



DOGSTHORPE ACADEMY

Forest School Handbook



The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is a unique educational experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands on learning experiences in a woodland environment.

Children engage in motivating and achievable activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers. Children will work with tools, play, learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world.

The Forest School concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at pre-school children, where it was found that children who had attended Forest School then arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in groups effectively, generally had high self-esteem and a confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped them to raise their academic achievements.

Forest School encourages children to:

- Develop personal and social skills
- Work through practical problems and challenges
- Use tools to create and build
- Discover how they learn best
- Pursue knowledge that interests them
- Learn how to manage failures
- Build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk
- Develop practical skills
- Understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- Explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- Regularly experience achievement and success
- Reflect on learning and experiences
- Develop their language and communication skills
- Improve physical motor skills
- Become more motivated
- Improve their concentration skills

Before the Forest School sessions begin

Permission from parents will always be sought to allow their child to attend Forest School. Along with the consent form will be a breakdown of what to expect at Forest School, a request for any relevant medical information and permission to take photographs which will be used to create display folders for each of the children to take away with them to accompany their Forest School

certificates. The photographs may also be used on our school website, in displays around the school and on any documents created to promote our Forest School.

Our Forest School Code of Conduct

Entering our Forest Area

When entering our Forest we will display a high level of respect towards the environment and adhere to the expectations which are in place. We will explore, investigate, learn and play in a manner that will not damage the trees while showing equal respect to the plants and animals that share the Forest.



Boundaries

Although the boundaries of our Forest School will be farther reaching than the Forest area itself these are liable to change on a session to session basis and will depend on the particular activities planned for that day. These will be discussed before each session with the children and any other adults who may be joining us. As children choose to explore the adult in charge may lose sight of them, if this occurs the adult must shout “1, 2, 3, where are you?” as our children have been taught to respond “1, 2, 3, I’m here”.



Lighting a fire

As our children progress through their Forest School experience they will get the opportunity to build a fire and cook on it. The Forest School Leader will take control of the procedure and any other adults will have been briefed on all safety aspects before we start. Once the fire has been lit it will not be left unattended. The Fire will only be lit once it has been confirmed that all required fire safety equipment is in place. All fires will be built within a fire square.



Safety at the fire circle

All fires must be lit within a fire square. We have a log circle for the children to sit on surrounding the fire at a distance of 1.5m from the fire square. Unless invited to do so by an adult no one may enter the fire circle perimeter. There must be no running past the fire circle. No items must be carried and placed within the fire circle unless by an adult. If a child wishes to move to a new seat they must step out of the circle and walk around the outside of the circle and walk around the outside.



Using Tools

All tools used during our Forest School sessions have their own code of conduct for correct use, including which personal protective equipment is required, the correct body posture and consideration of the appropriate activity for each individual tool. All tools are counted out and back in at the beginning and end of each session. The tools are kept in a separate tool bag and locked away in the gardening shed when not in use. (See tool risk assessments for guidance).



Picking up and playing with sticks

Although children are allowed to use sticks for certain games and tasks they must never be thrown or swung towards another child. Sticks may be required for holding food over a fire; in this situation identification of the type of tree this stick has come from is imperative to avoid all poisonous species. Sticks must not be removed from living trees.



Digging

Removing the top layer of soil is perfectly acceptable when searching for insects and their habitats but digging large or deep holes is not allowed due to the potential danger of other children tripping over them or falling in.



Collecting wood

Wood can be collected for a number of reasons but usually for the purpose of creating a fire. For this purpose it is usually collected in four thicknesses matchstick sized, pencil sized, thumb sized and wrist sized. Sticks may also be collected for creating pictures and as part of our wooden sculptures although these should be used sparingly to avoid disrupting too many insect habitats. Larger pieces of wood will be collected for den building but these will be stored in a separate location for the children to access as required.



Eating and Drinking

Unless the activity has been planned in advance such as blackberry/red currant picking or cooking over a fire then a nil by mouth policy is in place for anything found in or around our Forest area. Children will be reminded not to put their fingers in their mouths and for times when food is being consumed we have antibacterial soap and water for them to wash their hands.



Rope and String use

The use of rope and string will be required from time to time for such activities as den building and making picture frames. The children will be taught how to tie a number of different knots and will get the opportunity to demonstrate these when working on their den building and other activities.



Carrying and Transporting materials

Our children are encouraged to carry the items they will be using either by themselves or with a partner. How to correctly lift and carry items has been taught to our children to minimise the likelihood of an injury, this must also be modelled correctly by any adults attending one of our Forest School sessions. Heavier objects may be rolled, dragged or carried by more than one person.



Toileting

Children will be reminded to use the toilet before we venture out to our Forest area. If required during our session our year 6 helper will escort the younger child back to school to use the toilet. A designated outdoor area may be developed in the future for our children to use rather than having to return to the school.



Leaving the Site

“Leave no trace” is the mind-set required when leaving our Forest area after each session. This includes dismantling any shelters built and removing any materials taken on site by ourselves. There may be occasions when large items will be left for the following session although this will only occur when the Forest School Leader has agreed to do so. All rubbish must be removed after each session and all evidence of fire will be washed away although the fire pit will be a permanent fixture.



Tree Climbing

Tree climbing is an activity which is acceptable during our Forest School sessions providing the tree has been cleared as suitable for climbing. Once this has been agreed the area surrounding the tree must be checked for sharp objects and the tree itself must be checked for loose or rotten branches. An adult must be present at all times during the activity and the children are permitted to climb no higher than 1.5m.



Our Forest School Activities



The activities we engage in during our Forest school are very child led. Each session is discussed beforehand with the children who are given a list of possible activities they may wish to engage in. These sessions however are not set in stone as we are trying to create independent learners, leaving the children to create their own ideas while exploring their own interests and imagination.

Suggested Activities:

- Nature Obstacle course
- Making and decorating tree cookies
- Mud Creatures (on ground)
- Clay Faces
- Tree Guardians (on Trees using mud or clay)
- Cone Creatures
- "1,2,3 where are you?" hide and seek game
- Making and painting wood creatures
- Mini den building for cuddly toys
- Creating insect habitats
- Full size den building
- Making stick men
- Rain Forest in a jar
- Gazoo making with wood
- Bug hunting
- Scavenger hunt
- Toasting Marshmallows on an open fire
- Making hot drinks using an outdoor Kelly Kettle

Guidelines for Setting up and packing down



Prior to the Forest School session:

Before a Forest School session begins all staff or volunteers involved must be familiar with our Forest School handbook including all policies and risk assessments.

All equipment required including the First Aid kit and child register are to be collected by the Forest School leader. The First Aid kit must be checked on a regular basis to ensure the contents are present and in date.

All tools being used must be checked for any defects prior to the session starting while ensuring the correct P.P.E. (Personal Protective Equipment) is available for each tool.

The Forest School leader must complete a full site check prior to the session starting; this will include checking for the following:

- Animal mess such as fox and dangerous objects
- Dangerous eye level branches
- Carry out safety checks in line with the risk assessments
- Predicted weather from the MET office, paying particular attention to wind speeds
- Set up additional shelter if required due to weather

Once the session is complete:

At the end of each session a small amount of time will be allocated to clean away any mess which has been created, all children will be expected to help with this activity.

- All tools will be collected, counted and checked for any defects including sharpness before being put away into their specific tool bags.
- All rubbish to be collected and disposed of, including waste food which may have been cooked on the open fire but not consumed.
- All evidence of fire to be removed / washed away.
- Walk ways and log circles to be returned to their original positions ready for the next session.

First Aid Equipment List

- Sterile wipes
- Plasters of various sizes
- Surgical tape
- Scissors
- Conforming bandages
- Non adhesive square bandages
- Anti-bacterial hand gel
- Safety pins
- Disposable gloves
- Sun cream
- Eye dressings
- Specific medication for children as required
- Paediatric First Aid manual

Forest School Equipment Bag

- Register
- Accident forms
- Risk Assessments
- Tissues
- Secateurs
- Bungees
- Kelly kettle
- String (natural and nylon)
- Camera
- Water container filled each morning
- Mallet
- Cotton wool
- Vaseline
- Flint and steel
- Matches
- Tarpaulins of different sizes
- Fire safety blanket
- Bow saws
- Hack saw
- Loppers
- Wood carving knives
- Bug magnifiers

This is not an exhaustive list and items may be required for one off specific activities, any which do however will have been fully risk assessed before use.

Clothing Requirements



Due to the nature of the Forest School activities it is very likely that the children will get muddy and potentially wet, especially if the weather has been unkind to us and the Forest area is damp. We therefore ask parents to provide old clothing and footwear for their child which can be left in school between sessions or taken home each week to be washed at the parent's discretion. For particularly wet days we do have in school plenty of wellington boots and raincoats although on these days an extremely large tarpaulin will be in place to cover the main seating area of our Forest. During the summer months sun cream and sun hats may be required to be sent in by parents although we do have a supply of sun cream in school if necessary. The only exceptions with regards to weather where we may consider cancelling the Forest School session would be due to lightning or extremely high winds with the possibility of branches falling from trees, other than this we do not see any weather conditions as an issue.



Emergency Procedures

If an injury occurs during one of our Forest School sessions then as Forest School leader I will assess the situation to decide the best plan of action, giving first aid if necessary. Should the injury be of a serious nature then 999 will be called immediately using the emergency mobile phone carried with the other emergency supplies. Parents will be contacted immediately. Should first aid be required then another member of staff will be called to supervise the rest of the children while the injured child is being treated. Should an ambulance be required then a member of staff will meet them at the front entrance to direct the paramedics towards the location of the injured child. If the situation is not seen as an emergency but the child needs to be taken to the hospital, doctors or home then parents will be contacted to arrange collection.

All injuries or near misses will be recorded in the Forest School accident book and procedures will be investigated to determine if anything else can be done to avoid the situation happening again.

Donations



The Psychic & Spiritual Fellowship



Funding projects such as our Forest School can be difficult and is only really possible due to the kind donations received from local organisations. Both the “BGL group” and “The Psychic and Spiritual Fellowship” have donated a significant amount of money towards our Forest School project. These donations have allowed us to purchase new equipment which has enriched the Forest School experience for all of our children.



