examples of planned activities and / or tasks

Each Forest School session is unique, creating multiple learning opportunities. There are no expected outcomes from a Forest School session. The planned activities are designed to provide children with a sense of achievement and success and most of all enjoyment! The activities usually require creativity whether artistic or problem solving or learning / developing a skill. Activities can often involve collaboration, communication and social skills and always allow a degree of freedom for the child to approach the task or activity in their own way, or they may prefer not to take part, instead choosing independent/ free play. The activities below give an indication of the types of experiences a child may have in a Forest School session but is not an exclusive list.

- Den and shelter building
- Mini beast hunting
- Making bug or mini beast hotel
- Lighting a flame with a fire steel
- Making mini dens for creatures
- Collecting leaves and colouring them.
- Making leaf or flower crowns or bracelets
- Using clay to make a medallion printed with a leaf
- Making clay blob creatures
- Flower bashing hama zone
- Making mud paint
- Nature scavenger hunts
- Observing signs and changes of the seasons
- Decorating stones and horse chestnuts
- Drinking hot drink / food made over the fire
- Creating art using found natural materials
- Learning to use simple woodwork tools
- Making wooden pendants or cookies and decorating
- Making a simple bird feeder
- Using sticks and wool to weave