What is Forest School?
Your Questions Answered!

Where did Forest School originate?

Originating in Sweden in the 1950s, forest schooling was soon adopted by Denmark for their early years provision. In the mid 1990s students from Bridgewater College Somerset visited Denmark and set up the first British Forest School. The concept is now gaining momentum and many Local Education Authorities are embracing the idea.

What are the benefits of Forest School?

Benefits observed in our children are:

- A freedom to learn with hands on experiences in the natural world.
- An inspirational process to develop confidence and self esteem
- Time to take risks and assess risks for themselves.
- Learning in an informal environment at one with the great outdoors.
- Exploration in the way nature intended through curiosity and question

What happens at Forest School?

Forest schools vary. Our preschool children walk a mile to local woodland in all weathers (90 % off road.) This increases stamina, understanding of their environment and how to manage themselves safely en route.
Once at school the children have a forest routine of setting up the tarpaulin den for rain cover, deciding their limits of play with 'boundary bows' and making the fire square which is the hub of the camp.
Once the fire is burning bright the children get on with chosen or directed activities perhaps climbing dead trees, labelling trees and leaves, hunting for bugs or whittling wood for marshmallows later. Some simply enjoy singing round the fire helping to prepare lunch for when the others return hungry. Sessions run from 9.30am to 1pm twice a week February to November.
Our teaching is based on the Montessori Curriculum For Life and works towards the government's Early Learning Goals.

What qualifications do staffs have?

- All Forest Sessions have a fully qualified leader. Our leaders trained to level 3 with the Sussex Wildlife Trust. The Handbook produced on the course is available in the office at all times.
- All other staffs have attended 'The Outdoors Curriculum' training at Alice Holt run by the Woodlands Trust.
- Parents often join the group to gain experience of Forest School too.

How do you manage the risks?

- Children are taught to look for hazards and then discuss what they think the ‘rules of play’ should be. As they make the rules, they stick to them and teach their peers.
- Children are trained over many weeks to handle tools, fire safety, boundaries limits for free play etc. Training starts in the setting weeks before they go to the woods to gain a healthy respect for hazards and how to manage them.
- Children count themselves out of nursery, into the woods and again when the session has finished. They know they can play within the boundary bows and only leave with an adult.
- All staffs are trained in first aid with a Paediatric Certificate or Outward Bound First Aid Certificate.

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