

Forest School  
Ethos and the  
benefits on  
young  
learners



FOREST SCHOOL  
PRACTITIONER  
JEFF MANNING





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# Introduction

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Forest school is an innovative educational approach that takes learning beyond the confines of traditional classrooms and into the heart of nature. By immersing children in outdoor environments such as woodlands or forests, forest school provides a unique setting for experiential learning and holistic development. Through hands-on exploration, play, and discovery, children in forest school programs gain a deep connection with nature while developing essential skills, fostering creativity, and nurturing their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive well-being. Research has shown that forest school offers numerous benefits, including improved physical fitness, enhanced problem-solving abilities, increased self-confidence, heightened curiosity, and a greater appreciation for the natural world. With its emphasis on child-led exploration, risk-taking, and meaningful experiences in nature, forest school cultivates lifelong learners who are resilient, resourceful, and environmentally conscious. Join us in embracing the wonders of forest school and unlocking the boundless potential of outdoor learning for our children.



# Pedagogy

Forest School pedagogy is an outdoor education approach that prioritizes nature-based, child centred learning. Grounded in regular and repeated visits to natural environments, this pedagogy fosters hands-on experiences, exploration, and play. It empowers learners to take the lead in their education, promoting self-directed discovery and a deep connection with the outdoors. With an emphasis on experiential learning, controlled risk-taking, and holistic development. Forest School pedagogy aims to nurture physical and cognitive skills. Facilitating real world physics and mental wellbeing. Celebrating the diversity of participants and fostering social skills within a supportive outdoor community.





A group of approximately 12 children and one adult woman are sitting on a blue tarp in a forest. The tarp is stretched between two trees. The children are wearing various jackets and hats, some in blue, purple, and black. The adult is wearing a bright blue jacket. The background shows a grassy area, a building, and trees with some autumn-colored leaves. The text "Planning a forest school session" is overlaid on the blue tarp.

# Planning a forest school session



## The importance of Analysis

Planning a Forest School session involves careful consideration of the needs and interests of participants, and the desired learning outcomes. Observe and use observations to plan sessions. Examples of this may be planning to nurture self-confidence and social skills or empathy and team dynamics. Careful manipulation of the environment and the activities give participants the opportunity to express emotions and reflect both inwardly and externally. This facilitates personal growth on the individual and the group and Promoting existential development.





## There is NO BAD session

Arguments and disagreements are an important part to the development of conflict resolution, resilience, self-regulation and social intellect. Think of arguments and conflicts as the ingrediencies, in a recipe for personal growth. It's the practitioner's responsibility to get the quantities right and the participants will use their experiences to enhance their personal growth. Sessions can be developed by managing activities and allowing and planning for small conflicts to arise. Examples of this can be found in participant lead activity planning and structured play.





## Structured play

"Structured play" refers to play activities that are organized, guided, or directed to some extent by adults or established rules. Unlike free play, where children have complete autonomy in choosing their activities and directing their play, structured play involves some level of adult intervention or pre-defined rules.

In structured play, adults may provide guidance, set specific goals or objectives, or organize activities with predetermined rules or instructions. This can include games, sports, crafts, educational activities, or role-playing scenarios where adults provide structure, instructions, or supervision.

Planning for structured play will emphasise controlled management of expectations.

Practitioners allow for modelling and scaffolding during these sessions.





## Free play.

Free play is widely recognized as essential for children's development and well-being. It supports cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development by providing opportunities for exploration, problem-solving, creativity, and social interaction. Additionally, free play allows children to develop important skills such as resilience, independence, and self-regulation. Free play, also known as unstructured play, refers to activities where children engage in self-directed exploration and interaction without specific rules or guidelines imposed by adults. In free play, children have the freedom to choose their activities, manipulate materials, and explore their environment based on their own interests and desires.





## Safety and managing risks

Participant risk management in forest school involves strategies to ensure the safety and well-being of the children participating in the program while allowing them to engage in outdoor activities and exploration. Here are some key components of participant risk management in forest school:

1. **Informed Consent**: Obtain informed consent from parents or guardians before children participate in forest school activities.

Provide detailed information about the nature of the activities, potential risks involved, safety measures in place, and any required permissions or waivers.

2. **Safety Briefings**: Provide participants with comprehensive safety briefings before each forest school session. Review safety guidelines, emergency procedures, rules for behaviour and conduct, and expectations for participation. Encourage participants to ask questions and seek clarification on any safety-related concerns.

3. **Supervision and Monitoring**: Ensure adequate supervision and monitoring of participants during forest school activities. Maintain an appropriate staff-to-participant ratio to effectively supervise and support children in the outdoor environment. Assign specific roles and responsibilities to staff members to oversee different areas of the forest school site and respond to safety-related incidents or emergencies promptly.

4. **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement**: Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of participant risk management strategies in forest school sessions. Monitor incident reports, near misses, feedback from participants and parents / guardians, and observations of staff to identify areas for improvement and implement corrective actions. Regularly review and update risk assessments, safety protocols, and emergency plans to address evolving needs and ensure ongoing safety and well-being.

5. **Continuously assessing the participants**: and allowing progression of personal developments and achievements in a controlled manner. Encourage step by step motivational experiences tailored to the development of self-risk evaluation.

By prioritizing participant risk management in forest school programs, educators and organizers can create safe and supportive environments where children can explore, learn, and thrive in nature while minimizing potential risks and ensuring a positive and enriching experience for all participants.



## The benefits of Forest school

Forest school provides children with invaluable opportunities to learn and grow in natural settings, fostering a deep connection with the outdoors and the natural world. Through hands-on exploration, play, and discovery, participants develop essential skills, including physical fitness, cognitive abilities, social skills, and emotional resilience. Research shows that forest school enhances creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking, while also promoting physical health, emotional well-being, and environmental stewardship. By engaging in outdoor activities such as structured play, nature observation, and free play, children develop a profound appreciation for nature and a lifelong love of learning. Forest school encourages curiosity, independence, and a sense of wonder, empowering children to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally in today's fast-paced world







# Summary

They are not just playing in nature,  
They are Learning, creating, sensing,  
believing, relaxing, exploring, observing,  
wondering, connecting, discovering,  
appreciating, understanding and  
experimenting. Forest school teaches  
how to learn not what to learn.

feel freedom

