

Risk benefit assessment: **General Forest School activities and process**

To be read in conjunction with other related risk assessments & policies/procedures.

NB: It is accepted that this risk benefit assessment is applicable to everyone attending the programme.

Risk benefit assessment compiled by: Pablo Joyce

Benefits to children:

Forest School is a child-led pedagogy taking place outdoors, usually in a woodland environment that gives children agency over their learning and activities, gives opportunities for risk management, promotes physical, mental and social development, and encourages problem solving amongst its many other benefits.

Being child-led, children are actively involved and engaged in what they do in Forest School and have opportunities to direct their learning and activities in a direction that is appropriate for them at any given time.

Forest School Leaders facilitate learning and certain activities, especially where there is use of a new tool or experiences such as fire building, and promote active risk management and assessment while ensuring that children are kept safe from harm.



Notes about safety in Forest school:

We recognise that the world is full of hazards of various kinds and that we can prepare children for these by helping them to learn to manage acceptable risk in a safe, positive and supportive environment.

The safety and security of children in Forest School is our primary concern and while we accept that not all accidents can be prevented, we have put strenuous risk/benefit assessments in place to mitigate possible accidents, and that these risk/benefit assessments are regularly reviewed and updated.

We recognise all natural environments, including woodland, present risks and hazards such as branches, prickly plants and uneven ground. We welcome these acceptable risks as tools for children to learn to manage risk for themselves whilst being supported by the Forest School Leaders and other adults present.

Forest School Leaders will only facilitate tool use, activities and experiences that are considered age and stage appropriate to individual children as part of keeping them safe. We recognise that all children are individual and may not be ready for all experiences at the same time.

Whenever children choose to undertake unforeseen activities that have not been previously risk assessed, a Forest School Leader with a

thorough knowledge of other Forest School risk/benefit assessments will make a cautious judgement as to whether the activity presents unreasonable risk before allowing it to take place.

Notes about this risk and benefit assessment:

The majority of our Forest School risk assessments cover a specific area, experience or tool use, however this risk and benefit assessment is deliberately generalised and designed to cover the wider activities and process of Forest School to bridge any gaps left by the more specific risk and benefit assessments and the general control measures put in place, i.e. applicable to any situation where no specific risk and benefit assessments completely covers a chosen activity or experience, and for children *being* in March Wood.

This risk and benefit assessment in no way supersedes any other Devonshire Hill Primary School Forest School risk and benefit assessment and should be read in conjunction with other risk and benefit assessments for site and weather, experiences and tool use. Whilst this risk and benefit assessment contains much information also contained in the March Wood site specific risk and benefit assessments, the site specific assessment will contain many additional hazard, harm and control measures related to the March Wood site rather than Forest School activities and the Forest School process.

Probability Score:

1. <5% chance that it will occur – very unlikely
2. 25% chance that it will occur
3. 50% chance that it will occur
4. 75% chance that it will occur
5. >95% chance that it will occur – very likely

Severity Score

1. Not serious – no first aid required
2. Minor Injury – requiring basic first aid
3. Injury – requiring non immediate professional medical attention
4. Serious injury/multiple injuries – requiring immediate medical attention
5. Major accident – multiple injuries or fatality

Calculate the risk levels:

Multiply probability by severity to give a rating between **1 & 25**. Any activities deemed to have a **revised rating of over 12** are deemed dangerous even with control measures in place. In this case, review control measures.

Hazard	Harm	Risk level prior to control measures	Control measures to reduce the risk	Revised risk rating
Trees and plants	Cuts, bruises, allergic reactions, rashes and allergies	4x4=16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are made aware that there are risks in carrying out any activity where there is a risk of tripping, stumbling or falling close to trees and other plants. Children are made aware that such risks need to be considered and if necessary, the activity should be moved to a space further away from the trees or plants. • Everyone is made aware that tree roots can protrude from the ground and create trip hazards. • Everyone is made aware that tree branches grow at many different levels and that they need to be aware of 	1x4=4

			<p>their surroundings when moving around. Be particularly aware of branches above when getting up from a low position.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone to be aware of the condition of tree limbs and be aware of the danger of falling or low-hanging branches • Everyone is made aware that woodlands contain some toxic plants that should be avoided. The Forest School leader is responsible for identifying and making children aware of these hazards. Everyone should be aware that they should not put anything in their mouth other than food and drink provided for eating and drinking. • Everyone is made aware that they should not handle nuts, berries or fungi that they come across unless they know that it is safe to do so. Nothing that they find should be put in their mouths. No pick, no lick. • Everyone is made aware that woodlands may contain plants that can cause a 'sting' such as nettles. Everyone should look out for and avoid these plants. • Everyone should be aware of the presence of thorny plants in the woodland. Trees such as hawthorn have sharp spines and need to be handled with care. Plants with spikes and thorns such as brambles can easily hide in amongst other plants so participants need to be careful to avoid these or handle them with care. • The Forest School leader will have an up-to-date medical conditions list which includes accurate information about any allergies that any children in the group have. Any updates will be shared with the class teacher and forest school leaders. 	
Uneven surfaces, holes and woodland floor materials, e.g. dead wood	Cuts and bruises	4x3=12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are made aware that there are risks in carrying out any activity involving running or even walking close to holes, substantially uneven or slippery surfaces, or areas of dense foliage including bindweed. Children are made aware that such risks need to be considered and if 	1x3=3

			<p>necessary, the activity should be moved to a less risky area..</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Everyone needs to be aware that natural environments may contain many uneven surfaces that can be trip hazards. There may be obvious dips and peaks and sizable holes that can be obscured by grass. In particular, deep holes may be left by animals. ● Everyone needs to be aware that natural environments may contain hidden hazards in the soft undergrowth, leaves, foliage, etc. and that unless you can clearly see the ground surface, e.g. earth, then care is needed when moving around. ● Sitting dead wood such as old branches can be trip hazards. ● Low foliage, e.g. brambles, bind weed and floor ivy, can easily entangle feet and ankles when walking or running and become a serious trip hazard. This becomes a particular issue when moving rapidly through overgrown areas. Participants should be aware of the dangers of rushing through overgrown areas, particularly with tough low plants such as bramble and vines. ● Everyone needs to be aware that tree roots can grow above the surface some distance away from the trunk of the tree creating and that low tree stumps may be found anywhere on site, both being trip hazards. 	
Trips, stumbles and falls	Cuts, bruises, sprains, breaks, head and other injuries	4x5=20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children are made aware that any activity that contains a risk of trips, stumbles and falls requires looking carefully at the surroundings of the activity to identify hazards that may cause additional harm should a trip, stumble or fall occur, e.g. trees, especially in the case of saplings that include a bamboo support. ● Children are made aware that any activity that contains a risk of trips, stumbles and falls requires looking carefully at the surroundings of the activity to identify hazards that 	1x5=20

			<p>increase the likelihood of a trip, stumble or fall, e.g. holes in the ground or uneven surfaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are made aware that any activity that contains a risk of trips, stumbles and falls requires looking carefully at the surroundings to be aware of any risk of falling from height, e.g. a balance log. Additional care should be taken relative to the height it is possible to fall from, any possible obstacles and the surface below, e.g. possible fall from a tree branch. • Children are made aware that when taking part in any activity that contains a risk of trips, stumbles and falls, they need to consider and assess the risk related to and/or caused by any object that they or others around them are carrying or otherwise transporting, e.g. sticks, wheelbarrows, etc. • Children are made aware that when taking part in any activity that contains a risk of trips, stumbles and falls, they need to consider not only themselves but all those that are also involved, that they will come near and that may come near them in the course of the activity, including items carried or otherwise transported by themselves or others. 	
Toxic plants	Allergic reaction, rashes and sickness	3x4=16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone is to be given a briefing on specific toxic plants relevant to the site, such as hemlock. • All participants to be aware of a Forest School 'no pick, no lick' policy where nothing is ever put in the mouth unless provided for that purpose. • Nuts and fruit are only picked when specifically permitted by the Forest School leader. • Everyone to wash hands before eating or handling food • Forest School leader to make sure that hand washing facilities are available. • The Forest School leader will have an up-to-date medical conditions list which includes accurate information about any allergies that any children in the 	1x4=4

			group have. Any updates will be shared with the class teacher and forest school leaders.	
Forest School store	Cuts and bruises	4x4=16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will only be allowed to enter the Forest School store when permitted to do so by the Forest School Leader. • Children will only be permitted to enter the Forest School store by the Forest School Leader when it is safe to do so, e.g. tools are in order and safely arranged. • Tools and resources will be arranged neatly including tools being stored on a 'shadow board' so that it is clear where they belong and what is present. • No children will be allowed near the Forest School store doors when they are being opened or closed due to their weight. • In any breezy or windy weather, including when there is a chance of winds or gusts, the Forest School store doors will be fixed in an open position so that they cannot be moved by the wind. • In rainy conditions, the Forest School store doors will be fixed in an 'almost closed' position, open just enough to get in and out, so that rain is not driven inside making surfaces slippery. 	1x4=4
Fire circle	Cuts, bruises, burns and head injuries	4x4=16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are advised to take care if running around/near the fire circle, which in the case of March Wood, is the roundhouse. • Children are made aware that they must not run around or play physical games inside the fire circle. • Children advised that the benches, logs or other fire circle seating can be trip hazards and everyone must move carefully around the fire circle. • Children are made aware of the fire circle rules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nobody should enter the fire circle without the permission of a Forest School Leader. ○ We use the reminder word, <i>jellyfish</i>, to remind each other not to enter the fire circle. 	1x4=4

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anyone needing to move around the fire circle leaves at the nearest exit and walks around the outside. ○ No belongings, clothes, etc. to be within the fire circle. 	
Forest School building structures	Cuts and bruises and head injuries	4x4=16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children are made aware that the upright posts of many building structures in March Wood are very hard and many have sharp edges and can cause injury if they are run/walked/fallen into. ● Children are advised to take care if running around/near the building structures. ● Children are made aware that they must not run around or play physical games inside the building structures when there is active tool use inside these structures. ● Children advised that the dome tops of the geodesic domes are not suitable for climbing and must not be climbed on under any circumstance. ● Adults are advised to be careful when entering and exiting the domes as no entry/exit point has a large height clearance for tall adults. ● Adults are advised to take extra caution when using the wide '<i>front</i>' entrance to the large geodesic dome as it has a hard oak lintel making it the lowest entry/exit point, where tall adults may not clear without ducking down. The lintel has a climbing plant, clematis montana, climbing round it to highlight its position. ● Heavy objects are not to be hung from the geodesic dome structures above the upright post level. 	1x4=4
Lighting the fire	Burns	3x5=15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fires only ever to be lit by, or under the supervision of, the Forest School Leader or by a suitably trained member of staff. ● Fires to be lit in accordance with the agreed Devonshire Hill Forest School campfire procedure method. ● Absolutely no flammable liquids/accelerants used to light the fire or be kept in the vicinity. 	1x5=5

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If any child wishes to try and cause a fire using solar refraction or reflection, this must be done only with the Forest School Leader's knowledge and permission, with all appropriate fire safety measures to hand, e.g. fire blanket, burns kits, bucket of water. ● Any attempted fire lighting outside the fire circle to be performed in a <i>safe</i> environment, e.g, away from highly combustible materials such as dried grass and plants, kindling, etc. Anyone attempting to light a fire outside the fire circle must agree a location with the Forest School Leader prior to starting. 	
Fire out of control	Burns, scorching to surrounding land, forest fire, shelter fire.	5x5=5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Careful consideration of fire location on flat level ground. ● Immediate area is cleared of vegetation and combustible materials. ● For fixed fire pits, there will be a layer of sand and shingle below ground level covered by a layer of fire bricks. ● Fire to be properly extinguished with water before leaving and all ash and embers to be wet and cold before being disposed of. 	1x5=5
Behaviour	Burns, slips, trips, cuts and bruises.	4x5=20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All adults and children to be fully briefed on any experience or tool use before the first time. ● All adults and children are regularly reminded about safety rules appropriate to experiences and tool use. ● Anyone displaying inappropriate behaviour that puts themselves or others at an unacceptable risk in a particular experience, activity or tool use will not be able to continue with the relevant experience, activity or tool use at that time. ● Anyone displaying inappropriate behaviour that puts themselves or others at an unacceptable risk in general will be required to leave March Wood (or other Forest School location) at that time in the interests of keeping themselves and others safe. ● The Forest School Leader will judge whether any particular experience, activity or tool use is appropriate 	2x5=10

			for each individual at a particular time according to their age, stage, behaviour and current state of mind.	
Signed: <i>Pablo</i>	Name: Pablo Joyce	position: Forest School Leader	Date: 14.07.2021	
Signed:	Name: Thomas Ssesazi	position: Forest School Leader	Date:	
Signed:	Name: Julie D'Abreu	position: Headteacher	Date:	
Signed:	Name: Penny Woolley	position: School Governor	Date:	

This assessment is reviewed annually unless an accident/incident occurs requiring immediate review.