



Forest School Sessions FAQ & Terms and Conditions

What is Forest School?

Forest School is an inspirational process that offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in natural environments. Activities on offer will include den building, tool use, mini beast hunting, creative art using natural materials, team games and cooking on fire. The children however are at the centre of the process and we facilitate their choice of play whether that means mud pies, hide and seek, hunting for Gruffalo or whittling sticks! We aim to provide the time and space for exploration, playing with friends (and making new ones!) and reconnecting with the natural environment. Evidence shows that children who spend time regularly playing outside in natural environments have higher self reported levels of well being, develop skills of creativity and are highly motivated to learn about the world around them.

What happens if it rains?

Forest School happens whatever the weather* so we recommend that children wear waterproofs and wellies or walking boots-all in ones are great or separate waterproof jackets and trousers. We love the rain and think it's a fantastic multisensory natural experience that offers a wealth of puddle jumping, mud as well as new smells and sights. We will also bring our giant tarp to create a dry space to get out of the rain if the children wish!

***Extreme Weather**

Please note that whilst we endeavour to run all of our sessions there are circumstances where this may not be possible.

High winds – if a yellow warning of high winds has been issued we will monitor the situation and take a decision on whether to run the session. High winds means falling twigs and branches (and even trees!) and for the children and staff safety we will not operate in these conditions. If the decision to cancel a session is taken we will attempt to contact parents the night before if possible and by midday at the latest if on the same day. Regrettably we cannot offer a refund for these sessions.

Active Thunder Storms – If a warning of thunder storms is issued we will closely monitor the weather using live lightning trackers. Thunder storms are usually quite short lived and it is unlikely we will cancel a whole session on this basis – emergency evacuation procedures will be followed and at both of our sites we have access to inside space in these situations. Once the storm has passed we will go back to site and resume our activities.

Cold Weather conditions – we successfully run our sessions all the way through the cold winter months. Each child is required to wear warm layers including a warm hat and gloves. We focus on more 'active' activities during these months and have a warm drink and a fire

at every session – as with wet weather we have our dry space to retreat to should the rain (or snow) set in.

Hot Weather conditions – being in a wooded area means we are in the perfect place for hot weather! The tree canopy provides a lovely shady space for us to play in. In very hot weather we focus on more tool work which means (slightly!) less running around and we stop for frequent water breaks.

Toilets

Yes on both our sites we have access to toilets-either the inside ‘flushing’ variety or outdoor compost toilets. Staff are on hand to help with toileting if children need any help.

Food

We provide a small snack at our afterschool sessions although you are welcome to bring your own. Children bring their own packed lunches at our longer sessions. We have children attending our sessions with life threatening allergies to nuts so any food sent in from home **MUST BE NUT FREE!!** We cook from time to time on the fire including damper bread, toast, marshmallows, cakes and more. We do take in to account the information supplied by parents regarding dietary references so please make sure these are up to date in the booking system.

Cancellations

In the highly unlikely event that we have to cancel a session as a result of staff illness we will contact you as soon as it is apparent we cannot go ahead and you will receive a credit towards another session.

You pay for a half term or terms worth of sessions and no refunds are given if your child does not attend due to illness or holiday.

Risk, challenge and safety.

Risk and Challenge are important elements of Forest School. Through exposure to ‘risky’ situations children learn how to navigate tricky experiences which raises their self esteem and fosters independence. We believe that this is beneficial to all children and will support children as required to take on challenges and help them embrace a growth mindset when faced with repeated challenges. All of our sites are risk assessed prior to our starting delivery there. We do a daily site check at the start of each session and dynamically risk benefit assess the activities as they happen. We have written risk benefit assessment for using our tools and fire setting procedures. We have a few ‘Forest School rules’ which we recap at the start of each session. These focus on moving safely around the site and looking after each other, the environment and the equipment.

Play, Activities and Child Led Provision

We plan our sessions with regard to the seasons, the site we are on and in response to the children attending. As you can imagine there are a lot of variables to consider and so we do not have a set ‘lesson plan’ for every session-instead we provide a range of experiences of the course of each term and over the year. These will include tool use using peelers, pruning saws, mallets, bow saws and bill hooks, using a fire steel to make sparks and light ‘fairy fires’ (under direct supervision) feeding the

fire, cooking on the fire, using trowels and hand spades to dig for mini beasts, pond dipping, foraging for natural pigments, land art, using string to make knots that will secure materials in den building, utilising the mud kitchen, using observations and materials in the natural environment to create clay models and drawings and more. Some of these opportunities will be led by adults as a focus activity and sometimes these will occur naturally when a child requests them during a session. We aim to build each child's repertoire of 'Forest school skills' so that they can naturally extend their play and take it in the direction of their choosing. By employing this mix of adult led and child led approach we are able to tailor sessions to inclusively meet the needs of the children attending. Some children are ready to have a go at opportunities straight away whilst others take a more steady approach of observing their friends have a go and then joining when they feel ready. We will never force a child to take part in any activity or opportunity they don't feel ready for.

Natural environments are extremely rich in supporting children's play – they are full of interesting spaces, loose parts and the time and space to explore them. Whilst the team is led by a Forest school teacher the team are also playworkers and use the 'Manchester Circles' framework to ensure that the playing child is supported in their play choices and environment. This recognises the impact of a rich play environment on the playing child and how the physical and human elements contribute to this.

We are happy for parents to come and spend a session with us so that they can learn more about our approach – please contact us to arrange.