

## As a volunteer helper what do I need to know?

We have forest school so that our children will:

- learn to love and respect nature
- be adventurous and confident
- recognise and understand their own emotions
- manage their own learning

The children learn through play, it is important therefore that you :

- Are playful yourself
- Ensure children feel safe
- encourage participation
- Allow children to lead you and let them be in control
- Allow children to repeat activities
- Stay present - no mobile phones on show or chatting for more than a few minutes with other adults
- allow the children to be alone if they wish to be
- Allow safe risk taking

**Open ended questions :** when talking with the children please use positive language that encourages conversation and thought. If, for example, a child asks “What flower is this?” a closed answer would be “A daisy”. An open answer would be “Does it remind you of anything? What would you call it if you are going to name it?” You can then have a conversation about the flower in which the child can use language and imagination, and then help them to research it in one of our field guides.

**Emotional support:** some children may find it difficult to relax outdoors and many may struggle with getting dirty. It is vital to be a good role model – try to be positive about being outdoors, getting dirty, feeling the thrill of the cold, warmth of the sun etc. Talk about what you are doing and how it is making you feel. Let the children teach you, it gives them a huge emotional boost to feel like an expert. Gently encourage the children who are hesitant about joining in, be sensitive to their emotions, they may simply need to observe for a while before they're comfortable.



“And above all watch with glittering eyes the whole world around here because the greatest secrets always hidden in the most unlikely places those who don't believe in magic will never find it.”

- Roald Dahl

“The more risks you allowed children to take, the better they learn to take care of themselves”.

- Roald Dahl

“The future will belong to the nature-smart: those individuals, families, businesses, and political leaders who develop a deeper understanding of the transformative power of the natural world and who balance the virtual with the real. The more high-tech we become, the more nature we need.”

- Richard Louv



## FOREST SCHOOL VOLUNTEER



Thank you for volunteering to help at Forest School, we hope you get as much out of it as the children do. This guide is to give you a bit more of an insight into Forest School and how to keep yourself and the children safe in the woods. In order to volunteer you will be required to hold a current DBS check which the school can arrange. In order for us to plan and run successful sessions we would need volunteers to commit to attending on a regular basis.

Whether you are a member of staff, a parent or a person from the local community, thank you for helping with Forest School.

If you have any questions, or concerns please talk with the Forest School Leader.





### Safe risk-taking

To enable children to grow into responsible, confident adults they need to learn how to judge risk. Children are allowed to get dirty, use sharp tools, climb trees and so on. These activities are hazardous but we manage these hazards so that the risks taken by the children are acceptable.

By taking risks at Forest School children will learn valuable lessons and will be more able to judge risks for themselves as they grow older and become less dependent on adults. As helpers you need to read and follow the risk assessment and use your common sense to prevent accidents.

Use positive language and try not to use vague language such as 'be careful'. Words like 'you're doing really well, just check that branch, can you find a wider one for you to climb onto?' are constructive and encouraging safety assessment from the children.

**Emergency procedure:** A copy of the emergency procedure can be found in the Handbook, please read before our session. There will also be a copy in our emergency rucksack. It gives details of our location using coordinates and what to do in an emergency. Your leader will also share this with you at the beginning of each program.

**Tree climbing and den building:** Children must make an adult aware that they want to climb a tree (they may need reminding). They are allowed to climb no higher than two and a half times their own height. Please stay close enough to keep an eye on them without being too aware of you.

Large branches are to be carried by two children at either end or can be dragged. Show them how to check their den is safe for them to use and is standing strong.

**Den Building:** when children are den building, we will have done a risk assessment together for dangers to be aware of. Help children check that their den is secure before they climb into it, by checking for wobbly vertical supporting logs, eye-level twigs. Dismantling dens may also need your supervision, help them to do this in a calculated way.

**Staying within the site:** We will establish a boundary with the class each Forest School session. Children are reminded that boundaries are to keep them safe. Please encourage children to stick to boundaries and remind them if they need.

**Hygiene:** please make sure the children do not eat anything we find in the woods (even if you know it is safe to do so). The children wash their hands before snacktime and after using the toilet. staff members only to accompany children to the toilet (unless it is your own child).

**Tool Use:** The Forest School Leader will demonstrate safe use of tools and give a tool talk (there are 'safe tool use' cards in the forest school bag for a refresher). If you are not confident with tools, please always let the leader know. Always walk with tools pointed away and down from your body. When working with tools, we stay within the designated tool zone, always remain at least two arm's-length from each other and we always wear a protective glove on our non-working hand. When finished please remind the children to return the tool to the toolbox or bag.

**The Log Circle and FirePit :** We do not walk inside or across the log circle at any time. When children arrive or leave the log circle they must step over a log to sit on it. The only time that the children are allowed inside the long circle will be when we are doing fire striking as an activity or cooking on the fire. In both these circumstances the child must be seated on a log and be invited by an adult to enter. No more than four children are to be within the log circle at any one time. This is a strict rule.

**Respect:** remind the children that we respect nature as well as each other. We do not snap off branches or disturb habitats. If we collect insects to observe we use the most gentle way possible to preserve them and return them to the place they were found. We do permit picking living plants, but just a 'caterpillar pinch' (a tiny bit). The Forest School Leader will share any poisonous plants. Children will be reminded that berries and mushrooms of any kind mustn't be touched, but can be observed and identified.

**First Aid:** the forest school leader and at least one other adult are first Aid trained. Please do not attempt to administer first aid, but seek the help of the forest school leader, TA or class teacher if the situation arises. Please use your whistle to get help quickly.