

# WILDHEARTS

## FOREST SCHOOL HANDBOOK



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# What is Forest School?

Forest School is a unique experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed, and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment. Children engage in motivating and achievable tasks and activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers. Children will work with tools, play, learn and begin to understand the boundaries of behavior, both physical and social.

They will grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world.

The Forest School concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at pre-school children, where it was found that children who had attended forest school then arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in groups effectively, generally had high self-esteem and a confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped them to raise their academic achievements. A Forest School encourages children to:

- ! develop personal and social skills
- ! work through practical problems and challenges
- ! use tools to create, build or manage
- ! discover how they learn best
- ! pursue knowledge that interests them
- ! learn how to manage failures
- ! build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk
- ! develop practical skills
- ! understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- ! explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- ! regularly experience achievement and success
- ! reflect on learning and experiences
- ! develop their language and communication skills
- ! improve physical motor skills
- ! become more motivated
- ! improve their concentration skills
- ! improve their communication
- ! explore the world through all the senses available to them

# Our Environment

Our site is situated within the heart of Bulwell, surrounded by houses and the local primary schools. Our unique Forest School woodland is predominantly made up Scots Pine and Cherry trees, with Ash, Lime, Sycamore, Maple and Horse Chestnut, all planted approximately 35 years ago.



The woodland is located within Buwell Forest Garden, a 3 acre Community Garden, with raised vegetable beds, wildflower meadows, medicinal garden, wildlife pond and cob oven. This enriches our Forest School by providing opportunities to explore bio-diversity and life cycles, and to promote healthy eating.

We recognise the potential impact of woodland activities on the natural environment and endeavour to ensure that the work that we do encourages everyone to develop a high level of respect for the natural world, helping to maintain the sustainable use of the woodland and enhancing its biodiversity and ecological value.

During woodland activity sessions we educate Our Wildhearts that through learning about and looking after the woodland we learn much about the interconnection between nature and humans.

We hold environmental sustainability as a core value. When resourcing our activity sessions or running training we are mindful of reducing waste and of the need to re-cycle and re-use rather than buying new. Through doing this we hope to demonstrate and encourage a wider respect for the environment.



## Our Compost Loo

Our toilet isn't plumbed in, so has no flush. Instead, after use, you add a cup of sawdust and nature turns the waste into compost for our fruit trees.

## Who are we?



**ADELE**  
Level 3 Forest School Practitioner



**BABS**  
Level 3 Forest School Practitioner



**JO**  
Level 3 Forest School Practitioner



**DAVID**  
Forest School Volunteer

## **What to expect...**

Forest School focuses on SPICES - Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Emotional and Spiritual development. We provide opportunities for children to develop resilience, risk taking, resourcefulness, relationships, responsibility and independence whilst learning a wide range of new skills and having an enormous amount of fun.

Our woodland and surrounding area with wildlife pond and veg growing beds is a fantastic place to connect with nature and ourselves, a calming environment, free from the stresses of everyday life. We have a wide range of resources including a composting toilet and a pizza oven! A typical day might see us building dens, digging trenches, whittling sticks to toast marshmallows, playing hide and seek before going off on a nature hunt. The children generally leave us with muddy clothes, leaves in their hair, enormous grins on their faces - bubbling with excitement about all they have been doing.

### **Clothing, Kit and Subs**

Each participant will need a filled water bottle and £1 subs each week. They are also welcome to bring a snack (we will also provide snacks as part of an activity, such as damper bread, toffee apples, smores)

### **Spring/Autumn**

Comfy durable trousers which you don't mind getting muddy. (we will likely kneel on floor) One top, long or short sleeved depending on weather. A warm jumper or fleece. Wellies or walking boots (which you don't mind getting wet and muddy!). Waterproofs, depending on weather

### **Summer**

Comfy trousers which you don't mind getting muddy. (we will likely kneel on floor) One top, long or short sleeved depending on weather. One warm jumper or fleece. Sun hat, Sun cream & insect repellent in back pack if you have a preference. (we recommend applying before forest school)

### **Winter**

Comfy warm trousers which you don't mind getting muddy (we will likely kneel on floor) Base layers – thermals One top, long sleeved 1 warm jumper. 1 zip up fleece or similar that can be worn over jumper Warm coat. warm woolly socks, (one in back pack) Wellies or warm winter walking/snow boots that you don't mind getting wet and muddy. Warm scarf Warm hat and gloves

# How do we manage risk at Forest School

Children climbing high up a tree, playing out of sight of adults, cooking over an open fire and whittling with sharp knives are all common sights at a forest school, but which to outside observers, can appear dangerous. By allowing children to participate in activities that incorporate managed risk, we build confidence in the short term and allow children the opportunity to form essential skills needed to prepare for adult life. Not only this, but it also builds resilience, which is a key factor in supporting good mental health throughout childhood and adult life. So-called risky elements like fire, tool work and exploring are part of what makes forest school exciting for children – and are great tools for their development.

At forest school we talk about 'managed risk' and 'acceptable levels of safety' because we recognise that eliminating risks completely would be impossible, boring and counterproductive. Knowing about risks, understanding your own limits and being able to manage them for yourself is all part of growing up. There is strong evidence to suggest that children who are wrapped in cotton wool and not given opportunities to do risky things for themselves, may take unnecessary risks as teenagers when they get a chance to push the boundaries away from the eyes of supervising adults.

Forest School Leaders are qualified to Level 3 in Forest School Skills, which means they have been trained and assessed to demonstrate:

- ! An understanding of child learning and development
- ! Awareness of the impact on the environment and individual
- ! Knowledge of woodland plants, animals and how to care for them
- ! Practical outdoors skills such as fire lighting, tool use, cooking, knots and how to safely teach to others
- ! The ability to ensure all activities are managed to an acceptable level of safety, whilst understanding the relationship between risk and developmental benefit
- ! Paediatric First Aid trained.

## Tool Procedures

### Bow Saw

Bow saws are used to cut wood that is too large to be cut with loppers and should be used by 2 people.



Safety Checks: (to be carried out by FS Leader prior to session)

- ! Tightness of blade/cutting teeth are serviceable.
- ! Condition of the handle
- ! Safety guard is present and serviceable.

Teaching Points:

- ! The bow saw is to be carried as a suitcase, with the teeth facing behind the carrier.
- ! When not in use, the protective case is to be fitted.
- ! If the saw is being passed to another person, the handle is to be offered towards them, not the blade.

- ! When using the saw a glove must be worn on the non-cutting hand only. The non-cutting hand should be positioned between the blade and the hand.
- ! Partner mirrors this, both in the respect position
- ! Use “to me, to me” to get into a rhythm
- ! To start cutting, complete three full pull backs of the blade to create a groove. The whole blade should be used.
- ! The blade should be kept level with the floor, not pushing down at the front of the blade and let the blade do the work.
- ! Storage: The saw should be maintained by wiping away any debris by pinching away from the blade, ensuring that saw is dry, oil is applied before storage.

## Loppers

Loppers are to be used for cutting wood that is too large for secateurs and up to approximately the size of an adult thumb.



Safety Checks: (to be carried out by FS Leader prior to session)

- ! Visual inspection for blade sharpness.
- ! Check the locking bolt is secure.
- ! Check the security of the grips.

Teaching Points:

- ! When carrying the loppers, they are to be held against the side of the body with the hand on the lower handle preventing the tool from opening. The blade is to be pointing forward with the bend of the beak down.
- ! When passing the loppers, they are to be offered handle first.
- ! Stand in a strong position; feet shoulder width apart and one foot slightly forward.
- ! No-one should be within your ‘blood bubble’ (complete arms distance plus tool away from the user in all directions).
- ! Storage: Remove debris by brushing/pinching away from the blade. Wipe clean. Must be stored in a lockable containers.

## Secateurs

Secateurs are to be used for cutting wood that is up to approximately the size of an adult little finger



Safety Checks: (to be carried out by FS leader prior to session)

- ! Visual inspection for blade sharpness.
- ! Check the safety catch is serviceable.
- ! Check the security of the grips.

Teaching Points:

- ! When passing the secateurs, they are to be offered handle first.
- ! When cutting, ensure the blade is being pointed away from the body.
- ! No-one should be within your ‘blood bubble’ (complete arms distance plus tool away



from the user in all directions).

- ! Storage: Remove debris by brushing/pinching away from the blade, Wipe clean and dry. Must be stored in a lockable container

### Fixed Blade Knife



Fixed blade knives are to be used to whittling, cutting or carving.

Safety Checks: (to be carried out by FS Leader prior to session)

- ! Security of blade to handle.
- ! Sharpness of blade.
- ! Safety guard is serviceable.

Teaching Points:

- ! The user is to be seated with either both legs turned to the side opposite the knife or open leg stance leaning forward with elbows on knees.
- ! A firm grip on the handle.
- ! Straighten the arm holding the blade only ever taking the blade away from the body.
- ! No-one should be within your 'blood bubble' (complete arms distance plus tool away from the user in all directions)
- ! Storage: Remove debris by pinching away from the blade. Wipe clean. Sharpen when necessary. Must be stored in a lockable container in alarmed premises

### Bill Hook



The bill hook is to be used to chop or split wood.

Safety Checks: (to be carried out by FS Leader prior to session)

- ! Ensure the security of the handle and there are no splinters.
- ! Check the security of the blade and that the eye is fitted correctly.
- ! Check the blade for sharpness.

Teaching Points:

- ! When passing it, it is to be offered handle first.
- ! Use respect position.
- ! Ensure its handle is secured in the hand but with a relaxed hold to allow the wrist to flex without the upper arm taking all the work.
- ! Ensure the wood is secure on a tree stump which is level and secure before chopping.
- ! When used for splitting wood using a mallet, eye contact must be made between the individuals before striking.
- ! Communicate with partner - "how many blows?, soft or hard? Ready?"
- ! Storage: Remove debris by brushing/pinching away from the blade. Wipe clean and dry. Sharpen when needed.

# Behaviour

## **Wildhearts (& our FS leaders) aim is to:**

- Develop an awareness of acceptable behaviour in an outdoor environment.
- Encourage participants to take pride in their everyday activities & develop a sense of pride in their achievements.
- Build on self-esteem, independence and motivation.
- Reinforce collaborative behaviour
- Promote awareness of other people's feelings, respect and care for each other.
- Have a consistent approach to expectations at Forest School.
- Create a positive & Happy environment to encourage caring, nurturing and helpful behaviour
- Place the needs of the children first.
- Provide positive role models for children and volunteers.
- Promote effective relationships in which all are accepted, valued and treated equally.
- We end each day on a positive.

## **For the environment we will:**

- ! Promote respect for equipment, tools and their maintenance.
- ! We always place a high value on our surrounding environment.
- ! We provide activities to understand & encourage sustainable living
- ! We practice a no litter policy & offer a 'leave no trace' experience.
- ! We demonstrate conservation and good practice in a natural environment. (eg, not to damage vegetation unnecessarily & use sustainably sourced materials)

Good and helpful behaviour is positively encouraged at Wildhearts Forest School, with much emphasis on courtesy and consideration for others and the environment. We recognise that children respond well to praise and encouragement and therefore we use it freely to promote good behaviour. We will also prevent bullying by reinforcing our inclusion policy and ethos, in which bullying is regarded as unacceptable.

## **The participants/children will:**

- ! Listen carefully and always follow instructions concerning safety.
- ! Develop an acceptable attitude towards the environment and one another.
- ! Pick up their litter.

- ! Be helpful to one another.
- ! Stay within the Forest School boundary.

**If action is required, the following steps may be taken:**

Re-engage the child into Forest School activities

Talk to the child and remind them of the importance of acceptable behaviour and what we are trying to aim for.

Give the child time away from the activities to reflect.

If the behaviour continues more than 3 times, the child's parents will be informed.

If behaviour continues during 3 sessions, or the behaviour places them or other children at risk, a letter will inform parents and the child will miss one or more future sessions. If a child's actions are consistently placing themselves or others in danger, the following will happen:

- ! Parents will be invited for a chat with the Forest School Leader, as to how they may be solved and try to offer a fresh start.
- ! Where unsafe behaviour cannot be resolved, the child will need to be excluded from Forest School sessions.
- ! Where behaviour has affected the safety of others, an incident report will be completed by the Forest School leader and retained on file for either the parent or school to consider further action.

Accidents and mistakes happen..... Participants will never be put down or chastised over accidents. Instead we will encourage a more confident approach by discussing what went wrong and demonstrating a better way of doing things.

## **Safeguarding Children Policy**

Wildhearts has a duty by law and as a responsible organisation, to take reasonable care of children who participate in our activities at Forest School. Wildhearts aims to adopt the highest possible standards and take all reasonable steps in relation to the safety and welfare of children. The term safeguarding is used to define actions taken to protect children and vulnerable groups from harm. This harm might come from adults or other children. We are committed to ensure all members of the Forest School staff and volunteers understand what safeguarding is and why it's important. We are committed to ensuring that strict recruitment procedures are in operation and employees provide a DBS check. Volunteers will not be left unsupervised.

Through the long-term process of Forest Schools, we aim to build trust and meaningful relationships between the adults and the children. Therefore, disclosures can be more likely. In the event of a disclosure, any members of the team who finds themselves with children telling them something which concerns them, will follow these steps;

- ! Listen, without interrupting, especially if the child is talking freely
- ! If questions are needed to clarify the situation, ask simple open-ended questions so not to influence the communication.
- ! Remember that we must not promise to keep a secret.

- ! All team members must report to the designated senior person immediately and provide a written report to hand over to the agency.

The team members responsibility in terms of referring concerns ends at this point, but they may have a future role in terms of supporting or monitoring the child, contributing to an assessment or implementing child protection plans. Wildhearts will provide a framework for inter-agency communication and effective liaison. Wildhearts is fully committed to meeting the requirements of safeguarding so that children and vulnerable adults can enjoy the opportunities to develop their full potential.

## **Inclusion Policy**

Wildhearts actively promotes the inclusion of all children and adults into Forest School sessions. We will ensure that the opportunities for participation are available to everyone, irrespective of race, gender, ability, religion, sexual orientation or age.

- ! Inclusion is part of the Happy Habitats ethos which runs through all of the activities at Forest School
- ! Forest school is child led and enables children to develop their independent learning skills at their own pace.
- ! Using reflection, we talk about how we feel and our emotions. We learn how to be aware of who we are.
- ! Forest School activities encourage children to work together and trust each other. This develops social skills, how to share resources and confidence to try new things.
- ! Story telling allows us to share historical cultures, practices and beliefs.
- ! We give all participants of Forest School the time and space to learn and enjoy activities in a way that is appropriate and individual to them.
- ! Every child will be valued, enjoyed and celebrated.
- ! Discrimination will always be challenged, and intervention will be considered if a child has been excluded from play by another child.
- ! Activities and resources are accessible for all. We will offer a range of sizes of tools, seating and things to be active on.

(\* Please note, access in this woodland is limited for wheelchairs. In some cases, with help we can overcome this obstacle. Otherwise we will look to arrange group sessions that cater directly for limited mobility. We would like to discuss the options to have a more hands on approach where required, this may require more staff)

## **Publicity and Consent**

We regularly document our Wildheart sessions and share photos and videos on our social media platforms, so parents can see what fun their child has been up to. We also share images with our funders and partners to ensure we can still deliver affordable sessions. We ask permission at the beginning of your childs time with us, and if you would rather not have your child included, or you change your mind at any time, just let us know.