



Winter/spring 2022
Issue 4

The Outdoor Practitioner



Outdoor
Hub

It's popcorn time!

HEALTH & WELLBEING FOCUS

- reclaiming snack time
- mental health, inclusion & connection
- reflective practice & practical solutions

A CHILD'S EYE VIEW OF FOREST SCHOOL
NATURE PREMIUM



Practitioners Voice



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IDEAS & ACTIVITIES FOR PLAY & LEARNING OUTDOORS



Welcome

to Issue 4 of the **Outdoor Practitioner** magazine!

Hello friends

As Outdoor Practitioners, we know the many and varied benefits of playing and learning outdoors. This issue we focus on the benefits to health and wellbeing - our articles address issues from climate anxiety to fire safety, snow days and gratitude to projects that build in inclusion and tackle disadvantage, and a brand new investigation into the depths of understanding we can bring to the simple act of outdoor snacks and the importance of comfort, from Dr Mel McCree.

We also have an update on the Nature Premium campaign, a child's eye view of what's really happening at Forest School, and snapshots of outdoor projects in the Practitioners Voice.



We're very proud of the range and depth of articles in this issue. We think reading about outdoor provision in theory and practice, and inspiring reflections on how we work, is a great way of acknowledging and learning from the tremendous skills and experience in this welcoming, generous, nature-connected community.

Many thanks to all of our contributors, and to all of our readers - and to everyone who is getting outside and supporting others to do the same - it's important and it feels good!

As the days start to get lighter, we look forward to seeing you again soon!

Beccy

Beccy Golding
Editor, The Outdoor Practitioner

We really value your feedback - do keep letting us know what you think, and sharing your favourite articles, or the whole magazine, with all your outdoor and outdoor-interested networks!



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The Outdoor Practitioner

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Muddy Faces has a range of resources to buy & the fantastic Outdoor Hub with free downloadable activities and ideas to get you outdoors.

Please contact us if you would like to contribute an article or share activities.

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Reclaiming Snack Time: the importance of comfort

Cooking and eating in the open air are part of life's simple pleasures and an essential part of outdoor sessions. Yet a focus on snacks and food has not had the attention it deserves. It's time to think more deeply about the role of snack time for physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Dr Mel McCree makes a case for inclusive practice for nurture through food and nutrition.

Ensuring our participants are fed and comfortable is a fundamental starting point to any session

This is an essential part of a trauma informed, inclusive, recovery approach that we cannot afford to ignore. If you work outdoors with people in the UK, you will have noticed increases in need, precarity and general anxiety. Life became more stressful under austerity and in the pandemic, particularly for those in poverty and underserved communities.

According to [UNICEF](#), UK children's wellbeing is at an all-time low. Child poverty is now at 4.3 million, with wide geographical disparities, meaning some UK areas are at crisis levels. There are statistically more people of colour and single parents in these groups. Precarity is a critical race, class, gender and equality issue. That's one in three UK children, and

their parents, facing basic survival challenges.

Young adults are also at a critical point in their mental health, with challenges finding jobs, education and homes. One third of mental health problems in adulthood are directly connected to adverse childhood experiences (ACE) ([Young Minds](#)).

I paint a grim picture to acknowledge the reality that many outdoor practitioners work with. We can't solve the causes or the bottomless need, but nurture, food and nutrition is one way we can make a big difference.

Meeting needs for recovery with a trauma-informed approach

We all need our essential safety, food, warmth and wellbeing in order to flourish. Not just participants but

practitioners too. Can you plan to meet this need in your sessions? Even if you run very short sessions, keep reading for ways you can take action.

Nurture at snack time as inclusive practice

Why do we have snack time or a tea break? Firstly, this is not a break! Gathering together to share food and social warmth is where we 'build the village' and, I argue, the most valuable part of a session. For example, many practitioners report how outdoor cooking with refugee families is hugely successful, prompting the sharing of recipes and memories from home.

Amongst others, we can take the [nurture group approach](#) to support and recognise core social skills. Let's be honest and value snack time as the group experience highlight that it frequently is. It is incredibly important as a way of making the

outdoors inclusive and accessible to all, from poverty proofing, to sensory processing, and meeting our basic needs so we can relax and enjoy ourselves.

From my own perspective, when I get stressed, one of the first signs is my denial of my own sensory signals for food, drink and rest. I often find myself in desperate need of food and a cuppa. The anticipation looms large on my inner horizon until I can't concentrate on anything. Having a snack, or 'a nice cup of tea and a sit down' whenever you need it, is not always invited or seen as appropriate, so I can delay for social reasons. This becomes learned behaviour and my own signals become harder to recognise. However, once I meet my basic needs and refuel, I become calm, grounded and able to function again. If I leave it too long, then it takes longer to recover.

Sackville-Ford (2019, p93) notes how adding breakfast had a calming effect on behaviour in his Forest School sessions.

We can't expect people to function and wait for breaktime if they are tired and hungry. We can't expect regularly tired and hungry participants to bounce back from a snack immediately.



There are other challenges to inclusion in providing nurture through food. Sometimes, in a group, we can also feel too fragile to show up for a tea break. Joining in can be incredibly challenging for those who avoid direct conversation. It is possible to create an open snack table or spaces to snack solo. Those with sensory processing challenges may also need support in navigating snack time. Being outside brings a new dimension to the senses and many report that participants will experiment and try out all kinds of new foods when outdoors.

Putting our senses first

Despite all the books now on outdoor pedagogy, hardly any of them mention food. Notable exceptions are by authors Annie Davey, Jon Cree and

Marina Robb (see *refs*). Perhaps this is because, in our privilege, we take the presence of food and water for granted. Our stomachs have forgotten what it feels like to be really hungry and it is easy to forget to count our blessings.

The late Erin Kenny, describing a day in the life of [Cedar Song Nature School](#) (a 100% outdoors pre-school on an island off Washington state, USA), started her snack time by acknowledging how lucky we are to have food. It doesn't have to be pious, and a simple bit of appreciation probably makes it taste nicer, along with fresh air.

Our sense memory is strong. The quality of the biscuits is often the thing you remember about a team session or day out. When the break arrived, were you surprised or disappointed by what was on offer? What snacks are memorable for you and why?

Annie Davy, in *A Sense of Place*, talks about the window of the senses, or SWIM: Survival, Wellbeing, Independence and Meaning. Starting with our survival and wellbeing makes so much sense (in both senses!) if we want participants to gain independence and successfully create meaning. She notes that hunger can be a confusing & difficult sensation to assess, linked to emotions & cravings.



Encourage sensory exploration with some gentle reflections or prompts: My food feels / smells / tastes like...? What about yours? Where do you feel it on your tongue as you chew? Now you've eaten, do you feel full? Are you thirsty as well?

In their book *The Essential Guide to Forest School and Nature Pedagogy*, Marina Robb and Jon Cree describe the full [eight senses](#): the five survival senses and three functional senses of proprioceptive, vestibular and interoception. Consider all the ways that nature and food stimulate our sensory development and how our brains integrate this input, such as the balance and flow in diverse ecosystems that moves our '[gaze of fascination](#)' around, relaxing the eyes and restoring our attention. Recommended for screen breaks!

Outdoors is a wonderful place of subliminal multisensory stimulation. Cooking and eating can enhance all the senses. Which particular ways can you support this for your participants, to build that long term healthy relationship to food? For example, how is the tactile experience and can you prompt in more to enrich it? How about tasting food twice, as many cultures do? Once with the fingers , the second time with the mouth?

Robb and Cree also note the importance of clean fresh water and food hygiene. I recommend Richard Irvine's [soap dispenser](#), portable taps and [handwashing guides](#) in the previous issue of this magazine! ([see Outdoor Practitioner issue #2](#))

Wild wood case study

The scenes in the case study will be recognisable to many practitioners. There are deep principles inherent in these precious moments. Some children regularly reported feeling tired and in need of space when they arrived. One child said '*this is the only time I get some peace and quiet*'.

Wild Wood case study
hot chocolate as a holistic process

I worked with a Wildlife Trust group for disadvantaged young children (5-9) to research their long term project (2013-16), visiting the same local woodland each week year-round for a few hours. The children always chose what to do, including lots of free open-ended play, and took part in planning future sessions. However, making hot chocolate with a fire-based kettle was the one consistent activity that everyone agreed must happen every week. They came to site straight from school lunchtime and it wasn't just the warm, sugary snack they craved, it was the whole ritual of making and sharing. Observing this project really taught me the value of snack time.

It took time. They built slowly on their independent skills over years. It was a challenge at first for some to sit, drink and talk peacefully with each other around the fire pit. Then over a few years, they went on to find and chop wood, safely build and light



a fire, heat the water, carefully watch, set out cups, pour the hot water with help, hand it round with fruit and biscuits, then tidy up. Indeed a ritual worthy of merit and reward. I understand why the children saw it as the essential memorable ingredient of the session.

This level of responsibility and achievement was something all the children wanted to take on. It gave them confidence, self esteem and social recognition. They gained trust from the leader by safely handling risk and learning skills. For children who had a complex and challenging relationship with school, this was a badge of honour. They loved to be recognised as the one who independently provided and cared for their fellow peers. Importantly the group, valued their time to rest and socialise at this point in the group.

As the children got to know the space, they roamed further. Snack time was the one point that everyone was together. It was a time for jokes, stories, sharing news and reflections. A calm settled over the group. It was also a time for wildlife watching, as the robins and other birds gathered alongside to pick up the crumbs. Then, the sugar rush was absorbed by the wide ranging play that followed.

DEFINITIONS

- Trauma-informed practice develops strengths-based understandings and responses to the impact of trauma, emphasising physical, psychological, and emotional safety and empowerment
- Nurture group: short-term intervention for pupils with social, emotional & behavioural difficulties that make it harder for them to learn in mainstream class
- Proprioception: the sense of self-movement and body position
- Vestibular: the sense of knowing where your body is in relation to the environment
- Interoception: understanding and feeling what's going on inside your body



Wild wood snack
time discoveries

- Snack time is key to belonging and a successful group process
- Enjoy the ritual of coming together to share
- Give space for people to take turns to provide for each other
- Encourage experimentation and time to try out new skills, behaviours and tastes
- If people are tired, hungry or cold, meet these needs first
- Give space around snack time for a range of sensory and emotional processing
- Allow food and drink at any time
- Be open to other species – flora in the food and drink and fauna for company!

How does it change our approach when we value this unique chance for rest and a break from life challenges?

How does your thinking change about snack time when in context of all the social, emotional and sensory processing going on?

The [evidence](#) from this study demonstrated that supporting wellbeing through outdoor play and

learning facilitates improvement in school readiness and achievement. The children were learning both practical and soft skills, such as sharing, collaborating, independence and responsibilities. They learnt to recognise their own bodily cues for hunger, tiredness, cold, movement and rest.

It shouldn't need to be stated that learning to look after our basic needs and senses is the foundation for

being ready to learn further, but in increasingly pressured school and social environments, it needs saying again and again. Ultimately it was not about the hot chocolate, it was about the social bonding, personal growth, relationships and awareness that happened around it. It helped us as a group to feel welcomed, safe, connected, relaxed and calm.

Recipe for a healthier hot choc

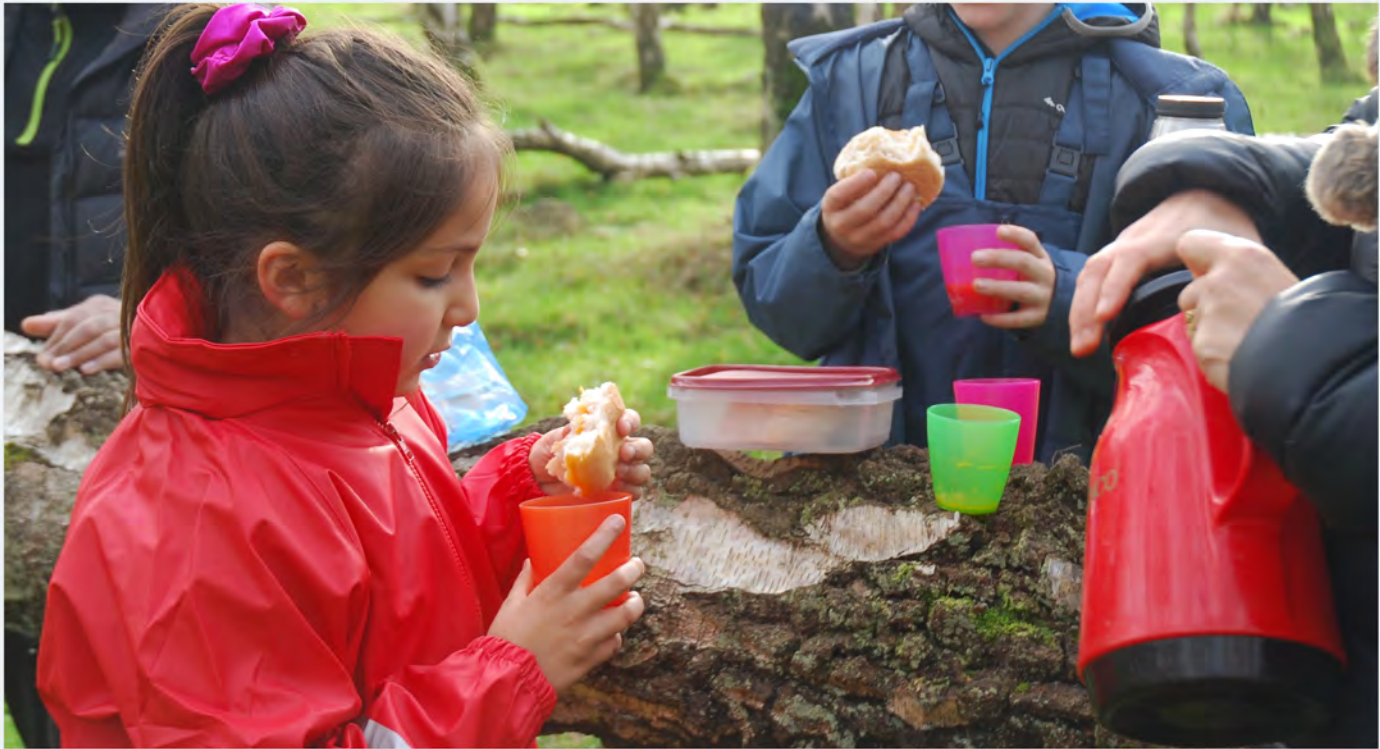
Preparation

- Pre-mix before the session
- Store in flasks, either ready to drink or stronger to add water

Ingredients

- Use cocoa powder with non-dairy milks or a full fat organic dairy milk
- It's good to have options
- Add a small amount of healthier sweetener such as xylitol, stevia powder, maple syrup or coconut sugar. See how little you can get away with
- Try adding a drop of vanilla, orange or mint extract
- Obviously for a big group some ingredients can be expensive, so save it for treats
- Buy in bulk or from wholefood suppliers to lower the cost
- Healthy hot choc has less sugar spike than instant, sustains for longer and you won't tell the difference





Keeping it healthy: nutrition, foraging & working with nature

I hear you. The sugar debate is real. Your snack doesn't have to be junk. Consider the debate around marshmallows: some foods are just a nostalgic throwback and not at all appropriate. However, sometimes hot chocolate is used to signal familiar comforts to newcomers, and over time, tastes can become more adventurous.

It takes time, months, or years as in the Wild Wood study, to attune to a place and to feel confident to use what you find and learn about the uses of plants around you, even the obvious nettles and berries.

Foraging has a positive neural and sensory feedback loop, encouraging safety and belonging. As we tune into how the world provides, we connect directly with the rest of nature.

In the Wild Wood study, some nurture needs were met with wider species connection. 'I like getting juicy blackberries', said one child. 'Fruit gives you energy and it's free!'

Never underestimate the power of a brief forage and the wonders of a blackberry face paint or cup of nettle tea.

Outdoor practitioners may not have the time or budget to lay it on thick with luxury treats, but there are quick and inexpensive ways to make things special.

Practitioner tips for alternative hot drinks

It is so enjoyable to expand participant's ideas of what kind of drinks are available

- rotate drinks to give variety and a range of sensory experiences
- ingredients can be special in many ways e.g. sharing a personal favourite with a story, some cultural context or a memory, foraging from a particular place, growing your own
- hot apple juice or ribena
- make tea from the hedge
- Foraging leaves and berries can be a revelation



Case study: Nik Elvy & the Curious School of the Wild

Based in Cornwall, Nik Elvy has done more than most to poverty proof the outdoors and her focus on food is timely and welcome. "We know that food can be a ticket to participation, and without it people may not join in, so we make sure we provide food as a default in all of our work. We are well known for providing second breakfasts"

Nik's explanation for this is simple; to lower the stigma of being hungry. Many children and even adult practitioners might turn up to a session having not eaten, so second breakfasts have become a regular feature. If everyone can have it, it is normalised, and this blanket approach is crucial. Too often, Nik knows that people may not attend if a session is badged as for the disadvantaged or poor. To survive with dignity, people practice 'poverty masking' and this needs respect.

Nik's team are trained in a trauma-informed approach which supports them to understand the possible causes of complex behaviours. They aim to create a 'low-demand environment' where the power to choose is paramount.

There will be many readers who feel the pinch of short timed sessions. Nik chooses to run longer sessions so there is time to cook and eat properly. She

usually runs an all-day play scheme in residential areas. Time is also important for her in working over the long term, with all age groups and participants growing up attending her sessions.

Nik and her team have some achievements to be proud of. She says her longest term group will cook and eat anything. They recently made and ate paella with prawns on the green of a housing estate where they meet. Progression to this advanced stage of outdoor cooking was made possible by a long lead-in period, that started with hot chocolate and hot dogs. She works to actively counter children's requests for marshmallows and hot chocolate when they see a fire, by supporting them to try different options and enjoy a food adventure. There are teachable moments using the Fare Shares scheme to save food waste, with the fun challenge in working out ways to cook and eat what turns up.

Sometimes having a fire can get in the way and Nik is a brilliant advocate for keeping it simple. If there is no reason for a fire or it is not appropriate, think outside the box. Take a camping stove or flasks; think what will make your group cooking succeed in an easy practical way.

Make a [DIY pot noodle](#) or use packet soup. I love that she says 'food turns a walk into an adventure'. What a great way to look at it, and a great provocation for parent and toddler groups, or others that meet without camp kitchens. Park bench session anyone? Nik's lateral thinking really shows how it is not always traditional campfire cooking that will meet your group's needs. If the priority is to eat, within the time, resources and environment you have, then think how to do that easily. As the permaculture maxim goes, minimum effort for maximum efficiency.



Outdoors, changes are constant. The weather, terrain, layers of clothes, seasons, canopy etc. Nik believes this is why always having food helps participants to know what to expect. They can rely on its presence and this is a wonderful way to encourage nurture and wellbeing.

Nik Elvy's top food tips

- Think of the food that you can make that has options to choose e.g. baked spuds or veg chilis with toppings
- The feeling of choice is paramount! Especially for sensory processing and neurodiverse inclusion
- It doesn't have to be fancy eg. go for flask food on a park bench for a quick win
- Try not to introduce new things before time; keep it simple
- The important stuff is to enjoy shared eating outdoors, not to give yourself impossible tasks
- If you can, provide a second breakfast for all
- Join Fare Shares and get free food
- Be community led, so the group learns to look after each other
- If working longer term, look for new recipes and ideas to keep it interesting

The importance of snack time - questions to get you started

What happens if you...

- think that snack time IS the lesson plan?
- assume we are all tired, hungry, traumatised and in need of nurture?
- start with small achievable tasks - this golden Forest School/Life principle applies to us as practitioners as well as the participants
- provide what is possible with the time and resources you have?
- use wellbeing outcomes to demonstrate your success?
- don't have a fire (eg have flasks, picnics & build up to it)?
- have snacks and spare clothes to share at any time? Try reminding parents, schools, settings etc to pack them for their child where appropriate
- Apply some long term thinking to your planning?



Equipment & tips for success

Some thoughts & questions to consider on the practicalities of taking snack time outside



Setting up the snack area - are you sitting comfortably?

The main aspect of comfort outside is protection from the elements, and how they affect temperature.

Think about where and how people will be sitting. How can this be made more comfortable?

Serving and eating

- Use plastic / metal cups for warm drinks
- Use cups and spoons for more liquid foods - pasta and sauce work well this way as it's very easy to hold the cup in one hand and a fork or spoon in another

Try • tarp shelters • foam sit mats • log seats • picnic benches



- Use small bowls when eating warm food outdoors - handing out smaller portions helps keep the main food warm, and also reduces the chance of food sliding off a plate (Ikea one's are ideal as they can be cupped in one hand and an implement held in the other).

Hand & pot washing

- If snacks are more complex than just held in the hand (eg soup), what happens to dirty dishes and implements?
- Can they be collected in a box and taken back to wash?

More developed sites may carry out dishwashing outside. This is also a social part of the snack and meal process

[Outdoor Practitioner #2](#) has a big feature on handwashing.

Food prep and waste

Think about -

- How and where will food be prepared? Food hygiene
 - How complicated and time consuming will prep outdoors be?
 - What equipment do you need?
 - What will happen to any waste?
- Site hygiene - after snack time have a hunt to search for dropped food to prevent attracting vermin, particularly to a regularly-used site

- How will food be given out? Often food is lost or dropped whilst children are moving about, and particularly when they transition from standing to sitting. Would it be more successful to have the group sitting down comfortably and the food handed out to them? This can be coordinated by a couple of children.

Simple snack time recipes

Cold snack ideas

- pre prepared carrot & veg sticks (more established projects might peel & cut carrots on site)
- take fruit to cut up
- make fruit kebabs

Warm food

Stuff you can pre-prepare and / or bring in a flask:

- drinks - hot milk, hot choc, squash
- tinned or packet soup and pasta

- hot dogs in hot water in a flask
- bring bread rolls, ketchup etc separately
- pre prepared baked potatoes wrapped in a tea towel and put in a box - on site cut them open and add beans from a flask and pre-grated cheese (be aware of travel & prep time so spuds are still warm when you're ready to eat)
- hot noodles or pasta and sauce
- [DIY pot noodle using a storm kettle](#)

Basic campfire food

- cook potatoes wrapped in foil and warmed in embers (you could part-cook them beforehand). Warm beans in the fire + add other toppings
- hot drinks
- packet or tinned soup
- soup and pasta
- pancakes • bread on sticks (damper)
- bananas & chocolate
- caramel apples - slices of apples dipped in brown sugar and cooked

I hope this article helps you to think differently about snack time. There are many inspiring, creative ways to be inclusive and to take a trauma-informed recovery approach. As you get to know your groups, you will know what might work best for them. Put wellbeing first and the rest will follow. Quality snack time is part of a restorative pedagogy that is desperately needed.

Mel McCree

Mel McCree is based at Bath Spa University & the first person in the world to write a PhD on Forest School practitioners. She is co-founder of the Forest School South West skill share network, Going Feral play days for adults, and Co-Director of Earthstars Education and Play CIC, supporting practitioners in their outdoor setting development & training.

[Mel Mccree website](#)



Evidence for gaining support

How do you advocate for all this with your senior leadership and get support from funders? Be a **Snack Champion** and share this evidence and the links below.

[Evidence of outdoor wellbeing as essential grounds for learning](#) Mel McCree, Roger Cutting & Dean Sherwin (2018) The Hare & the Tortoise go to Forest School: taking the scenic route to academic attainment via emotional wellbeing outdoors

[Critical Issues in Forest Schools](#) - Sackville-Ford and Davenport (2019)

[Addressing childhood adversity & trauma](#) - Young Minds

[Trauma informed schools UK Trauma](#) / [Trauma informed practice](#)

[Trauma informed practice toolkit](#) - Scottish government

[Sensory integration & nutrition](#) - Autism Awareness Centre

[Outdoor food hygiene training](#) eg [Blake Training](#)

[Fare Shares Community Food membership](#) to receive food donations

[Muddy Faces Outdoor Hub](#) pages on [foraging & food outdoors](#) for a foraging guide, recipes etc including dandelion jam and a wonderful story of the [deep learning](#) that goes alongside.

[Nik Elvy's fantastic Youtube channel](#) with recipes, microadventure demos etc.

[Learning through Landscapes outdoor recipes](#) for campfires using typical school grounds produce.

There are some good **books that focus on outdoor cooking**. Try [Cook Wild year round cooking on an open fire](#) by Susanne Fischer-Rizzi.

Annie Davy's book [A Sense of Place](#)

Robb and Cree's book [The Essential Guide to Forest School & Nature Pedagogy](#)

No list is complete without a [blog link to Juliet Robertson](#) for practical snack ideas and a nod to [Lily Horseman](#) too, who excels in outdoor baking. Check out those macaroons in hazel leaves, mmm!

One final reflection...

... perhaps we could take a leaf out of the French book on cuisine. For why do the French eat snails? Because they hate fast food!





Project manager Charlotte Levene on building access & inclusion into the WWT's newest nature connection project

WWT's learning programme runs across 10 wetland sites, welcoming over 40,000 learners per year. Their new project **Generation Wild** aims to ensure that schools and families from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have access to nature. The project is offered to schools with a high % of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM).

Generation Wild is based on the story of Ava the osprey

One day Ava the osprey lands on a giant nest. She magically transforms into part bird, part girl.

Children are introduced to Ava through a digital storybook in school before their visit. On their visit to the wetland centre they discover her giant nest and meet her in life-size puppet form. Through listening to the animals at the wetlands, they discover that Ava's parents have gone on a long journey called a migration, all the way to West Africa. If she is to find them, she must do the same. Back at home and at school, children, their teachers and their families log into a specially-designed website. They follow Ava on her journey through a series of audio blog posts. They see her reunited with her family and being introduced to the Guardians of the Wild, a great council of animals that protect the earth and everything that lives here. They promise that any child willing to care for and connect with nature can themselves become a Guardian of the Wild; the very first humans allowed to join this group.

Children complete nature connection activities, earning virtual badges and, when ten are collected, become Guardians of the Wild, receiving a certificate and pin-badge in assembly. This helps inspire others to do the same, helping to create the next generation of nature lovers.

How does this project overcome barriers and promote inclusion?

Storytelling approach

Children learn and engage in lots of different ways. Generation Wild brought together specialists from the worlds of theatre, technology, education, children's mental health and wildlife to develop a unique project that works for all children. The approach seeks to veer away from the "telling about nature" model and tap into children's love for stories and natural curiosity. Children are sent out across the wetlands to discover some of Ava the osprey's secrets. They are encouraged to run and see what they can find rather than listen and follow the adults. Children are able to engage with Generation Wild in different ways - they can watch a puppet show, follow a trail, listen to the voices of animals, complete nature activities and follow Ava's journey on a website.

Nature Connection

Sitting and learning is difficult for lots of us, especially children. Nature connection activities allow children to use their senses and creativity to realise that they are part of the natural world - that it isn't about them and us.

Something for everyone

Everyone enjoys experiencing nature in different ways. Some like to simply sit quietly to listen and observe. Others prefer to be more active. Some wish to get creative, some want to see the wildlife. We have categorised our nature activities so that when people find the type of activities they can enjoy they can easily find others that they're likely to enjoy in the same way.

No equipment necessary

The project suggests over 50 nature connection activities for children and families. We have tried to ensure that no equipment is needed for these so that any child can do lots, simply by going outside. Most can be done any time of the year and lots are very easy to achieve. This isn't about challenging children; it's about enabling them to have as many enjoyable nature experiences as possible.



Money

The project is completely free for eligible schools (calculated using FSM data), with each family involved entitled to a free visit to one of our wetland centres.

Building resilience

For many of us, the last couple of years have been especially tricky. Lockdowns have limited our movement and freedom, and it has been a scary time for adults and children. When we look at how people cope when things are particularly tough, being outside and surrounded by nature is often a key factor in building resilience, or coping when things are difficult. What we know about resilience is, if we make one "resilient move" it has a knock-on effect and lots more positive things take place. Being outside gives us space and freedom. It allows time away from screens, potentially somewhere quieter or with just natural sounds. The more time we spend being outside and connecting with nature, the more we feel like this space is for us and that we belong. That sense of belonging is really key to our wellbeing. Learning that we can engage with nature and doing more of it feeds into our self-esteem and sense of achieving. The benefits go on and on.

Developing an inclusive project - what to consider

- **Representation Matters!** If we never see people who look like us we may not feel welcome. Consider how we can make spaces feel welcome for all.
- **Equipment.** Offer as many activities as possible that don't need any specialist equipment. Binoculars, bat detectors, magnifying glasses are all great, but many people don't have access to these. Suggest activities that don't need anything at all - just an opportunity to be outside and become part of the natural world.
- **Outside anywhere.** Show how children can connect with nature in the smallest of outdoor spaces. Wildlife photos of swooping landscapes are glorious but photos of children playing in a local park or grass on a housing estate may feel more familiar to lots of children.
- **What's allowed?** For lots of people, nature reserves and wildlife centres come with rules and people are scared to get things wrong. Make it clear what people are allowed to do. Tell them where they can touch things. Tell them if they need to be quiet, and tell them where they can make lots of noise. No-one likes to get told off - make it clear and make it friendly!
- **Ask the experts.** Often we are scared to ask about nature as we don't want to look stupid! I couldn't tell an egret from an eagle until I asked one of the people with a telescope in one of our hides. But I was nervous and felt that I should know more. I was delighted that they wanted to share their knowledge with me and recognised what a great idea it is to have "Guides in the Hides". If you have experts on site, think about how they could pro-actively tell people about nature. It might be that they wear an "Ask Me About Nature!" badge, or they welcome people and invite them to look through their telescopes.
- **Ask the children!** Find out what they like best and what they don't like. Find out what they wish they could do more of. We can guess what is working for children but when we ask them, we are often surprised. Think about how to include a participation or co-production element to your project. How do we know it's working if we don't check in with those it was designed for?

Click here for more on [Generation Wild](#)



Generation Wild was created in partnership with [Stand & Stare](#)

Bringing Therapy Outdoors

Using the Forest School approach in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service at Alder Hey Children’s NHS Foundation Trust



Carl Dutton is a newly qualified Forest School leader, mental health nurse and psychodrama psychotherapist. Here he introduces the Forest School provision at Alder Hey Children’s Hospital in Liverpool and how they use the approach to support children with mental health needs.

Our Forest School is used for therapy for those young people who might need a different approach and where traditional talking only therapies might not work. The Forest School has been developed in our local park attached to Alder Hey Children’s Hospital which serves the children of Liverpool but also the wider North West, North Wales, and the Isle of Man. The park is a mixed use space which includes grassed areas, playground, adventure trails and a mixed wooded area which we use for our Forest School. It has a wide range of trees including rowan, sycamore, wild cherry, crab apple and Alder, which the hospital is named after. It has an open area where we have a parachute to cover/protect us from too much sun or rain.

Philosophy

The underlying philosophy for the Forest School is using a child centered approach with the emphasis on play, creativity, and problem solving as the model of therapy. The sessions are run by my colleague Louise who is a dramatherapist and Forest School Leader and myself. We both have experience in delivering dramatherapy groups in clinic and school settings but believed that this could be done outdoors with nature as our therapy space. Central to our model is to follow the child’s lead and be open to the numerous possibilities to be together in the park space. The model has the Forest School philosophy around exploration, play, and learning by doing and reflecting on what has been done together.

We also use the **5 Ways to Well Being** approach as an overarching way of thinking about the sessions and encourage the young people to reflect on each session with those things in mind - Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Learn and Give. The 5 Ways to Well Being is a recognised public health model of maintaining mental health and well being and we find that young people are able to use its principles easily in discussion or to mark down in writing or drawing in the sessions. The other measures we use to help gain valuable feedback on progress are the **Connectedness to Nature Questionnaire** by the RSPB and the **Edinburgh Warwick Well Being** check cards. They are an important part of the process in helping to see and show how young people have developed during the sessions.

For more info

- The **Five ways to Well Being** are - Connect, Be Active, Give, Learn, and Take Notice. Download the 5 Ways to Wellbeing report from the New Economics Foundation [here](#)
- For the **RSPB Connection to nature questionnaire for 8–12 year olds** click
- For the **RSPB Guide to using the Connection to Nature Index** click [here](#)
- To find out more about the **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales - WEMWBS** click [here](#)

Things that make you feel good!

Below are some sentences about how you feel. Please tick the box that describes how you have been feeling for the last few weeks.

	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I have things to look forward to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I've been helping other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel relaxed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have problems I know what to do about them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find it easy to pay attention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel like I have friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I've been able to make my own choices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Female

Male

Age

Postcode

▲ Example of the questions used in the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales

Sessions

Each session has a ritualistic aspect which helps with those young people who may suffer from anxiety or neurodevelopmental conditions such as ASD. It gives a sense of predictability and psychological containment also for those whose emotional regulation may be impacted by traumatic events or attachment issues.



We always start with a check in with each other, this can be verbal or non-verbal, to gauge how each young person is feeling/thinking but also how the group is as a whole. It might mean that we are aware that the group might need more time to work together with some drama/ play based exercises to help with connectedness to self, others and the wider physical environment - maybe checking the space, how has it changed, parameters (boundaries), and previously created nature based art in the wooded area.



This is a very important aspect because it allows the young people time to arrive, be present physically and emotionally in the session, and allows them to reconnect with the space. Ideas generated from previous sessions are offered to be done but this may also be 'parked up' if new thoughts/ideas are created and we then go with what the moment requires - a spontaneous approach which allows new ideas/possibilities to unfold and develop - this leads then to more creativity, which enhances a sense of locus of control but also self esteem.

"What we learn with pleasure, we never forget." Alfred Mercier

During this time we often spend lots of time being playful in the space with different drama based activities which bring the group together. It might be that those drama games lead to the development of a drama based enacted story with woodland based activities included.

Example

In one session we were struggling in a biblical downpour under our tarpaulin and the group decided they wanted to make different containers to collect the water off the tarpaulin. This developed into a group based story about boats on the sea, creatures from the deep, and songs about rain. Each young person in the group developed the story some more with the whole group wanting to contribute by making containers from leaves/ mud, boats to float on the collected water, and developing songs together about the rain. Collectively we also learnt which leaves in the woods made good containers and also that some pieces of wood made as boats floated better than others.

As one young person said in a session:

"The adults in Forest School are very friendly and helpful and always make it lots of fun. I have learned so much in the outdoors and I have learned many skills that I can use in the future. I think Forest School can be for other children too as it will teach them that it's fun in the outdoors and you can make fun things with fun ideas. You can give your creative ideas to anyone and they won't doubt it."



During these times our role as therapists is to facilitate ideas, be a mindful guide, and offer support/ encouragement and feedback so that the young person can dream again with their thoughts and ideas. Psychologically, as therapists we are finding ways for the young people to explore, test out, work on their own but as a group, reflect back what we notice about them in relation to the sessions, and share their frustrations but also delight in what they do.

"Finding the medium that excites your imagination, that you love to play with and work in, is an important step to freeing your creative energies."
Sir Ken Robinson

Ending a session

Within the structure we give time to reflect on what we have done together, how it has made us think, feel, respond and notice within the session. It helps develop the capacity to take time to notice ourselves, our relationships with others, and our environment. One young person with ASD was able to notice a robin we had in each session who would visit us mostly at break time - free food was available and he spoke about how he had created bird feeders at home and what visitors he had. This led to him developing a number of bird feeders in our wooded area and seeing which one the robin and other birds were attracted to. We all enjoyed his ability to share his passion and also help



create a number of bird feeders. Some of our endings have included group stories to reflect what we have shared together or moments of silence and stillness just listening to nature together to help ground us all before we return to the hustle and bustle of life beyond the sessions and taking that feeling with us. A final comment from a parent of one young person about the CAMHS Forest School:

'He absolutely loved it and it did wonders for his confidence, social skills, and mental health.'

About the author

Carl Dutton is a mental health practitioner, psychotherapist and Forest School Leader. He works for Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust for FRESH CAMHS working with young people. He has worked in the area of nature based therapies for 17 years and helped set up a Horticulture Therapy Program in schools across Liverpool. He has written and presented work extensively on using nature, horticulture and Forest School in Children's Mental Health Services. He uses in particular art, drama, storytelling/making, and playfulness in the Forest School as well as outdoor activities.

Carl says: "A Forest School specifically to help support, maintain, and develop mental health and well being is something that can be set up and used within many settings including within a CAMHS service and all those services who engage young people in this area of work."

Carl can be contacted by email on carl.dutton@alderhey.nhs.uk
[FRESH CAMHS](#)

For further information

Youtube: [Using Forest School for therapy at Alder Hey Children's Hospital Liverpool](#)
Wildlife Trusts Lancashire, Manchester, North Merseyside: [Forest School in Liverpool](#)
NHS Forest: [Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool](#)



Snow Day at Forest School!

5 top tips for managing your Forest School in the snow

from Forest school trainer & practitioner Jackie Roby

Everyone loves a Snow Day but this weather phenomenom presents new challenges for Forest School leaders.

If snow is severe enough to cancel school, you shouldn't be hanging out under trees: the added weight on branches and shelters makes them more vulnerable to collapse. However, there are times and weather conditions that mean that snow, school and Forest School can all happen.

Let's assume you've checked your site and it's looking lovely (and safe!). How are you going to navigate this new-found wonderland?

Tip 1: Layer up

The difference one extra item of clothing can make is immense, especially on extremities such as hands and feet. Wellies aren't known for their insulating properties so extra socks are a must. Gloves are always handy (sorry..!) but unless they're waterproof, they will quickly become wet while playing in snow. A spare, dry pair is essential.

Tip 2: Redirect excited behaviour

Even adults get excited about snow, so asking children to be sensible on the rare occasion we experience it is likely to be a losing battle. The key here is to think about ways for you to all get what you want. For example, throwing snowballs at a target is safer than throwing them at people.

Tip 3: Embrace what you've got

We're all used to slipping and sliding in mud, so ice may not be the challenge we think it is. Talk to your group about what to expect and ways of moving across icy areas. If you've ever played mud slides, why not have a snow slide? And if mud freezes, it's easier to walk on, so your Forest School site might actually be easier to navigate as a result.

Tip 4: Find ways to create warmth

Get the fire on, have hot drinks and full tummies, and keep moving. But what do you do if one of your group really starts to feel the cold? If they're wearing wellies, a bucket of warm water can be really handy for frozen feet. Simply stand them, wellies and all, in the bucket and let the warm water get to work. Smooth pebbles kept in a pan of warm water by the fire, dried off and used as hand warmers, work too.



Tip 5. Know when to call it quits

Forest School takes place in all weathers, but this should come with a caveat: until it stops being fun. If your group is unhappy then there is no point in carrying on for the sake of it. Remember, the younger your group is, the closer they are to the cold ground and the less likely they are to be able to tell you they're feeling cold.

Now you've begun to think about the changes you can make, what else could you do?

Jackie Roby is a Forest School trainer and practitioner offering online and in-person Forest School training and CPD and runs Go Wild Forest School.

www.gowildeducation.co.uk



Further reading: lots of great tips & guides on the Muddy Faces [Outdoor Hub/Outdoor Clothing section](#)

How can educators best support children through climate anxiety?

Learning through Landscapes CEO, Carley Sefton, reflects on how The Big Ask, recent climate anxiety reports and COP26 must provoke some big conversations

The concept of 'environmentally aware' young people has changed so much over the last few decades.

When I was growing up in the '90s, I cared about the environment and thought I was doing my bit to help by going on rubbish collections and taking aluminium cans for recycling at our local supermarket.

But in recent years, the public's understanding of the climate crisis – as well as the scientific research linked to it – has gone so much deeper. Over the last few months, Glasgow's COP26 summit, studies on youth climate anxiety and the publication of the [Children's Commissioner's Big Ask report](#) have highlighted that, in an era of constant information and escalating environmental issues, being an

'environmentally aware' young person today means facing many more climate worries than my peers and I ever did.

And it's taking its toll on their wellbeing: results from The Big Ask have shown that 39% of children (aged 9–17) said that the environment was one of their main worries about the future, making it the second most common answer, while [Avaaz's recent report](#) has shone a spotlight on the sense of abandonment that many young people are feeling at the hands of adults over the climate crisis.

As educators, we need to recognise the impact that climate anxiety is having on our children and young people and do everything we can to support them. So, how can we help?



Credit: Simon Hadley

Initially, the task can seem overwhelming. We are not responsible for government policies, and educators can't solve all the problems of climate anxiety by ourselves. But we can hold important conversations with the children and young people in our care, and it's essential that we do.



Tips for talking about climate change



1 Do your research

Before holding conversations on climate with your class, find time to read trusted sources of information and good resources about climate change. Consider not only the potential associated concerns, statistics and impacts, but any positive steps and projects that are already taking place around the world to combat the climate crisis – from local litter-picking groups to examples of international award-winning projects, such as those from the [Earthshot Prize](#). National Geographic also have a huge number of helpful articles and have their own [tips on how to help climate anxiety](#), and you can visit the latest [IPCC report](#) for a deeper insight into the most recent scientific research and updates.



Credit: Simon Hadley

2 Assess the level of awareness

Use your research to introduce the topic gradually and ask simple questions about the climate crisis to assess levels of interest and anxiety, e.g. "do you think it's important for us to look after the planet? Why?". You may find that awareness of and engagement with the topic varies between children, so ensure you don't overwhelm them with information or heighten the concerns of those who are already anxious for the future.

Make sure that everyone in your class feels included in the conversation – especially children and young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented communities.

3 Provide a safe space

If you think your class would benefit from it, consider holding regular sessions to discuss news and developments in the climate crisis conversation and ask children to present their views on environmental topics. Listen to children and young people when they express their concerns, so that they feel validated and understood. Just talking about something can alleviate stress and anxiety.



4 Transform concerns into positive action

After discussing climate crisis concerns, remind children and young people of their own power in fighting the ongoing crisis – even the smallest action can make a positive difference!

Empower them to make changes at home or in school to help the environment, promote life skills that they can use to develop resilience, talk about youth environmental action and, if there's interest, research 'green' careers together. Make it clear that they are not alone in their interest in protecting the planet and that the climate crisis is important to your school/setting. And above all, fostering a love, understanding and respect for the planet among all children and young people is key. Only by giving all young people the opportunity to experience, learn from and discuss the natural world around them can they become informed and empowered to care for it.



Learning
through
Landscapes

As the UK's leaders in outdoor learning and play, Learning through Landscapes has been helping children and young people to connect to nature, become more active and have fun outdoors for over 30 years. For further information, visit ltl.org.uk or contact enquiries@ltl.org.uk

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



Doncaster Forest School: Chitter Chatter

Forest School practitioner Claire Bowley describes the theory and practice of a pilot programme developed for disadvantaged families

In the spring of 2021 Doncaster Forest School piloted a new twelve-week Forest School intervention called 'Chitter Chatter'. The pilot worked collaboratively with a team of specialists from Doncaster Family Hubs, Doncaster Forest School and Bentley High Street Primary School.

The practice

Three families were invited to attend Forest School sessions at Robin Wood, adjacent to Bentley High Street School in Doncaster. The families who attended had little knowledge of one another but as the sessions progressed, positive interactions and supportive relationships formed not only between the children but also amongst the adults.



Each session followed the Forest School ethos of encouraging holistic development, and practitioners worked alongside the families in exploring a range of experiences whilst supporting the participants and modelling positive parenting skills.

Sessions took place over lunchtimes and into the afternoon and were flexible in structure. The start and end of each session allowed for time around the fire circle for preparation and reflective discussions. At lunchtime the meal was central to the intervention and this was prepared by the families and cooked on the fire. This gave the whole session a sense of belonging and togetherness which as the weeks progressed was tangible within the group. The woodland experiences that were provided were based upon practitioner observations and reflections of each session. The team took time to reflect and plan together at the end of each session. As practitioners' knowledge of the participants

"I was very nervous but excited at the same time about the thought of Forest School. Now I really look forward to Wednesday as it means it's Forest School day. I like being able to learn new things. Using the tools is my favourite. It is a really calm environment with no distractions. All the adults are very helpful and like to talk to us about what we are doing. The mud throwing was very good and being able to squelch in the mud too but with my wellies on. I enjoyed the fire based activities such as helping light it and cooking or making snacks on it. I also enjoyed that all activities are a choice & nothing is forced." Child participant



increased, personalised opportunities for exploration, confidence building, resilience and building of self-esteem were provided. Children were involved in starting fires, campfire cooking, den building,



balancing and obstacle course making. They also engaged in team games, seed/mud bombs and explored different sensory experiences. Nature connectivity and the impact of Biophilia theory ¹ was observed as the group connected with the natural world around them. Clear tarpaulins were used during rainy sessions as windows to the sky, families lay and observed the rain, trees, and sky above them. Over the course of the twelve weeks families relaxed and got to know each other and shared special moments with their children and each other. Progress was recorded by the use of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires and the outcomes showed an improvement in social and emotional wellbeing as well as

improvements in emotional literacy and language and communication. Doncaster Forest School program lead Kelly Severn said: *"Chitter chatter enabled the Forest School ethos to support children, parents and collectively families to create a small supportive community group. The parents had opportunities to see their children interact with others, engaging in risky play, connect with nature amongst other factors. Chitter Chatter is a unique but powerful framework which gives back to our families and communities."* The sessions ended with a small graduation ceremony where the children were presented with a Forest School certificate and goodie bag to remind them of their Forest School experience. **Contact Doncaster Forest School via email: Forest.school01@don.ac.uk More info on the [website](#) or [Facebook](#)**

The theory

Chitter Chatter was developed building on the knowledge of several child development theories including Erikson's Growth and Change ², Vygotsky's Social learning Theory ³, and Bowlby's Attachment Theory ⁴.



The practice framework was written by Janine Ryan (Head of School for Education and Arts at Doncaster College and Doncaster Forest School) who, following an evaluation of previous interventions, recognised the measurable impact that Forest School could have on children living in the most disadvantaged wards of Doncaster.

The practitioners at Doncaster Forest School benefitted from having Trauma Informed training ⁵ and understood the importance of having an Emotionally Available Adult (EAA) within their practice. The EAA supported participants by providing empathetic listening and a safe place to support and reflect on

past and present experiences whilst promoting positive outcomes. Communication and language development of all participants was key to the sessions and foundational theories supported the development of the framework and its aims.

'Every child, to be educationally successful, needs a language rich environment, one in which adults speak well, listen attentively and read aloud every day... if every child is to be ready for school, language must become a priority in every home.' ⁶

The practice framework was created with parents as a central theme. Family involvement, effective parental relationships and positive parenting ensure positive outcomes for children.

The framework aimed to build on parental strengths whilst recognising the part each family member can play.

'In addition to higher academic achievement...parental involvement leads to greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance, fewer behaviour problems at school, and greater social and emotional development.' ⁷

The pilot was delivered with the collaboration of professionals with different expertise from Doncaster Family Hubs, Doncaster Forest School and a learning support member of staff from Bentley school. This collaborative approach brought a range of professional perspectives and experiences and added a joined-up approach.



A parent said: *"It would be my vehement recommendation that Forest Schools is given the opportunity to continue the excellent work it does. There needs to be some semblance of continuity for these children in order for longer term benefits to be realised; our girls are testament to the success of the programme and the Forest School team's dedication."*

References

- 1 Biophilia: [info](#)
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The Healing Power of GRATITUDE

Forest School practitioner & trainer Louise Ambrose reflects on thankfulness & connection

As I sit down to write this, the rain is streaking down the windows and the grey clouds are making it darker than it should be at this time of late afternoon. I find myself feeling grateful for the soothing sound of the rain hammering on the roof, the turning of the seasons and the cosiness of the log burner in front of me.

Gratitude comes in different forms. It can be an action – the choice to say ‘Thank you’ for some pleasant gift or occurrence. It can also be a state of being – a way of living, healing and growing.

The first form feels good, and the second form is life-changing.

Dr Robert Emmons and colleagues have been studying the benefits of gratitude for over 20 years and found overwhelming evidence that gratitude improves physical health, psychological wellbeing and relationships with others.

They have found that people who have regular gratitude practices (such as writing things down in a journal) have received a host of benefits:



Increased vitality
Increased positive emotions – happiness, joy, optimism
Better quality of sleep
Stronger immune systems
More likely to exercise and take care of oneself
Lower blood pressure
More helpful, generous and compassionate
Feel less isolated and alone (1)

These healing benefits of gratitude perhaps were a wisdom our wild, nature-connected ancestors may have known about. According to storyteller and mentor Jon Young, gratitude is core to the traditions and practices of numerous indigenous cultures. It is an essential thread woven through the fabric of native patterns of psyche and supports connection to nature, to others and to oneself (2).

Used in **nature connection** practices, such as sit spots or timeless wandering, gratitude seems to ‘supercharge’ one’s abilities to connect with the other-than-human. Animals will come closer to you, as if they do not perceive you as a threat, birds will land close and sing to you, and plants will share their medicine with you.

Used in **human connection** gratitude amplifies emotional intelligence, increases awareness and grounds you like nothing else. During difficult

conversations, finding gratitude can help you keep calm, find resilience and remain kind.

Used in **self connection** gratitude is life-saving. It heals body, mind and spirit.

Being grateful asks us to look beyond ourselves. To see the complex web of connections that holds us. We realise that we are fully tangled and dependent on the rest of the world, human and non-human alike.

Gratitude = Connection.

And feeling connected is the path to joy, relationships, healing, love and much more. Another great thing about gratitude is that it’s a choice. We don’t need any special conditions, abilities, skills or attitudes. We simply have to choose to be grateful. It doesn’t even matter what we are grateful for – just that we are grateful.

However, remembering to pause and feel what we are grateful for in the moment can be easily forgotten, especially in challenging times. Steindl-Rast suggests a simple method we can use at any time:

- 🛑 **Stop** – take a moment to pause and bring our awareness to the present moment
- 👁️ **Look** – use all our senses to soak in the richness of life on offer in that moment
- ➡️ **Go** – do whatever life offers to us in that present moment (3)

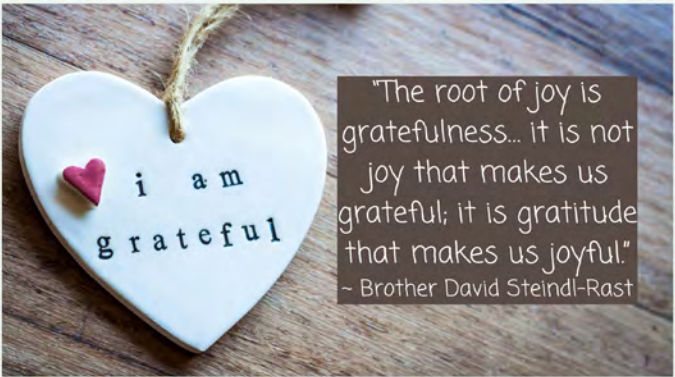
Being outdoors seems like a natural place to practice gratitude in this way:

- 🛑 **Stop** - the realness of nature draws our attention and encourages us to be present
- 👁️ **Look** - our senses are constantly showered with an abundance of sights, sounds, smells, textures and tastes
- ➡️ **Go** – the natural world offers opportunities in a way that indoors does not

As outdoor practitioners we are already well placed to support mental health, as the numerous studies evidencing the positive effects of being in nature to one’s wellbeing show. If we can also incorporate gratitude practices into our sessions then this will surely amplify the positive effects for everyone’s health, happiness and the healing of all.

References

- 1) [Why Gratitude is Good by Dr Robert Emmons](#)
- 2) [The 512 Project - Jon Young](#)
- 3) [Want to be Happy? Be Grateful](#) TED talk by David Steindl-Rast



5 tips for sharing gratitude practices with children

Be creative in how you invite people to be thankful

Whisper thanks to a tree, blow grateful feelings into a handful of leaves before throwing them into the air, write thankful thoughts on the wind with a stick, make up songs and dance your gratitude to the earth!

Model being in gratitude

The most powerful way of encouraging thanks giving is to be in it yourself. Sharing your own gratitude out loud may inspire others to do so too.

Reframe Language

Young children may not understand the concept of gratitude. Reframe it by asking ‘what made you smile?’ or ‘what would you like more of?’

You can’t force gratitude

Making a child say ‘Thank you’ for social politeness is a long way off from feeling genuinely grateful and could even make a child resentful of giving thanks.

It doesn’t need to be verbalised

The healing benefits of gratitude come from feeling it, not whether we express it to others.



Louise Ambrose has worked as a Forest School practitioner with groups of all ages, coordinated FS development for a local authority & been a FS trainer for 15 years.

Visit her Youtube channel: [Forest School Lou](#)



"We are calling for a Nature Premium to fund regular nature experiences for every child, to improve children's mental and physical wellbeing after lockdown and demonstrate a positive investment in their future as part of the Green Recovery." Forest School Association

Crisis

As the first lockdown hit, polarisation of the ‘haves and have nots’ exploded. Too many children were trapped indoors, without safe places to play, no access to nature, the lack of technology isolating them further.

Before Covid19, schools and [Youth in Mind](#) warned of a growing mental health epidemic, services overstretched after a decade of austerity, amidst the toxicity of social media and environmental chaos.

The 2021 [Good Childhood Report](#) found ‘roughly a ¼ million children did not cope well with changes during the pandemic’ and states children ‘deserve drastic change’.

The government’s education recovery commissioner [Sir Kevan Collins](#) called for a ‘landmark investment in education’ to address the huge inequities of learning and experience, whilst the education secretary explains the government needs interventions they can “actually deliver today”.

Answer

The Nature Premium offers an immediate way to disrupt this ‘health gap following the wealth gap’, providing fresh, clean air, fun and rich learning. [Research](#), pre-pandemic, from the University of Edinburgh, showed time ‘noticing in nature’ benefits the disadvantaged most, whilst improving outcomes for all. According to Natural England’s survey, 83% of children interviewed said being in nature made them happy, whilst the [Why Society Needs Nature](#) report found 60% of children are spending less time in nature than before coronavirus.

This simple idea is a radical one - to ensure nature threads through every part of every child’s education, from Early Years to secondary school, for the health & wellbeing of a generation and their educators. For all children to grow up knowing their place in the world, understanding the connectedness of life on earth, and caring for the planet. Children will have the skills & knowledge to improve their local environment, promote biodiversity, think globally, and grow up greener through the Nature Premium.



Who & how?

As with the Sports Premium, settings would have freedom to use Nature Premium funding for resources, grounds development, training and to bring in specialists.

There is a wealth of professional expertise readily available to support schools (see [Turning Learning Inside Out](#)). Through modelling nature connected behaviours, sharing knowledge and curiosity, these experts facilitate memorable learning, enable smaller class sizes, and build teacher confidence.

Supporters

This campaign has been strategic and opportunistic. Started by volunteers at the Forest School Association it is gaining momentum, supported by a growing network of environmental, educational & youth climate organisations, high profile academics, economists, authors, artists, teachers, and members of both houses at Westminster.

Together we are framing responses to the DfE’s draft Sustainability & Climate Change strategy, speaking with teaching unions, meeting with colleagues at the DfE, seeking funding mechanisms & and strategic partners in the business world.



Forest Bathing is a Japanese process of relaxation; known in Japan as *shinrin yoku*. The simple method of being calm and quiet amongst the trees, observing nature around you whilst breathing deeply can help adults and children de-stress and boost health in a natural way.

While forests provide the perfect environment to reconnect with nature, our forest bathing exercise is also suitable for indoor or outdoor spaces like gardens, parks and playgrounds, and helps to support the emotional wellbeing and mindfulness of young children. And if you're looking for a way to unwind and de-stress after a busy day, check out our online [guide to forest bathing](#).

We want to inspire the next generation to help us grow, shape and care for our nation's forests. Forests provide the perfect classroom to learn, explore and play but are also sustainably managed by Forestry England for people, wildlife and timber.

We're supporting educational groups to discover the benefits of their local forests. We provide a range of free, curriculum-linked resources, covering early years through to KS5. Our activities, lesson plans and teaching packs are adaptable, for use outdoors or in a learning setting.

We also welcome visits to our woodlands from educational groups. Visits can either be self-led or supported by our partners at your local forest. [Find your closest forest to see what opportunities are available](#) and book in advance for a truly immersive forest experience.

For our latest free resources and inspiring learning opportunities, [sign up to our termly email newsletter](#).

 **Forestry England**

Forest Bathing
from home

Forest bathing is a great way to spend time outside with nature and to de-stress. Taking time to encourage children to use mindfulness is beneficial for their health and wellbeing. But how do we achieve this when we are staying at home?

Take your time: sit or lie down on the ground for a few moments.

- Take 3 deep breaths, you may even wish to close your eyes.
- Continue to breathe slowly trying to make the out breath a little bit longer than the in breath.

Find your favourite place:

Find a quiet spot that makes you feel safe and relaxes you - this might be outside, on a balcony or near an open window. Switch off mobile phones, tablets and TVs and enjoy disconnecting from technology!



 **Forestry England**



Use your senses
Just like animals in the forest do - be curious - and if your mind wanders off to other things, that's ok, just gently bring your focus back to your surroundings.

Bats
Bats are nocturnal, they are awake at night when it's dark, so they have fantastic hearing.



Rabbits
Rabbits have a fantastic sense of smell which helps them be aware of what's around them.



Close your eyes - how many sounds can you hear?

Where are the sounds coming from?

Can you sniff like a rabbit?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What do you smell?

Take yourself on a magical forest adventure

Let your mind wander through the forest of your imagination. What colours can you see? What animals live in your imaginary forest? What sounds echo through the trees?

When you are ready, take 3 slow breaths and open your eyes.

Share
After a while, join your family and share your experiences and how you are now feeling.



forestryengland.uk

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Campfire popcorn in a seive

Introduction

Cooking popcorn kernels over a campfire using sieves is a fascinating cooking activity. You can see the individual kernels burst open and the sieves start to fill up. Think about all the science conversations and questions that will be stimulated watching these little explosions. The resulting flavour is usually a little smoky which adds to the experience.

Environmental and health & safety considerations:

Consider the environmental impact of preparing, carrying out & completing this activity. Could this impact be reduced? Follow your usual operating procedures and carry out appropriate risk benefit assessments.



Step 1 Pour the corn kernels into your popcorn maker and fasten it shut. Use approximately the amount shown in the picture as this will fill half the sieve when popped.

Step 2 Close the second sieve over the top and secure it with wire or an 'O' ring.



Step 3 Hold the sieve popcorn maker over the embers of the fire. Give the pole a gentle shake to move the kernels around and wait for the popping to start - when this happens will depend on the heat of the embers! If nothing is happening after a couple of minutes you may need to create



some warmer embers. Take the popcorn maker off when the popping slows down and it looks like most kernels have popped.

Step 4 Release the top sieve and pour the popcorn into bowl. Be careful - the sieves and wire fastenings will remain hot for a while.



Step 5 Scoop out the popcorn and serve... and enjoy!

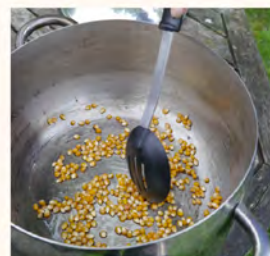
Disclaimer: Muddy Faces cannot take any responsibility for accidents or damage that occurs as a result of following these activities. You are responsible for making sure that each activity is conducted safely.

Campfire popcorn in a pan



If you want popcorn to eat as a tasty snack for a number of people, we recommend you use a pan or popcorn net as this creates a tastier, and less smoky, result.

You can add flavours such as sugar or cinnamon by sprinkle directly over the warm popcorn.



Step 1 Pour in enough cooking oil to coat the bottom of the pan (you can also melt butter in the hot pan). Heat the oil up with 3 corn kernels in it, and only once you hear these pop take the pan off the fire. Add the rest of the kernels and give them a swish around to cover them in oil.

Step 2 Replace the lid and count for 30 seconds (everyone can join in) before placing the pan back over the heat. This allows all the kernels to warm up to near-popping temperature, which should help more of the kernels pop at the same time, leaving less un-popped kernels.



Step 3 Return the pan, with the lid on, to the fire. From time to time give the pan a little shake to prevent the kernels burning, as there may be hot spots over the embers.

Step 4 When the kernels start popping, give the pan a shake once in a while - but avoid taking the pan off the heat for too long - just a few seconds at a time. **Tip:** keep hold of the lid whilst shaking the pan. Not always easy when campfire cooking but if possible, try keeping the lid slightly ajar to let out the steam as the kernels start to pop. It makes the popcorn a little drier and crisper.

Step 5 Remove the pan and put it in a safe place to cool for a short while and until you are sure all the popping has finished. Keep shaking throughout this process to avoid the popcorn burning on the bottom of the pan.

Step 5 Use a ladle or cup to serve into bowls or cups. Allow to cool if serving melted butter or sugar as they can cause severe burns.



Make a sieve popcorn cooker

Introduction

Making your own popcorn sieve cooker is a great way to cook popcorn so you can hear and see the kernels changing form. Have you ever thought about why the kernels pop? In the centre of the kernel is a small amount of water, and as the kernel heats up so does the water. As the water changes to steam it expands and the increase in pressure causes the kernel to explode! There are many ways to make your popcorn maker and lots of different people will have a preferred method. The following method has been developed to help overcome niggly, problems like the whole lot falling off the end of your pole into the fire and also to give you some nifty tips for quick release.

What you'll need:

- pole/stick approx. 100cm in length
- 2 x stainless steel sieves*
- thin steel wire approx. 50cm
- wire cutters/pliers
- work gloves



* The type of sieve is important for the longevity of your sieve cooker - try to avoid fine aluminium, obviously plastic, and mesh sieves, as the wire is much thinner and too closely weaved. Use 2 sieves of the same size.



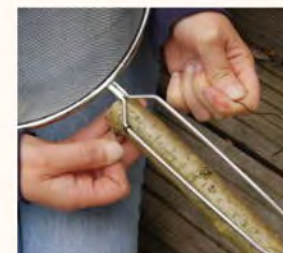
Step 1 - drill a hole at the top of the pole The pole needs to be approximately 1 metre in length. Adding these drilled holes will give the wire a static place to grip, as they can often slip up and down the outside of the pole. The pole needs 2 holes drilled through it - 1 an inch from the 'top' of the pole (to prevent side to side movement of the sieve) the other to hold the base of the sieve handle in place (to prevent movement up and down). Make sure your pole is clamped securely in place before drilling.



Step 2 - mark up the position of the 2nd hole Once you have made the first hole in your pole you are ready to mark up the second hole. Place the pole on the workbench with the 'top' hole in a horizontal plane (twist the stick 90 degrees from 1st hole). Place the sieve in position on the pole ensuring that the top of the sieve handle (nearest to mesh) is above the 'top' hole in the pole. Mark up the second hole just below the bottom of the handle.

Step 3 - drill the 2nd hole Reposition and clamp the pole on the workbench ensuring that the hole at the 'top' of the pole is still in a horizontal plane (twisted 90 degrees from the 1st hole). Drill your 2nd hole and your pole should look like image in the photo. We have added the sticks so that you can see how the holes should look.

Step 4 - attach the wire to the sieve Attach the wire to the sieve handle by wrapping the wire securely around one side of the handle at the top nearest the mesh of the sieve.



Step 5 - attach the sieve to the pole There is no right or wrong way to attach the sieve to the pole. The main aim is for the sieve not to slip around when in use as a popcorn cooker. Place the sieve on the end of the pole with the mesh bowl facing upwards (this enables the second sieve to be fitted without the pole being placed inbetween the two sieves, which would prevent it from shutting). Thread the loose end of the wire that is attached to the sieve handle through the top hole. Remember to keep pulling the wire tight at each stage of the wire fixing. If your wire is a little stiff you may need pliers to pull it tight. We wrapped the wire around the other side of the handle then went back through the hole, around the handle and back through the hole again (pull the wire taught as you go and use pliers if necessary). Finish by wrapping around the handle to secure the end. Any excess wire can be trimmed off or tidied up to avoid leaving sharp ends sticking out (we poked the end into the hole to stop it sticking out).

Step 6 - attach sieve handle to 2nd hole We made the 2nd hole perpendicular to the 1st hole to provide an anchor for the sieve, to prevent it from moving up and down. Wire the sieve to the bottom hole in a similar method to wiring up the 1st hole.



Step 7 - attach the 2nd sieve Now the sieve is secure you can place the other sieve on top and create a hinge - to allow kernels to go in and popcorn to come out at the end. Fasten the horns together with wire or clips. If your sieve doesn't have horns like these ones you will need to use a central hinge directly through the sieves. We have used little clips as they are a little less fiddly than wire. Small rings from key rings would also work well. The sieves should now be hinged together.

Step 8 - holding the two sieve handles together We now need a mechanism for holding the sieves closed when cooking. Most people would just wrap some wire around and unwrap it to release which works fine or create a moveable ring with wire. We came up with a handy idea using O-rings. Slide the O-ring onto the pole (opposite end to sieve) then roll it along until it reaches the sieves. Close the sieves together and roll the O-ring over to hold them shut. When you want to release the sieves; roll off, refill, then roll on again.



Step 9 - READY TO COOK! You are now ready to pop your corn! Please turn over for how to cook your popcorn.

Some health and safety considerations particular to this activity include the use of tools and sharp wire. Ensure all wire is collected and discarded.

Practitioners Voice

Forest School for All

Writer and experienced Forest School practitioner Teresa Davies shares how she has worked with children with different access needs at Forest School, and a book she has written to help

If you ask any Forest School leader how Forest School has impacted the children and adults in their setting, I think everyone would have many positive stories to tell.

When I am experiencing that overwhelming feeling of trying to balance everything in my life, I find the peace and quiet while setting up for Forest School such a calming and wonderful place to be in that I can't help but switch off from the outside world. Once everything is ready I take a deep breath - that moment before the fun begins and you are about to be inundated with the curious minds of those who are about to join you - and my whole body and mind is ready to take on the world again.

So if Forest School has this effect on many of us as adults, it's no wonder the whole experience creates something magical for those that join us. I have worked with many children, with different complex needs, and have found Forest School always has such a positive impact on their lives.

I have only ever had one child whose physical ability and poor vision challenged me when making the site suitable, safe and accessible. To add to her challenges, the child was not able to wear welly boots as she needed the support of her specially-made boots.

How did we meet the child's needs? Her mum would join us for the walk to the site and a member of staff would assist on the other side, so if they needed to have a hand to tackle any obstacles we were there ready to assist. Pathways were always cleared of any obstacles that would create a tripping hazard and one-to-one support was in place to help the child access as many areas as possible. She was determined to be as much like her peers as possible, and with this amazing mind set and love for the outdoors she achieved so much during her time with us, taking on challenges that, had she not been included in our sessions, she may not have had the opportunity to experience.

Over the years I have seen Forest School sessions help so many children, from children who speak very few words, to one who took on a form of mutism when



away from home; all suddenly start to communicate when in a small group working on different projects. Other children attending, who were sensitive to the children's needs, became a huge part of this process, encouraging them to join in and be part of the group. Taking away the pressure of everything in a classroom, it became clear that the space and environment was a great place for these children to flourish; through communicating their needs and things they discover, to building relationships with their peers.

I frequently saw those who were not as academic as some of their peers take charge and lead very successful games and creative activities. Their practical skills had a chance to really shine, and seeing their faces of accomplishment and how proud they were when this was shared with their teachers, peers and parents was incredible. Children who found it difficult to engage in activities and sessions in school or nursery, who were often disruptive, loved taking on the riskier activities and were often the ones with great understanding of the possible risks - becoming engrossed in sawing, using a drill or mallet, creating things with rope, and especially loving cooking on an open fire and eating their creations.

Forest School has brought calmness to all these children's lives - a time to think, space to be able to move around as much as needed, and a chance to use tools and participate in riskier play that helped them to experience a feeling of accomplishment. To add to this, using the natural materials around them seemed to release inner tension, which has been a great way to defuse and change the child's demeanour. Spending many hours sitting on the floor with children mixing

water and mud and then just squeezing it between our fingers and just listening to what the children have to say, the whole process almost felt therapeutic and such an important part of their healing process.

Above all, watching the children's whole body change as they gradually relax, speaks volumes of how important this time at Forest School is for these children and is an important way in which to help support every one's mental health.

About Teresa Davies

When I did my Forest School training I didn't realise the impact it was going to have on my life! I qualified as a level 3 Forest School leader in 2006. I was trained by Chris Dee (now director of Forest School Learning Initiative) at Wood Norton in Worcestershire, in the woodland there - extremely basic - we even had to dig a hole to use as a toilet!



While training I set up my first Forest School in a local pre-school. We were lucky enough to be able to use a member of staff's land that had a wonderful track across the field and a lovely coppice of trees. I used to pack my Land Rover every Thursday Night and feel like I was camping for a week! We had nothing on site apart from the structure in the photo. We had to build a metal post framework as we kept getting vandalised, but to my knowledge it is still standing 15 years later as we moved it with us when we relocated.

I added Forest School sessions over the years, running 3 different sites over 3 days at the nursery and two schools at one point.

I am now in a lovely nursery in Worcester where we are predominantly outside, which is my ideal situation. I help run Forest School sessions once a week and outdoor learning the other two days, all year round.

I have continued to run Forest School sessions since qualifying in 2006 apart from 10 weeks when I left to create my book before coming to my recent job where I have been for 15 months now.

I hope to continue to create more books that are relevant to Forest School so watch this space!

Fiery Fox learns about Fire Safety by Teresa Davis

When I was not running Forest School sessions during the time many people were at home in 2021, I really missed it and had time to think about how I could make my sessions better, and what I could put in place to help the children.

I have found fire safety can be quite a hard subject to talk about without scaring children, so I decided to put a book together with this in mind. I chose illustrations to capture the effects of a fire that was spreading in a woodland, that was not too scary, but had lots of detail from tiny birds and many creatures. I included rules for around the fire which the characters use to keep the family safe, and a 'look and find' page that reflects on the important fire safety aspects we are teaching the children.

The book had to have a happy ending and what better way than to show them sitting in a fire circle, sharing a wonderful moment as a family, as you and I would with our Forest School family!

I also inundated my poor illustrator with all the tiny details of the fire blanket, kindling, water etc to make it as relatable as possible, so when we share the book with children it is all relevant to what they themselves are experiencing.



If you want to find out more about the book visit www.bear-books.net or Etsy [bearbooksLtd](https://www.etsy.com/shop/bearbooksLtd)

Practitioners Voice

Peter Gladwin Primary School,
Brighton



Karen Harrison, Head Teacher

My aim is to provide many outdoor opportunities for our children at Peter Gladwin Primary. I am passionate about educating our children to prioritise their well-being and health through the benefits of the outdoors. Our school is situated at the foot of the stunning South Downs and is fifteen minutes from the sea. It's within Portslade historical village and just outside Brighton.

Dear Outdoor Practitioner

At Peter Gladwin we include our large school grounds and the stunning areas within walking or cycling distance from our school in our outdoor learning.

Reception children can be observed exploring and learning in their outdoor classroom. The mud kitchen, digging pit and an array of large natural resources stimulate the children's creativity and help develop their speaking and language skills. Children explore and learn scientifically about plants and their habitats. They tend the vegetables in our garden that they grew in the seed station. There is an excited buzz coming from the Forest School as children cooperatively learn new skills.

Since returning from lockdown you will find us learning about the outdoors at Truleigh Hill YHA, through the Generation Green Project - from children cycling to the Downs to carrying out scientific research. Year 4 can be found on the beach learning about sustainability and marine life through the John Muir Award. Groups of children investigate the rich historic sources on the Portslade Historic Trail which they helped design with Fresh Start - a Portslade charity.

Learning is active, fun and purposeful. As a Rights Respecting School our children learn about the importance of their surroundings and the world. Together we help empower our children to understand their well-being and to embrace the opportunities our outdoors provides.

from Karen



Practitioners Voice

AssemblePlay,
London

Dear Outdoor Practitioner

AssemblePlay started life as PlayKX in the Kings Cross development, north London. Rather than building a playground, the developer funded a team of experienced play workers and a

collection of loose parts.

Families can come along, join in free of charge and stay for as long as they like.

We have now run these sessions in lots of different locations from lush parks and ancient churchyards in central London, to car parks and car-free streets and bus stands. Our partners have included the Royal Academy of Art, Toynbee Hall and the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Wherever we have been we have seen

children seize the moment and play in beautiful creative ways and exactly as they need to play. We have had hundreds of conversations

with families, delighted to find an opportunity for their children to play freely with other children, without a curriculum and free of charge.

from Penny Wilson, AssemblePlay coordinator

Jenny Ellen Magpie-Eye Photography

Jenny Ellen is a professional photographer based in North London. Her work has led her to many unique and exciting locations over the years, but her favourite experiences have been whilst photographing children and families at play in various outdoor locations, from large scale festivals to families at home in the garden.

Jenny says: *From the moment you step foot in this magical world spearheaded by very skilled play workers you can feel the shift from adult world to child led. The premise is simple - an abundance of loose parts, a public space (often satisfyingly commandeered*

from the adults!) and some playworkers. The outcome is anything but! Watching children create, explore, break down, rebuild, forge alliances, break bonds and above all play unrestricted, you can all but hear the synapses snapping.





FOREST SCHOOL, OUTDOOR PLAY AND LEARNING RESOURCES



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