

## 23. Forest School Policy

At Westfield House, we love taking the children out to explore the local environment. In addition to natural play space onsite, we offer Forest School sessions led by our Forest School teachers.

These sessions take place at Northcliffe Woods in Saltaire, which we feel is a fantastic place to explore and learn in. Each session is tailored to the children's individual learning styles and developmental needs. These may involve shelter building, potion making, tool use, fire lighting, mud painting, weaving, tree and plant recognition and much more. Central to the Forest School ethos is the importance of children having the freedom to explore the outside environment with appropriate support and risk taking.

Information sessions for parents are held annually. Any parents with transitioning children are invited to attend these sessions to find out more information about Forest School. These sessions will take place at Northcliffe woods and will be fully risk assessed by our Forest School Leader.

### **Staff and Qualifications**

Each Forest school session is led by our Forest School teachers who will ensure a dynamic risk assessment is completed and that the children are monitored in accordance to our policies and procedures. There is also a core risk assessment available for parents and staff to view on request, this risk assessment looks at all possibilities and likelihoods during any type of session.

During a Forest School session staff ratios are higher, this is to support the children in appropriate risk taking and traveling to and from Northcliffe Woods. Children will take part in a range of games/discussions to instill the Forest School rules and ethos such as, how to travel around the fire circle, tool safety talks, fungus awareness, what to do in situations where a dog may come onto site etc and what to do if they need the toilet.

Staff attending Forest School are paediatric first aid trained and carry mobile phones in case of emergency. In the absence of a Level 3 Forest School Leader sessions will take place either at Westfield House, with a focus on natural activities, or alternatively a woodland walk. Sessions involving fire or tool use will only take place when a level 3 Forest School Leader is present.

### **Kit**

All children attending Forest School must wear appropriate clothing to protect them from extreme heat or cold and keep them covered to prevent cuts and scrapes. We encourage parents to think carefully about the suitability of their children's clothing, as their child will most likely get very muddy.

## **Poor Weather**

We check the weather forecast before every session to ensure that appropriate clothing/equipment is available. When it is raining a trained adult will put a shelter at the start of the session so that children have a dry, safe place to play. The session will only be cancelled if the conditions are deemed dangerous such as, thunderstorms and high winds. As the walk to the woods is via a steep hill this will also be checked for ice and heavy rainfall.

### Clothing and Equipment

Children are encouraged to wear

- Long sleeved top
- Full length trousers/leggings
- Waterproof trousers
- Waterproof coat, with a hood
- Boots or Wellies
- Warm socks
- Gloves and a woolly hat/sun hat
- Spare clothing

## **Toileting Procedure**

As sessions take place in the woods, there are no toilets. Therefore we always choose a designated 'wee tree' for the children to use. We also take a potty along if required, as some children may feel more confident using this. All adults helping are DBS checked and wear personal protective clothing when supporting toileting children.

## **Photographs and Permissions**

Photographs are taken using a nursery iPad during sessions. The photographs taken will only be used for tracking children's progress and sharing with children's parents on their online learning journals. If at any point photographs are used for advertising parents will complete a necessary consent form. All photographs will be stored securely on the iPad or nursery computer which is password protected and locked away in the nursery safe at the end of the working day. Most will be uploaded to Famly for parents to see. Once photo's are uploaded to Famly, photo's can be deleted from the devices.

Before attending their first Forest School session, every child is required to have a given consent on the nursery permission form filled in upon admission.

We stipulate that children attending Forest School must be aged 3 and above. This is mainly due to the intensity of the walk to the woods. From time to time Forest School sessions do take place at Nursery, therefore the children in preschool who may not yet be 3 are able to take part in the sessions. This will only take place when staff feel that child is ready and able and a consent form has been completed by parents.

## **Forest School Code of Conduct**

During Forest School sessions children and staff are asked to respect and follow our Forest School Code of Conduct.

### **Entering the woods**

When we enter the woods the children are taught to respect their surroundings and recognise our Forest School expectations. These are introduced at the start of the programme. Children are encouraged to explore, investigate and learn in the woodland environment without damaging their surroundings. They are made aware of the plants and animals that live in the woods and how to respect their home.

### **Boundary ties**

Once we arrive at the risk assessed area the children will be reminded of the boundary lines, which will be put in place each session by a member of staff. Children will be encouraged to explore the secured area and learn about the area through different games, such as 123 where are you?

### **Rope and string use**

Whilst at Forest School children are encouraged to develop their skills in knot tying. This must be undertaken with adult supervision, adults will support the children when shelter building and making tree swings etc. Children are not left alone with string or rope as this may become a strangulation hazard.

### **Eating and drinking**

Children must only eat and drink resources provided by Forest School staff. Under no circumstances must they eat anything they find whilst out and about and this will be reminded through safety talks at the beginning of each session.

### **Collecting natural objects**

Children are able to collect a small amount of resources to play with and take home with them. They are advised to consider whether taking the item will affect the natural environment around them as lots of plants and creatures may need them to survive.

### **Playing with sticks and stones**

We understand that children like to play with sticks and stones, so they are taught how to do this safely and with an awareness of others around them when using them and they fully encouraged to play and use woodland materials to develop skills.

### **Transporting and carrying objects**

It is an adults role to model safe lifting by bending their knees and keeping a straight back. Children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag and pull materials using their hands or rope. When moving heavier items they must be rolled, lifted or carried in a team.

### **Tree climbing**

Whilst exploring the woods children are encouraged to climb trees, there must always be an adult present without being too invasive. Prior to the session the area will be risk assessed and an adult will look for loose branches and anything broken on the floor, Children will be able to explore their own limits or to a maximum of 5ft.

### **Fire**

During Forest School sessions children are encouraged to take risks, this may involve fire and tool use. Children will be taught how to act safely around a fire and how to enter or leave the fire circle.

### **Tools**

During Forest School sessions, there will be many opportunities for children to take risks, including using tools. Children will be taught how to safely use each tool, and will be taught the safety talks before using any tool, this will be continuously practiced to help individuals remember key points for each tool. Gloves will be provided for helper hand depending on each tool use.

### **Leaving the site**

The Forest School ethos promotes children being independent and looking after the environment around them. Children are encouraged to clear away the remains of the sessions and the sight is left 'as though we were never there.'