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INTRODUCTION

FOREST SCHOOL SCOTLAND

discover, develop, deliver



FOREST EDUCATION INITIATIVE



This pack has been designed as a resource to support Forest School Leaders working in a range of situations across Scotland.



An increasing number of people are being trained as Forest School leaders and practitioners in Scotland. This is coinciding with an exciting time in Scottish education – and Forest School has an opportunity to grow alongside a Curriculum for Excellence 3-18. The ideal is that Forest School becomes a core experience for children and young people through their transition from pre-school to adulthood, and this pack is designed to help Leaders to share best practice in their approach to achieve this goal.

WHAT IS FOREST SCHOOL?

Forest School enhances and complements mainstream education, offering an alternative curriculum in an outdoor context.

Forest School is an inclusive and inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults, regular opportunities to achieve, and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or outdoor setting.

The suggested aims of Forest School in Scotland (FS subgroup meeting 2006) are:

- “To promote the values of wisdom, compassion, integrity and justice through experiential learning in a natural outdoors environment”
- “To develop young people who are successful learners, confident individuals, who effectively contribute towards the natural environment and are socially and environmentally responsible citizens”.

Based on a Scandinavian idea, Forest School is a long-term educational programme.

The Forest School ethos focuses on learning styles that maximise the emotional, social and developmental benefits of education.

Participants work outdoors with qualified practitioners and teachers over a period of time.

Learning and teaching strategies are used to foster independence and develop language and communication skills, and increase levels of physical activity and emotional wellbeing.

Participants are encouraged to understand, appreciate and care for the natural environment.

Provided with opportunities to take risks, make choices and initiate learning, they develop practical skills in a context where they can really achieve, and grow into confident and capable people.

The outdoors offers a dynamic, challenging, stimulating and informal environment for learning. Local access to suitable woodland is the ideal setting for Forest school but experiences across Scotland can vary. Forest school can take place around trees in or beside school or nursery grounds, woodland parks, community woodland beside settlements, or forest in the wider countryside.

What is unique to Forest School, and sets it apart from other outdoor education programmes, is that the programme is long term, and can be designed to support all ages from pre-school to adults. Learners visit an outdoor setting on a regular and frequent basis in small groups with a high ratio of practitioners to learners. Learning is enhanced with the freedom to explore using multiple senses, and is actively linked to the curriculum within practice that is holistic, participative, and sustainable.

See http://www.foresteducation.org/forest_schools.php

FOREST SCHOOL & THE FOREST EDUCATION INITIATIVE (FEI)

Forest Education Initiative (FEI) aims to increase the understanding and appreciation, particularly among young people, of the environmental, social, and economic potential of trees, woodlands and forests and of the link between the tree and everyday wood products.

FEI works with a number of organisations to steer forest education in Scotland.

The Forest Education Initiative (FEI) supports the development of local forest school settings through its network of local cluster groups, which bring together interested parties from the environmental and educational sectors. In addition, each group has access to internal funding as a constituted FEI cluster group. Local and national expertise and advice is also available from the FEI national partners.

An FEI recognised Forest School would be expected to follow the criteria set out below.

- Have the support of a local FEI cluster group.
- Have the support of its local FEI coordinator.
- Be sited in a local woodland setting, therefore creating links to the learner's local community.
- Be led by Disclosure Scotland checked staff trained in or training for Forest School qualifications (e.g. OCN – check) and holding an appropriate First aid qualification.
- Carry out on-going ecological impact assessments of the Forest School sites and activities – samples are available in this handbook.
- Hold an up-to-date Health & Safety manual including guidelines on child protection, emergency procedures, risk assessment and equipment.
- Carry out on-going evaluation of learning and personal development of all those involved in Forest school.
- Have a commitment to external reviews and sharing of best practice within the network.

All of the above can be supported by FEI recognised training and by information in this handbook. Further information on FEI Forest schools can be found on http://www.foresteducation.org/forest_schools.php

Information about FEI in Scotland can be found on the Scotland page of the FEI website:
<http://www.foresteducation.org/country.php?ctry=s>

FOREST SCHOOL - LEADER QUALIFICATIONS

- All Forest Schools will be run by qualified leaders
- Forest School Leaders will hold a relevant first aid qualification
- All Forest School Leaders will be subject to an Enhanced Disclosure check

Training to become a Forest School Leader

To be a Forest School Leader it is important to undertake the necessary training.

- **Level 3** training is available to teachers, support assistants, nurses, nursery nurses, etc, with relevant experience. This is the agreed level of training required to run an FEI Forest School.

- **Level 2** training is shorter, and designed for people with less previous experience of working with children and young people, or those who only want to work as assistants.

- **Level 1** training is available to people who only want to work on existing school/nursery/playwork sites.

Before you can lead Forest Schools, you need a first aid qualification. The First Aid qualification can be either First Aid at Work (4 days) or the Intermediate Temporary Care (ITC) Qualification First Aid in the Outdoors (2 days) and is valid for 3 years. Due to the outdoor nature of the work it is recommended that the ITC qualification is gained in addition to the First Aid at Work especially if Forest School sessions are to be led in remote locations.

Level 3 Training Providers

Most trainers offering Open College Network qualifications in Forest Schools now belong to the OCN Forest School Training Network.

For further information on training to become an FEI recognised Forest school Leader see http://www.foresteducation.org/forest_schools.php

- 1 Trained and experienced Forest School Leaders recognised and accredited by the schools and who are confident to deliver sessions
- 2 Enough adults at each session to ensure a low child to adult ratio
- 3 The same Forest School Leaders for each group or cohort throughout a series of sessions
- 4 Close contact and good communication between the school staff and the Forest School Leaders.
- 5 A prepared and established site where all the sessions are delivered
- 6 Good access to the Forest School
- 7 Link activities to the school curriculum
- 8 Familiar routines and structures to sessions
- 9 Enjoyment by the teachers and Forest School Leaders
- 10 Parent and carer involvement in Forest School activities

Traditionally, best practice Forest School has been described as an extremely effective process to support and nurture self esteem among its participants. Another aspect of emotional well being is the ability to develop emotional resilience, which encompasses the concept of self esteem. The Health Promoting Schools initiative www.healthpromotingschools.co.uk works very well in the Forest School context:

Health Promoting Schools describe the resilient person as someone who is likely to:

- Recognise and manage their own feelings and understand the feelings of others
- Have a sense of independence and self-worth
- Form and maintain positive, mutually respectful relationships with others
- Be able to solve problems and make informed decisions
- Have a sense of purpose and goals for the future.

A caring and supportive Forest School programme can promote a sense of connection and belonging and help children, young people and adults become more resilient and confident to learn. It supports young participants in the following ways:

- ▶ Includes personal reflection as a way of showing the pupils their own feelings
- ▶ Provides a safe setting in which to talk about their feelings
- ▶ Helps pupils to identify triggers that elicit an emotional or angry response, and teaches them alternative ways of dealing with and expressing these emotions.

How can the Forest School Leader support the development of emotional resilience?

- Encourage the development of a positive attitude, self belief and communication by providing positive feedback, encouragement and reassurance, help pupils to understand and express their feelings, and communicate openly
- Increase support networks for pupils by providing one to one support and peer support, and foster a culture of listening.
- Build trusting and co-operative relationships within Forest School by fostering mutual respect and recognising outside pressures/ influences on pupils.
- Increase pupils' engagement with learning by taking a flexible approach to programmes and styles of activities, and reviewing the learning experience with participants.

- Foster a positive and inclusive ethos by building a sense of belonging in Forest School, involving pupils in decision making and celebrating diversity.
- Encourage a sense of fun and provide opportunities for games, laughter, jokes and relaxation
- Develop life skills through practical tasks, involving pupils and giving them responsibility for tasks, providing opportunities for pupils to think and act in enterprising ways, and build literacy and numeracy skills in the Forest School setting through appropriate activities.

Emotional literacy

Health Promoting Schools describe emotional literacy as “the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions and respond to the emotions of others in ways that are helpful”.

The Forest School Leader can support emotional literacy in the following ways:

- Organise and make time for informal relaxed discussion - for example, when reviewing sessions with the group, or circle time around a camp fire.
- Consider the emotional health of pupils when planning sessions with co-leaders
- Identify what motivates us and others
- Develop and use language which expresses feelings
- Create a culture of listening
- Share feelings and concerns with someone else
- Nurture, support and value each other – work as a team
- Develop skills in emotional literacy: listening skills; recognising and understanding emotions and body language; coping with stress
- Focus on strengths and look for solutions
- Be flexible and open to different ways of working
- Explore opportunities to work closely with school staff and different age groups
- Relax and have fun together
- Acknowledge and celebrate when things go well
- Make it okay to talk about things that go wrong
- Encourage self-evaluation that explores feelings as well as actions
- Promote empathy among the Forest School participants

Forest School practice works on the understanding that emotions are the key to learning.

One of the unique qualities of Forest School is that, due to the high adult to child ratio, and the relaxed informal outdoor setting, leaders are enabled to treat the pupils as individuals and give them more focussed attention to meet their individual needs. By its nature, the outdoors is unpredictable and stimulating. These factors can help facilitate children's interest and enjoyment in learning and enhance their emotional well being.

As Rose & Nicholl (1997) stated, on average we remember

- ▶ 20% of what we read
- ▶ 30% of what we hear
- ▶ 40% of what we see
- ▶ 50% of what we say
- ▶ 60% of what we do
- ▶ 90% of what we see, hear, say and do

Individuals learn in different ways, and respond to some contexts better than others. Most individuals learn best when given an opportunity to use different styles of learning. In this way, they can respond to the style that suits each one best in different situations.

- **Visual learners** learn best by watching things being done, or from diagrams
- **Auditory learners** learn well from verbal instructions
- **Kinaesthetic learners** find it difficult to learn by listening and watching but learn well when allowed to physically try things out.

In professional teaching practice, active learning approaches are probably best developed in the pre-school and early years' sector. However, children of all ages – and adults - respond well to Forest school because it offers more personal choice and more scope for kinaesthetic 'hands-on' learning than the traditional indoor classroom context. Forest School provides the ideal situation for 'learning by doing' alongside a supportive adult or peer.

e.g. Tying a clove hitch to start a lashing – this can be quite hard for children, or adults, to get the hang of. It is particularly difficult if you are a kinaesthetic learner and expected to learn it from a picture or watching someone else demonstrate it, especially if they are sitting or standing opposite. For these children, give the child a piece of string and sit beside them, doing it stage by stage with them copying you each time.

With experience, Forest School Leaders can begin to differentiate learning preferences among participants, from the child who prefers to sit and watch before tackling a new activity, to one who cannot listen and is itching to 'get stuck in'. Avoid 'pigeonholing' learners however. Most people use a variety of ways to learn. Many other factors affect how children learn including their developmental stage, personality, emotions and life experiences.

A caring and supportive Forest School programme supports learning in the following ways:

- ▶ Offers pupils the chance to talk about what they have learned, enjoyed and what they were good at
- ▶ Lets pupils think about what they are achieving and how they are progressing
- ▶ Develops tasks and activities that give everyone the chance to talk and listen to each other
- ▶ Offers pupils a choice of activities and lets them take responsibility for their own learning
- ▶ Gives pupils praise and positive encouragement and encourages them to praise each other

PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Positive behaviour is supported by outdoor activities because these tend to use active learning processes. Here the learner can progress at his or her optimum pace and is set up to achieve – which helps to build self esteem.

Children may reflect this by showing a progressive increase in positive behaviour as they learn actively and so more happily outdoors...

There is now a page on the LTS website to support the promotion of positive behaviour. The Positive Behaviour Team has seconded educational practitioners, each responsible for a local authority – see

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/positivebehaviour/index.asp>

Every Forest School Leader needs to foster their own self worth, self-awareness and be able to manage their own emotions positively.

In order to support learning, emotional development and positive behaviour, each leader also needs to:

- Give lots of positive feedback and be enthusiastic about individual and group achievements
- Provide a positive role model in the way you behave and display your feelings
- Acknowledge her/ his own strengths and weaknesses
- Demonstrate how to be safe and face challenges in the outdoor environment
- Have a good understanding and working knowledge of the natural environment, and communicate this effectively
- Treat everyone, including the environment, with respect
- Be flexible, and well practised in Forest School activities and skills before leading a session
- Work cooperatively with other leaders
- Be sensitive to the fact that every learner has a different personal history that may affect how they behave and learn

