

Forest School Ethos

The Forest School ethos is an inspirational and proven approach to learning in outdoor environments. It creates opportunities for learners of all kinds and ages to build lasting confidence, creativity, motivation, resilience, agency, social skills and a deep connection to their natural world.

'Forest School is a feeling you can't put into words.' Tonicha, aged 9

The ethos is shared by thousands of trained practitioners across the UK and beyond. Its roots reach back to early years pioneers in outdoor learning and across the sea to Scandinavia.

'I don't have ADHD when I'm out in the woods.' David, aged 14

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.

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.

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

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

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

Principle 6: Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

See www.forestschoollassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/ for more information.

The Forest School Association is the professional body and UK wide voice for Forest School, promoting best practice, cohesion and 'quality Forest School for all'.

It is a self governing, democratic and inclusive membership organisation that works towards supporting and ensuring high standards in Forest School training and practice across the UK, and promoting the benefits of quality Forest School.

Some key elements that support the principles

- A Forest School programme has a **structure that is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners**. This structure should clearly demonstrate progression of learning.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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**. The group size is often smaller than an average class, to allow a sense of overall community.
- 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**.
- A **learner-centred pedagogical approach**, including play and choice, is employed by Forest School that is responsive to the needs, interests, learning preferences and dispositions of each learner
- **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.