THE WOODLAND WORKS

Forest School Handbook

What is Forest School?

Forest School is a person-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.

"The process helps and facilitates more than knowledge-gathering, it helps learners develop socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually. It creates a safe, non-judgemental nurturing environment for learners to try stuff out and take risks. Forest School inspires a deep and meaningful connection to the world, and an understanding of how a learner fits within it. Our approach to risk means that learners constantly expand on their abilities by solving real-world issues, building self-belief and resilience. We believe that risk is more than just potential for physical harm, but a more holistic thing, there are risks in everything we do, and we grow by overcoming them. Forest School, therefore, helps participants to become, healthy, resilient, creative and independent learners."
https://forestschoolassociation.org/what-is-forest-school

Through holistic development every child, young person and adult is valued, and the Forest School programme allows each individual to learn in their unique way and encourages them to extend their learning in a natural way.

At the heart of Forest School, the key principle is:
Be kind, look after Nature
Be kind, look after Each Other
Be kind, look after your self



Statement of Aims and Ethos

At The Woodland Works, we hold to the six key principles that are at the heart the Forest School, providing the best opportunity for everyone to learn and grow in a holistic and sustainable way.

1. **LONG-TERM PROCESS**
   We provide a long-term process of regular sessions that promotes, well-being and learning, rather than one-off or infrequent visits. The programmes are developed through the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and reviews which links each session to help develop and extend curiosity and learning over time.
2. **NATURAL SETTING**
   Our Forest school takes place in a semi ancient woodland at the foot of Mynydd Du. Nature provides us with endless resources, and not just sticks and mud, that nurtures the development of a lifelong relationship between the learner and the natural world, re-connecting and remembering that we too are nature. We regularly monitor the ecological impact and work within a sustainable woodland management plan to ensure Nature is nurtured.
3. **BUILDING COMMUNITY**
   We aim to create a thriving community that is driven by the learning needs and motivation of the learners. Having shared learning experiences nourishes support for everyone.
4. **HOLISTIC LEARNING**
   Our aim is to promote a holistic, non-judgemental, safe environment that helps to develop the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and spiritual aspects of learning. Our role as forest school leaders we can link forest school experiences to home, work and education.
5. **RISK TAKING**
   The opportunities of growth and development are built on the learners existing knowledge and skills. As learning develops, tools and fires are introduced when it's appropriate. These risks follow a Risk to Benefit process managed by us and tailored to the learner's developmental stage.
6. **QUALITY LEADERSHIP**
   We are Forest School Level 3 practitioners and aim to run our sessions in small groups that enables a high ratio of leaders to learners. We continuously maintain and develop our professional practice, forever expanding our knowledge – as we are learners too. We have current Outdoor First Aid and Food Hygiene qualifications, we have safeguarding training and valid DBS checks, and we review all of our working risk assessments regularly and keep the relative policies up to date.

Daily Routine

- **Meet group at the carpark – Check that all are appropriately dressed for the conditions.**
- **Walk to site, usually with a game or nature exploration along the way.**
- **Gather around the fire circle for snacks/drinks, and to check in with the group to discover their expectations and wishes, and to explain what we have planned to offer today.**
- **Morning activities and free play.**
- **Gather around fire circle for lunch and to check in with the group again.**
- **Afternoon activities and free play.**
- **Closing circle to share stories of the day, allowing children and parents/carers time to reflect and feedback, which helps us plan future activities.**
- **Walk back to the car park to finish.**

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Health and Safety

The health and safety of all participants is central to everything we do within a Forest School programme. We encourage children to play an active part in undertaking risk assessments in the language we use and the discussions we have. The ethos of Forest School instils in our children the ability to take measured risks, appropriate to their age and developmental stage, and to carefully consider the repercussions of their actions.
All our Forest School leaders are qualified level 3 leaders, have a valid DBS check, hold a current emergency outdoor first aid certificate and are fully trained in risk assessment. Risk assessments are maintained and evaluated at regular, seasonal intervals throughout the year. Our site is assessed, prior to every session, and risk assessments for activities are completed and available as working documents for use by all staff and volunteers; we keep first-aid equipment at the site. Any accidents that occur are dealt with by a qualified first aider and recorded appropriately on the accident form. First-aid boxes are located in the leader's backpack and in the shed at the forest school site, treatment is carried out by a Forest School leader (trained in outdoor first aid) who then records it on the accident form. The contents of the first-aid kit are maintained by the Forest School leader. Any accidents or incidents are investigated by the Forest School leader and information that is gathered is used to inform future risk assessment and policy making. The Forest School leader/s carry a charged mobile phone which remains switched on throughout the session. The mobile phone signal is checked at the start of each session.

Some of the activities the children may participate in are 'higher risk' activities (such as tree climbing, low ropes, campfire cooking or tool use); these are done under controlled conditions with close supervision and are only available to the children once it is felt they have a good understanding of the risks and benefits and are able to adhere to safety agreements. Children are encouraged and supported in recognising and managing risk for themselves through real-life situations and experiences.
Tool use such as sawing and whittling is taught on a 1:1 basis, and once the child gains a level of competence this can be reduced based on the age of the child and their experience level. During the session the Parental/emergency contact details for each child are kept in a folder in the emergency rucksack. At the end of the session the folder is kept in a secure box.

Site Risk Assessment

Site Risk Assessments are carried out on a seasonal basis or after particularly bad weather incident. In the assessment the Leader will identify the natural hazards and boundaries of the landscape, the woodland structure of canopy, shrub, field and ground layers. As its seasonal the Leader will identify areas that need to have a 'rest' to minimize any impact on the areas, or sites that need special care in case of nesting birds, insects or breeding woodland creatures.

Daily Site Risk Assessment

The Forest School Leader will check the site at the beginning and end of each day the site is used. Checks on the woodland structure for new hanging dead wood that's beginning to become unstable, rubbish – especially sharp objects such as glass, cans, broken fencing wire. The 'base camp' is checked in case it's been misused in between sessions. The Forest School Leader will be looking for any environmental impacts, recognising the signs of flora and fauna that the groups

need to be aware of, e.g. poisonous plants. At the end of the session the Leader will always check that no rubbish has been left behind and that all traces of Forest Schools are kept to a minimum.

Activity Risk Assessment

During planning the Forest School Leader will identify any hazards of the activities and reduce them by using safety procedures that are set out in the policies. This makes the activity as safe as possible. This assessment is also dynamic – meaning that it can change, for example if the group is too boisterous for a tool activity, then the activity can be changed to suit the energy levels of the group.

Dynamic risk assessment

During every session, the Forest School leader and other adults are continuously assessing risk in real time – this is dynamic risk assessment. It is the on-the-spot judgement that allows us to say "yes" to a child who wants to climb a particular tree, build a den somewhere new, or try a new use for a tool, even though that exact activity is not covered by an existing written assessment.

The leader considers: what are the benefits? what are the foreseeable risks? what controls can be put in place straight away (where, with whom, with what supervision and PPE)? and what the leader will do if it goes wrong. If the residual risk is too high, the activity does not go ahead, and the child is offered an alternative. Significant dynamic decisions are recorded in the session notes and may then be written up as a new Activity before the next session.

Activities at Forest School

For full details on all the Tool and PPE please see the Tool Risk Assessments

Tools

When the children are confident in their woodland environment, the use of tools can be introduced. The benefits of using tools are numerous: following instructions, assessing the risks while using the tool, creativity, language, numeracy, physics, and of course fun. All tool work is relative to the age and ability of the children, young person and adult and can range from making 'wood cookie' necklaces to spoon carving, even making a woodland go-cart. The forest school leaders are solely responsible for the tool work and volunteers who work alongside the leader must ensure to follow all the safety protocols and work under the guidance of the leader.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is always readily available and is the first point of safety for all who are using the tools. PPE includes cut resistant gloves, ensure the learner is wearing strong, sturdy footwear, hairbands if it needs tying back and no jewellery is going to get in the way. On rare occasions Eye protection and safety helmets are provided if the group is going to embark on any overhead tree work, such as coppicing.

- **In case of an injury all forest school leaders are qualified outdoor first aiders and carry first aid kit in their bags at all times.**

Fire

Please see our fire risk assessment

Fire is a central and meaningful part of Forest School practice. Used safely, with respect and clear agreements, fire offers children a wealth of learning opportunities that no other activity quite matches:

• It offers a real, tangible experience of risk that children learn to assess and manage for themselves.

• It is a powerful focus for community: gathering around the fire to share food, stories and conversation builds connection and a sense of belonging.

• It supports learning across many areas – science (combustion, fuel, materials), maths (counting sticks, sorting by size), language (vocabulary, storytelling), and physical development (collecting and processing wood, using fire-lighting tools).

• It introduces a key bushcraft and life skill and connects children to a long human tradition of cooking, warming and gathering around fire.

• It enables campfire cooking – a sensory, hands-on experience that supports healthy eating, food awareness and turn-taking.

• Practical fire safety experience builds genuine confidence; children who have learned to behave safely around fire are safer everywhere.

We aim to ensure that everyone participating in sessions with fires does so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. During unaccompanied sessions, fires are only used once children are familiar with the setting and the Forest School leaders feel they are able to adhere to agreements about fire safety.

In case of severe accident or fire emergency call 999 and request appropriate service. This information is kept as a laminated sheet stuck to the tool shed door at the forest school site and in the leader's emergency kit bag.

The details to provide are:

In an emergency call 999

Ask for the relevant service, give details of the incident, your name and contact number.

Our address is

The Woodland Works

Opposite Dan y Coed

Llangadog

SA19 9TB

(Phone – 07407 136516)

Car park entrance

What3Words – beans.fearfully.exhaling

Grid Reference – 737 225

Secondary entrance (with 4x4 access)

What3Words – exits.shopper.translate

Grid Reference – 737 224

Forest School site

What3Words – edges.blast.clouding

Grid reference – 739 223

Accident & Emergency Procedures

fire emergency procedure:
Designated Fire Safety Officer: Georgie Bailey,
Assistant: Lobby Bailey

Emergency Procedures

In case of fire in the car park:
Fire Assembly Point: Entrance gateway or secondary gateway.

In case of fire at Forest School Site:
Fire Assembly Point: Compost Toilet Area

If a fire occurs elsewhere on the land main fire assembly point is the entrance gateway in the car park.

Call 999 or 112 for the emergency services

The Forest School Leader, Georgie Bailey, is the designated fire safety officer, Lobby - assistant. Before and after each session check the fire area and fire safety equipment – fire blanket and bucket, extra emergency water. Seasonal checks of fire assembly point signs and areas.

- **In case of fire, lead the group to the nearest designated muster point for safety.**
- **Emergency services access point is the Woodland Works car park on the A4069, see info at top.**
- **Register of all people on site, medical forms, phone numbers for emergency contacts to be kept in the Emergency Bag.**
- **If medical emergency –this includes drowning and severe burning, the FS Leader needs to assess situation and administer immediate 1st aid.**
- **One adult to stop activity, tools safely put away in designated container and fire extinguished safely; keep the group together at Base Camp.**
- **One adult to telephone 999 for emergency services,**
- **If a child goes to hospital the FS Leader is to remain with group while the parent or one adult accompanies child with emergency services to hospital. Give full details to emergency services and supporting adult.**
- **Complete Accident Form (RIDDOR)**

All accidents, major and minor, need to be recorded in an 'Accident Book' and a copy of all RIDDOR forms must be kept.
If someone has been severely injured i.e fracture, unconscious, and has needed medical assistance and has been affected by the injury/occurrence for more than 7 days then RIDDOR (Reporting Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995) needs to be informed. It is the Forest School Leaders responsibility to complete the Accident Book and The Health and Safety Officer, Georgie Bailey to complete the RIDDOR forms. (In case of FS Leader having the injury the assistant, Lobby Bailey, will need to complete the procedure.)

Safeguarding, disclosures and accusations
General principles at The Woodland Works

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for The Woodland Works is Lobby Bailey who has completed accredited level 3 safeguarding training. The deputy DSL is Georgie Bailey level 2.
Any safeguarding concern should be reported to the DSL as soon as possible (and in any case within 24 hours). The DSL is responsible for liaising with external agencies.
Children Services Referral Team – 01554 742322
Outside of Office Hours: Delta Wellbeing (24 hours) 0300 333 2222
Adult services Advice and Assessment Team – 0300 333 2222

For full details please see The Safeguarding Policy.

Keeping children physically safe.

• We introduce the children to physical boundaries of the forest school site at the beginning of a session. They are told that if they want to explore further, they must be accompanied by a member of staff.
• If a stranger comes into the site the children are advised to immediately tell the Leader/ staff and not to engage in conversation with them. The uninvited visitor will be asked to leave immediately, if they do not comply the police will be called.

Staff and Volunteers Safe

• Volunteers/supporting adults always work in a minimum of two; there will never be a volunteer working on their own with a single child.
Volunteers/supporting adults always stay within sight or sound of staff members.
Volunteers/supporting adults are never left alone with the group; the Forest School leader is always present.
• All volunteers/supporting adults receive a safeguarding induction from the Designated Safeguarding Lead of The Woodland Works, Lobby Bailey.
• Children are supervised at all times: 'supervision' means that at least one member of staff can see or hear the children at all times.
• Forest School leaders avoid being alone with a child wherever possible. Where 1:1 contact is unavoidable (e.g. comforting an upset child), it takes place within sight of another adult.
All staff and volunteers at The Woodland Works are DBS checked.

Why disclosures may happen at Forest School

Forest School is, by design, an environment in which children spend long periods of unhurried time outside, talking and playing alongside trusted adults. This open, calm environment can make it more likely that a child will choose to share something that is worrying them, including something that Procedure for managing a disclosure.

If a child begins to disclose something that is or could be a safeguarding concern, the adult will:

• Stay calm and listen. Do not interrupt, do not react with shock or judgement, do not promise to keep what is said a secret. If the child has not yet started to disclose but the adult senses they want to, find a quiet but visible place to sit together.

• Use TED prompts only (Tell me, Explain to me, Describe to me) – never leading questions. Ask only what is necessary to understand whether the child is in immediate danger and to be able to record what they have said.

• Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling, explain that you will need to share what they have said with the person who can help keep them safe, and explain who that person is (the DSL).

• As soon as possible after the conversation – and on the same day – make a written record using the child's own words wherever possible. Do not paraphrase or interpret. Record date, time, place, who was present, what the child said and what was said back. Sign and date the record.

• Pass the record to the DSL immediately. If the DSL is the subject of the concern, pass it to the deputy DSL or directly to the Carmarthenshire local authority.

• Do not discuss the disclosure with any other staff, volunteers or parents (including the child's own parents if there is any reason to think they may be implicated).

• The DSL will, without delay, contact the local authorities, and follow their guidance. If a child is in immediate danger, the police will be called on 999.

• All records relating to a safeguarding concern are kept in a separate, locked location an shared only with those who need to know basis.

Allegations against staff or volunteers

If an allegation is made against a member of staff or a volunteer: The allegation is reported immediately to the DSL (or, if the allegation concerns the DSL, to the deputy DSL).

• The DSL contacts the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officers) within one working day for advice.

• The person against whom the allegation has been made is not informed about the details of the allegation by The Woodland Works, and may be asked to step back from sessions while the allegation is investigated.

• All actions, conversations and decisions are recorded in writing and kept securely. Employees may also contact the (LADO)

Confidentiality

It is our intention to respect the privacy of children and their parents and carers. We aim to ensure that all parents and carers can share their information in the confidence that it will only be used to enhance the welfare of their children.
'Share with informed consent where appropriate and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information.

Records and registers

At the Woodland Works we keep the minimum personal information necessary to run our sessions safely. This includes:

- **Booking records: name and age of child, name and contact details (email, phone) of parent/carer.**
- **Session sign-in sheets: child name, the responsible adult on the day, an emergency contact number, any medical or dietary information disclosed for the day, photo permission for the day**
- **Individual Health Care Plans, where a child has a significant ongoing condition. These contain medical information and are held with explicit parental consent.**
- **Medication records: each administration of medication on a session, signed by two adults.**
- **Accident/Incident records.**
- **Safeguarding records (where there has been a concern).**
- **Photographs taken during sessions, where consent has been given.**

All records are kept securely. Paper records are stored at the registered home address of the Forest School leader in a locked box. Electronic records are stored on a password-protected device with cloud backup. Records are kept for the period required by law (typically the duration of the child's attendance plus 3 years for general records, longer for safeguarding records) and then securely destroyed.

Use of photographs and videos

Forest School staff often take photos of the children at play, to support our planning and assessment and for promotional reasons. Permission to take photographs during sessions, and for these photographs to be used on social media and in marketing materials, is sought via the sign-in sheet prior to each session. Children for whom we do not have permission to include in photographs will not be included. All photographs are stored securely and anonymously in line with our GDPR policy; if parents request that their data be removed, all photos will be deleted. Any identifiable photographs (clear photos of the front of faces) are not stored elsewhere and are subsequently deleted. Photos may be shared with parents or used in promotional materials including on our website and social media sites. Children's names will not be given in any publication.

Parental consent

As well as photo consent, parents are asked to sign the following consents on the booking form and confirm them on the sign-in sheet at every session:
Consent for the child to attend Forest School and to take part in the activities described in this handbook (including supported risk-taking, fire and tool use as appropriate to age and stage).
• Consent for the Forest School leader to seek emergency medical treatment if the parent cannot be reached.
• Consent for any prescribed medication brought to site to be administered as set out in the Medication and medical needs procedure.
• Confirmation of any allergies, dietary requirements and behavioural needs.
• Acknowledgement of the cancellation procedure.

Equal Opportunities at Forest School

At Forest School we will always endeavour to:

- **Promote a positive, empathic and value creating ethos that celebrates and embraces the diversity of race, religion, ethnicity, ability and gender.**
- **To value everyone as an equal.**
- **To show understanding and accommodate all the different learning styles.**
- **To use different forms of communication, verbal, non-verbal, signs and symbols so that everyone is included.**
- **Support anyone who maybe suffering from discrimination, gain advice from experts to respond in a positive way.**
- **Suitably challenge any stereotypical judgements to broaden awareness of the kaleidoscope of differences and everyone's uniqueness.**

Behaviour and Bullying at Forest School

Bullying is a deliberate, aggressive and repeated action carried out with intent to cause harm or distress to others. Young children are keen observers and more likely to copy behaviours which mimic the actions of others, especially the actions of people they have established a relationship with. These are learned behaviours rather than premeditated behaviours that requires addressing. The Forest School leader would approach the situation calmly, stopping any hurtful actions, acknowledging the feelings of those involved, gathering information, restating the issue to help children reflect, regaining control of the situation and helping the children to resolve the situation themselves.
With older children, who may be cognitively capable of bullying, the approach remains similar – the Forest School leader approaches the situation calmly and with empathy, bearing in mind our motto of "presume a cause". If necessary, children can be accompanied and removed from the group in order to calm down and, if appropriate, helped to reflect on what has happened.

Any aggressive behaviour by children towards other children will result in a Forest School leader intervening immediately to challenge and prevent escalation. Should any behaviour become a cause for concern regarding bullying, or should any child make an

allegation of bullying, this will be investigated by the Forest School leaders, who will listen to the child/ren, keep factual records of incidents, arrange to have a restorative conversation with all children involved (if appropriate), continue to monitor the situation and inform the parents of the children involved.

The Leaders and staff will:

- **Create a positive environment, which encourages and reinforces caring, nurturing and acceptable behaviour towards each other, the environment, the equipment and tools.**
- **Build positive relationships with the children that shows respect and equality.**
- **Clearly define and reinforce boundaries that show acceptable standards of behaviour.**
- **All adults must consistently model high standards of behaviour themselves.**
- **Place the needs of the children at the centre of the FS programme to minimise failure and maximise success.**

How do we deal with bullying at FS?

- **We will intervene to stop the child/children harming others**
- **We will explain to the child/children doing the bullying why their behaviour is inappropriate.**
- **We will help and support the child/children who have been bullied.**
- **We will help and support the child/children who do the bullying in a positive manner so their needs can be met.**
- **We will only praise behaviour that is positive and acceptable.**
- **We will discuss the bullying discreetly in confidence with the parent and work together to promote a more positive attitude to stop the bullying.**

Lost/Missing Children

The first few sessions at Forest School the Leader will ensure the children become familiar with the site in a variety of ways that are fun and promote safety.

- **Begin the Forest School sessions by exploring the site together, point out the natural boundaries and areas of risk, talking about them and how to keep safe.**
- **Set the boundaries by playing games so they become familiar with their environment and where they are allowed to go.**
- **Express that it's good to stay within eyesight of the leader and other adults.**
- **Play 1,2,3, Where Are You – and teach them 1,2,3 'Over Here' response and relate it to when people are lost. If it's used often then it'll be remembered if it's really needed.**

In the unfortunate event of a child or young person missing the Forest School Leader will:

- **Stop any activity and re-group.**
- **Take the register of all children and adults at forest school,**
- **If child is missing gather the remaining group at a muster point and keep together.**
- **Adults to search for missing child, if they're not found within 5 minutes, phone the parents/carers/school and they will proceed to phone the police**
- **Keep the group safe and continue to search**

Procedure for uncollected child

If parent/carer does not collect their child at the end of the session the following procedure is carried out

- **The child will be reassured and kept safe at the Woodland Works**
- **2 members of staff will remain with the child**
- **Parent/carer will be contacted to ascertain reason and time delay before collection**
- **Emergency contact will be phoned if parent/carer unavailable and collection arrangements made.**
- **If no contact with parent/carer or emergency contact is made within 1 hour staff will contact the local safeguarding team - Central Referral Team on 01554 742322 (during office hours). Outside of Office Hours: Delta Wellbeing (24 hours) 0300 333 2222**

Cancellation

The session will be cancelled if there is severe weather forecasted such as high winds above Force 7, thunderstorm, severe snow fall, flooding, or if there aren't enough staff to support the children.
The Forest School Leader will advise the parents that it's not appropriate to take the students out to forest schools in such conditions.

All the contact details of the parents and guardians – mobile phone numbers, emails and land line numbers to inform them of the cancellation will be kept in a folder in the leader's rucksack.
Please see our Booking and Cancellation Policy

Toileting and Hygiene at Forest School

At The Woodland Works we have an outdoor 'tree bog' composting toilet. During unaccompanied sessions children are supervised as appropriate when going to the toilet; we support their independence and are respectful of their privacy. The leader will ensure all children know where the toilet is and how it works. All children will inform a member of staff or volunteer if they need to use the toilet facilities, and this person will monitor their safe use; older children may use the facility independently. If an adult accompanies a child to the toilet, they must not enter the toilet with the child and must remain within sight of other staff at all times

There is a bucket of fresh water with a bottle tap for running water and soap outside the toilet. Hand drying is air drying during the summer months, winter months a clean towel will be provided. Anti-bacterial gel is provided.

Food Hygiene at Forest School

Cooking around the campfire is a favourite activity at Forest School and the fire safety rules must be adhered to as well as good hygiene standards.

- **There is a bucket of water and soap to wash hands and anti-bacterial hand gel before any food preparation or eating and drinking.**
- **Wipe down the preparation table and chopping boards with a suitable anti-bacterial spray.**
- **Bring only enough food to cook that day as there are no facilities to keep food fresh.**
- **Only vegetarian snacks are cooked during the group sessions.**
- **Take all remaining food, ingredients or scraps and rubbish home at the end of the session.**
- **In the case of toasted marshmallows have '10 big blows before eating' rule to avoid burning mouths.**
- **It's advisable to have enough cold water or milk to cool down any hot drinks served, particularly for younger children to avoid burnt tongues.**

Signing Page – Acknowledgement

This page is to be signed by all staff, regular volunteers and (where applicable) parents/carers whose children attend Nature of Learning Forest School. By signing below you confirm that you have read this handbook and agree to support and follow the policies and procedures it sets out. Name Role (parent / volunteer / staff) Signature Date

Name	Role (parent/ volunteer/Staff)	Signature	Date