

Forest School at Brookside Preschool



This handbook has been created by Leanne Moriarty with support and input from Emma Forbes - May 2022. It has been created using information contained in the original Brookside preschool handbook originally created by Michelle Hughes - April 2021, which this handbook now replaces.



Contents

- What is Forest school?
- What are the benefits of Forest school for children?
- What does my child need to wear for forest school?
- Personal Protective and safety Equipment
- What might a typical forest school session look like?
- Who will lead the forest school sessions?
- Managing risk
- Common questions
- Equal opportunities
- Behaviour management
- Site location
- Policies and procedures & Risk assessments



What is forest school?

Forest School has been defined by Forest School England as

“...an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults, regular opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self-esteem, through hands-on learning experiences in a local woodland environment.”

The aim of the forest school ethos is to support children's holistic development with a strong focus on their emotional development, health and well-being. Forest school connects children with the natural environment, giving them the freedom to discover, play, explore and learn.

Forest school is not a one off trip to the woods, forest school is a programme which allows children to develop over a period of time, practice and embed their knowledge/skills and build relationships with others.



The History of forest school

The Forest school ethos was adopted by Denmark in the 1980's as a solution to the lack of buildings available for the number of nursery places required.

The philosophy of the Forest School was based upon the desire to provide young children with an education which encouraged appreciation of the wider, natural world and which would encourage responsibility for nature conservation in later life.

Forest School was introduced in the UK, in 1995 when a group of lecturers and nursery nurses from Bridgewater College, Somerset had visited a Danish Forest School. The practitioners were so impressed with the whole ethos they developed a forest school program in the UK.

Forest School has been rapidly developing in the UK, where trained and accredited Forest School leaders devise a learning program tailored to children's interests and individual needs.



What are the benefits of forest school for children?

- **Building confidence and independence** - Children develop a strong self esteem in a climate of small achievable steps, child led learning which supports their own interests and the opportunity to develop independence skills which will support them in later life.
- **Physical health benefits** – Children are physically active for most of the forest school session which is a good form of exercise and general development of physical stamina. There are frequent opportunities for children to develop fine and gross motor skills, balance and co-ordination.
- **Mental health and wellbeing benefits** - Balance of supported and self initiated activities the children are encouraged to stretch beyond the usual boundaries set by the classroom and to eventually take risks safely by learning to assess the risks of activities independently.
- **Ability to manage own risk's** – Forest school allows children to push boundaries of learning, trying something new and move out of their comfort zone. Forest school leaders



teach children about safety by carefully explaining how to avoid accidents, by teaching the children how to use tools correctly and by giving them opportunities to practice activities safely.

- **Opportunities to develop team building, friendships and social communication skills** - Children will be part of a regular group which supports friendship building. Children are invited to participate in team games and chats during each session. There are many opportunities for children to problem solve and work together such as building dens or creating games.
- **Knowledge and Understanding** – Children develop a greater interest and understanding of their natural surroundings and are found to have more respect for the environment.



What does my child need to wear for forest school?

- Waterproof coat
- Waterproof trousers or all –in-one
- Fleece/sweatshirt
- Long trousers and long sleeved top (in all weather conditions), several layers during cold days.
- Thick socks
- Wellies or waterproof walking boots
- A change of clothes and a carrier bag for dirty/wet clothing
- Hat, scarf & gloves (weather dependant)
- Sun hat, sun cream and insect repellent (weather dependant)
- Hair tied back in hairband or a plait

Top tip;:

Please consider all weather conditions when packing your child's clothing for forest school. The weather can change quickly!

Send your child with old clothing which you don't mind getting dirty or damaged.



Personal Protective and safety Equipment (PPE)

PPE

- Tight fitting work gloves offer tactility, so are more suited to activities such as whittling. Children and adults wear appropriate sized gloves.
- Rigger gloves are sturdier and will offer more protection so are more appropriate for a child who is being supported to use a bow saw for example.
- Hi visibility vests are worn with the pre-school logo on by children and adults
- Fire proof gloves are worn whilst lighting and maintaining fires



Emergency Equipment

During every forest school session we have an emergency equipment bag which we call our “happy sack” this contains the following items:

- A first aid kit suitable for outdoor use
- Instant cool pack
- Burns first aid kit including burn gel
- Antibacterial hand gel
- A list of emergency contacts and children's personal details
- Any personal medication such as inhalers
- Drinking water



What might a typical forest school session look like?

- Prior to each forest school session a detailed site risk assessment is carried out by the forest school leader or assistant. Any major hazards will be removed or adaptations will be made if necessary before the children arrive. We also encourage children to look out for any potential hazards as we enter the woods.
- Firstly we gather round in a circle and do a 'check in', this is usually an introduction such as giving our name and sharing how we are feeling.
- We re-cap our forest safety rules and sing our forest school song—this helps the children to remember our rules., we remind the children of these rules when we arrive at the woods.
- Short warm up game as a team such as 'Nut, nut, squirrel ' or 1,2,3 where are you?
- We then explain what potential activities and equipment are on offer for the session. We support the children to build skills such as den building, exploring nature and using tools.
- Together we gather around our fire circle for a snack.
- Children have some free-play time to lead their own learning and embed their knowledge and practice skills.
- We gather in our circle for our 'check out ' where we chat and reflect on something we have done and share how we are feeling.
- We work together as a team to pack away our equipment and head back to pre-school.



Each session may differ dependent on spontaneous learning opportunities, the children's interests and their needs.



Who will lead the forest school sessions?

Forest School Leader

Name: Michelle Hughes

Role: Pre-school Manager/ Forest School leader

Qualification: Level 3 Certificate in Leading Forest school

Other qualifications: BA (hons) in early Childhood studies, Btec Nat Dip Early Childhood studies. Paediatric first aid & ITC Forest School First Aid Certificate.

Forest School Leader

Name: Leanne Moriarty

Role: Pre-school Deputy Manager / Forest school leader

Qualification: Level 3 Certificate in Leading Forest school (in training)

Other Qualifications: Level 3 - Child and young persons workforce, Level 4 - Advanced EYFS Teaching, Paediatric first aid

Forest School Leader

Name: Emma Forbes

Role: Practitioner / Forest school leader

Qualification: Level 3 Certificate in Leading Forest school (in training)

Other Qualifications: Level 3 Homebased childcare. Paediatric first aid

Ratios

There will be an adult to child ratio of 1:4 at all times with a lower ratio during high risk activities such as using tools.

Adult:Child ratio for whittling = 1:2

Adult:child ratio for using a saw = 1:1



Managing Risk

During our forest school sessions children are encouraged and supported in recognising and managing risk for themselves, through real life situations and experiences.

Health and Safety is deeply embedded into the forest school ethos. Risks are carefully assessed by skilled practitioners and will be suitably managed to suit the age and abilities of individual children. Higher-risk activities such as using tools will be introduced carefully once behaviours and boundaries are established within the group.

Some of the rules and boundaries we use with the children to support them with managing risk and boundaries are:

‘No pick, no lick, be careful how you carry a stick’

We respect animals, plants and trees

We stay within our boundary marker

We respond to the leaders calling signal straight away

We embed these rules through the singing of our forest school song at the beginning of each session.

More detail on managing risk can be found in our forest school policies and risk assessments.



What are the benefits of allowing children to take risks?

- Through risk taking children gain confidence in their abilities.
- Develop an awareness of their own limits and boundaries.
- Increase their confidence in managing risks which will equip them for later life as they become more independent.
- Greater awareness of safety and potential hazards.
- Encouraging children to enjoy challenges rather than to shy away from them could also increase their persistence and learning abilities.

Common questions

What if my child needs the toilet?

We will ask the children to use the toilet before leaving preschool. If the children need to go to the toilet whilst in the woods, we encourage them to go in a close by designated area. This will usually be behind a bush or tree which offers some privacy. We will always have tissues, baby wipes, spare clothes and hand gel available.

All our Forest School practitioners are DBS checked so are able to support children with toileting. In the event of a soiled accident the child will go back to pre-school with an adult to be cleaned and changed.

If the weather is bad, will my child still go to forest school?

'There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing'

Forest school will take place in all weather conditions except for high winds or thunderstorms, in which case the session would be deemed unsafe and postponed. To protect us from rain and sun, we put up a large group shelter each session. We take ground tarpaulins to keep our equipment and resources clean and dry. Each session, we ask that children arrive with appropriate clothing to suit a range of changing weather conditions. Please see page 5 for the recommended kit list.

Staff are always observing throughout the session and respond appropriately to any children who are struggling due to the weather conditions. For example, if a child is cold, then they would be offered a blanket and to sit around the fire.

I am worried my child might wander off?

Safety is at the very heart of the forest school ethos. Children's trust is built up over the course of the programme and strict boundaries are put in place right from the initial session. We have the added advantage that staff already know the children well so we have good judgement of children's character, listening skills and ability to recognise risk.

Right from the beginning of our sessions, the children are made aware of safe boundaries to ensure that they don't wander out of immediate eye sight. If we feel it appropriate, we may create a safety boundary using blue rope to support children's awareness, this would be laid on the ground. Our rules are not to cross the boundaries/rope without adult consent.

We play regular games of 1, 2, 3 where are you? And the children respond 1, 2, 3 I'm here. This trains the children to respond immediately if they are out of eye site.

How will I be updated on what my child has been up to at Forest school?

Some photographs will be taken and some notes to record achievements during the forest school program. These will be shared via Tapestry in your child's learning journey. Our main priority will be to spend time with the children so write ups may be limited and will not be uploaded straight away.





Will my child be involved in lighting or using fires?

Fires will be lit by the forest school leader only. Children are not allowed in the fire circle unless invited by an adult on a 1:1 basis, and children must kneel by the fire at a safe distance. This would be carefully managed and would be limited to tasks such as holding skewers to toast a marshmallow for example.

- Fires and hot equipment will never be left unattended.
- Fire proof gloves will be worn when using the fire.

Although children's participation with the fire is limited due to their age there will be plenty of opportunities to learn about fire lighting, maintenance and safety.

Who do I contact if I need to get in touch during forest school sessions?

Please contact us on the pre-school mobile for any urgent matters **07762 087 821**

Is the pre-school insured to carry out forest school sessions?

Yes, we are insured to carry out forest school sessions within our general pre-school insurance policy. There are some specific requirements regarding ratios for activities, children's ages and staff qualifications. These have been incorporated into our policies and risk assessments.

Insurance details; Morton Michel , policy number; 20803



Where will the sessions take place?

Address near:

Brookside Preschool
Scout Hut HQ
Gatley Hill (off Church Road)
Gatley
SK8 4EY

Contact Number:

07762 087 821

Directions to main site:

From the Pre-school—come out of the gate and turn directly left. Walk along the path past our garden railings and enter the woods. Walk straight down the hill and turn left as you get to the bottom. There will be a short walk forwards until you reach our log circle and main site.

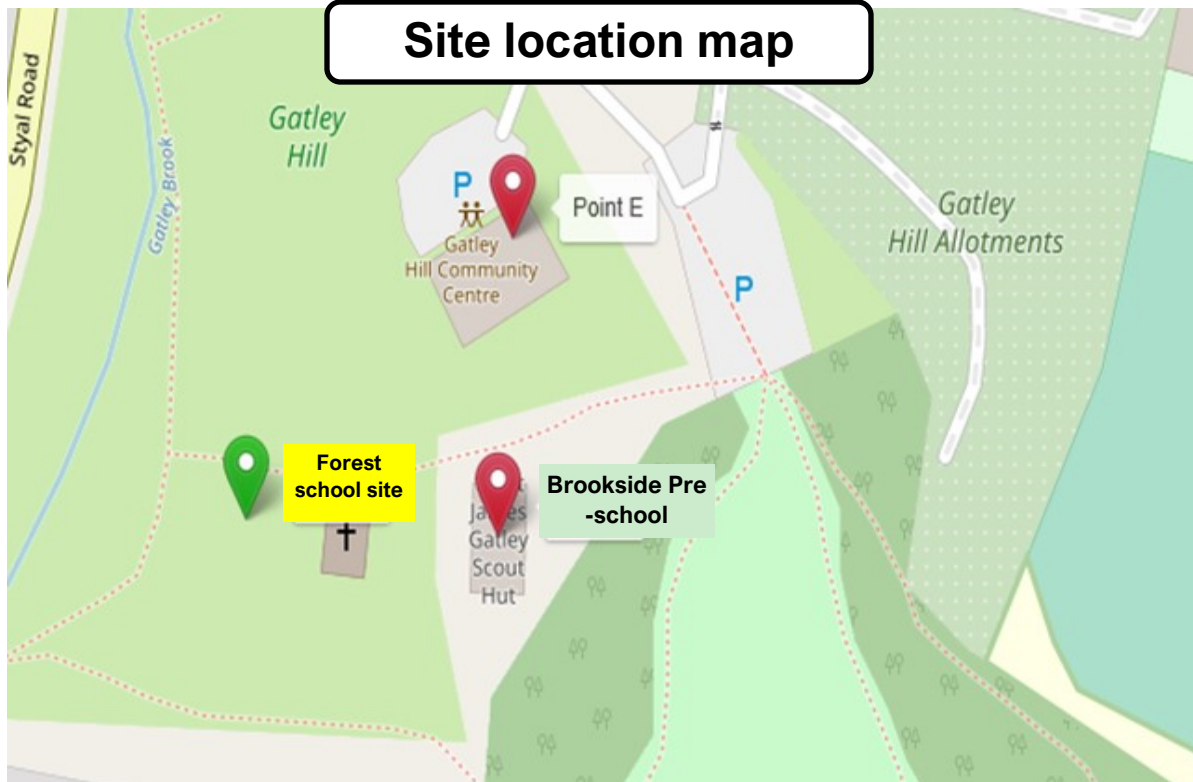
Forest site location:

Nearest Post Code SK8 4JG
Nat Grid; SJ840880
OS X (Eastings) 384095
OS Y (Northings) 388047
Lat 53.389019
Long -2.240610
what3words- cages.bump.button

link to grid reference:

https://gridreferencefinder.com?gr=SJ8409588047|Point_s_C|1&t=Point%20C&v=r

Site location map



Equal Opportunities

Equal opportunities are embedded into our pre-school environment and we aim to continue this commitment during our forest school sessions. We strive to offer a community feel to the sessions, where everyone is treated fairly and with respect. We want all children to reach their potential, and recognise that for some children extra support is needed to help them to achieve and be successful.

- Wherever possible, adjustments will be made to accommodate children with allergies, SEND, medical conditions or behavioural issues. This may include additional adult helpers, adapting the site if physically possible or adapting activities.
- All participants should feel that their experiences and contributions are worthwhile, so raising self-esteem and confidence.
- Our team games promote inclusion by welcoming participation and not forcing. We ensure that nobody is 'out' of a game by giving those who would be out a different but empowering role within the team.
- Forest School is a child led experience, and wherever possible the children will be allowed to follow their own interests providing they show respect for each other and the woodland environment.
- Due to insurance and ratio requirements only children aged over 3 are able to take part in our forest school sessions. We have capacity for only 8 children per half term programme. The children will be selected according to age from the oldest child on our registers and then down the list.

Behaviour management

We aim to work towards a situation in which children can develop self-discipline and self-esteem in an atmosphere of mutual respect and encouragement. We aim to offer an environment where children learn to respect themselves, other people and their surroundings and can learn from and make mistakes without fear of any consequences.

- At forest school we place an emphasis on positive praise which is given to children demonstrating independent work, team work, positive behaviour, and displaying effort and resilience.
- We encourage and reinforce, acceptable and kind behaviour towards each other, the environment and the equipment used.
- Forest school practitioners act as good role models for positive behaviour
- We separate the behaviour from the person, promoting appropriate discussion and reflection on behaviour and supporting coping mechanisms.
- Forest school practitioners promote what we should do rather than what we shouldn't do. We hold back from saying 'don't do.....' or 'stop doing.....' and replace this with opportunities for discussions. For example, 'Have you thought about what could happen if...?' or 'perhaps we could try....'



Policies & Procedures

Health and safety

At Brookside preschool, we take health and safety extremely seriously, as a matter of both legal and moral importance.

All staff supporting forest school will be familiarised with the provisions contained within this policy as part of and will be expected to act in accordance with them at all times.

The preschool aims to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all staff, children, visitors and other individuals who may be affected by the preschools activities. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 and their associated Approved Code of Practice (ACoP) and guidance will be complied with at all times.

Daily procedures to maintain the health and safety of all whilst at Forest School to include:

- ◆ Site risk assessment is carried out prior to each session
- ◆ Staff Ratios, roles and responsibilities
- ◆ Tool and Fire use
- ◆ Emergency Procedure
- ◆ Safeguarding
- ◆ Extreme weather
- ◆ Personal Protective Equipment necessary for sessions
- ◆ Emergency bag equipment
- ◆ Guidance for safe tool use and maintenance
- ◆ Guidance for safe use of fires
- ◆ Guidance for hygienic handling of food
- ◆ Procedures for toileting and disposal of litter whilst on site
- ◆ How to report accidents and near misses
- ◆ Examples of consent or medical forms
- ◆ Confidentiality
- ◆ Inclusion
- ◆ Behaviour at forest school
- ◆ Procedures for unexpected events e.g. Lost child, 1st Aid, Loose Dog, members of public/visitors

Please refer to “Forest school at Brookside Preschool policy” for full information on our forest school policies and procedures.

This policy will be followed for the requirements of running safe Forest School sessions. It is in addition to the main Brookside Preschool policies and does not replace them. All staff, visitors and volunteers have a duty to follow all policies, procedures and risk assessments when in and around the Forest School areas.

Full copies of policies can be found at: <http://www.brooksidepreschool.co.uk/policies>

