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Holiday Forest School Frequently Asked Questions

Does forest school continue in all weathers?

Forest School is an all outdoor experience that takes place in all weather, including rain and snow. Dressing appropriately with layered clothing and good waterproofs and footwear will protect participants from the worst of the weather. Leaders are responsive to the weather conditions and how the children are managing. If it is raining, we can put up tarps for shelter and encourage active activities such as den building and games, and if it's very cold we can also light a campfire and serve some warming hot chocolate. We keep a close eye on the weather forecast and in line with our weather risk assessments, only cancel if very heavy persistent rain is forecast for most of the day or if very strong wind is forecast, where there would be a danger of falling branches. Very occasionally we have recommended individual children be collected as, despite our best efforts, they have become cold and unhappy, but by and large, most children cope well with adverse weather, often relishing the conditions, providing they are dressed appropriately.

Can parents come with their child to forest school?

Forest school is just for kids I'm afraid! Our holiday forest schools are play-based programmes where child-led play is encouraged. We find that children can behave differently when their parents are there and can rely on them for support rather than making new friends and using their own initiative, therefore missing out on the benefits such as independence, self-reliance and confidence. If you are concerned about how your child will settle into forest school, please discuss it with us as our practitioners are skilled in helping children integrate, overcome issues and find their feet. We have often seen shy children or those lacking in confidence transform through forest school.

Can my 4-year-old come to forest school?

We can take children on holiday forest schools once they have started school, as we find that by Reception class, they have the skills, independence and resilience to cope with a full day at forest school. Our ratios are generally 1: 8 so we don't have the staff numbers to be able to offer the support that can be needed for pre-school children. Children need to be able to know when they need the toilet or when they are hungry, to be able to put on their coats unaided and to be able to be away from their parents for 5 hours. So although our publicity says that forest school is for age 5 and over, we do allow 4 year olds to come along once they have started school.

Can my 12-year-old come to forest school?

Yes! We advertise the programmes as for primary school age children, but find that many of our regulars still want to come when they are in Years 7 and 8. 12 and 13 year olds are welcome to come to our holiday forest school, but should be aware that they may be the oldest there. In Ilkley we run a programme for 9-14 year olds, and may replicate this in our other settings if there is a demand.



Why can't I book individual days?

The reason we only sell tickets for the full programme for our holiday forest schools to begin with is because of the nature of a forest school. Children gain from experiencing the full programme and the repeated visits to the woods as part of a community of children, with child-led planning and reflection a key feature of the forest school approach. Children who miss days miss some of that development and it undermines the dynamic to have different children attending on different days. As leaders we notice children may have to catch up if they miss the establishment of the groups and the ground rules on the first day. For this reason, we try our best to book out the programme with children coming to the full programme and only sell individual days if there are spaces remaining nearer the time.

What should my child wear to forest school?

Layered clothing is important in all weathers – they can always take layers off if too warm.

When it is cold, an extra thermal layer beneath long trousers (not jeans) and long-sleeved tops and fleeces is ideal. A waterproof coat is essential all year round and waterproof trousers are great if you have them. We also recommend a warm hat, gloves and sturdy boots with warm socks (hiking boots or snow boots are better than wellies in cold weather).

In summer we still recommend lightweight, long sleeved tops and trousers rather than shorts or T-shirts to protect from scratches and insect bites or stings. On hot days, it can be cooler in the woods than the surrounding area and of course, in the UK we can never guarantee a dry day!

Clothes can get very muddy so be prepared to do some washing afterwards, and don't let them wear favourite clothes that they would be upset to get dirty.

What should I pack in their bag for forest school?

Children need to bring a packed lunch, drink and some spare clothes. That's all they need for a day in the woods. If children bring other items such as toys, electronic devices or phones there is the risk of things being lost in the woods. Please do not bring any knives or tools as we have our own tools which we closely supervise.

Do you take childcare vouchers?

Unfortunately, we are unable to take childcare vouchers. To participate in the scheme, we would need to be OFSTED registered, as we don't have a permanent site and operate at many locations the logistics of this would be unrealistic.

What if my child has additional needs?

We aim to be inclusive and enable any child to participate in forest school. Please let us know anything that will help us to look after your child during a day at forest school by including the information on the booking form, whether that is a food allergy, disability, behaviour issue or anything that would be helpful for leaders to be aware of. If your child needs one-to-one support, please give us a call and we will do our best to find additional staff. We have many children with additional needs who regularly attend our forest schools, but unfortunately we cannot guarantee a place if we are unable to find enough staff.

How do you minimise the risks and keep children safe?

At forest school, children are encouraged to develop their awareness of safety by taking managed risks in a controlled environment. We carry out risk assessments for all our activities and sites and have a range of policies and procedures for specific activities e.g. tool use and fire. Our qualified and experienced forest school leaders carry out on-going risk assessments, assessing changing conditions and situations to enable all participants to take part safely.



We also encourage children to assess risk for themselves, with close adult guidance. In our introduction, we help the children think about how they can stay safe. We provide appropriate safety equipment such as gloves for using tools and teach the children to use them safely and closely supervise their use.

Risks are minimised, but they can't be eliminated. However, the occasional cut, bruise or bump are part of forest school and need to be balanced against the many benefits of forest school including learning through exploration, gaining independence, self-confidence and enjoyment. We keep a record of accidents and near misses to inform parents and help us with our future risk assessments.

What rules do you have at forest school?

The rules of forest school can be broken down into 3 main areas. These are to look after yourself, look after each other and look after the environment. In addition, there are specific rules particularly relating to fires, tool use and tree climbing. The boundaries within which children are allowed to play are also specified to keep children safe.

Why do children choose all their own activities at forest school?

One of the principles of forest school is that it is child led. This means that children can choose what activities they would like to do. Forest school practitioners provide a choice of equipment, suggested ideas and support when necessary and children are free to choose what activities they would like to do. After the very defined structures of a school and other clubs, children respond well to this freedom and choice.

Why can children eat lunch when they like at forest school?

As activities are child led, we also allow children to decide when they would like to eat. This enables us not to interrupt their activities if they are busy being creative or engaged in an activity. We do prompt children if they begin eating at 10am and remind them to save some for later. We also remind them in the afternoon to eat if they haven't already had their lunch.

Where do children go to the toilet?

There are generally no toilet facilities in the woods. Please advise your child beforehand that behind a tree in a concealed area of the woods is the usual method! If your child is young or not used to the outdoor method of going to the toilet, it is a good idea for them to have a practice beforehand – especially if they will be dressed in an all-in-one waterproof! We can deal with accidents and offer discreet support if children request it. (Please pack change of clothes if this may be an issue for your child). For hygiene purposes we carry water and hand washing equipment for children to use after toileting and before eating.

What are the benefits of forest school?

Children often get very little time for free play outdoors during the school week. Forest school encourages children to be physically active with lots of activities to develop both fine and gross motor skills. Children also learn to assess, appreciate and take risks, making sensible and informed decisions. They learn to be independent and develop new skills, which boosts their confidence and self-esteem. Through trial and error they learn to deal with failure and develop resilience by keeping going. Children also benefit by just being outdoors; a strong body of evidence has shown being in woodland surrounded by nature improves mental health and wellbeing.

What qualifications do your forest school leaders have?

All of our forest school leaders are qualified to Level 3 in Forest School Programme Leadership and have an up to date Paediatric and Forest School First Aid certificate. The support practitioner may be qualified to level 2 or 3. A forest school programme is usually staffed by 2 qualified leaders and a volunteer who are all DBS checked and covered by our insurance.



What if I need to swap days or I can't make it?

Please take care to book your child onto the correct forest school as we may have several on offer! We can only swap your child onto another forest school if a place is available. Refunds are in line with our cancellation policy (below). If there is a waiting list and we are able to rebook your place, then we will refund your money minus our administration fee. If you know of someone that can take your child's place, you are welcome to do a direct swap, but we must have the registration information for the new child, including consent and contact information, before they can attend.

Customer cancellation: If you decide to cancel due to sickness or changes of plan, our cancellation policy is as follows:

Cancellations with more than 14 days notice, we will issue a refund less a 10% admin fee.

Cancellations with between 13 and 7 days notice, we will issue a 50% refund

Cancellations with less than 7 days notice will not be refunded

If we cancel e.g. due to weather, low numbers, etc, a full refund will be given.

