



DUXFORD PRESCHOOL

Forest School Information Pack

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Contents

What is it all about?.....	3
What does it look like?	3
Role of the adults	4
Staff	4
Volunteers	4
Parents & Carers.....	5
Risky play and your child’s safety	5
Cancellation	6
The bigger picture.....	6
Where can I find out more?	6
One final note.....	6

What is it all about?

“Forest School is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.” (Forest School Association, 2015)

Forest School is an idea and way of learning outdoors that have developed over many years, in various countries and are now becoming very popular within the early years sector and schools in the UK. This is an exciting time to be involved in the Forest School movement as much research is being undertaken into the already proven benefits for all participants, both in terms of learning as well as physical and mental health.

The Forest School ethos supports children to become confident learners and confident individuals within a team, fostering a deep connection with the natural world alongside skills of problem solving and creativity which are crucial in this fast paced world our children are growing up in. Children are given the time and space to discover things for themselves, alongside ‘knowledgeable others’, including our specialist Forest School trained staff who are always close by, to guide and reassure.

During sessions children will have many opportunities to develop knowledge and skills that link directly into all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage, in particular those associated with personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication; the ‘prime areas’ of learning will be greatly strengthened.

At Duxford Preschool, we have been developing the Forest School Programme since 2011 and remain committed to providing high quality Forest school sessions each week, run by qualified Forest School practitioners and working to the Forest School Principles.

What does it look like?

Staff will greet children at the footpath entrance, ensuring that they all have the appropriate clothing and footwear, and giving them a high visibility jacket to wear. Children are then led down to the woods to ask our guardian tree ‘Grandpa Sycamore’ for permission to come and play (see separate Forest School Booklet). This process encourages the children to recognise and respect the living, breathing nature of the woodland whilst also creating a starting point with a sense of wonder and fun.

We then go for a brief walk around the site together, discussing and refreshing our safety agreements whilst taking note of any changes in the environment.

Next, we come together at the log circle, to create a sense of community as we set our group and individual intentions for the session. We introduce ourselves using our Forest School names, (for example Heather is known as “Heather Hare”), which helps to encourage the sense that we are all part of something special, together with the environment, whilst supporting the development of communication, self confidence and creativity at a pace which suits the individual child. We also practice our ‘Cockerel call’ which alerts all participants to return to the circle whenever required, for both safety and practical reasons woods.

Once these welcoming rituals and safety procedures are completed, the children are given the freedom of the woods, under the watchful eyes of our staff. There are usually planned activities and a small selection of resources available, particularly as the group is getting used to the environment, but we are mindful that the children learn best when supported to discover the woodland naturally and in their own time, so we facilitate this, whilst encouraging them to observe, explore and collaborate as and when they feel ready. Learning

outdoors, in such a different environment can initially be a big and perhaps even a scary thing for some children (and adults!) and so our high ratios ensure we are able to meet these individual needs.

Children receive a snack and drink in the same way that they ordinarily would at preschool. This usually comes in the form of water or hot chocolate (unless weather is hot) and cereal bars as these are practical and hygienic. Hand washing facilities are provided.

Observations are made and documented via the Tapestry programme, in the usual way.

Before the end of the session, children are brought back together using the cockerel call and we have a short reflection time with the children at the log circle before gathering our belongings to walk back to the Sunshine Room, ensuring we stop to thank Grandpa Sycamore for allowing us to come and play. We then walk back to the Sunshine Room, often singing, telling stories or taking note of the flowers, leaves and creatures we see along the way. Once at preschool, we support the children to remove their outdoor clothing and join together for a story or singing until they are either collected by parents/carers or seated for lunch if staying for the afternoon session

Role of the adults

Staff

Forest School session staff would always include at least one Forest School Level 2 qualification holder as well as meeting and exceeding the usual EYFS qualification and ratio requirements. Session staff would usually include both:

- Heather Nedzynski – Forest School Leader – currently completing Level 3 Forest School leadership qualification, Forest School level 2, Outdoor First Aid, EY/Primary QTS
- Carrie Darlington – Deputy Manager – Forest School level 2, Paediatric First Aid, SENCO

The staff always have a flexible plan for an enjoyable and child-centred session in the same way that we do for standard sessions in the Sunshine Room. We take into account children's needs and interests, the changing seasons and all they have to offer as well as any seasonal celebrations. We are experienced at adapting routines and activities to suit children's individual needs. Please do not worry if your child is not naturally "outdoorsy", as we have lots of different methods for encouraging a love and appreciation of the natural world and will take everything at your child's own pace.

Our role within the session is to ensure the safety of the children whilst allowing them to meet risk and challenges that are appropriate to their age, personality and stage of development. We are not only there to keep them safe though. We work hard to ensure children's natural curiosity is ignited and their learning is extended by providing opportunities and guidance skilfully and sensitively, to support all children reach their full potential. Staff are also responsible for guiding volunteer practice and ensuring the smooth running of the session as directed by the Forest School leader, who takes over all responsibility.

Volunteers

We welcome volunteers at Forest School as this enables us to share this ethos more widely as well as increasing our group knowledge and skills and keeping the adult to child ratios high. Volunteers are usually parents, carers or other relatives of the children attending, but we would welcome anyone who has an interest in helping the setting or learning more about Forest School. Volunteers are given a pack with information about their role within the sessions including any safety elements and are inducted to the site. If you would like to become a Forest School Volunteer or know someone who may want to then please contact Heather or Carrie for more information at forestschool@duxfordpreschool.org.uk. In line with the setting's standard policies, volunteers are not responsible for first aid or intimate care.

Parents & Carers

We greatly appreciate your support in ensuring your child comes prepared, so that they can get the most out of Forest School sessions. In particular, this means making sure they are appropriately dressed. It can be hard to estimate just how many layers a child will need but it is always colder in the shaded woods. Please see below for a guide:

- **Layers!** - Layers are the best way of easily keeping warm. As a rule, always add one more than you think they need. We can always remove a layer if a child gets too hot.
- **Waterproof Trousers** - Essential. The thick, thermal ski type are ideal for the colder months, otherwise, an extra layer is necessary. Please speak to a member of Management if you need support with providing waterproof trousers.
- **Under-Trousers** - We'd recommend leggings/tights/thermal base layer trousers under normal trousers.
- **Warm socks** - Normal socks in wellies will not be warm enough for cold or even cool weather. We recommended an extra pair of wool/ fleece/ fluffy socks inside wellies.
- **Waterproof Coat** - Ideally with a hood.
- **Warm/Wooly Hat** - preferably one which covers the ears. -
- **Mittens/Gloves** - ideally thermal and waterproof as thin, knitted gloves may not always keep little hands warm enough during the colder months. Don't worry about mittens limiting finger movement as the cold is much more limiting! -
- **Tops** - We recommended at least 3 layers under the coat during the colder months. Perhaps long sleeved top, jumper, fleece and coat, or 'base layer' top, long sleeved top, warm jumper and coat.
- **Waterproof Boots** - Wellies are essential. Alternatives include snow boots and walking boots
- **In The Summer**- Wellies, waterproof trousers and light long sleeves are still essential, to protect from thorns, insect bites etc. Please also send a sunhat in hot weather, particularly for the walk back.

We politely ask that parents leave as soon as children have been safely dropped off at the entrance and a member of staff has marked him/her off on the register. This is so that we can settle the children and get them down to the main Forest School session as quickly as possible. This is also for safety reasons so that children are not trying to get back out onto the road area to see parents once they are registered as in our care.

Your other crucial role is to embrace the mud! Please do not send your child in their best clothes as they will almost certainly get dirty during the session!

Risky play and your child's safety

At Duxford Preschool, we recognise that allowing children to safely meet risks and challenges develops their awareness of safety and enables them to manage their own safety, becoming more confident and independent. This can come in all forms, from developing their safety awareness and physical abilities through tree climbing, to having the confidence to ask if they can join in with friends.

Knight (2011, p.117) states that "learning to manage risk and adventure has important cognitive benefits, not just in increasing knowledge but also in developing personality traits such as team working skills, motivation, concentration and perseverance." This idea is at the heart of our Forest School sessions. We allow children to explore and experience risk, but rest assured, we do not allow your children to be unsafe.

We thoroughly risk assess the site on a daily basis and also use risk benefit assessments for appropriate activities, which weigh up the possible risks versus the benefits to the children for the particular activity and ensure that we minimise any possible risk.

The Biggen is an open and wild space which can be daunting for some children, as it can hold many unknown possibilities. We are there to support your child in exploring the area at their own pace and teach them how

to keep themselves safe. We ensure that children are aware how far they can safely explore and we talk about what is safe to touch and eat on site, as well as how to safely participate in Forest School in general.

Children wear high visibility jackets at all times during the session, we do regular head counts and they are taught to return to the log circle at the sound of a cockerel call, in case we need to have an emergency circle time and gather them all back together for safety. At least one member of staff will have an outdoor first aid qualification and others will be trained in paediatric first aid and will be competent to deal with risky play, assessing risk and dealing with emergencies and accidents. All staff have safeguarding training.

Cancellation

Forest School will usually go ahead in all weathers and the only exception to this is extreme weather such as high winds as this can compromise the safety of the session. In extreme heat or cold, we may occasionally cancel or shorten the length of the session to protect children from the elements. The only other reason we may cancel is due to staff absence. In the unlikely event that we need to cancel a session, we will let parents know via email, so please ensure we have your current email address. In addition, we will write a message on the chalkboard outside the Preschool. In the event of a session being cancelled we will run a standard session from the Sunshine Room so please drop off here if a Forest School session is cancelled.

The bigger picture

Our aim is to create a generation of children who have a respect for their local environment and feel a sense of connection to the natural world, who build a relationship with it and who will hopefully one day protect it and teach others to do the same. We hope that by giving children opportunities to learn and develop in natural spaces, teaching them about keeping themselves safe, appropriate risk taking and respecting both the environment, each other and themselves they will go on to become confident, caring and pioneering adults, who care about the planet they live on and all those who inhabit it and inspire others to do the same.

Where can I find out more?

If you would like to learn more about the history of Forest School at Duxford Preschool or how we aim to progress it in the future, or have any other questions about the information here, please speak to Heather or Carrie.

Alternatively there are some links below to useful websites that give further information about Forest School in the UK:

<http://www.forestschoollassociation.org/>

<http://www.greenlighttrust.org/we-help-schools-colleges/forest-schools>

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/inf-d-5z3jvz>

One final note

We love it when our families use the Biggen outside of Forest School sessions, but we ask that if you do, or indeed you use any other natural space, please try to return it to how it was when you found it.

Sadly, there have been a number of instances when our logs in the circle have been removed or scattered, ropes left up in trees or large amounts of litter left on site. This has an impact of our sessions as well as risk assessment and takes time away from the session, not to mention potentially damaging wildlife. The council have now provided a bin at the entrance to the footpath for convenience.

We would greatly appreciate you helping us to spread this message to others in the community so that our children and their Forest School experience can help others to learn more about valuing and caring for the environment.