

Forest School

Forest School is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.

Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and compliments the wider context of outdoor and woodland education.

The Forest School Association



An adult's guide to Forest school



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School
Provider

www.forestschoollassociation.org

What is Forest School?

Forest School is a programme developed in Sweden in the 1950's.

It concentrates on delivering education in an outdoor environment. A study carried out concluded that children who experienced learning in an outdoor setting were more balanced, more socially developed, had deeper concentration levels and better coordination. Today, outdoor learning has shown to increase attainment and attendance levels in students. It is also shown to increase self-esteem, confidence and communication skills.

Forest School is a practice that gives young people the opportunity to develop self-learning through natural play and positive outdoor experiences. A gradual introduction to learning is facilitated by trained professionals who guide young people by way of experiential learning. Forest Schools help young people to understand the importance of nature and the environment. Young people can learn about tree and plant life and how to protect them, fire safety and camp fire cooking, shelter building, safe use of tools, woodland crafts and more.

Working with fire and tools allows young people to manage risk and take responsibility for their learning, themselves and the people around them. This responsibility in turn leads to young people gaining a greater sense of self-worth, self-confidence, self-esteem, leadership and communication skills. Forest Schools can be used from early years right up to KS5 and beyond.

What is the role of the Forest School Practitioner?

The role of the forest school leader is to offer a safe and secure learning environment suitable for the needs of all. Every young person will be different with different needs so it is important to be able to make your forest school area as versatile as possible.

The forest school leader, along with schools, parents, and key workers work together to identify the needs of a group and the individuals within the group and plan a programme that works for all on all levels. Forest school will tackle all aspects of emotional and social wellbeing including: self awareness, social skills, motivation, empathy and how to manage feelings. Working in this way will help young people to learn tolerance, compassion and empathy showing emotional intelligence and help with developing new skills, concentration levels, independence and communication showing increased self esteem.

The forest school leader is constantly observing and will be ready to adapt sessions to meet the needs of the group.

The forest school leader is there to guide, nurture, facilitate, keep safe, encourage and reinforce positive behaviour towards each other and the environment.



How can Forest School help with holistic development?

Forest School can aid holistic development by helping with nonverbal communication, where language may be a barrier, look at emotional development by focussing on the care of the environment including animals and plants, teach a range of skills using tools to help physical development.

Forest School can help with:

- ☐ Social development– being able to build positive relationships with others and be a valued part of community.
- ☐ Physical development– using our bodies and muscles to develop, learning how to use objects such as utensils and drawing materials. Being aware of and using our senses.
- ☐ Emotional Intelligence– being aware of oneself and the feelings of others around us.
- ☐ Spiritual development– understanding what is right and wrong and being responsible for the consequences of our actions.
- ☐ Language skills– being able to communicate verbally and non-verbally with peers. Learning communication skills.

Forest School can be a liberating experience full of surprises as young people discover things about themselves they never knew. All these practices are a journey which encourages complete holistic development by offering alternative ways to learn, grow and develop by hands on experiences.

“If your emotional abilities aren’t in hand, if you don’t have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can’t have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far”. ~ Daniel Goleman ~

How can Forest School encourage appropriate behaviour and promote learning and development?

Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning

- ☐ A learner-centred pedagogical approach is employed by Forest School that is responsive to the needs and interests of learners.
- ☐ The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building.
- ☐ Play and choice are an integral part of the Forest School learning process, and play is recognised as vital to learning and development at Forest School.
- ☐ Forest School provides a stimulus for all learning preferences and dispositions.
- ☐ Reflective practice is a feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.
- ☐ Practitioner observation is an important element of Forest School pedagogy. Observations feed into 'scaffolding' and tailoring experiences to learning and development at Forest School.

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How can forest school help to develop self esteem and emotional intelligence?

Forest school allows children and young people to use their initiative, problem solve and work with others. These skills help develop empathy and respect for others, respect for the material and tools that are used. It allows young people to grow and develop at a pace that is right for them: there are no targets, timescales with forest school. Small achievable tasks gives young people a sense of achievement, not failure.

Working with a range of materials and tools helps with concentration levels, coordination, independence and communication. Working with nature helps develop empathy, creativity, imagination and self awareness. All these skills will work towards developing increased self esteem and emotional intelligence. In working with young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, forest school helps these young people to develop trust by being allowed to manage themselves appropriately, it enables pride by giving young people the chance to see progress in themselves.



The importance of play

Article 31 of the U.N. Convention of Rights of the Child states that 'every child should have the right to rest, play and leisure and that governments must promote children's and young people's involvement in the arts'.

Play is defined as:

- ☐ Children enjoying themselves
- ☐ Being creative, using imagination
- ☐ Being independent
- ☐ Expressing themselves
- ☐ Staying healthy and active
- ☐ Managing risk and boundaries
- ☐ Building relationships
- ☐ Developing a sense of community.

Outdoor play can help young people get the physical activity they need and maintain healthy weight as outlined in the Early Years Framework. Active play, including running, jumping and climbing help contribute to the prevention of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and can also aid mental health problems.

Forest school encapsulates all aspects of free play (in early years), active play (primary years) and adventurous play (secondary – young adult).

**"The young of all creatures cannot keep their bodies still or their tongues quiet: they are always wanting to move and cry out; some are leaping and skipping and overflowing with playfulness and pleasure, and others uttering all sorts of cries".
(Plato, 360 BC).**

Links to the curriculum

- ☐ English— story telling, learning new words through identifying flora and fauna, using nature in poetry, developing language through exploration, developing communication through team work.
- ☐ Mathematics—measuring trees, counting and producing data for mini beasts, shapes in nature.
- ☐ Science—food chains, pond and woodland mini beasts, life cycles, methods of creating fire.
- ☐ ICT—producing data on flora and fauna, recording project work
- ☐ Art, design and technology—photography, natural art, working with clay and mud, willow sculpture, making dens, camp fire cooking, using tools, making boats.
- ☐ Music—making instruments, recreating animal and natural sounds.
- ☐ Geography—maps, looking at different woodlands and environment and seasonal changes.
- ☐ History—history of local woodlands and nature areas.
- ☐ Physical education—walking, tree climbing, obstacle courses.

Sessions can be developed for any key stage from early years to KS5.

