

Our Free Minds

Welcome Pack & Parents Agreement

1. Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to Our Free Minds. We are a consent-based, self-directed learning community for children and young people. OFM is intentionally designed as a mixed-age, low-demand environment where we respect each child's pace, preferences, needs and differences.

This information pack has been created to give families a clear, honest understanding of how Our Free Minds works before children join our community. Our experience has shown that clarity from the outset helps avoid misunderstandings and supports positive, trusting relationships between children, parents and facilitators.

2. Our Aims

At Our Free Minds, we aim to:

- Provide a safe space for children to explore what is interesting and important to them
- Build a community where children learn to understand their agency, experience friendships, and the freedom, responsibilities and boundaries that come with it
- Support learning by providing opportunities, resources, and facilitation by open and interested adults, supported by a flexible community structure in which their voices are heard

3. Activities & Daily Flow

There is no “typical day” at Our Free Minds. Activities change depending on the interests and energy of the group.

We usually begin with a voluntary morning meeting where members can share ideas, plans or requests. From there, children may engage in any number of activities, which may include for example:

- Creative and artistic activities
- Games and physical play
- Cooking and practical life skills
- Projects and collaborations
- Conversation and social time

- Quiet rest or independent play

4. Practical Information

Operating Hours

Days: Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays

Times: 9.30am - 3.15pm

Fees & Payments

Session cost: £27

We operate on a termly block-booking basis (or you can opt to pay by two instalments). Families need to commit to their preferred block booking arrangement (either two days or three days per week) for the whole term.

Our goal is to create a stable community with invested members. As such we are currently transitioning towards a commitment of two sessions a week minimum from our members.

Please refer to our Admissions and Fees Policy for further details about booking.

Contact Details

Registered Provider: Guy Asherson-Taylor

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL): Guy Asherson-Taylor

Email: guy@ourfreeminds.org

Phone: 07502337396

Trustee for Safeguarding: Cléa Sambrook

Email: clea@ourfreeminds.org.uk

If you need to contact us during sessions, use:

- Guy: 07502337396
- Sze Wai: 07877007012

5. Staffing

Sessions are staffed by our trained facilitators and supported by our team of volunteers. At least one facilitator is always present on site and all our facilitators are Paediatric First Aid trained.

6. Safeguarding Children

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is our highest priority.

- All staff and regular volunteers are DBS checked and recruited following safer recruitment procedures
- Staff receive safeguarding and child protection training
- Clear codes of conduct and risk assessments are in place

If you have a safeguarding concern:

- Speak directly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (Guy Asherson-Taylor).
- If the concern involves the DSL, contact the Safeguarding Trustee (Cléa Sambrook)
- Where appropriate, concerns may be escalated to external safeguarding agencies

Our full safeguarding and child protection policies are available on our website:

<https://ourfreeminds.org/mission-and-policies>

7. Information We Collect & Data Protection

We collect essential information before your child attends - to keep children safe and to meet legal requirements:

- Registration form
- Emergency contact details
- Medical and dietary information
- Medication consent/non-consent form
- Intimate care consent/non-consent form, if necessary
- Photo/video consent/non-consent form
- Local outings consent/non-consent form
- Signed parents agreement checklist (below) indicating you have read and understood our approach

All data is handled in line with GDPR regulations (please refer to our Privacy and Data Policy).

8. Complaints Procedure

We welcome feedback and aim to resolve concerns openly.

- Please speak to Guy Asherson-Taylor in the first instance
- If unresolved, concerns may be submitted in writing
- Complaints may be escalated to the Board of Trustees if necessary - please refer to our Complaints Policy.

9. How You Can Help Us Support Your Child

- Share updates about your child's needs or wellbeing - communicate openly with facilitators
- Aim to drop off by 10am, in time for attendance at the morning meeting
- Ensure timely collection
- Read and understand our policies

10. Community Focus and Parent Support

We aim to provide a variety of family activities beyond our group sessions, where the families of children can come together to connect and support one another, form or strengthen bonds within the community, and socialise.

In the past these events have included:

- **Family Walks** - making use of local outdoor spaces such as Savernake Forest, West Woods, Martinsell Hill and Coate Water
- **Seasonal Family Parties** at Halloween and Christmas, including accessible travelling theatre productions and bringing and sharing of food
- Annual family **Summer Camp Out Nights** - at the rented space in Burbage and an off-site camping weekend at Litton Lakes in Dorset.
- Coordinating **Family Trips** - for example, to the Newbury Lido, We The Curious Science Museum in Bristol, a local campsite by a lake for raft building and camp-fires, a science workshop at Baylab laboratories in Reading, a Plant and Seed workshop at Bowood House and Gardens, and a workshop and light show at Longleat House - helping our families to take advantage of discounted prices for home ed groups.
- **Family Chill Out Days** at the rented space in Burbage - giving time for families to relax and make use of the community's space and resources together.
- **Family Hut Cleaning Days** - inviting community members to come and help us take care of the rented space and our shipping container together.
- **Family Fundraisers** - for the last three years we have taken part in the Burbage Community Fireworks, with many families coming together to volunteer at the event and enjoy the incredible display. From time to time we organise other fundraising events and always appreciate support from our

community to come together, enjoy the time and hopefully raise some money for the charity along the way!

You are invited to engage in our community as much as you are able - it is what we all make it!

11. Feedback and Communication with you

We have various levels of feedback and communication with our parent community, to give you feedback about your child's day.

- **Daily Facebook Summary:** At the end of each session we create a group post (with photographs of children for whom we have consent) on our private Facebook Group for current parents. This outlines the highlights of our day so that you can see the types of activities we have been engaging in. Many of our parents like to use this information about their child's day for their LA reporting. We will email you the details of how to join this group.
- **Quarterly Parent Newsletter:** Four times a year we add a newsletter to our website here: <https://ourfreeminds.org/for-current-parents> - this page is where you can keep track of bigger plans and information about how the charity and community are progressing, as well as information about family events, fundraising events, staffing and other opportunities coming up or in review.
- **Informal chats** - At pick up and drop off, we are available for hand-over information about your child and to catch up on how they are doing in general.
- **Organised meetings or discussions** - For more complex issues or topics of concern, we will arrange a suitable time to communicate with you either in an online call, face to face meeting or in writing. We will allocate a particular team member to have those conversations with you, to ensure consistency of understanding.
- **Annual Report** - Every year we create an Annual Trustees Report for the charities commission, which gives an overview of our performance as a charity for the year including financial information, and this is available to parents on our website at the bottom of this page:
<https://ourfreeminds.org/mission-and-policies>
- **Policies** - All our policies are housed on our website so you can refer to them at any time here: <https://ourfreeminds.org/mission-and-policies>. These policies outline how we operate in critical areas from safeguarding to financial management and plenty in between!
- **Incident Forms** - Where your child has been involved in an incident that we feel you should know about, we will write a report about what happened and let you know our plan for following up on that incident. This will be emailed to you.

- **Accident forms** - Where a child has had an accident that required first aid we will report to you using an Accident Form by email.
- **Voice notes** - Where the accident is considered very minor (such as a small graze or scratch) or for other hand over notes such as the child's mood or wellbeing, we will let you know at pick up or via a voice note or text message at the end of the day.

12. Our Free Minds Ethos and Practice

Settling in

- We understand that settling into a new community can take time, and that every child's process will look different. To support this, we may offer:
 - Shorter sessions initially, gradually building up to full sessions
 - The option for a parent to stay with their child for a period (DBS check required; cost covered by the parent)
 - A shorter trial booking period (e.g. three weeks) followed by a review
 If you could think of other ways which would help your child settle in, you are welcome to discuss this with us, and we will see if we can accommodate.
- We do not pressure children to stay against their wishes. This aligns with our consent-based, self-directed values.
- You may have your own agreements with your children regarding how long they stay, but we will not enforce this agreement.
- If a child asks to be picked up early and requests our help communicating this, we will do so.
- We understand and are prepared that this could be a long, slow process. In our experience, respecting the child's pace has far better long term results than rushing, pushing or coercing in the process.

How Learning Happens at Our Free Minds

- Children take the lead in their own learning. Facilitators are present to support, help, and respond when invited.
- We do not evaluate the children. They are responsible for their own learning, which includes listening to their own heart, engaging in new tasks, getting help and making things happen, and deciding for themselves how successful their endeavours are.
- We see all areas of interest and play as an important and meaningful learning process.
- We do not lead children towards areas like literacy, numeracy or academic subjects. If they express they are interested in these areas, we will give them the help and support they need, just as we would do the same to any other areas of interest.

- Children may choose to do very little for periods of time; we respect this.
- At some point in the journey, they may feel bored and unsure what to do with their time. Boredom is recognised as a valuable process, and we do not rush children to fill it. We trust that over time they will learn how to move on from that state.
- Our Free Minds provides a self-directed learning environment, not a curriculum or programme of instruction. Our role is to support children's autonomy, curiosity, and wellbeing, not to direct or oversee their educational outcomes. We make no guarantees about what or when a young person will achieve any learning goals.
- As set out in law, regardless of how a child is educated, responsibility for a child's education remains with their parent or carer. If there are specific skills, knowledge, or experiences that you believe are essential for your child, it is the family's responsibility to ensure these take place. But in our experience, a great deal of learning happens at Our Free Minds - often in unexpected and meaningful ways.

Conflict resolution and community care

- Disagreements and conflicts are a normal part of community life and are seen as opportunities for growth rather than problems we should avoid.
- When a conflict arises, as much as possible we give the members space and time to handle it and find a way to set and adjust their own boundaries.
- When a young person asks for our help, or when intervention feels like it would be helpful, that begins with a conversation in which all parties are heard, with a consent-based approach.
- Some conflicts may take time and multiple conversations to resolve. We may take a break and come back to discussion in a few days. We may split the circle into smaller groups, or have one-to-one discussions with some members. Each situation is unique so we always play by ear and adapt our approach over time.
- We see resolving conflicts as a patient task. It takes time but it is worth it - we all learn tremendously through discussing problems and resolving conflicts.
- If we feel the conflict raises safeguarding concerns, or requires further support and the participation of parents in the wider discussion, parents will be informed and an incident summary kept.

Screen time

- We see computers and the Internet as useful learning tools and opportunities for children to equip themselves for the modern world. Many of our members learn how to read and practise collaborating with the others through playing computer games.

- Under our agreements, members are required to sign up and take turns to use the Group's devices. Our agreements may change over time, but the main principle is that the use of the computers is fair to all who want to have access to them.
- It is members' choice whether they bring their own devices to OFM or not, and whether they use them during our group sessions.
- Members who request to connect their devices to the Wi-Fi at OFM will need to complete an Internet safety certification.
- We do not enforce family screen-time agreements. However, if a child asks for help remembering to take breaks, we are happy to support them.

Food and Drink

- Cooking is a regular activity at OFM and is valued as an important learning opportunity.
- We aim to accommodate different diets where reasonably possible.
- Maintaining diets and preferences is a challenging balance in life, and we will facilitate this depending upon the need and preference of the individual. However, ultimately, food choices remain the child's responsibility and we do not police or report on food intake.
- Please inform us of any allergies or medical conditions that pose a serious and immediate risk. In such cases, we will work with families and the community to put appropriate safety measures in place.

Safety Supervision & Unsupervised Time

- We prioritise safety while respecting children's need for independence. We provide a grounds safety walk twice annually for all members in small groups, so that they understand the safety issues and the geographical boundaries.
- We have a number of safety training and certification processes for different skills, e.g. Internet safety, cooking in the kitchen without adult supervision, using the hot glue gun independently etc. These processes are in place to make sure our members understand the safety and risks related to these higher risk activities. When the training is completed, we continue to observe the activities and revisit the process if necessary. The certification processes are a means to foster independence as well as confidence. Even if the children obtained certain certifications, it does not guarantee that no accidents will happen.
- Unsupervised time is a core part of our approach. It supports trust, creativity, peer relationships and emotional wellbeing. We believe members thrive when they feel trusted rather than constantly monitored.
- Self-directed learning requires room to think and follow curiosity. Quiet, unsupervised moments often become the space where confidence, creativity, and self-awareness take root.

- Some of the most meaningful learning happens between peers. Unsupervised time allows relationships to develop naturally and gives members the chance to practice cooperation, communication, and problem-solving together.
- Everyone needs moments where they are not being watched. Respecting privacy supports emotional safety and helps members feel at ease and valued in the community.
- Unsupervised does not mean unattended. Our staff are always present on site and intentionally move through the space so support is never far away. Members are also encouraged to approach adults at any time, building confidence in both self-reliance and help-seeking.

Off-site Excursions

- From time to time we leave the scout hut to explore the localities, e.g. we go for local walks, go to the local shop or spend time in the local playground. We believe the option of unsupervised off-site excursions is beneficial to members who are relatively independent, since it provides them the opportunity to explore freedom and take responsibility for their safety.
- We supply parents with consent forms for such off-site excursions, either for your children to go only when accompanied by a DBS checked grown-up, or for them to go without an adult (always as a minimum with another child).
- In either case, children must sign out before leaving the site.
- Clear agreements are made each time regarding destination, group size and return time.
- Facilitators retain discretion to decide whether unaccompanied excursions are appropriate on a given day.

Money, Belongings and Trading

- Children are responsible for their own money and belongings. How the children spend the money they bring to OFM is their own choice. You may wish to set a limit to the amount of money your children bring to OFM, or have an agreement on this with them. Again we do not police or report on the children's spending.
- It is also the children's choice whether they offer or accept each other's money and treats. Sometimes members bring things like toys or books to OFM to sell or barter. Sometimes they create things or provide services to try to make money. Sometimes they lend or give each other things. We see these as great opportunities for them to learn about value and to practise negotiating and problem-solving.
- If a child has repeated issues from these activities or asks for our help, we will be there to offer support. We will have open discussions and together come up with ideas to help them.

Sensitive language and topics

- We recognise that families hold different values around language and topics such as sex, drugs, violence or swearing, or pretend games which involve these topics.
- At OFM, we don't treat these areas as taboos. We aim to create a space where children can explore ideas safely, legally and with consideration for others.
- We work hard to ensure that children understand they can be open and honest about these issues, and that they can trust that grown-ups at OFM would not judge or evaluate them because of these behaviours.
- From time to time we have discussions about these issues and hear everyone's opinions. In these discussions, we always remind members that OFM is a mixed-age environment, where members of different ages or backgrounds may feel very differently about these topics or certain words. The aim is always to increase people's awareness of how their language or actions could affect others.
- OFM is **not** designed as a highly controlled environment where we would ban swearing or pretend games which involve particular topics. Instead, it is a place where young people feel safe to discuss or explore any topics in a legal and considerate manner, a place where members of different age groups and backgrounds learn over time to respect one another's needs and feelings.

Agreements within your family

- If you have agreements with your child around learning goals, screen time, food, routines or behaviour, please understand that these are agreements between you and your child. We are not able to enforce these on your behalf. The only exception is where an agreement relates directly to the immediate safety of your child or others.

13. Parent Agreement

By signing below, you confirm that you:

- Have read and understood this Parent Welcome Pack
- Understand and agree to the ethos and practices of Our Free Minds
- Accept the shared responsibilities outlined above

Parent/Carer Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Facilitator Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Document control and review

This Parent Information Pack & Parent Agreement is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains accurate, transparent, and aligned with Our Free Minds' values, safeguarding responsibilities, and regulatory requirements.

- **Owner:** Our Free Minds Trustees
- **Approved by:**
- **Date adopted:** 13.01.2026
- **Last reviewed:** 13.01.2026
- **Next review due:** 13.01.2029

Families will be notified of any significant updates. The most current version of this document will always be available on the Our Free Minds website or on request.

- End -