General Aims, Ethos and Principles of Forest School Sessions

Forest school allows young people the opportunity to learn through experiencing an outdoor or woodland setting on a regular basis. The learning is an all 'hands on' approach that hopes to develop the young person's confidence and self-esteem.

Through planned and risk assessed activities and sessions the young learners get the opportunity to develop a positive and inquisitive relationship with the Natural World.

Forest school offers a Holistic approach to learning where the Learners can develop to their full potential.

Regularly experiencing the outdoor environment encourages:

Individual development of fine and gross motor skills

A sense of self-motivation and inquisitiveness to lead their own learning

An increase in self-awareness and independence

An Improvement in language and communication skills

An increase in engagement and focus in given tasks

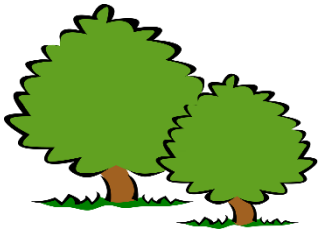
An increase in self-awareness and confidence

An improvement in general health and physical fitness

A deeper understanding and empathy for the natural world and for their peers

The ability to recognise and manage their own risks

A positive attitude to learning.



Forest school has six principles, which were agreed by the UK Forest School community in 2011.These are given below:

Principle 1: Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.

• Forest School takes place regularly, ideally at least every other week, with the same group of learners, over an extended period of time, if practicable encompassing the seasons.

• A Forest School programme has a structure which is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners. This structure should clearly demonstrate progression of learning.

• The initial sessions of any programme establish physical and behavioural boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.

Principle 2: Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

Whilst woodland is the ideal environment for Forest School, many other sites, some with only a few trees, are able to support good Forest School practice.

• The woodland is ideally suited to match the needs of the programme and the learners, providing them with the space and environment in which to explore and discover.

• A Forest School programme constantly monitors its ecological impact and works within a sustainable site management plan agreed between the landowner/ manager, the forest school practitioner and the learners.

• Forest School aims to foster a relationship with nature through regular personal experiences in order to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices in staff, learners and the wider community.

• Forest School uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and to encourage intrinsic motivation.

Principle 3: Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners

Where appropriate, the Forest School leader will aim to link experiences at Forest School to home, work and /or school education

• Forest School programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of the learner.

Principle 4: Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

• Forest School opportunities are designed to build on an individual's innate motivation, positive attitudes and/or interests.

• Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners, and dependent on completion of a baseline risk assessment.

• Any Forest School experience follows a Risk–Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

Principle 5. Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

Forest School is led by qualified Forest School practitioners, who are required to hold a minimum of an accredited Level 3 Forest School qualification.

• There is a high ratio of practitioner/adults to learners.

• Practitioners and adults regularly helping at Forest School are subject to relevant checks into their suitability to have prolonged contact with children, young people and vulnerable people.

• Practitioners need to hold an up-to-date first aid qualification, which includes paediatric (if appropriate) and outdoor elements.

• Forest School is backed by relevant working documents, which contain all the policies and procedures required for running Forest School and which establish the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.

• The Forest School leader is a reflective practitioner/facilitator and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too.

Principle 6. 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

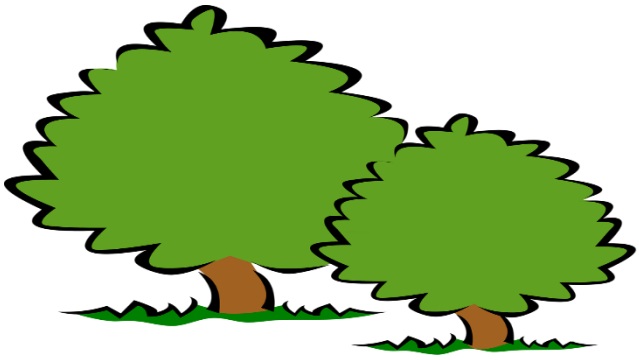
• The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building.

• 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.

References

www.forestschoolassociation.org