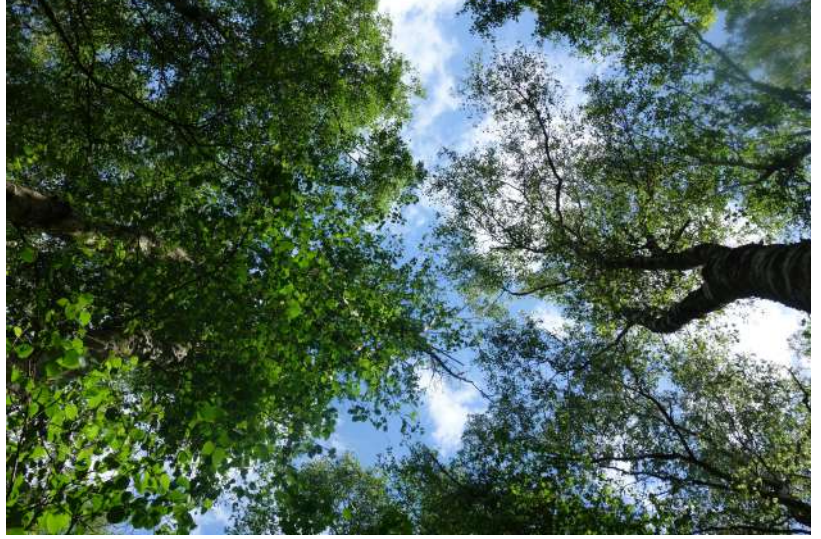


# BRANCH OUT EDUCATION FOREST SCHOOL HANDBOOK



Branch Out Education CIC  
Company reg no 10921661  
Pringle House, Ellonby, Penrith,  
Cumbria, CA11 9SN

# Contents

1. What is forest school?
2. Forest school pedagogy
3. Forest school activities
4. Roles and responsibilities
5. Health and safety policy
6. Safeguarding
7. Equal opportunities
8. Anti-radicalisation & bullying policy
9. Equipment
10. Using and storing tools
11. Policy, procedures and insurance summary
12. Risk assessments
13. Accident and emergency procedures
14. Poor weather/ unexpected events





# What is forest school?

The forest school concept originated in Denmark in the 1950s for pre-school children and was found to have a remarkably positive effect on children's behaviour, confidence, concentration, self-esteem and health. It was introduced into the UK in the 1990s and it is now being used by schools, further education providers and corporate organisations as a valuable way to connect with nature and enhance physical and mental wellbeing.

The Forest School approach to learning is based on six principles:

1. It is a unique **hands-on learner centred** process that allows learners of all ages and abilities the opportunity to develop their emotional, social, physical and intellectual wellbeing.
2. All learning activities take place in a **woodland setting** or natural outdoor environment.
3. Forest school sessions are frequent and over a **regular** period of time. Planning, adaption, observations and reviewing are an integral part of the sessions.
4. All sessions are run by **qualified leaders** (Level 3) who continuously develop their professional practice.
5. Forest school provides the freedom to **explore, play, make choices** and experience **managed risk** whilst developing a range of **skills** and increasing in **confidence and self-esteem**.
6. Forest school aims to promote the **holistic development** of all those involved.



# Forest school pedagogy

The Forest School pedagogy is comprised of a number of carefully orchestrated processes which are responsive to the needs and interests of the individual learners. These processes are brought together to create a community for development and learning.

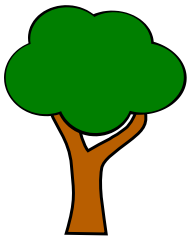
The FS practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building.

Encouraging choice and inviting play into forest school sessions are an integral part of the learning processes.

Forest school provides a learner centred platform for all learning preferences and dispositions.

Reflective practice is an essential feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.

Practitioner observation is an important element of forest school pedagogy. Observations feed into scaffolding and tailoring experiences for personalised learning and development.



# Forest school pedagogy

At Forest School participants can:

- regularly experience achievement and success
- become more motivated and improve concentration skills
- develop language and communication skills
- participate in healthy physical activities
- gain in confidence and self esteem
- develop practical skills, problem solving and collaboration
- make choices and learn to assess risks
- develop personal and social skills
- explore the connections between humans, wildlife and the environment
- discover how they learn best
- learn to use tools
- learn to be resilient and to manage failure
- reflect on learning and experiences
- be creative
- improve gross and fine motor skills
- have lots of fun



# Activities



There are many different activities to explore and experience at Forest School. We may follow a theme or provide a springboard for ideas. Wherever possible we aim to make the activities learner led, giving the participants chance to try out their own ideas and pursue their own interests.

Activities could include:

- Team games
- Sensory activities
- Learning about nature
- Building shelters/ bridges
- Fire lighting
- Campfire cooking
- Using tools
- Woodland crafts
- Environmental art
- Music in the woods
- Tracking games
- Climbing trees
- Using a Kelly kettle
- Imaginary characters and developing stories and drama

# Roles and responsibilities

The forest school leader:

The FS leader has overall responsibility for ensuring the planning, delivery and observations of all FS sessions. This person will ensure there is a safe and secure learning environment suitable for the needs of all learners.

The FS leader acts as a facilitator; providing participants with learning opportunities and choices, the freedom to experiment in their own time and support through their development process to allow learning to happen organically.

The FS leader is fully trained in the safeguarding policies and procedures outlined in this handbook. They will be qualified to deliver Outdoor First Aid and have Enhanced DBS clearance.

Forest school assistants:

These are people who support the leader(s) during sessions. They may be FS (Level 1) assistants, subcontractors, volunteers or parent helpers. Assistants will be under the supervision and guidance of the FS Leader at all times. Formal qualifications are not required. They will be briefed in the Branch Out Education code of conduct, emergency procedures and all policies and procedures held by this organisation. (See policies in this handbook).

All full time staff at Branch Out Education have Enhanced DBS.



# Health and safety

In addition to a client's own health and safety policies, the following points and measures relate directly to forest school sessions.

1. The named forest school leader (level 3) is always the person in charge of sessions.
2. The FS leader has overall duty of care for the children in their charge. However, all adults involved in the session are to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe.
3. All adult helpers **MUST** sign and date the assistants form (attached) to show they have read and understood the handbook and the risk assessments appropriate to the session for which they are helping. They must sign and date the form stating that they comply with the general operating procedures (code of conduct).
4. The FS leader or assistant will always carry a first aid kit to the session. The FS Leader is always a fully trained outdoor first aider.
5. The FS leader or assistant will always carry an emergency bag to each session.
6. The FS leader will ensure the emergency bag contains:
  - essential survival equipment
  - telephone number for the group's main point of contact
  - emergency action plan (including details of postcode and OS grid reference for the emergency services)
7. The FS leader will always carry a mobile phone.
8. In the event of an emergency, the FS leader will call or text 999 and contact the main point of contact to let them know.
9. The FS leader will review the risk assessments before each visit to the FS site.
10. When tools (e.g. knives) are used the adult ratio will be 1:1 with 3-5 year olds, 1:3 with children 6+.
11. The FS leader is responsible for the maintenance and checking of all tools and equipment, prior to their use.
12. The FS leader is responsible in training the children to use tools safely and responsibly.



# Safeguarding and confidentiality

Everyone involved in Branch Out forest school sessions has a responsibility in relation to child protection.

We are committed to:

- Taking all reasonable measures to safeguard and promote the welfare of each person in our care.
- The practice of safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children.
- Protecting each pupil from any form of abuse, whether from an adult or another pupil.

In addition, anyone working within sessions needs to be aware that the different environment and ethos of forest school, may move pupils to disclose information that they might have otherwise kept to themselves. Any volunteer or member of school staff who finds that a child is telling them something that concerns them, should follow the course of action set out below:

1. Listen to the pupil but ask no leading questions. Allow the child to lead the conversation but do not press for details.
2. Keep calm and offer reassurance. Accept what the child says without challenge.
3. Make no promises. You cannot 'keep a secret'. You should make it understood that there are limits to confidentiality at the start of the disclosure.
4. Inform the school/ group's child protection officer.
5. Keep an accurate written record of the conversation, including the date, time, place and the essence of what was said and done by whom and in whose presence. Keep the record secure and hand to the CPO.

# Equal opportunities and inclusion

Forest School is for ALL. In order to provide all participants attending FS sessions with the opportunity to succeed and achieve their potential we will:

- ensure quality of access for all participants
- employ a range of styles, including collaborative learning, so that participants can value working together and supporting one another
- seek to involve all relevant individuals who may in a supportive role around participants to help with development and understand the value of FS sessions
- take account of the personality, interests and performance of all participants when planning for future learning and setting appropriate targets
- make best use of all the available resources to support the learning of all groups of participants

Forest school leaders and supporting adults ensure that participants:

- feel secure and know that their contributions are valued
- appreciate and value the difference in others
- take responsibility for their own actions
- participate safely, in appropriate clothing for the weather and environment (spare clothes available)
- are taught in groupings that allow them to experience success
- use materials that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, learning styles and linguistic needs, without stereotyping
- have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles
- have challenging goals that enable them to succeed, grow in confidence and self-esteem
- are encouraged to participate fully regardless of disabilities or medical needs (and provide additional support to enable this)
- are entitled to participate if they have challenging behaviour (risk assessed and supervised 1:1 if necessary to enable participation.)

# Preventing radicalisation and bullying

This policy is part of our commitment to keeping children safe. We have a duty to promote community cohesion. Over the last few years, global events have led to a growth of extremist viewpoints, including advocacy of violent extremism. Safeguarding participants from all risks of harm is important and protecting them from extremism is one aspect of that.

At Branch Out Education we ensure that through our vision, values, rules and diversity we promote tolerance and respect for all cultures, faiths and lifestyles. Participants who attend our sessions have the right to learn in safety. We do not tolerate bullying of any kind and will challenge derogatory language and behaviour towards others.

## Referral process

Staff must refer all concerns about children and young people who show signs of vulnerability or radicalisation to the forest school leaders who will follow the safeguarding procedure as indicated in the Branch Out Education handbook, following the usual methods for reporting other safeguarding concerns.

When there are significant concerns about an individual the main point of contact or Headteacher will be notified who will inform the appropriate body.



# Forest school equipment

The Forest School leader will take a variety of equipment depending on the time of year and activities planned for. A first aid kit with essential equipment will be taken to each session.

## ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT (when off school grounds)

- First Aid kit (see contents list)
- Emergency procedures card
- Medical information for each individual (adults and children)
- Risk assessments
- Mobile phone
- Water
- Whistle
- Emergency life blanket
- Medication for individuals (to be carried by individuals or labelled clearly in the bag)
- Spare clothing (hat, gloves, warm jumper, poncho)
- Basic snack e.g. oatcakes

## OTHER EQUIPMENT

- wet wipes, hand gel
- nappy sacks or plastic bags
- trowel
- suncream (parental permission required)
- chocolate/ sugary food
- roll mat and blanket
- fire blanket
- knife
- tick remover
- bivi bag

## ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT: Clothing

“There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.”

- All participants at Forest School must have appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of hot or cold, is comfortable and will keep them covered to protect from cuts, scrapes and nettle stings.
- In the forest it can often be cooler than expected under the shade of the trees. We encourage participants to choose clothes that are suitable for outdoor activities and that are easily washed as it's possible they will get wet and muddy!

### Clothing list:

- waterproof trousers
- waterproof coat, with a hood
- long sleeved top
- long trousers (no shorts)
- warm boots or wellies (with thick socks when cold)
- gloves and a warm hat (cold weather)
- sun hat (in summer)

## ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT: First Aid kit

- Contact cards (location with postcode and grid reference/ What3words)
- Latex gloves
- Bandages
- plasters
- dressings
- eye wash
- cotton wool
- antiseptic wipes
- cotton wool
- scissors
- sewing kit
- medication for individuals (labelled)
- tick removers
- sterile water
- blood bag (disposal bag for medical waste)
- bites and stings cream/ spray (parental permission required)

## ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT: **When having a fire**

- Flame retardant gloves (gauntlet)
- bucket of water
- burns kit
- fire steel
- Vaseline
- cotton wool
- matches

## Using and storing tools



Tools are only used for a specific purpose. FS leaders will model correct and safe tool use, transportation and storage. When using a tool there must be a designated area for use and all must be aware that tools are in use. Tools are used ‘two arms and a tool’ distance from others at all times.

Each tool is kept in suitable tool boxes or bags. There must always be adult supervision when tools are collected, transported and used.

Participants must never help themselves.

Tools are counted out and back in at the end of each session when required. Before tools are used, they will be checked for damage and that they are in good working order. The FS leader will clean and maintain tools after sessions.

See ‘tool cards’ for individual tool guidelines.



# Risk assessments

A thorough SITE risk assessment is undertaken each term and the site is checked on arrival each week. In addition to this the participants are encouraged to be part of this assessment and it is undertaken as a group. An ACTIVITY risk assessment will be written before any activity that requires it. These include using tools, shelter building, fire lighting and cooking, tree climbing. (see risk assessment pdf)

Additional risk assessments will be undertaken for participants with disabilities, whose medical needs or whose behaviour requires them.

The following risk assessment process will be followed:

- Look for potential hazards
- Decide who might be at harm
- Think about how the harm may occur and the worst outcome possible
- Evaluate the current level of risk (probability x severity)
- Decide on precautions and actions to minimise the potential risk
- Re-calculate the level of risk once precautions and actions have been put in place
- Create a risk assessment document
- Send risk assessment packs to schools and groups. All adults supporting in the FS sessions must read the relevant risk assessments.
- Regularly monitor and review each risk assessment as a team, termly and as action is required.

# Emergency procedures

Location and school contact details for FS outreach sessions are kept on the FS leader's clipboard/ plan.

In the case of an injury:

- Stop session.
- Gather group, do a head count & keep group calm and distracted.
- Secure area and make it safe.
- FS leader or assistant to carry out first aid and monitor casualty.
- Adult call/text emergency services 999. State location, incident, service required, injury, repeat location.
- Adult meet emergency services at woodland entrance and guide to casualty.
- Call emergency contact to arrange group return transport (on leader's clipboard).



# Emergency procedures

## Missing participant

1. On discovery of a missing participant use '1, 2, 3, where are you?' or 3 whistle blows procedure and recall rest of group.
2. Commence immediate search of the vicinity.
3. Inform main contact
4. Advise to notify main contact/ headteacher who will decide whether to notify the police, then the parent/guardian.

## Behaviour procedure

1. Talk participant involved down.
2. Remove other participants from area of risk if deemed necessary.
3. Inform office and call for help as needed.
4. Debrief participant after calm down period.
5. Log incident.
6. Inform parents/ guardians.
7. Create risk assessment if necessary.
8. Maintain close supervision and monitor behaviour.

## Poor weather & unexpected events

Before leaving for a Forest School session, an up to date weather forecast will be checked to make judgements about weather conditions. The FS leader will decide in collaboration with the main contact/ headteacher whether the conditions are suitable for the session to run. We will not go into the woods if the conditions are considered dangerous e.g. high winds, thunderstorms or extreme cold.

If it is unexpectedly wet, a shelter will be built immediately by a trained adult so that there is a sheltered dry space available throughout the session.

- Keep calm
- Get the entire group to move well away from the danger area.
- Count all participants and staff.
- If emergency services are required give the postcode/ grid reference/ what3words of your site along with directions.
- Assess the situation using a Dynamic Risk Assessment (see pdf) so that the safest course of action can be followed.
- As necessary, ensure all relevant personnel and parents/carers are notified

# Insurance

Branch Out Education CIC holds Employers Liability Cover with Birbeck Insurance (Underwriters - Self Assured). Cover includes Employers Liability GBP 10,000,000, Public Liability GBP5,000,000 and Products Liability GBP5,000,000. Forest School practitioner providing activities for children and adults of all ages, general forest school activities (for full list see attached schedule).

# Forest school assistants form

To be completed by any volunteers, parent helpers or visitors taking part in a Forest School programme.



I have read and understood Branch Out's Forest School Handbook and agree to follow the policies and procedures outlined.

I understand that the Level 3 practitioners are in charge of the session at all times and my role is to assist them in supporting the wellbeing and safety of any participants.

I know what to do in an emergency and where the emergency procedure and First Aid equipment is kept during a session.

Signed.....

Date .....

