Cringleford Crackerjacks
Forest School Handbook
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The policies and procedures set out in this Handbook are in addition to the Cringleford Crackerjacks policies and do not replace them.

1. What is Forest School?

Background

Forest Schools in the United Kingdom have been adapted from a Scandinavian approach to learning. They originated in Sweden in the 1950s and first came to the UK in the mid-1990s when a group from Bridgwater College in Somerset visited Denmark and witnessed children playing outside, leading their own activities, cooking on open fires, climbing and using tools. They were inspired by what they saw and started to run their own Forest School sessions in the UK. Since then, Forest Schools have become increasing popular across the country.

6 Key principles of Forest School

1. “Forest school is a long term, repetitive learning process that uses a natural outdoor space”
2. “Forest School empowers children and young people to take responsibility for their own learning and development”
3. “Forest School promotes holistic, individualised learning and development”
4. “Forest School encourages emotional growth, self-esteem, confidence and independence”
5. “Forest School is facilitated by qualified Level 3 Forest school Practitioners”
6. “Forest School instils a deep respect and awareness for the natural world and reconnects participants to their environment”

2. Our Forest School

Our Forest School site is in the grounds of the Willow Centre in Roundhouse Park. Sometimes, we will leave our site to go on nature walks in the local area. These walks will be planned in advance of the session. At least once a term, we will visit a private wood in Dunston which is about 4 miles away.
For the Spring 2015 term, sessions will take place on a Friday. The day may be changed for subsequent terms to ensure that all children have the opportunity to take part in Forest School.

The children will meet at Crackerjacks at their normal time and walk to the site together, returning to Crackerjacks for collection at their normal time.

Our ratios for Forest School sessions are at least 1:2 for our nature walks and at least 1:3 for our other Forest School activities. Forest Schools must be led by a Level 3 qualified Forest School leader. Karen Latoy is currently working towards a Level 3 with Forest Schools Education which should be complete by June 2015.

Consent forms are required for each child before they can attend Forest School sessions.

3. Our Forest School Golden Rules

- We always try to be kind to each other and look after each other
- We always listen to the grown ups
- We look after our tools and equipment
- We look after plants and animals
- We are sensible with tools and fire and follow the rules carefully
- We look after ourselves and clean our hands after touching plants or animals, after going to the toilet or before having our snack
- We don’t pick any plants or flowers unless we are told we can
- We don’t put anything in our mouths
- We are careful when we play with sticks
- We always come back when we hear “1, 2, 3 Come back to me”
- If the whistle is blown three times, there is an emergency and everyone must gather together immediately
- We never wander off without a grown up
4. Learning and Development

The Forest School approach to learning is holistic and compatible with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). It covers all areas of the EYFS and allows children to learn and develop in their own way and at their own pace. Sessions are flexible and tailored to meet the needs and interests of individual children.

Benefits of Forest School

**Physical health** – Increased physical activity reduces the chance of obesity and increases bone density (reducing chances of osteoporosis) whilst increased oxygen levels from being outside can increase brain function.

**Mental health** – Spending time in green spaces reduces Cortisol (a stress chemical) levels in the brain and therefore has a calming influence. The reduction in cortisol also increases receptivity for building neural pathways (learning) in the brain.

**Social** – Playing outside can help to develop communication, teambuilding and language skills.

**Risk awareness** – Playing outside allows children to learn about risk assessment and risk taking. Children that are exposed to acceptable levels of risk at a young age are less likely to make bad judgements in the future.

**Behaviour** – Due to the calming effect on the brain and the increase in physical space outside, improved behaviour is often noticed.

5. Woodland Conservation

It is important that children learn to look after our woodlands and outdoor spaces. They need to learn how to share the woodland with animals and plants and know how to look after them. Forest School will encourage them to take responsibility for this and develop a respect for the natural world.

Forest School sessions should not have any negative impact on the Forest School site and there should be no evidence of our visit after we have left.
6. Safeguarding Children and Confidentiality

Cringleford Crackerjacks has a comprehensive set of Safeguarding policies and these apply to all Forest School sessions. Please refer to these for information and advice on safeguarding.

A summary of these policies is included below:

- Every child has the right to be safe from harm and danger. It is everyone’s responsibility to ensure every child is free from fear and able to learn and develop in safe, secure environments.
- Cringleford Crackerjacks is committed to ensuring that every child is safe in our setting and we take this responsibility very seriously.
- All staff attend regular safeguarding training
- All staff receive an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check
- Staff will respond promptly and appropriately to all incidents or concerns of abuse that may occur and work with statutory agencies as required.
- Our Safeguarding Lead Practitioner is Karen Latoy and our Deputy Safeguarding Lead Practitioner is Viv Sargen and any concerns must be discussed with one of them.
- All suspicions and investigations are kept confidential and shared only with those who need to know.

Note - It is important to be aware that during Forest School sessions, children may become more confident and feel more secure. This, together with the development of risk taking skills, could increase the chance of disclosure about a safeguarding issue being made.
7. Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

In our Forest School, we are committed to equal opportunity for all and we create an environment in which people feel equally valued, regardless of their ethnic heritage, social and economic background, gender, ability or disability.

We will make every effort to ensure that our activities are accessible to all children and adults by making appropriate changes to the environment, resources and activities. However, there may occasionally be times when we are unable to do this.

Forest School encourages children to develop positive attitudes about themselves as well as to people who are different from themselves. Children are respected as individuals and given opportunities to participate and succeed regardless of their ability or style of learning.

8. Missing Child

As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, staff will gather the remaining children together for a headcount to check that no other children are missing.

An adult will shout “1, 2, 3 Come back to Me!” while other available adults search the immediate vicinity.

An adult will blow the whistle 3 times.

If the child is not found within 5 minutes, the emergency services will be contacted and the child’s parents will be informed.

Adults will stay with the remaining children to keep them safe and calm while the search takes place.
9. Using and Storing Tools

Please note, we will not be using tools until we have a qualified Forest School Leader to supervise

General rules

- Tools will be kept maintained and in good order
- Tools will be inspected before each session
- Children and adults will not use tools until they have been shown how to use them
- Tools will be kept in the toolbox or designated area when not in use
- Tools will be removed from the toolbox only by the Forest School Leader
- We never run with tools
- Tools will be counted at the beginning and end of each session
- Permission to use tools can only be given by the Forest School Leader
- Permission to use tools may be withdrawn at the Forest School Leader’s discretion if the rules are not followed
- The working area should have sufficient space (at least two arms and a tool away from anyone else) and be clear of trip hazards

Bow Saw rules

- Bow saws must have a blade guard on when not in use
- Supervision ratios are 1:2
- Bow saws are used to cut anything larger than a 2 pence piece
- A glove must be worn on the helping hand (children and adult sizes are available)
- Wood being sawn must be supported on a safe cutting bench
- The crossed hands method must be used to start sawing

Lopper rules

- Supervision ratios are 1:2
- Loppers are used to cut anything smaller than a 2 pence piece
- Loppers are used with bare hands
Knives must have a sheath on when not in use
Supervision ratios are 1:1
Knives are always used on the outside of the body and away from the body
A glove must be worn on the helping hand (children and adult sizes are available)

Billhooks must have a sheath on when not in use
Supervision ratios are 1:2
Billhooks are used to split wood
Billhooks are used with bare hands

10. Fires

Please note, we will not be using fires until we have a qualified Forest School Leader to supervise.

The fire will be contained within a square of logs
The logs will be pegged to stop them rolling
Seating logs will be placed in a circle a safe distance away from the fire
The seating circle will have a clear entrance and exit
Walking within the seating circle is not permitted
The ‘respect position’ should be used when kneeling by the fire
Water will be available to put the fire out
A fire glove will be available nearby
The fire will be lit with a Swiss fire steel
The fire will never be left unattended
A burns kit is available
**Extinguishing the fire**

- All fires must be extinguished at the end of a session
- Whenever possible, all fuels should be burnt off to ash
- At the end of the session, the fire must be doused with water and stirred until cool
- The ash should be scattered around the woodland to decompose
- There should be no trace of the fire left behind

**Kelly kettles**

- The Kelly kettle must be placed on flat, clear ground
- The Kelly kettle will be removed from the fire pan by the Forest School Leader
- The Kelly kettle must never be heated with the cork in

**11. Health and Safety**

All staff and adult helpers must read this Handbook and relevant risk assessments before participating in Forest School sessions.

The Forest School Leader is the person responsible for Health and Safety during Forest School sessions.

Essential survival equipment will be carried by a senior member of staff and will include:

- A copy of this Handbook
- First Aid kit
- Burns kit (if fires are planned)
- List of children with allergies and medication
- Emergency contact list
- Risk assessments
- Accident book
- Spare clothes
- Register
- Clean water
- Anti-bacterial wipes
- Nappy bags
- Drinks and snacks
- Storm shelter (bothy bag)
- Trowel (when away from the main site)
- Potty (when away from the main site)

In addition, the Forest School Leader and staff will carry mobile phones and there will be a supply of clean water, drinks and snacks.

12. Accidents and First Aid

Karen and Viv both hold a Paediatric First Aid certificate and there will always be at least one other member of staff present with this certificate. In addition, Karen holds a Forest Schools First Aid certificate which has an emphasis on administering first aid in the outdoors.

In the event of illness or injury to any child or adult during a Forest School session, first aid will be administered by a qualified first aider.

All accidents will be recorded in the Forest School Accident book and parents/guardians will be notified and asked to sign the record.

13. Emergency First Aid Procedures

In the event of an emergency, the following procedure will be followed:

- The area will be secured and made safe
- First aid will be administered by the Forest School Leader or a first aid qualified assistant
- The Forest School Leader or a first aid qualified assistant will stay with the casualty and monitor their condition
• An assistant will be asked to call the emergency services, giving an exact location and as much detail as possible
• An assistant will gather the children for a headcount and keep them calm
• An assistant will be asked to call children’s parents/guardians to arrange for children to be collected
• An accident report form will be completed
• Reports will be made to RIDDOR and Ofsted

In the event of an injury to the Forest School Leader, first aid will be administered by another qualified first aider using the same procedure described above.

14. Risk Assessments

Risk management is an important part of Forest School. It is concerned with the identification of significant risks of harm and is based on the likelihood of an incident occurring and the severity of any injury or harm if it does.

There are four different types of risk assessment used:

Site assessment

This assesses the risks associated with the Forest School site itself. Each layer of the woodland site is assessed at least once each half term and more frequently following adverse weather conditions.

Daily assessment

This is carried out before the start of each Forest School session and includes a review of the site and current weather conditions.

Activity assessment

An assessment of each planned activity will be carried out before the activity takes place. This will include activities using tools or fire.
**Ongoing assessment**

This is a dynamic, on-the-spot, assessment carried out continually during each session to take account of changing situations such as a change in weather conditions or a change in planned activities.

All risk assessments are recorded and current risk assessments are carried in the Happy Bag. Historic risk assessments are filed in the Crackerjacks’ office.

**15. Clothing**

*“There’s no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing”*

This is an old Scandinavian saying which is of great importance for Forest School as sessions take place in almost all weathers. It is important that all participants (children and adults) are suitably dressed for Forest School. Otherwise, they will feel uncomfortable and miserable and are unlikely to enjoy the experience.

It is recommended that long sleeves and long trousers are worn throughout the year to provide protection against sunburn, bites, stings and ticks. Layers are the best idea as temperatures and conditions can change significantly during a session. Plenty of warm clothing is essential on very cold days.

Footwear needs to be sturdy. Sandals or flip flops are never suitable for Forest School. Wellies or strong boots are best and remember to add an extra pair of socks in cold weather as cold feet can make you feel particularly miserable.

Waterproof jackets AND waterproof trousers are essential if there is any chance of rain or if the ground is wet. Crackerjacks has a limited supply of these if children need to borrow them.

Sun hats and sun cream are essential in the summer.

These recommendations apply to adults as well as children.
16. Poor Weather Procedures

Forest School sessions take place in all seasons and in all weathers – sun, rain, snow, ice, etc. In extreme weather conditions such as strong winds or thunderstorms, Forest School sessions may be cancelled. In the event of cancellation, a session will take place in the Crackerjacks’ room instead.

In cold weather, shelters will be erected and activities will be planned to keep children warm.

17. Food and Hygiene

Anti-bacterial wipes and a limited supply of soap and water will be available. Wipes will be disposed of in a bag and removed from the site.

Children will be offered a snack and a drink during the session. Normal food hygiene rules and standards apply when preparing and serving food during Forest School sessions. This includes any cooking done over an open fire.

18. Toileting

Children should be encouraged to use the toilet before they arrive for a Forest School session.

If children need the toilet or a nappy change during a session in the Willow Centre grounds, a member of staff will take them into the Willow Centre. When we are not at the Willow Centre grounds, children will be taken to an area away from other activities. A potty will be available if they choose to use it and anti-bacterial wipes will be available for hand cleaning. These will be disposed of in a bag and removed from the site for disposal.

Nappies will be double bagged and taken away for disposal.
19. Insurance

Our insurance with Morton Michel covers us for Forest School activities with the following requirements:

Forest School Activities
Guidelines and Requirements

General

1. Policies, procedures and risk assessments for each location and activity must be completed.

2. Leaders must have a Level one Forest School qualification for basic Forest School (FS) activities. For certain activities – eg. Fire making and use of tools – a level 3 qualified leader must lead the session. See below for further details.

3. You should obtain written parental consent for “forest school activities”, giving parents examples of the type of activities that would be included.

Approved and Agreed Activities

A.

The following activities are automatically covered subject to normal statutory adult to child supervision ratios

Digging, Exploring, Hikes, Woodland Walks, Treasure Hunts, Orienteering, Map Making, Bug Hunting, Hide and Seek, Shelter Making, Den Building

B.

The following are automatically covered subject to enhanced conditions as specified below.

Whitling

3+ only.
Whittling to be by potato peeler or suitable knives.
1:2 supervision ratio
Glove to be worn on non-tool hand.

Use of Saws

3+ only
Hand saws only, no power saws and must be type and age appropriate.
1:1 supervision ratio for children 3-8, 1:2 supervision ratio for over 8s. If working in pairs, then 1: one pair for under 8s and 1: 2 pairs for over 8s.
Glove to be worn on non-tool hand.
A Forest School Skills level 3 required for supervision of use of saws.

Fire Making

3+ only
A Forest School Skills level 3 required for supervision of making and using fires.
Fire to be lit and extinguished by adults only, children to be kept outside a one metre fire circle. (See NB below)
Supervision ratio 1:4
NB: If children are to light fires and/or put them out, this to be referred to Morton Michel. The minimum age and supervision ratio requirements will be increased in these circumstances.
**Cooking on Fires**

3+ only

For cooking with pots and pans and the like, 1:2 supervision ratio for under 8s and 1:4 for over 8s. All other cooking, 1:4 supervision ratio.

A Forest School Skills level 3 required for supervision of making and using fires.

Children not cooking to be kept outside a one metre fire circle.

**Tree Climbing**

3+ only

Supervision ratio 1:1 for under 8s with adult standing directly below child.

Supervision ratio 1:2 for over 8s with adult standing directly below child.

Maximum height 5ft for under 8’s, 6ft for over 8’s.

**Other Activities**

Underwriters may consider other activities but will require full details of the type of activity, supervision ratios and ages of children involved before considering them on a case by case basis.