

# Forest School Handbook



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# Forest School Ethos

*“Forest School is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self-esteem, through hands on learning experiences in a local woodland or natural environment with trees.*

*Forest School is a specialised approach that sits within and complements the wider context of outdoor and woodland learning.”* (Forest School and Outdoor Learning in the Early Years, Sara Knight, p.16)

Forest school is a process that happens over a number of weeks. It is a long term process led by a qualified Forest School leaders. Sessions are run regularly in natural spaces with the children being given the opportunity to become independent thinkers through opportunities to learn and explore the natural world. Children will build strong relationships whilst increasing their confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness and develop an ability to risk assess for themselves. A skilled Forest School leader will support children to lead their own learning at a pace that is suitable for them. Sessions are run to support all children with their development at their own pace and through a learning style that suits the individual children. During the Forest School process all children have the opportunity to achieve their own goals.

Forest School sessions motivate and challenge children in an outdoor environment, in all weathers. Children are given the opportunity to lead their own learning through trial and error in the safe knowledge that an adult is close by to support if and when necessary

Forest School is a long term process with children building in confidence and self-esteem. First hand experiences are key to ensure the children gain a good understanding of the natural world around them .

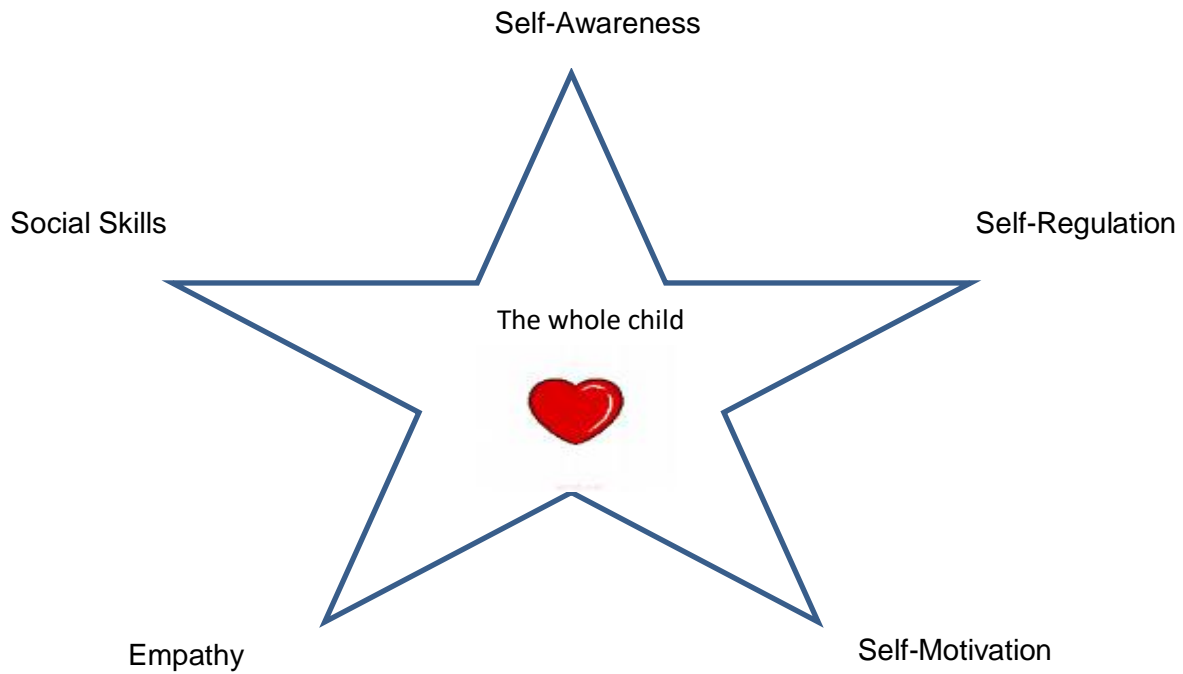
The Forest School concept was developed by a school in Denmark who established that children who have been exposed to this type of learning had better communication skills, social skills and a higher self-esteem when moving into a school setting.





## The benefits

Throughout planned Forest School sessions children have the opportunity to gain a wide range of learning. The star below shows the 5 main points of learning the children will have:



**Self-Awareness** – Children are beginning to have a better understanding about themselves in the world around them

**Self-Regulation** – Children are beginning to take an active role in guiding their own behaviour

**Self-Motivation** – Children find their own ways to drive their learning with their own interests and needs

**Empathy** – Children show an understanding of others needs and feelings

**Social Skills** - Children develop a skill of communicating with others either through verbal or non-verbal ways. They are enjoying being with and supporting their peers.

# Equipment

During the Forest School sessions equipment will be required to support the learning and to ensure children are kept safe at all times.

Essential equipment	Other equipment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mobile phone</li><li>• Emergency Procedures</li><li>• Risk assessments</li><li>• Medical information / equipment</li><li>• Gloves</li><li>• Sun cream</li><li>• Wet weather clothing</li><li>• Spare clothes</li><li>• Toileting equipment</li><li>• Whistle</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tarpaulin</li><li>• Ropes / string</li><li>• 1<sup>st</sup> aid box</li><li>• Blanket</li><li>• Roll mat</li><li>• Rubbish bag</li><li>• Fire kit</li><li>• Tools</li><li>• Tick remover</li><li>• Water bucket</li></ul>

The Forest School leader will always carry an emergency bag with them with the



# Forest school risk assessment

Location			Name	Emma Griffith	Date					
<b>Description of site / activity/ tools:</b> Woodland situated next to nursery – owned by the Forestry commission. There are a variety of tress such as pine, beech and sweet chestnuts. Dog walkers can be seen occasionally. There are signs of badger activity No vehicles can access the woodland at chosen venue										
	Hazard	Harm	People at Risk	Existing Preventative Measures	P 1-5	S 1-5	Rating (PxS) 1-25	New Preventative Measures	Who? When?	Benefits
1	Falling branches	Head injury	Forest School participants, Staff	Site management Woodland patrol with Forestry Commission	2	4	8	Change environment Share information Carry equipment Change practice	Emma	
2	Holly bushes	Scratches, cuts	Forest School participants, Staff	Walk through site and talk through risks *	2	1	2	Share information Carry equipment	Emma	
3	Tree stumps	Falls, trips	Forest School participants, Staff	Walk through site and talk through risks	5	3	15	Share information Carry equipment	Emma	
4	Uneven ground	Slips, trips, falls	Forest School participants, Staff	Walk through site and talk through risks	3	2	6	Share information Carry equipment	Emma	
5	Loose footings	Slips, trips, falls	Forest School participants, Staff	Walk through site and talk through risks	3	2	6	Share information Carry equipment	Emma	
6	Weather	Falling trees/branches, heat, flooding	Forest School participants, Staff	Use MET office weather warning as guidance	3	4	12	High winds – no session Sun cream Carry equipment	Emma	
7	Dog walkers	Dog mess, out of control dogs	Forest School participants, Staff	Talk through ways to behave	4	1	4	Share information	Emma	
8	Ditches / standing water	Falling, drowning	Forest School participants, Staff	Talk through dangers Tape off ditch areas	3	4	12	Share information Carry equipment Tape off ditch areas	Emma	
9	Leaning trees	Banging head, trees rotting	Forest School participants, Staff	Talk through dangers Site management	4	2	8	Share information Carry equipment Change environment	Emma	

10	Litter	Sharp objects, infection	Forest School participants, Staff	Collect litter before children enter woodland Talk through risks with children	3	2	6	Collect litter Share information	Emma	
11	Insects bites/stings	Infection, allergic reaction, itching	Forest School participants, Staff	Establish any allergies Talk to children about wasps etc. Use antiseptic wipes	3	3	9	Share information Carry equipment	Emma	
12	Biosecurity	Cross contamination of soil to other woodlands	Forest School participants, Staff	Ensure children bang the mud off their boots when leaving the woodland If necessary clean boots	5	3	15	Share information	Emma	
13	Eating wild plants / vegetation	Allergic reaction, poisoning, choking	Forest School participants, Staff	Talk through poisonous plants / fungi Talk about not putting their fingers in their mouths	2	5	10		Emma	
<b>Your comments:</b>  <b>Your main concerns:</b>  <b>Your main positive features:</b>					<b>Your recommendations</b>					

Key – P = Probability / S = Severity



## Activity ideas

Forest School promotes children to become independent learners through a wide range of activities.

Practitioners spend time observing the children, noting down what their needs and interests are. These observations then lead in to the planning for the sessions; ensuring children are being challenged in their learning.

Activity ideas may include:

- Building a house for a mouse
- Large den building
- Making bird feeders
- Finding wildlife
- Using ropes and string to construct objects, such as;
  - Picture frames
  - Dens
  - Ladders
  - Boats
- Cooking on open fires
- Whittling objects with knives



During the sessions children build their confidence and their imagination skills through being allowed to be themselves.





## Using and storing tools

When using tools with children it is important to ensure the children are kept safe at all times. **Tools should only be used with a trained Forest School Leader**

Tools must be counted in and out of the locked box at the beginning and the end of the session. Children only use tools under the close supervision of an adult. The Forest School Leader checks the tools at the end of each session for damage to the equipment.

Children will have a safety talk about using tools; this will be for a specific purpose. Tools will only be used on a 1:1 basis with the adult modelling the correct way to use them.

A glove will be worn by the child on their non-tool hand to ensure they are safe when using the equipment.

### Knives

Knives will be used on a 1:1 basis

Children will be sat an arm's length away from the child next to them

The whittling piece of wood will be placed across the child's body with their elbow on their knee

The knife is then scrapped away from the body pointing down towards the ground and away from the body.

When not in use the knife will be returned to its sheath, once the knife is safe it will be returned to its safe box

### Bow Saws

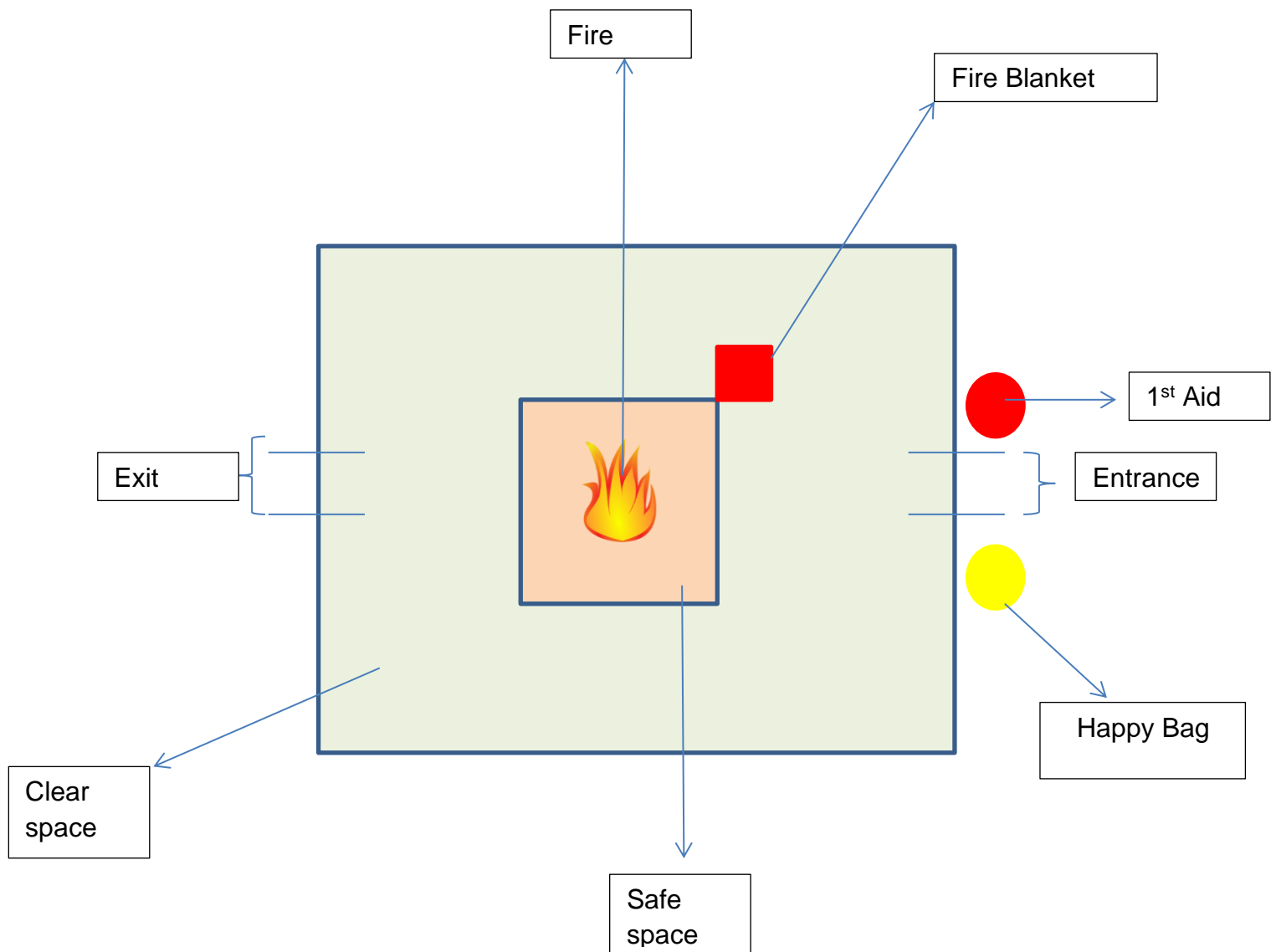
Bow Saws are used on a 1:2 basis.

Children will work in pairs when sawing wood. They will be sat opposite each other each with the bow saw in their right hands. Their left hands will be place through the gap in the Bow Saw, crossing over each other. One child will issue the orders, by saying, "push, pull" until the wood is cut through.

When the Bow Saw has been used the blade cover will be returned and the Saw will be placed back in the safe box

## Using a fire

Clear boundaries are set with children when using a fire. Children will be sat at a safe distance away from the fire. Rules will be set with the children as to what they can and can't do to ensure they are kept safe at all times.



A fire glove will be worn by anyone using the fire. A 1:1 ratio will be in place at all times when using the fire.

**A fire should only be used with a trained Forest School Leader**

# A parent's guide to Forest School

Go and open the door maybe outside there's a tree, or a wood, a garden, or a magic city.

Miroslav Holub



## **What is Forest School?**

The development of Forest Schools began in Britain around the mid 1990's after a college in Somerset observed children in Denmark exploring and learning about the natural world. Children were observed cooking on open fires and using tools.

The sessions are always child led enabling them to build confidence and independence whilst developing their trust in others.

## **What happens in Forest School?**

A qualified Forest School Leader, together with support staff, work with small groups of children in activities directed by their interests. In regular sessions over a number of weeks children take ownership of a small area of woodland for their Forest School adventure. They will have the opportunity to learn about their natural surroundings which gives them the opportunity to develop:

- ✓ social skills
- ✓ physical skills
- ✓ intellectual skills
- ✓ communication skills
- ✓ emotional and spiritual awareness



Early sessions use games, rhymes and repetition to encourage safety and responsible behaviour in the outdoor environment. This builds a sense of security within which the children can gain confidence to explore and interact with the woodland.

Activities during the time outside will include:

- ✓ den building
- ✓ climbing
- ✓ making their own art creations
- ✓ identifying wildlife
- ✓ woodland tool expertise i.e. whittling
- ✓ safe and controlled fire making for keeping warm cooking



and

### **How will my child be kept safe?**

There will only ever be 8 children out in the woods at one time. They will be accompanied by 3 adults. Part of the experience is supporting children to learn about risks and how we manage them. Clear rules and expectations will be shared with the children at the beginning of each session. The woodland site, which is adjacent to the nursery, and all activities are risk assessed on a daily basis.

### **How long will the sessions last?**

The sessions will last between 2 and 3 hours depending on the weather.

### **What will my child need to wear?**

Your child will get dirty during these sessions and it is important to remember that there is no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothes.

A change of clothing would also be advisable as you just never know how messy we might get.



Cold wet weather:

- ✓ waterproof jacket and trousers or a waterproof all in one
- ✓ hat
- ✓ gloves
- ✓ warm clothing
- ✓ wellies are essential



Warm dry weather

- ✓ light weight long sleeved tops and long trousers
- ✓ sun hat
- ✓ sun cream
- ✓ good sturdy shoes or wellies



Dear Parent / Carer

**Re: Forest School sessions at .....**

My name is Emma Griffith and I am an Early Years Virtual School officer employed by Wokingham Borough Council. I am currently working with the staff at the nursery to support the development of the daily provision for the children.

As you are aware, your child has been selected to take part in an exciting programme of six sessions in the woodlands next to the nursery. Your child will have the chance to explore, discover nature, work cooperatively with their friends, build dens and enjoy the freedom of learning outdoors.

This opportunity is fully supported by the management team of the nursery with staff members supporting the children during their exploration of the woodland. Children will be fully safeguarded during the sessions with extensive checks having been carried out.

I will be leading the sessions with your child alongside the staff at the nursery. We will be delivering a Forest School programme over six weekly sessions of woodland activities with a group of children. All activities during these six sessions are fully assessed for their learning benefits and risks, however children will be encouraged to explore, build, climb and investigate independently. Staff will support children to look after and assess risks themselves. A fully qualified first aider with outdoor training will be present during all sessions with ratios being kept in line with the Early Years statutory framework.

During the 6 week programme we will be observing the children's development, which will be documented through their learning journey's within the nursery setting. An evaluation of each session will be completed including photos of the children participating in the activities, comments they make and the development of their confidence.

There is a booklet attached to this letter with more information about Forest School, if you have any questions about these sessions please feel free to chat with your nursery manager.

Yours sincerely

Emma Griffith

Early Years Virtual School officer and Forest School Leader, Wokingham Borough Council

### Forest School Permission Form

I give / do not give consent for my child to attend the Forest School Session with Emma Griffith

Name of child

.....

Signature of parent / career

.....

Print parent / carer name

.....

Date

.....

I give consent for my child's photograph to be taken of my child during these sessions:

Name of child

.....

Signature of parent / career

.....

Print parent / carer name

.....

Date

.....

### Policies and Procedures

## Forest School Policy [insert date]

Date	Authorised Signature	Review Date

### Statement of Intent

The [name of setting] aims to use the natural outdoor woodland area to offer the children an insight into the Forest School ethos. This approach to outdoor learning encourages children to become independent, use their imagination, take appropriate risks within boundaries and initiate learning for themselves. Forest School is a holistic approach to learning, incorporating children's individuality and develops their skills for lifelong learning. It works in connection with the Early Years Framework offering children opportunities to develop their emotional and spiritual aspects of learning where self-esteem and self-confidence can grow, and positive relationships with peers can be formed. Forest School explores the outdoors and the natural environment with practical, useful activities all year round. It develops peer learning with the adults providing support and enabling activities to take place. The child's interest will be at the heart of any activity.

Additional policies will be adhered to alongside this policy during Forest School sessions within our Forest School area and the surrounding Woodland.

### Legislation considered for policy

LAW Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the associated

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

LAW Education Act 2002, Education and Inspections Act 2006

LAW Children Act 2004

LAW Disability Discrimination Act 2005

LAW Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

LAW Compensation Act 2006

### Implementation



Risk assessments are in place for the use of tools, fire and the surrounding area.

Equality and Diversity: All children will be included with all activities and no form of discrimination will take place, reasonable adjustments will be made to make it inclusive for all. Inclusion is a thread which runs through all of the Forest School activities regardless of a child's ability, disability, gender, race, culture.

[name of setting] has an Inclusion, Special Educational Needs Policy and an Equality and Diversity Policy which will be adhered to during Forest School sessions.

### Health and Safety

Forest School sessions by their nature encourage children to develop their own risk management skills and will support them to become responsible for themselves and others around them. Children will be reminded of rules and safe play if they are considered too dangerous. Ratios within the woodland area remain the same as indoors unless we are off site when we will increase the number of adults (1 adult to 4 children for 2 year olds 1 adult to 8 children 3 and 4 year olds or with an Early Years Professional 1 adult to 13 children). Risk assessments will be carried out before each visit and for the use of all tools and equipment. The Forest School Leader will assess weather conditions regularly and will evacuate the area if they become too extreme. All children and adults will wear appropriate clothing depending upon the weather conditions. An open fire risk assessment will be carried out before a fire is allowed and protection procedures followed. A Forest School Leader will be present at all times and children will be reminded of safe practice. The pre-school has a Health and Safety Policy, Safeguarding Children Policy etc. to enhance aspects of health and safety

Risk Assessments will include:

- The site of the Forest School
- Individual Risk Assessments for tools (bill hook, saw, mallets, knives)
- Open Fire
- Rope and string
- Shelter building
- Collecting natural materials

### First Aid

The Forest School Leader has an enhanced first aid certificate to specifically cover outdoors. Ensure the safety of all other children within the group and the possible need to evacuate them indoors. Seek emergency help if needed. There will be a first-aid kit taken into the woodland area and extra first-aid equipment is located within the pre-school. Contact the parents and complete the accident report forms, contact HSE if it is a serious accident. Emergency procedures are within the Forest School Sessions handbook which is taken into the woodland each session. Ensure all staff are aware of medical conditions of the children and inhalers, epi pens etc. are taken into woodland.

### Use of Tools

Children and adults will be trained in the use of each tool before they use it. Tools will be counted in and out and checked against an inventory. Tools will be stored safely and kept out of the reach of children. They will be cleaned after each use to prolong their life, broken and damaged tools will not be used. Children and adults will be informed of rules, safety and how to use before they use. Tool use will be on a ratio of one to three.

### Use of Fires

A Forest School Leader must always be present when a fire is lit and it must never be left unattended. There must always be water available to extinguish the fire.

Children will be reminded of the fire pit procedures at each and every visit.

Walk behind the log seats and stand behind the log.

Step over and sit down on the log seat.

Stand up, turn around and step over the log.

Children are not allowed to cross the inner circle (adults should be role models of this).

### Environment

Wherever possible environmentally friendly products and recycled materials will be used. The [name of setting] will promote environmental awareness and care for our environment. Conservation issues and sustainability will also be supported. The woodland will be maintained to ensure the survival of all native flora and fauna and new flora will be introduced if needed. We will remove all litter and debris we take into the woodland and have regular litter picks to remove other refuse which is in the area. We will be caring towards our neighbours and try to minimise the amount of smoke and noise produced. Brambles and nettles will be removed from the main pathways but will be allowed to grow in other areas of the woodland. Branches at eye level and below on the main pathways will be removed to avoid injuries for people entering the woodland unsupervised (without the Forest School Leader), they will remain on all other trees. Dead and fallen branches will be removed, cut down and stored in the log store and used as fire wood. During the winter months large stones and logs will be left alone to avoid disturbing hibernating creatures. There will be areas created where wood is allowed to rot to encourage insects to thrive, wild flowers will be allowed to grow and children encouraged to enjoy them growing rather than pick them.

### Roles and Responsibilities:

Forest School Leader: will have a level 3 Forest School Leader qualification, DBS enhanced disclosure and an outdoor first aid qualification.

Forest School Leader will have the overall responsibility for:

Risk assessments for each session, pre-visit site checks and continuous safety monitoring.

Planning for sessions, differentiation for individual children's needs.

Ensuring necessary equipment is taken into woodland.

Administration of first aid and first aid kit.

Supervision of tools use, cleaning and storing.

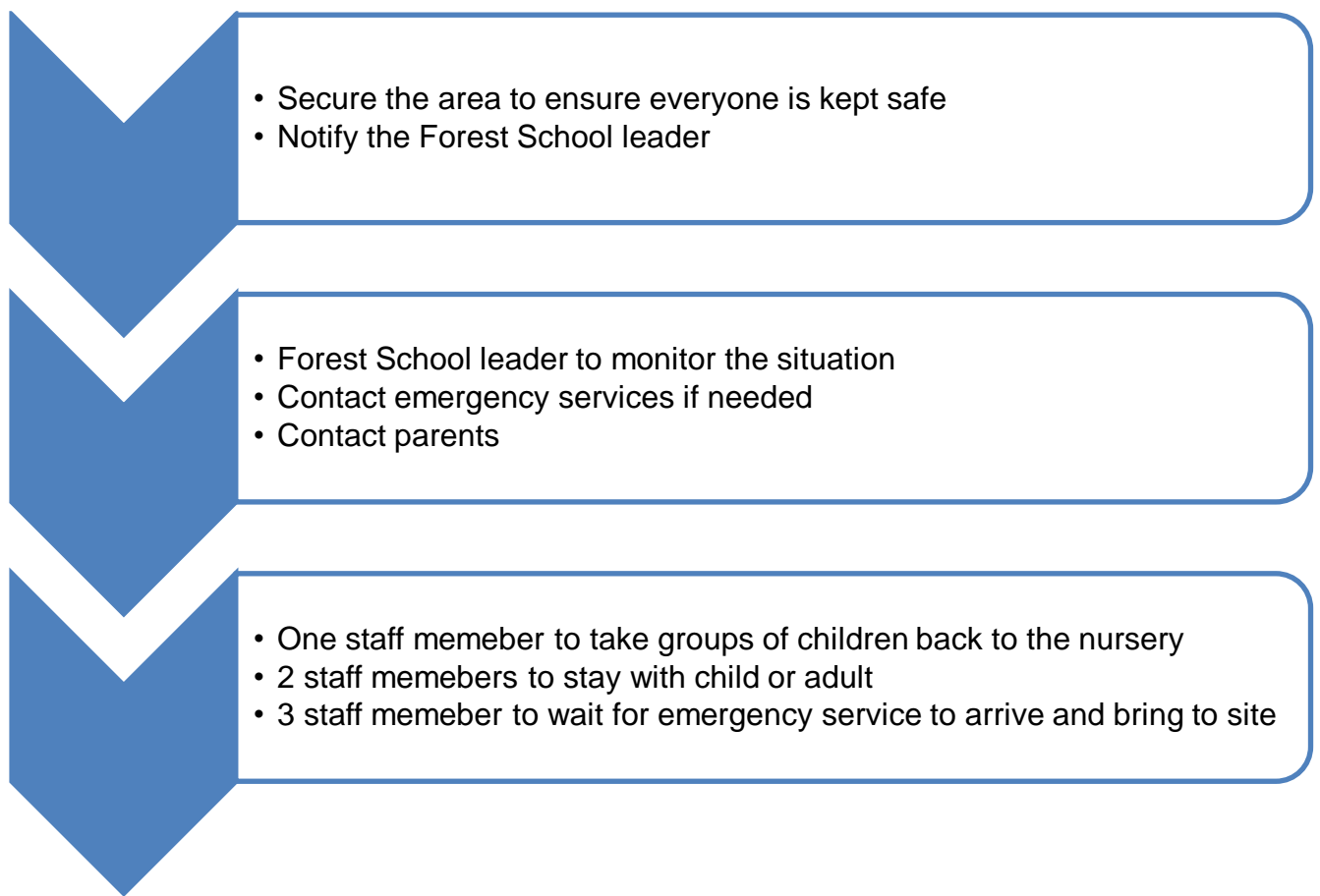
Organisation of emergency procedures.

Staff/ students / volunteers: will model good practice throughout the session, carry out delegated roles and responsibilities, extend children's learning where appropriate by asking extending questions, support children to manage their own risk, remind children of rules and boundaries, be aware of dangers within Forest School and monitor levels of safety at all times, support the Forest School leader to run the sessions.

#### Monitoring of policy

This policy will be reviewed annually or before should any incidents arise or laws and policies change.

#### **Emergency action plan**



It is important that after any incident the staff members should have a debrief with a sit down. Panic and shock may set in after the incident so staff need to ensure they are looking after their own wellbeing.

Accident / incident forms need to be completed as soon as possible.