

Forest School Fire Lighting and Tool Use Procedure

Giving children access to a wide range of new and different experiences for children is an important part of what we do at pre-school. Additionally, it is important that we provide children with opportunities to engage in risky play/activities to encourage them to learn to judge their own abilities and to assess risk for themselves.

At the same time, we aim to make Forest School a safe environment, and to keep children free from harm. Therefore, fire lighting and use of tools will take place only when the Forest School Leader is confident that both children and staff are ready, and that the rules and boundaries are clearly understood.

We prepare the children for fire-lighting and cooking activities by sitting in a circle to drink hot chocolate, having the circle clearly marked out with the parachute, logs or rope, and teaching the children to walk around the circumference of the circle, never crossing over the centre.

For a session involving fire-lighting, we will explain beforehand that we are intending to make a fire. Children will be encouraged to collect sticks in preparation.

Fires will be lit only in the fire-pit in the woodlands or in our metal fire-pit, to avoid marking the ground. A circular boundary marking 2.5 from the fire will be put in place, and children will be asked to sit around this before fire-lighting. A large container of water will be placed at the edge of the circle.

The fire will be lit by the Forest School Leader, and they will stay with the fire. If it is necessary for the Leader to leave the fire at any point, they will designate another member of staff to stay with the fire until they return.

While the fire is lit, children will be allowed to enter the circle individually, and at the invitation of the Forest School Leader. After the main fire-lighting activity is over, and if not all the children wish to stay by the fire, then the number of adults remaining by the fire will be determined by the number of children. An adult will remain with the fire at all times.

Use of Tools

All children progress and develop in different ways. The Forest School Leader will use their discretion to determine when individual children are given use of different tools. As our children are very young, we use only a small selection of tools, and the procedure for using each of these is set out below:

Potato Peelers

These are an easy and safe way to introduce young children to using tools at Forest School. Children will be shown how to cut away from themselves, and told to keep their fingers away from the sharp edges. Children will need to sit down, either on the ground or on logs/flat stones.

Folding knives

Once children can demonstrate capable and responsible use of the potato peeler, they may be able to move on to using a small knife. Children should be taught to open and close the knife with the blade facing away from them, to keep the knife closed when not using it, and reminded to always cut away from themselves.

Bow saw

The Forest School leader will sometimes undertake wood-cutting activities with the children. The bow saw can be used by one adult and one child together, with the child holding the handle, adult and child sitting on either side of the wood being cut. The child will need to hold the saw with their dominant hand, and to kneel with their body well over to the side of the saw blade. The child should be asked to keep their free hand behind their back while sawing. The adult should ensure that other children stay back from the saw, however they can be involved in the activity by kneeling and holding the wood steady while they wait for their turn.

Hacksaw

If the Forest School leader judges the child to be ready, they may be able to use the hacksaw, either with help from an adult in the same way as the bow saw, or independently with close supervision. The adult should make sure that the wood to be cut is suitable, and that the child is cutting on a level surface, ideally with the wood raised on tree stumps or flat rocks. Other children should be reminded to stay well back from the saw and the child using it.

Hand drill

To use the hand drill, children should be shown how to use one hand to hold the drill steady and the other to turn the handle. The adult should make sure that the child is working on a suitably flat surface, and that other children do not sit/stand too close.

Children should be carefully supervised and instructed during any activity involving tool use.

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