



Forest School for Assistants and Volunteers

What is Forest School?

- It's a **long term** process – with a weekly or bi-weekly continuum over a minimum of 6 weeks.
- We are outside in all weathers through the seasons (excepting storms and high winds)!
- Activities, reflections and just being foster **empathy and connection** with nature, ourselves and each other
- It's **learner centred** – through following the children's interests and allowing children to direct their own learning, we aim to build confident, creative, resilient learners
- **Risk taking** - both emotional and physical. Children are supported to take reasonable risks in the physical environment and there is a culture of reflecting on and understand emotions, feelings in order to boost self-esteem and self-confidence

What will we be doing ?

Structured tasks as well as supporting the topic, foster collaboration and communication as a group, environmental awareness, and learning through doing. The emphasis is **process** rather than outcome. Adults may be asked to support a specific group or activity. Children may need ideas or support to get started and are more likely to do so independently when they can observe good role models – which we as adults can be for them.

Play: As the term progresses, the children will begin to direct the session and move into free play. Adults supporting the session may be asked to observe play as it happens, making observations supporting children to problem solve,

helping them communicate with each other if necessary and intervening if play becomes unsafe.

Skills: the Forest School Leader will introduce some basic practical skills that may include tool use such as the bow saw. Gaining experience with tools has the potential to increase self esteem and autonomy. The children and assistants will be shown how to use tools safely. The Forest School Leader will over see any tool use involving knives however if you are comfortable to use a saw there will be simple tool guides in the tool area to remind you of the important considerations. Tools must be over seen by an adult and returned to the tool bag when not in use.

Basecamp Each session beginnings and ends with a circle in which we discuss boundaries, agreement, and end with a reflection.

How you can help!

- **Be playful!** Run with them, laugh with them, have fun with them! Model how we can be!
- **Encourage participation:** Gently encourage children to participate but don't force.
- **Be flexible!** Although we pre-plan sessions we are always ready to engage in child led activity or interest when appropriate. If children are taking the initiative they are fully engaged and are learning how to concentrate, work together, deal with frustrations and achieve!!
- **Support** children to understanding physical and emotional **boundaries** based on our basecamp agreement: looking after each other, themselves and their environment. Try to resist making suggestions or directing children particularly where they might be disagreeing about something. If a disagreement arises, asking questions could be more helpful in getting them to think about how a disagreement can be solved. Please encourage them to talk about how they feel and to empathise with others and help them show respect for others and the site – considering nature and not causing unnecessary damage.
- **Support risk taking** – to enable children to grow into confident, responsible adults they need to learn how to judge risk themselves. Children are allowed to get dirty, use certain tools and climb to head height in Forest School. Trust your common sense to prevent

accidents and intervene and speak to the Forest School Leader if you are unsure how to support a situation.

- **Emotional support:** some children find it difficult to relax into playing and being in the woods and may find it difficult getting dirty. As adults we model how to be and encourage and allow children the opportunity to talk about how they feel, always making much of the things that they are confident about and allowing them to teach you. It will give them a huge boost.
- **Observations** – your input is invaluable in helping every child get as much out of Forest School that they can; please do let the Forest School Leader know if children are cold, hungry, thirsty or frustrated!
- **Toileting:** children use the toilets at school before leaving however if you have a current dba authorized by the school, you may be asked to accompany a child to the compost toilet in the yard if they need the toilet during the session (you may accompany your own child). Please communicate to the Forest School Leader that you are leaving with a child.
- **Basecamp Area/Fire:** This area is a calm area in which we begin, end and do quiet activities including firelighting. Once the fire is lit in our basecamp area it will be necessary for one adult to stay in this area at all times. The area must be kept clear of trip hazards such as bags, coats, belongings.
- **Drinks and Snacks** – your help handing out wet wipes and drinks during the reflective circle would be appreciated.
- **Hygiene** – wet wipes, water container and soap are provided in the basecamp area for handwashing. Children must not eat anything they find unless it is with an adult for a designated activity.
- **Emergency Procedure/Incidents**
A copy of the emergency procedures is available in the school office, please read if you are attending a session as a volunteer. The first aid kit is in the emergency back pack which will be in the basecamp area at all times. Any first aid treatment or situation with children becoming upset due to conflict must be documented as an incident which you may be required to sign as a witness.

Safeguarding

Children are often more relaxed at Forest School and may decide to share personal information with you. It is important that in this situation children are listened to and valued but where appropriate please follow the school

safeguarding policies and procedures. Remember anything that makes you feel uncomfortable should be discussed with a member of staff.