

Handbook: working document on your Forest School (unit 8)

Before working with your group of children on your introductory 8-week Forest School practice block you will need to submit a working document that we call a 'handbook'. This document is required as part of your coursework portfolio.

This handbook has three purposes:

1. It evidences that you have checked and understood the legislation and guidance relevant to working in a group leadership capacity in the outdoors in your particular context.
2. It allows you to plan carefully.
3. It facilitates communication – showing supporting staff, parents and line managers how you'll be running things, and what's expected of them. Some candidates make shorter versions of 'need to know' information for different audiences.

The document should:

- be easy to read
- contain short paragraphs of 'need to know' information
- be well structured
- have a contents page

Your handbook will include policies and procedures for relevant parts of the following legislation and guidance:

- Health and Safety
- Hygiene: food, cooking, toileting, general (inc. Covid-19)
- Child and Vulnerable Person Protection including GIRFEC and SHANARRI
- Equalities Act Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
- General Data Protection Regulation
- Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC)

Do I have to create everything afresh?... No!

- You can **refer to the source policies** from the organisation you are working with. Do ensure that you copy over any information from those policies and procedures that:
 - your staff team could not be assumed to know (volunteers, parents etc)
 - your staff team may need to be reminded of
 - might need to be added to or modified for outdoor/off site environment.
- If you are working somewhere that **already has an existing handbook**, you need to review and update it. For evidence, submit a copy of the existing handbook, plus a list of your recommended changes.
- You can **use an existing handbook** as a starting point. Do ensure you credit the source, and show how you have adapted it.
- If you are planning to co-lead your forest school sessions both candidates can share the completion of the handbook. You will need to **submit a statement** with your handbook detailing why and how you worked together, and **summarising your own individual contribution**.

What goes in my handbook?

All the areas listed below should be considered within your handbook. You are expected to write a short procedure on each of the aspects listed below. This will detail how you deal with each of the aspects at your Forest School. Do make sure that your plans are within the limitations set by legislation, and your organisation's existing policies.

Content: areas to cover

- Contents page
- Author(s) signature (s) and date of creation
- Review policy and next calendar date due
- Record of any managerial sign off required
- What is Forest School and who is responsible for running it
- Aims of your Forest School sessions

Health & Safety

- a. How are you insured
- b. Staff and helpers – what ratios do you work to, are they PVG / Disclosure checked, is there induction training
- c. Risk management & risk assessment – who is responsible, what RAs are done (inc. for Covid-19)
- d. First aid – who is responsible, what is their training and what kit do you carry
- e. Accident and Emergency procedure – who to contact, who is responsible, what happens to the rest of the group
- f. Lost or Missing Person Procedure – how will you ensure you have everyone in the group and what will you do if someone is lost. How long before reporting?
- g. Cancellation procedure – under what weather conditions and what staffing ratios will mean you have to cancel the session. Also how do you cancel it (i.e. let school/parents know)

- h. Toileting procedure – where at your FS and how is it going to be staffed
- i. Tools used at Forest School – what tools are used, ratios for usage, who is responsible for overseeing safe use and maintenance. Any PPE for the staff and/or young people. Include two tools as minimum.
- j. Fire at Forest School – choosing a safe site, lighting, management of fire at FS, safe behaviour around fire, extinguishing procedure
- k. Transport to and from FS site – how is this done if walking or driving
- l. Administration of medication policy
- m. Parental consent

Hygiene procedure

- a. General food hygiene
- b. Campfire cooking procedure, if needed
- c. Toileting hygiene
- d. Covid-19 compliance

Safeguarding children procedure

- a. Who is responsible
- b. What to look for
- c. How to talk to person disclosing and what to say
- d. What to record disclosure
- e. How to report in the event of concerns
- f. What happens if staff are accused
- g. What happens if person responsible is accused
- h. How will you keep records and registers
- i. What information will you carry during FS and how
- j. Confidentiality policy and procedure
- k. How will you ensure confidentiality of staff review and evaluation

Behaviour / Anti-bullying Policy

Equality policy

General data protection regulation

Sustainability policy

- a. Use of resources & materials
- b. Use of woodland site
- c. Environmental choices

Daily operating procedure

1. What to do before the session: Risk assessments, Staffing, Register, Equipment (inc. any tools) check
2. What to do during the session: Ongoing (inc. dynamic) risk assessment, Head counts, Key roles and responsibilities, Observations
3. What to do at the end of the session: Head count, Transport back/Collection procedure, Equipment (inc. any tools) check
4. What to do after the session: Evaluation, Planning for next session, Equipment (inc. any tools) store / maintain

Resources that may help you

Example Handbooks on FSTC Website (which will need reviewing / adapting by you for your specific circumstances)

www.forestschoolltraining.co.uk/student-home/student-resources-links-10-day/10-day-planning-and-delivery/

National guidance

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/out-play-practical-guidance-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-children/>

Safeguarding - writing policies & procedures

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/writing-a-safeguarding-policy-statement>

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-checklist/>