

Forest School 'Handbook' – a Working Document

Forest School Norfolk - Guidance Notes

Please also see Forest School Norfolk Guidance Notes:

- Introduction to Health and Safety
- Introduction to Risk Management

It is strongly recommended and also the requirements of most OCN Level 3 Forest School Practitioners Awards for students to present policies and procedures in line with statutory requirements and good practice, appropriate to their site and client group. Many Forest School Training providers recommend presenting these in the form of a working document or 'Handbook' so all relevant information is drawn together in one place.

Why do Forest School Practitioners need Policies and Procedures?

Professional integrity – having all appropriate paperwork in place demonstrates that the practitioner is well prepared and considering good practice. Undertaking the process of compiling a handbook can provide the practitioner with peace of mind as they have considered and planned for all likely foreseeable outcomes.

A communication tool – explaining what and how things are undertaken at your Forest School, to be shared with other staff, managers, client group leaders, parents.

Protection against litigation – accidents and incidents do happen. Having all necessary paperwork in place and up to date will evidence practitioners thought processes in managing health and safety, risk, safeguarding children etc. as far as is reasonably practical.

A legal requirement – under Health and Safety Law employers (with more than 5 employees) must have a written Health and Safety Policy appropriate for their work situation. Organisations that work with children also need a safeguarding children policy.

Policies and Procedures

A **policy** can be described as a plan of action or intent designed to guide decisions to achieve particular desired outcomes. In Forest School there may be various policies (or statements added to existing organisational policies) **outlining a vision or intent** on a particular issue. Policies may be supported and actioned through written procedures.

A **procedure** can be defined as a specific series of actions or operations that are required to be undertaken in specific order to obtain a consistent desired result. In Forest School there may be various procedures outlining **specifically how we do things** at Forest School. Procedures may link directly with a Policy and be written as part of the same document.

Possible Forest School Policies and related Procedures

Every Forest School is different and will need policies and procedures appropriate to their needs and situation. The list below may provide some ideas of things to consider, but should not be treated as a definitive list.

Policy	Related Procedures
<p><u>Health and Safety</u> (including statements on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management and assessment • First Aid provision (inc. Emergency equipment carried) • Staff/helpers qualifications, training & responsibilities • Equipment • Use of personal protective equipment • Welfare requirements – toilets, hygiene, food and drink • Emergency and Incident management • Contingency and cancellation • Transport • Insurance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk assessment • Weather and clothing • Gaining parental consent • Administering medicines/items to children • Tool and equipment operational • Fire protocol • Toileting • Food Hygiene • Emergency and serious incident • Reporting and near miss • Cancellation and contingency • Walking/driving/transport
<p><u>Safeguarding Children</u> (Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental/carer communication and permissions • Training for staff and responsibilities • Vetting and Barring (what was CRB) • Ratios • Preparing children for Forest School • Use of photographs and digital recording media • Receiving visitors • Confidentiality) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding recording and reporting • Disclosure • Lost or missing child • Unwanted visitor
<p><u>Learning and Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest School ethos • Aims and objectives • Observation and assessment • Role of the adult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation and evaluation • Planning • Procedures for certain experiences e.g. – Fire, cooking, using tools, climbing, games, construction etc.
<p><u>Equal Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special educational needs • Inclusion and access • Behaviour management • Anti-bullying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-escalation • Positive handling • Rewards and sanctions
<p><u>Environmental/Sustainability</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable use of site • Care of flora and fauna • Purchasing/suppliers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological impact assessment and management • Procedures for certain tasks – coppicing, minibeast hunts, planting, mowing etc. sensitive to ecology of site
<p><u>Terms and Conditions</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booking • Cancellation • Complaints
	<p><u>Daily Operating Procedures</u> (Stating what is done before, during and after sessions and by whom.)</p>

The Handbook - A 'Working Document'

The information within the 'handbook' needs to be relevant and appropriate to your Forest School – the physical site and also the staff, client group and activities that are undertaken. Information needs to be specific to your Forest School's circumstances. As the Forest School Leader it is your responsibility (in consultation with managers) to ensure this is in place.

Policies and Procedures should be realistic and practicable; your handbook should reflect your Forest School practice. As your practice develops and changes, so too should your handbook. Your handbook should be considered a useful tool that is regularly reflected upon and updated.

All policies and procedures should be signed and dated by the author, with a review date specified, at least annually or after a change, incident or near miss.

Working within existing documentation

It is likely (unless you are freelance) that your organisation or School will already have certain Policies and Procedures in place. As a Forest School Practitioner it is essential that you understand the guidance presented in these documents and review whether they adequately cover the needs of working at a Forest School. If not, you may need to write an addendum to how certain aspects of the policy/procedure are met during Forest School. For example, most school policies and procedures may not refer to how fire is used to support learning and how it is managed when having campfires with pupils.

It is also important to check that your statements and addendums are within appropriate limitations set by wider legislation, such as the Health and Safety at work Act (1974), Disabilities Discrimination Act (2005), Children Act (2004) etc. You may also need to get your documents approved by managers, or governing body.