

7

SAMPLE PROGRAMMES

- SPECIAL NEEDS

FOREST SCHOOL SCOTLAND
discover, develop, deliver



FOREST EDUCATION INITIATIVE



Section 7 - Sample Programmes

- Special Needs



Special Needs

"Forest school is an excellent medium for working with pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders since the ethos of the scheme is setting pupils up to succeed through easily achievable tasks. The opportunities for tackling the triad of impairment: social interaction, communication, and flexibility of thought permeate all of the activities in an environment devoid of the stresses of schools and classrooms."

Tom Wallace, Outdoor Education Teacher (additional learning needs), Autism outreach team, Cedarbank School, Livingston



The term 'special educational needs' may be too narrow to describe the range of children and young people that require additional support and may benefit hugely from Forest School.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 describes how a child may require additional support for a variety of reasons. These may include those who are being bullied, are particularly gifted, have experienced bereavement, or are not attending school regularly, as well as those who have behavioural or learning difficulties, mental health problems, or specific disabilities such as deafness or blindness. More information on inclusive education can be found on <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/inclusiveeducation/index.asp>

Forest School should aim to be inclusive and cater for all needs and abilities. An inclusive ethos is not one that treats all individual the same way but one that takes into account individual's needs and experiences (LTL March 2008). Forest School Leaders should be sensitive to any day to day challenges that may affect any child in their care, including those that have been identified as needing additional support. Effective partnership working with schools, authorities and parents is particularly important with children that fall into this group.



Many of the activities described in this handbook can be used or adapted successfully to meet particular needs and abilities. Challenging behaviour can come in various shapes and forms. It is a natural part of growing up for children to challenge adults and assert their independence. Other young people may be locked in a cycle of failure but with appropriate intervention this vicious circle can be broken. Judging when to intervene is a skill, and ideally low key early intervention should be used to defuse a situation before it escalates, and children helped to develop their own coping strategies. Forest school training enables the leaders to help young people grow and develop emotionally as well as gaining physical and cognitive skills. For many young people, repeating and extending learned tasks and experiences becomes an important part of the learning process.

Cedarbank School in Livingston had good success combining Forest School and the John Muir Award. They have been working on a project to create a teaching facility out of doors for the local children with special needs. The boys' work included making bridges, repairing footpaths and much lopping and trimming.

"The work seems to suit these pupils since it is easy and repetitive".

Tom Wallace Outdoor Education Teacher (additional learning needs), Cedarbank School

The Forest School leader should take time during any activity to observe and work with the children on any behaviour issues. Activities should be selected that are particularly helpful in supporting personal and emotional development. For example, the Rope Trust game supports the development of mutual trust and group cohesion, and creates the opportunity for emotional reviews - as does the Chuff line review session. 'Meet a Tree' encourages young people to care for themselves and each other, and '1-2-3 Where are you?' reinforces the rules for keeping together and not getting lost.

The acquisition of Forest school practical skills demands safe behaviour. Young people showing challenging behaviour can be assessed in their ability to work safely and competently in a range of Forest School skills, particularly tool and fire use. Activities such as Tree Shuffle and camp fire procedures can reinforce the rules of fire safety. Awarding certificates for competence for each assessment can be based on the young person's ability and trustworthiness and provides positive feedback for improved behaviour.

Lindy Furby describes how Forest School practice at St Crispin's School Edinburgh helps children with severe and complex learning difficulties and Autism develop orientation & sense of place, using a programme of the following activities described in more detail overleaf.

FOREST
SCHOOL
GAMES FOR
CHILDREN
WITH SEVERE
AND COMPLEX
LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES
AND AUTISM

*provided by
Lindy Furby,
St Crispin's
School
Edinburgh*

- A simplified Hide and Seek
- A simplified Follow-My-Leader
- Wool trail
- Find the bauble
- A simplified orienteering course
- Fitness trail activity

Forest School games for children with severe and complex learning difficulties and Autism

(provided by Lindy Furby, St Crispin's School Edinburgh)



A simplified Hide and Seek:

One person runs off and hides behind a tree with a bird whistle whilst everybody else counts to 10. The hider then blows the bird whistle and everybody looks for him/her. (The hider is supported by a grown up) When s/he is found it is somebody else's turn to hide. Extension – 2 people hide and so on.

A Simplified Follow-My-Leader:

Everybody holds onto a climbing rope and the Leader goes off climbing over logs, under branches and around trees. Everybody follows the Leader until s/he returns to the tarpaulin. Then it is somebody else's turn.

Wool trail:

The Forest School Leader lays a wool trail around the forest to a packet of sweets. Everybody follows the trail (last along picks up the wool) and when they reach the sweets – everyone has a sweet. Next stage a child lays the trail (first with and then without support)

Find the bauble:

10 plastic baubles (in our case golden apples) are hung up in the forest. The children are all sent off to find the baubles. They are brought back and matched to a bauble strip – so that the children know whether they have found them all. When all the baubles are found everybody will get a reward. This activity supports working towards looking for more natural things in the forest.

A simplified orienteering course:

This supports navigation skills but more simply, using directional arrows instead of compasses. Small kites or orienteering stations with stampers attached are pegged up in the trees. Ensure the orienteering stations are put up in sight of each other (i.e. you can see the second from the forest and the third from the second). Each child's card is stamped as they successfully reach each station.

Fitness trail:

A member of staff pegs out the instructions (symbol activity cards) on the trees in a trail. From these instruction cards a long ribbon hangs down so that they can be easily spotted through the forest. The children follow the trail and follow the instructions on each card, with appropriate levels of support from the forest team staff. The children are familiar with the exercises they have learnt these in gym at school. Last along the trail collects the cards

Extension: a child will peg up the trail.

