

A CHILD'S VIEW OF FOREST SCHOOL

To an outside eye a Forest School session might 'just' look like playing outdoors - all fun and games – some might even ask 'what is the point?'

Outdoor practitioners understand there is so much going on, if you only stop and observe. Sarah Rix of Milford Pre School Plus, Lymington, Hampshire offers some insights into what is really going on...

"Our Forest School activities provide experiences rich in visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning within each of our activities. Each one is flexible so each child can build their confidence by repetition and develop self-esteem by succeeding, which will in turn encourage that perseverance that builds up resilience, a crucial part of growing up through childhood.

We access Forest School for five mornings over a fortnight, so we are so lucky to observe all the changes through the year and adapt exciting activities and free play opportunities. The children absolutely love their sessions, they are so keen to get on those waterproofs or sun hats ready for a new experience. We share the Forest School area with the school next door, it contains a wide space filled with mighty oaks for rope swings, field maples for climbing, a large wildlife pond for dipping, a fire circle for cooking and reflecting, a construction area for building, travelling and balancing, a shed containing tools and a saw horse, whittling area and a parachute area for creating.

We hold a family session each term so the children can show their parents all the amazing activities they get up to at Forest School, and I can tell them all about the incredible opportunities for a wide range of learning. The children love to show their parents how they can carry them out too!"



"I can help you, just hold them like I did. Look, you need to cut here."

One of the remarkable things about Forest School is using proper tools. It gives our children great confidence, and their self-esteem rises when they can use tools, 'just like Daddy!' Because they regularly attend Forest School, they become familiar with the tools we use as part of the maintenance of our woodland site, and to craft wood. We risk assess every session to remind the children how they should use the tools, which in turn ensures they take the care required and understand what could happen if they don't. This makes certain less adult intervention is needed and the children support one another, giving them the leadership.

"I can hear the birds singing and they are watching me whittle!"

Our three-and four-years olds whittle independently. They appear to find it such a relaxing and calming activity. Often they are not choosing to create a particular product - they are happy to simply strip the bark of the hazel. The children generally whittle in silence; they are simply listening to the sounds of the woodland as they concentrate.



“I know how to light the fire - you hold the Dragons Sneeze here and go whoosh down.”



Our children love fire lighting, its part of our routine to have a fire to cook snacks and the Kelly Kettle for warm water to hand wash. This ensures there are plenty of opportunities for each child to have their turn as they are so keen! Lighting the fire encourages perseverance and determination so the success is immense! A loud cheer rings around the woodland when one of our children succeeds! The children often just come and sit around the fire to watch it grow and cook our food, giving a calming and reflective time, just being. Once the child has success with fire lighting, they offer to help their peers, who always accept the support. They always get down to the same position and take ownership, even giving encouragement as the adult has previously given them. You can see the confidence shining from the lead child as they inspire their peer.

“We all have to go this way, or you will fall off!”

The biggest part of Early Years is providing a rich environment full of personal, social, and emotional experiences. As Forest School is holistic, we can support all these activities including teamwork and playing as part of a group. Activities such as rope play, where groups of children play together, is a fitting example of this. Few whole group experiences occur during indoor play - Forest School offers space and time for the children to play together.



“Look, the Bluebells are growing here!” “We don’t want to break them; I can put a hazard flag here.”

The children are shown how to look after the fauna and flora at Forest School. We use hazard flags to show everyone where special plants are growing, or if we see a hazard such as Foxgloves. The children have also placed them by ant nests or the bird feeders, so no one touches them. This teaches our children empathy for others. They are learning to respect and connect with their natural world. We always say thank you to the wood when we leave and put everything away, to return it to how we found it when we got there.

“When we have seen that worm, we have to put his house back or he will die”

Not all our children have the opportunity to own or to look after pets. Forest School enables all our children to experience looking after insects or animals. They love to bug hunt and feed the birds, and we always talk about how we respect their feelings by caring for them and handling insects appropriately. The children become so caring, and this then channels across to caring for their peers. We feed our family of sparrows that nest in our boxes and our robins, we talk to the children about how we feed them when they cannot find worms so they will be hungry.



Milford pre-school plus



The Outdoor Practitioner



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