



# What is Forest School?

"Forest School is a child-centred inspirational learning process, that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is a long-term program that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting.

Forest School has a developmental ethos shared by thousands of trained practitioners around the world, who are constantly developing their learning styles and skills to support new and imaginative learners. Its roots reach back to the open-air culture, friluftsliv, or free air life, seen as a way of life in Scandinavia where Forest School began. It arrived in the UK in 1993 and has grown from strength to strength since then."

- Forest School Association, <https://forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school/>

Quality Forest School is delivery which holds to all six key principles that shape and govern the Forest School ethos. There are many forms of outdoor education and all have enormous value, however, Forest School is unique in its reach, delivery and effect. These six principles are:

- 1 Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
- 2 Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a lifelong relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- 3 Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
- 4 Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- 5 Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- 6 Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners, who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

"It is only when we see these six principles working together do we truly see the value of Forest School. Underpinning our principles are some positive core beliefs. These can be summarised as, learners are all:

- equal, unique and valuable
- competent to explore & discover
- entitled to experience appropriate risk and challenge
- entitled to choose, and to initiate and drive their own learning and development
- entitled to experience regular success
- entitled to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people
- entitled to develop a strong, positive relationship with their natural world

Forest School's learner-centred approach interweaves with the ever-changing moods and marvels, potential and challenges of the natural world through the seasons to fill every Forest School session and programme with discovery and difference.

Making each session and every experience a valuable one.

## Best Practice...

Criteria for good or best practice is listed below, directly correlating to the six key principles

- 1
  - 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
- 2
  - 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.

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- 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 and spiritual aspects of the learner.

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- 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.

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- 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 and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too.

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- 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.