



## Health and Safety Policy

Last Review Date: September 2023

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually.

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### Statement of Aims

It is a matter of principle that Willow Banks Forest School personnel respect the policies of the organisation. However, there are particular issues relating to the woodland, the specialist tools used there and on the main site with lighting fires which are not included in the standard Health and Safety policy and for which this document is an addendum.

Forest school sessions offer learning opportunities for children and young people. Part of their purpose is to encourage participants to face new challenges and to learn to take reasonable risks. In order to do that safely, the adults involved must know their role and ensure that the necessary risk assessments are carried out regularly and thoroughly. Risks can rarely be eliminated entirely, but they can be reduced to a minimum without unduly limiting opportunities for children to explore and learn.

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### Objectives of the document.

- To identify the roles of those involved in Forest Schools, with respect to Health & Safety.
- To identify safety procedures so that they can be carried out effectively and without difficulty.
- To identify suitable and sufficient risk assessment processes to ensure that risks are adequately controlled.
- To develop effective communication systems throughout the setting.
- To ensure that all those involved in Forest School are aware of all relevant Health & Safety documents.
- To develop effective inspection/monitoring procedures to ensure compliance with Local Authority Health & Safety requirements.

## **The Legal Framework.**

### **(Health & Safety At Work Act 1974 and Regulations 1992)**

Employers must:-

- Assess the risk of activities.
- Introduce measures to control those risks.
- Tell their employees about the measures they have introduced.
- Follow LEA Guidance on Educational visits and journeys for arranging school visits ( but decisions about visits are usually delegated to the head teacher).

Employees must:-

- Take reasonable care of their own and others' health and safety.
- Cooperate with their employers over health and safety matters.
- Carry out activities in accordance with training and instructions.
- Inform the employer of any serious risks.
- Act in accordance with the teacher's common law duty (as a reasonable parent would do in the same circumstances).
- Follow the written procedure for arranging off-site visits, including obtaining the forest school manager's prior approval.

Responsibilities.

- LEA
- Maintain appropriate insurance cover.
- Have procedures in place to monitor and review safety of the Forest School site.

Director

- Ensure they are aware of Forest School procedures and objectives.
- Ensure they are informed of the health and safety procedures in place for Forest School.
- Be confident that the Forest School Manager is competent to monitor the risks.

They should also ensure that:-

- Adequate child protection procedures are in place.
- The risk assessment has been completed and appropriate safety measures are in place.
- The Forest School Leader or another member of teaching staff is competent to lead the activity and is familiar with the site.
- The adult: child ratio is appropriate.
- Parents have signed consent forms.
- Arrangements have been made for the medical and special educational needs of children attending.

- Adequate first aid provision will be available.
- The mode of travel is appropriate.
- Travel times, pick up and drop off points are known.
- There is adequate and relevant insurance cover.
- They have the address of the site and the numbers of the Leader's mobile phones.
- A school contact has been nominated, with details given to the group leader.
- The Forest School leader, teachers and school contacts have a copy of the emergency procedures, the names of everyone in the group and contact details for the next of kin.
- There is a contingency plan for any delays, including a late return home.

In order that Forest School sessions may be run safely, the Forest School Leader will:

- Have regard to the Local Authority Publication Outdoor Education, Visits and Off-site Activities
- Ensure that at least one appropriately qualified first aider is on-site
- Establish and maintain a safe and healthy environment by: Establishing, maintaining and evaluating appropriate procedures, policies and risk assessments, as set out in the Handbook
- Ensure the provision of sufficient information and instruction for all adults so that they can contribute to their own health and safety and that of the children they are working with
- Establish and be utterly familiar with, all emergency procedures including the reporting and recording of procedures
- Ensure that risk assessments and pre-site visits take place before children are permitted on to the site.
- Risk assessments will be held in the Health and Safety folder, located in the forest school office and a digital version on the forest school Google Drive.
- Ensure alternative plans are in place should a planned activity be compromised by health and safety concerns
- Ensure that Forest School Volunteer Rangers are aware of their responsibilities towards the children
- Investigate any accidents and use information gathered to inform future risk assessment and policy making
- Teach all members of the party to maintain their own and others health and safety by involving them in the risk assessment process at appropriate opportunities
- Maintain the legal adult-child ratio
- Ensure that safety equipment is in good working order and is used appropriately

**Forest School Leaders assume responsibility for the maintenance of the First Aid Kit, Kit Bag(s) and any tools brought into the Forest School camp.**

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Responsibilities of the Forest School Leader**

- To plan and lead all Forest School activities
- To ensure that planned activities are within the capabilities of the children taking part, amending plans to provide an inclusive curriculum in its broadest sense.
- To take responsibility for discipline during Forest School sessions (see Behaviour Policy)
- To have an up to date Outdoor First Aid qualification
- To ensure that all participants follow the Clothing Policy
- To carry out daily and dynamic risk assessments as described in the Risk Assessment Policy
- To assist with the toileting of children if they request help
- To ensure all Forest School policies are regularly reviewed and that review is informed by observations and developing knowledge of the Forest School setting

### **Responsibilities of Accompanying Staff and Forest School Volunteers**

- To take an active role in Forest School activities and assist with any discipline issues within the group (see Behaviour Policy)
- To assist with the walking of children on roads to off-site locations (see Walking On Roads Policy)
- To assist with the Forest School Leader in ensuring equipment meets safety standards and to report any concerns about the state of equipment immediately
- To assist the Forest School Leader in teaching children to maintain their own and others' health and safety
- To report accidents or hazards to the Forest School Leader immediately
- To take responsibility for making themselves aware of safety issues, such as the whereabouts of the first aid kit
- To provide their own suitable outdoor clothing and footwear

### **Responsibilities of the Children**

- To take personal responsibility for their own safety as well as the safety of others
- To listen to and follow safety information given to them
- To ensure that inhalers and epipens are carried by themselves in a bum-bag during forest school sessions
- To bring appropriate clothing and footwear to Forest School sessions

## **The Shelter**

We have a permanent classroom on-site. This allows for shelter during inclement weather, health and hygiene for handwashing. As well as a secure storage area for equipment.

## **Firesite.**

Normally a designated area for fires will be present within a Forest School site. Seating will be arranged for the children to sit on at a safe distance from any fires lit. The children and young people will be encouraged to walk around the designated area at all times and they will not approach any fires unless specifically supervised to do so. Water will always be available to safely extinguish fires and the fire site will be designed to reduce the risk of any spread of fire.

## **Toilets/Hand washing**

There are no toilets on the forest school site. Children and young people are allowed to use designated toilets in the main pavilion and are told how to do so with due care and consideration to hygiene, care for the environment and personal privacy. They must be escorted by staff at all times to and from the toilet, due to the risks posed by other groups using the facility..

There is running water, it is available for handwashing in the classroom and in the toilets in the main pavilion. Hand wash, towels and antiseptic wipes will also be available.

## **First Aid**

At least one adult will have the relevant first aid training and a First Aid Kit, along with relevant emergency equipment, which will always be readily accessible. There will also be a mobile phone on site and in the event of a serious accident the emergency procedures will be followed.

## **Weather Conditions**

Assessments of weather conditions will be taken prior to a visit and if the weather is too extreme the session will be cancelled. Where possible, alternative indoor provision will be arranged in the on-site classroom. If the weather deteriorates suddenly during a session, the adults will decide whether to leave the site, use the alternative classroom or arrange for students to go home (extreme flooding or snow). When windy and there is a danger of falling branches, the children will be taken to the classroom.

The participants are asked to bring Wellington boots and suitable warm/waterproof clothing. If possible the setting will provide them with any missing essential items. The nature of woodland means that Forest School sites are quite sheltered and most

will have a shelter on site. Participants will experience hot, cold and wet weather but this will harm no one if they are properly dressed. If cold, they will be more active in order to maintain warmth. In extreme heat, care will be taken to stay in the shade and plenty of water for drinking will be available.

### **Ground Conditions**

On some sites the ground conditions may present a higher risk and these will be assessed and dealt with accordingly, for example mud or steep slopes. Paths steps or even boardwalks may be constructed to avoid or reduce the risks. Discussions will also take place on how to safely access/cross/use such areas.

### **Vegetation**

The areas of woodlands used are checked for toxic plants and participants will be instructed not to pick or eat any plants. Areas of nettles, brambles and other potentially harmful plants will be cut regularly to open up areas for access, but some areas will be left uncut to support dependant wildlife.

### **Using Tools/Lighting Fires**

Participants will only be involved in using sharp tools/fire when the Forest School Leader deems that they are confident and competent at working in the woods. When tools such as penknives and small saws are used the younger participants will always be appropriately supervised. Fires will only be lit in the designated areas and again the participants will be appropriately supervised.

With older groups, tools will be used after individual risk assessments of each child have been carried out to determine the degree of supervision necessary. Children will always be in sight of an adult. Proper instructions will have been given and safety issues discussed prior to the use of any tools. Where appropriate, participants will use safety and protective gear such as gloves etc.

### **Forest School Leaders Personal Safety**

When working alone, i.e. when carrying out visual checks prior to site visits, a mobile phone will be carried and the landowners will be made aware of their intentions and whereabouts, if they do not appear within a reasonable period after the agreed time, and cannot be reached on their phone. Whilst in the woods with the children, the Forest School leader will usually be within sight of another adult

### **Risk Assessment**

A full and comprehensive site risk assessment will be conducted prior to the first visit to any new site. This will be done by the Forest School Leader and, if possible, in conjunction with a member of staff from the site setting. This risk assessment will be reviewed regularly. A visual check will be undertaken immediately prior to every session. Individual generic risk assessments will be used for the use of tools and some activities/actions. Individual activities will be risk assessed previously by the

Forest School Leader. Ongoing risk assessments will take place at various times during a visit – this normally consists of judgements and decisions made as the need arises, which will then be recorded after the visit.

Risks can be minimised, but they cannot be eliminated altogether, and health and safety concerns need to be balanced against the potential benefits of any activity. Children, young people and adults will suffer the occasional bumps, cuts and bruises which are a part of everyday life. The application of common sense will ensure that everyone is as safe as they can be, whilst enjoying all the physical and intellectual challenges of Forest School!