

Saplings Forest School Guide for Parents/Carers



At heart, all learning is about going from what is known and familiar to what is unknown and uncertain. So learning, growth and development depend upon risk. Outdoor environments offer the best opportunities for children to get to grips with the unpredictable, engaging, challenging world around them.

(Tim Gill, 2007).

(Photograph acknowledgements - www.google.co.uk and www.getoutmorecic.co.uk).

What is Forest School?

This document aims to provide you with information about Forest School, safety matters and the benefits to children's development and well-being through attending these sessions. Please read this information, **including appropriate clothing to be worn**, and sign the consent form provided if you are happy for your child to participate.

Forest School originated in Scandinavia in the 1950's and proved so successful in terms of children's development that its reputation brought it to the UK. The Forest School's ethos and approach to learning is centred on children leading their own learning, gaining independence, self-esteem and self-confidence, the use of real tools and reasonable risk-taking, together with an appreciation of the natural world.

At Forest School we aim to offer children a wonderful opportunity to have fun and learn through valuable child initiated, hands-on play, in an ever changing outdoor environment. Forest School provides children with real experiences which are essential for young children's learning and is carried out all year round in most weathers, with consideration being shown to children's comfort and basic needs.

Play is child-led which allows children to take responsibility for their own learning at their own pace and where all participants are respected and offered equal opportunities. Activities are flexibly planned and offered in response to observations of individual children's interests and needs, identifying small, achievable steps which allow children to succeed and progress. Research suggests that attending Forest School is particularly beneficial for children who currently find it difficult to focus indoors, often increasing their interest and motivation to learn, which can gradually be seen reflected back indoors. Forest School provides links to the learning requirements set out in the Early Years Foundation stage.



Physical and emotional risky play



Exploration

This powerful approach encourages children's self-esteem and independence along with respect for others and the environment. It offers the freedom for children to work together and problem solve with the minimal amount of adult input possible, prompting valuable self-discovery. Staff and parent helpers volunteering to join a session will be provided with information on general Forest School procedures and how to get involved and appropriately support children's independence and questioning, once they are invited to join us.

Risky Play

Risks associated with Forest School can relate to the environment, the activities undertaken or to children's feelings and self-confidence. At Forest School these risks are carefully balanced with regards to children's safety and the benefits to children's well-being and self-confidence. Children benefit greatly from being allowed to play freely in a woodland environment, facing challenges and managing their own and other's safety. This could be through discovering the fun of playing in a ditch and learning how to clamber back up, balancing on branches, climbing trees or using real tools. All of these actions provide children with the opportunity to test their current knowledge and abilities whilst allowing them to experiment and step into the unfamiliar and unknown, gaining valuable confidence and self-belief as they go. At Forest School measures are taken to ensure the risks are reasonable and that activities are fun, challenging and achievable for all children with stringent risk assessments being carried out to ensure an environment that is safe enough.



Taking risks and building trust



Raising self-esteem

Environmental Risks

Regular risk assessments will be undertaken on the Forest School site starting with an initial site survey carried out by a suitably qualified tree surgeon to assess the safety of the site for the purposes of Forest School sessions, and any recommended work will be carried out. Regular safety checks of the site will then be carried out and recorded at the start of each term with a daily site check being carried out, and any necessary action taken to maintain the safety of the area, before entering the site for each day's session. Sessions will not take place in dangerous conditions such as very strong winds. Children will be instructed not to eat any plants and to avoid putting fingers near their mouth or nose until hands have been washed.

Tool Use and Fires

Activities involving tool use and lighting fires will be assessed and recorded on individual Activity Risk Assessment sheets and will be reviewed termly. Children will be gradually introduced to the different tools for craft activities and, if they choose to participate, will be closely supervised, generally on a 1:1 adult/child ratio. Once we feel confident that the children understand the safety rules regarding the log circle and fires a fire may be lit towards the end of a term. It will be lit within a designated area and the children will sit a safe distance away, unless invited to approach nearer for such activities as cooking, which will involve close adult supervision.

Children's Emotions

Some children may find the change in environment and freedom offered in the woodlands a little daunting so every care is taken to gradually introduce them to their new exciting surroundings. Using our knowledge of individual children and careful observation we will provide a fun environment in which they feel safe. This can be achieved by introducing a “1,2,3, where are you?” game to provide them with a means of quickly gaining support and attention whenever they need it, or such things as building secure ‘smaller spaces’ in the form of dens. Introducing challenging activities in small, achievable steps promotes children’s self-confidence/self-esteem.



A safe place to be

Important Information

The Forest School Leader is trained to Level 3 and holds a Paediatric First Aid certificate. At least one other member of staff will hold a First Aid qualification for early years.

Emergency procedures are in place in the event of illness, a major incident, or a missing child. Two working mobile phones will be on site at all times along with emergency contact details for parents/carers. We would ask parents to ensure the contact details provided are kept up-to-date at all times, and that any known allergies or illness are reported to the Forest School Leader prior to the day's session. Parents should telephone Saplings Nursery initially if they wish to make contact with Forest School staff.

To allow the children to enjoy the sessions they need to arrive at nursery with appropriate clothing for the day's weather. Providing your child with layers of clothing will keep them warm and allow removal of items if it becomes warm.

Please expect that the children might get muddy! Also, ticks like to live in woodland areas and can attach themselves to bare skin, and although highly unlikely, they can transmit Lyme disease. Wearing clothes that cover bare skin is advisable and the best way to avoid them, including long trousers and long sleeved t-shirts in the summer (this includes parents/carers if you have been invited to join the session). Please be vigilant after your child has attended a Forest School session and if a tick is found that night do not panic but follow the guidance on the attached leaflet and advise us about the discovery of the tick.

Toileting

There are no flushing toilets on site but a designated area and an appropriate procedure will be in place for toileting to ensure children's personal privacy and hygiene standards. Water, soap etc. will be transported to the site. However, we will only be away from nursery for a couple of hours and in reality most children are unlikely to need to use the toilet during that time.

Snacks and hand-washing

The children will be offered a healthy snack and a drink – hot chocolate in the winter and water in the summer. Children will, as always, be encouraged to understand the need for good hygiene.

Parent Partnership

We hope you are as excited as we are about our Forest School project and the opportunities being offered to the children. We continue to respect that as parents you are your child's first and most important educator and we aim to work in partnership with you to share and extend each individual child's personal experience and development. We aim to keep you up to date with Forest School activities and, with your prior consent, will provide photographic records of our adventures.

So please get involved by simply discussing with your child their experiences as they participate in the Forest School sessions or by volunteering to help at a session and attending a brief introductory workshop. Please provide any requested information promptly, keeping us up to date with contact details along with your child's current interests and any health issues.

Interesting Links

If you are interested in finding out more about the ethos and benefits of Forest School please speak to a member of staff, volunteer to come along to a session or take a look at the following websites.

The Get Children Outdoors website provides links to fun ideas and activities for families to do outdoors as well as providing links to serious Forest School research information – <http://getchildrenoutdoors.org/>.

The second website the Forest Schools Education site also provides links to several pieces of research including information about the benefits of 'risky play' to children's development and can be accessed through the <https://www.forestschools.com/> link.

By clicking on the risky play link readers connect to the Green Guide website, another site offering a variety of interesting features related to health and well-being, climate change and sustainability.