

Learning Policies and Procedures

Nature Explorers promotes the development of a relationship between the participants and the natural environment to support and transform relationships with themselves and others. The Forest School ethos follows the six Forest School principles

Nature Explorers projects promote the holistic development of the participants offering social, physical, intellectual, communication, cultural, creative, emotional and spiritual dimensions for personal development.

Play and Learning Policy

Nature Explorers projects are based on a learner-centred pedagogical approach that is responsive to the needs and interest of learners. Play and choice are an integral part of the Forest School. Learning process and free play are recognized as vital to learning and development. Practitioners/supporting adults are all part of the learning community and view themselves as learners. Projects are participant driven and whilst national curricula outcomes may be met they are not the drivers behind a specifically delivered content.

Play and Learning Procedures

Nature Explorers operates within the six Forest School Principles.

- 1) Long-term process – Sessions run weekly in six week blocks in all seasons.
- 2) Takes place in woodland – this supports the development of the relationship with the natural world.
- 3) Promotes holistic development – by having mixed age groups and plenty of unstructured play, we can foster resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- 4) Opportunity for risk-taking – Nature Explorers provides tools and equipment as needed and encourages appropriate risk-taking.
- 5) Run by a qualified Forest School Practitioner – Continuing Professional Development maintained on a regular basis.
- 6) Uses a range of learner-centred processes – we are creating a community for development and learning.

Play is voluntarily participating in a fulfilling activity, which evokes an emotional response. Key feature of play include:

- Imagination
- Stimulation of senses
- Sense of fulfilment
- Child-led/initiated
- Promotes social interaction

Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning. It provides an opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to the participants.

By following all six Forest School Principles we promote holistic learning and development. This means that the participants are benefitting emotionally, physically, mentally and individually as well as forming a community together with their peers, and with a deeper connection to the natural world. They are enhancing their skills of problem-solving, logic, balance, dexterity, teamwork and physical strength. They use all of their senses and can adapt to suit the environment and the activity. They learn to assess risks and become more resilient, confident, independent and creative.

Forest school provides an environment to allow children to develop their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual characteristics. Physical activities such as climbing, swinging, and jumping allows their gross motor skills to develop, while activities including rope tying, whittling, drawing, weaving and writing develop their fine motor skills and manual dexterity. Their sensory development is also enhanced with the use of all the senses, including sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch, balance and proprioception.

Problem-solving activities, communication with team-mates and adults, and developing their knowledge of biology and ecology develops the children's creativity and intellect. Their emotional development is nurtured by allowing them the freedom to work at their own pace and complete a task, building their resilience by letting them have as many attempts as needed to master a skill, and the satisfaction and confidence that follows when they achieve this. There will be regular opportunities during the sessions for the children to reflect and share on their experiences. By encouraging a deeper relationship with the natural world, and an atmosphere of trust and openness, the children will develop their own spiritual connections to themselves, and to everything around them. They will be encouraged to respect one another's beliefs and values, and to maintain a sense of responsibility for the environment.

Nature Explorers sessions will be almost entirely child-led and child-centred. The Forest School Leader is seen more as a participator and facilitator than a leader. The freedom of this learning environment allows children to follow their instincts, become independent, resilient, confident and creative learners without the constraints of curriculum outcomes and objectives.

Observation, Planning and Assessment Policy

Nature Explorers uses the OPERA cycle to scaffold learning and tailor experiences to individual learning and development. Appropriate planning is a result of accurate and insightful observation. Assessment will be informative and whilst it may link to specific curriculum areas and individual developments these are not the driving forces for assessment.

Observation and Assessment Procedure

The OPERA cycle is the system underlying the observation and assessment of participants at Nature Explorers. It stands for Observation, Planning, Evaluation, Reflection and Assessment. Every session will be designed based on observation and reflection of the previous session. Different factors may affect the planned sessions, including age range and ability of the participants, the weather and suitability of the site, and available equipment and tools. Each week, there will be an opportunity for participants to share which things they have particularly enjoyed that session, and any things they would be particularly keen to do in a future session.

Each participant will have their own Forest School journal to use at sessions. These will be for recording thoughts and experiences, drawing and writing reflective stories and poems. The Forest School Leader will have a file for each child to record observations and note down any achievements. Photographs will be taken to show how the children's learning and play develop throughout their time at Nature Explorers, and to record any projects they would like to include in their journal – for example particular knots they have learned, or an item of furniture they have made. We will also have a group journal for sharing every week throughout the year.

Staffing Policy

Nature Explorers has a qualified Forest School leader to run Forest School projects, supported by additional volunteers. All volunteers must meet criteria set down in our **Safeguarding Policy**.

Staffing Procedures

The Forest School leader promotes learning at Forest School by sharing their own enthusiasm and fascination for the natural world. By continuously maintaining CPD, they will be able to inspire the participants to learn new skills. Emotional intelligence and increased self-esteem are promoted by the Forest School leader by treating all participants with equal respect and allowing everyone a chance to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe, open and trusting environment. By allowing participants to take appropriate risks and find their own solutions to problems, they allow them to develop their self-esteem and confidence.

There will also always be at least one parent volunteer present, who has been carefully selected by Steph. Consistency is maintained by having the same volunteers at each session. All adults who volunteer to assist at sessions are invited to familiarise themselves with all the policies and procedures in order to support participants in their holistic learning and play. If the opportunity for educational workshops arises, volunteers will be invited to attend.

Nature Explorers strives to have a ratio of at least one adult to ten children, but preferably one adult to five children. No more than twenty children may attend a session at any time, and at least two adults will always be present.

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Completed by: S Holland

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