



Handbook of Policies & Procedures 2024

To be read by all staff, volunteers and visitors to Wheatfen Forest School CIC

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Due for revision: March 2025



FOREST SCHOOL
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www.forestschoolassociation.org

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1. Introduction & background

This handbook contains the essential who, what, where, why and how of Wheatfen Forest School (WFS).

It is for anyone who wishes to work with us – be they staff, volunteers, visitors, collaborators, students, teachers or referrers. It must be read and understood by all participating staff and volunteers before any activity takes place.

Wheatfen Forest School CIC provides forest school clubs for children and young people, toddler groups for families and alternative provision for high school pupils.

Contact Details & Essential Information:

Address: Wheatfen Forest School CIC, Wheatfen Broad, The Covey, Surlingham, Norfolk, NR14 7AL

Telephone: 07956 704195 (Office Phone) 07956 704196 (Forest Phone for on-the-day contact)

Email: wheatfenforestschool@gmail.com

Website: www.wheatfenforestschool.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/wheatfenforestschool/

Liability Insurance: Policy Number SALSALIA/R254855/0332/23

Professional Indemnity Insurance supplied by Birnbeck Insurance Services/QBE

1. What is Forest School?

Forest School is a specialised learning approach which offers all learners regular opportunities to achieve through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment.

Forest School follows 6 core principles:

1. It is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
2. It takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a lifelong relationship between the learner and the natural world.
3. It uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
4. It aims to promote the holistic development of all involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
5. It offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
6. It is run by qualified Forest School practitioners, who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

The development of healthy self-esteem is at the heart of Forest School.

2. Vision

At Wheatfen Forest School we passionately believe that children and young people need more freedom, risk and trust, to reach their potential and flourish. We seek to facilitate this in an ethos of support and acceptance, where all aspects of the child are nurtured and equally valued.

Our mission is to:

- Inspire the next generation to develop a deep, positive relationship with the natural world.
- Give learners the freedom to follow their natural curiosity, creativity and intrinsic motivation by creating programmes that are responsive to their needs and interests.

- Support participants to develop their independence by learning new skills, gaining greater responsibility, experiencing appropriate challenge and learning to assess and manage risks independently.
- Empower learners to develop confidence, resilience and self-esteem through hands-on, real life learning experiences.

3. Activities

Forest School activities will depend on the experience, needs and interests of learners. Here are some examples of what a session might include:

- Team games
- Adventurous and imaginative play
- Fire making and making things in fires (eg. charcoal, burned out spoons, food)
- Using tools, such as knives and saws, for green woodworking and conservation work
- Crafting things from natural materials such as clay, wood and plant pigments
- Nature exploration and natural history
- Learning knots and lashings
- Shelter building and wild camping

4. The Forest School Site at Wheatfen

[Wheatfen Nature Reserve](#) is recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Ted Ellis Trust aims to preserve its rich and fragile ecology, and to keep the land and its wildlife accessible for the enjoyment and education of all. WFS operates at Wheatfen Nature Reserve through a legal agreement with the Trust.

Site information: Getting here, parking & facilities

By bus: The number [85 Konect Bus service](#) runs regularly between Norwich and Surlingham. Request to disembark at the corner of The Street & The Green. Take a 10 minute walk down The Covey following the green signs to Wheatfen Nature Reserve entrance.

By bike: National cycle route 1 passes through Surlingham on the stretch from Norwich to Loddon <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/ncn/map/route/route-1> . Bicycles can be locked behind the warden's hut.

By car or minibus:

There is a small car park at the entrance to the reserve. Cycling, walking and car sharing are encouraged to limit environmental impact. At busy times cars may park on the left-hand side of the lane approaching.

- There are two toilets located by the Study Centre, one with disabled access.
- Unfortunately, the woods are not wheelchair friendly.
- The Forest school site is located in the woods and is sustainably managed as part of the nature reserve.
- Please note, the Forest School area is not open to visitors outside of scheduled sessions
- Please note that dogs are not allowed onto the reserve.

Local medical facilities

The nearest **A&E** department is based at NNUH, Colney Lane, Norwich, NR4 7UY 12 miles from Wheatfen. Tel: **01603 286286**. **If you need to dial 999, the nearest location accessible by Emergency vehicle is Wheatfen Nature Reserve car park. Grid ref: TG 32454 05661 What3words: skies.quilt.compliant**

For non-emergency ailments, Norwich Walk-in Centre (NHS) is located in the city centre 8 miles from Wheatfen. Rouen House, Rouen Rd, Norwich, NR1 1RB. Open 7 days 7am - 9pm, no appointment needed. Tel: 01603 677500.

5. Ecological Impact

Wheatfen is principally a nature reserve, designated as an SSSI and a Special Area of Conservation. We model a caring attitude to nature. All of our on-site activities are designed to minimise environmental impact.

Activity	Impact	Mitigation
Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denudation of deadwood • Compaction around the fire area • Fire could spread underground to roots undetected even if it appears extinguished. • Corruption of ground flora 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated sacrificial area for fire & seating. • Use a fire pit when needed • Make sure fire is extinguished with water. • Keep charcoal that can be re-used in shed. • Scatter the ashes widely and discretely.
Collecting natural materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depletion of plant species • Damage to plants (can be dependent on manner of harvesting - eg. using secateurs vs tearing - and plants can be more vulnerable during certain seasons). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We operate a general 'no picking policy' • We only pick plants for specific activities, allowed by an adult, using tools that limit damage, at favourable times of year. • Picking things already shed in favour of taking them from the living plant. • Educate learners which plants are best - rare, fragile, common, vigorous, poisonous, seasonal etc.
Tree climbing and swings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to trees – potentially making them vulnerable to infection by pests or diseases. • Disturbing nesting birds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stick to sacrificial areas. • Assess and identify trees that will tolerate this activity. • Choose invasive non-native tree species (rhododendron & cherry laurel) for most intensive activity - any resulting damage will diminish harmful species over time. • Encourage children to observe and assess for themselves. • Monitor bird activity during nesting season, and select trees that are not inhabited by nesting birds.
Shelter building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential loss or disturbance of habitat for invertebrates, small mammals and fungi. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stick to sacrificial area. • Do not take material from habitat piles. • Show participants how to spot signs of habitation so they can identify and select uninhabited deadwood. • Where possible, return the materials to where you found them afterwards.
Campfire cooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presence of food waste attracts animals which could increase their numbers causing adverse change in biodiversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burn any organic waste in the fire (eg. banana skins, egg shells, teabags) before extinguishing or take away for composting. • Take any non-organic waste away at the end of the session & recycle or dispose of.
Recycling and waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Litter could be a hazard to wildlife, chemicals from waste could affect the soil and damage plants • Waste materials have a negative ecological impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We separate our rubbish at FS into recycling, compost and landfill waste. • All types of waste are then removed from site for appropriate disposal

Sustainable procurement

We understand that the choices we make as consumers is a large part of our environmental impact. As far as possible we will buy items which are produced: as locally as possible; organically; from sustainable or renewable sources; ethically, with regards to environment, and workers' and animal welfare; and with minimum packaging. We will favour small business, ethical and social enterprise over large corporations where we can.

6. Health & Safety

WFS fully accepts its legal and moral obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. At WFS we always consider both the risks and benefits of an activity. Risk taking is an integral part of a child's learning and development. We believe that the best way to help children safely enjoy the great outdoors is to teach them how to assess and manage risks for themselves in a secure and supportive environment.

All staff will be familiarised with the provisions contained within the Health and Safety policy as part of their induction and be expected to act in accordance with them at all times.

The steps below will be actioned as a matter of course:

- Create an environment that is safe and without mitigated risk to health.
- Prevent accidents and cases of work-related ill health.
- Use, maintain, and store equipment safely.
- Ensure that all staff are competent in the work in which they are engaged.
- WFS will ensure that adequate arrangements exist for the following:
 - Monitoring the effectiveness of the Health and Safety policy and authorising any necessary revisions to its provisions.
 - Providing adequate resources
 - Providing adequate health and safety training for all staff.
 - Ensuring that all accidents, incidents, and dangerous occurrences are adequately reported and recorded (including informing the Health and Safety Executive, and Ofsted, where appropriate).
 - Reviewing all reported accidents, incidents and dangerous occurrences, and the Forest Schools response, to enable corrective measures to be implemented.
- The Forest School leader is responsible for the day-to-day implementation, management and monitoring of the Health and Safety policy. The Forest School leader will ensure that:
 - Regular safety inspections are carried out and the reports accurately logged.
 - Any action required as a result of a health and safety inspection is taken as rapidly as possible.
 - Information received on health and safety matters is distributed to all members of staff.
 - An investigation is carried out on all reported accidents, incidents and dangerous occurrences.
- Staff are responsible for ensuring that the provisions of the H&S policy are always adhered to.

Full policy documents are available on our website.

To minimise risk, we follow appropriate procedures for activities, such as tool use and fires, and carry out risk assessments covering the main hazards that children encounter at Forest School.

Risk Assessments

Wheatfen Forest School employs four types of risk assessment:

1) Seasonal site risk assessment

Rose Hoare carries out a thorough site risk assessment every 3 months, to identify any hazards present and implement the necessary controls, with the support of the Wheatfen Nature Reserve Warden.

The six steps of site risk assessment are:

1. Look for the hazards, (eg. deadwood in the canopy, slippery ground or poisonous fungi)
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are sufficient or more needs to be done
4. Record the findings
5. Share the risk assessment with all staff
6. Review the assessment and revise if necessary, and share immediately with all staff

2) Daily risk assessment

The Forest School leader will perform a risk assessment prior to activities taking place. This includes: identifying any hazards (including weather, site, any changes noted on the day, and possibly individuals attending that session) and implementing the necessary controls; checking for mobile phone coverage and access in case of emergency and; ensuring that staff and volunteers are apprised of the daily RA prior to a session. The location of the main sites and their grid references are noted on pages 3 of this Handbook. All staff will have access to this info in case the leader is unable to attend to an incident.

3) Generic activity / experience risk benefit assessment

These take into account all the aspects of specific activities, such as tool use, campfire cooking, games and tree climbing. Once correct procedures have been established, these generic activity risk assessments become part of the standard operating procedures.

4) Dynamic, ongoing risk assessment

This involves professional judgements during the session in response to changing situations.

Current Risk Assessments are shared with staff via Basecamp and hard copies can be found in a folder in the emergency bag in situ.

Shared information & responsibility

Where WFS works directly with families, our terms and conditions require that they provide pertinent information about their child on their booking and consent form – eg. medical conditions, phobias, allergies, and behaviours that may present risk to individuals and/or the group. This may be followed by a conversation or ongoing conversations if necessary. This information enables us to plan sessions to be as beneficial as possible and keep everybody safe. If required, a separate risk assessment will be prepared.

Where WFS works with schools, the WFS office will communicate with a named staff contact who will provide all pertinent information as listed above, which will be shared with the FS group leader. The lead contact of the participating school staff will maintain regular contact with the FS group leader, keeping them informed of any pertinent circumstances or changes.

Insurance

WFS is insured by Birbeck Insurance for £5 million public liability cover and employer's liability. Surlingham Wood is covered in an insurance policy held by the Ted Ellis Trust, through Aviva, for £2 million public liability cover.

Staffing, Training and Ratios

The Forest School leader on duty is responsible for health and safety during sessions and will have the relevant qualifications and experience, up-to-date outdoor First Aid, and a current Enhanced DBS check.

All Forest School practitioners delivering sessions must have a current Enhanced DBS check for the child workforce. We will aim to provide adequate training and support and ensure all staff and volunteers are confident and competent when following the policies and procedures in this handbook.

Forest School works with higher-than-average staff to child ratios. All sessions will be led by a level 3 practitioner who will always be accompanied by at least two other adults.

The recommended ratios, used as guidance only, are as follows:

- EYFS: 1 adult: 4 children
- Key Stage 1: 1 adult: 6 children
- Key Stages 2-4: 1 adult: 10 children

Ratios are worked out individually beforehand, depending on activities, needs and abilities of each group.

We've found that the ideal group size is around 15 children, with 4-5 adults. Our groups never exceed 20.

Staffing in-situ

The forest school area at WFS is large, with staff and participants spread out. The site can be divided into these areas: fire circle, tool area, craft area, laurels and bog. For younger groups (Seedlings & Saplings) a member of the team may be ascribed to an area in the group leader's plan. What is appropriate for different groups and circumstances will vary. If a team member has been designated an area, and needs to leave it, they must let the group leader know first, to ensure adequate supervision is in place.

A guide for Forest School Volunteers & Assistants

WHEATFEN FOREST SCHOOL SESSIONS AIM TO:

- be participant led
- be tailored to participant's age, ability and interests
- promote risk taking and self-motivated risk awareness/management
- encourage children & young people to negotiate and problem solve independently
- provide achievable activities (offered to them, but they do not have to take part)

A SESSION WILL INCLUDE:

- Circle time at the beginning and end of each session
- A chance for participants to reflect on and come up with ideas for learning/risk management
- Familiar activities/resources that build on children's interests and skills each week (e.g – water/mud play, tool use, crafts, mud kitchen, rope traverse, swing/hammock etc.)
- New/different activities each session to introduce new skills/learning (e.g – seasonal arts and crafts, nature ID linked games/activities, fine and gross motor skill or problem-solving activities, bush-craft such as den-building, fire-building etc.)

THE ADULT'S ROLE IS TO:

- Join in the fun by being relaxed, playing and supporting the child-led approach
- Observe children's interactions and interest/skills development and feedback to FS leader
- Give children time and space to solve their own problems (physical or emotional) let children try and negotiate through their own arguments/disagreements
- Try not to rush in when we think we see a problem (it is only through overcoming difficulties and finding solutions that children can truly develop independence and self-confidence).
- Give gentle guidance and support where necessary, avoiding praise if possible.
- Observe the doing, not the doer. Don't judge the person, affirm the action.

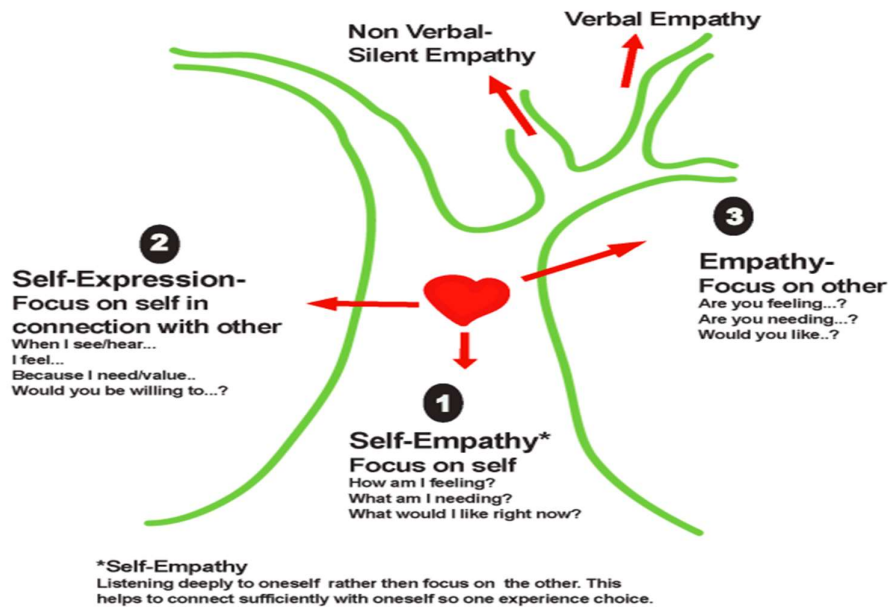
THINK – are they in danger? If so, step in immediately. If not, keep observing without interrupting.

WHEATFEN FOREST SCHOOL SESSION AGREEMENTS:

- Look after ourselves
- Look after each other
- Look after the woods
- All tool use to take place initially with an adult, at 1:1 ratio, in the tool area. See tool use policy for more details.
- Other 'agreements' are negotiated and discussed as an equal group, led by the group leader.

If there are individuals in the group who pose a hazard to themselves or others, or if you have any general concerns about safety, please inform the Forest School leader.

NVC's tree of life: 3 options for connection



NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION:

This approach is based on the idea that all human beings have the capacity for compassion and only resort to violence or behaviour that harms others when they don't recognise more effective strategies for meeting needs.

Through talking to children in a certain way, we can model authentic and peaceful alternative approaches to managing our own and their own feelings and behaviours.














Cancellation Procedure

Rose Hoare is responsible for the cancellation of Forest School sessions. Forest School should be cancelled in the following circumstances:

- In the case of extreme weather (high winds, lightening, floods) or a severe weather warning.*
- Changes and damage to the site - deeming the site unsafe during the risk assessment - that cannot be resolved in time.
- Insufficient adult to child ratio or absence of a Level 3 forest school leader

Under these circumstances, sessions may need to be cancelled at short notice. Rose Hoare will contact parents or schools of attendees and staff by phone. Every effort will be made to reschedule. Where this is not possible a refund will be offered according to our severe weather cancellation policy. Where customers cancel, they will not be refunded, as per the T&Cs.

Beaufort Scale

Beaufort number	Wind Speed (mph)	Seaman's term		Effects on Land
0	Under 1	Calm		Calm; smoke rises vertically.
1	1-3	Light Air		Smoke drift indicates wind direction; vanes do not move.
2	4-7	Light Breeze		Wind felt on face; leaves rustle; vanes begin to move.
3	8-12	Gentle Breeze		Leaves, small twigs in constant motion; light flags extended.
4	13-18	Moderate Breeze		Dust, leaves and loose paper raised up; small branches move.
5	19-24	Fresh Breeze		Small trees begin to sway.
6	25-31	Strong Breeze		Large branches of trees in motion; whistling heard in wires.
7	32-38	Moderate Gale		Whole trees in motion; resistance felt in walking against the wind.
8	39-46	Fresh Gale		Twigs and small branches broken off trees.
9	47-54	Strong Gale		Slight structural damage occurs; slate blown from roofs.
10	55-63	Whole Gale		Seldom experienced on land; trees broken; structural damage occurs.
11	64-72	Storm		Very rarely experienced on land; usually with widespread damage.
12	73 or higher	Hurricane Force		Violence and destruction.

*Wheatfen nature reserve is closed if there is an Amber Weather Warning from the [MET office](#) or a Flood Warning from the [Environment Agency](#). The reserve is occasionally closed if there is a Yellow Weather Warning from the MET office or a flood alert. Forest School will not operate if Wheatfen is closed due to wind. With or without a weather warning, we would not proceed if the mean wind speed is Gale force 8 or above. Where the mean wind speed is less than gale force 8 but there may be strong gusts, we will check conditions on the ground and consult the Wheatfen warden and make a decision based on that. If the wider reserve is closed due to flooding, Forest School can still go ahead as the FS area and path leading to it are unaffected by flooding.

Group walking

When the group goes for a walk the following procedures will be followed:

- The destination will be communicated to all adults present
- Children will be counted at the beginning and end of the walk, and at any necessary points in between, such as after a rest or play stop.
- Walking on roads will be avoided if possible, but where necessary will be in single file, with an adult at the front and the rear wearing high viz, and remaining adults interspersed between children.
- For longer walks and those which venture beyond the Forest School site, the route and projected timings will be communicated so somebody who is not with the group, and arrangements made for a check-in system between that person and the group leader

Toileting Procedure

When Forest School is taking place at Wheatfen and the children are below 10 years of age, children will be encouraged to use the toilets on arrival before going into the wood.

At Wheatfen, if children need the toilet mid- session, they can be accompanied the short distance to the toilet with two DBS checked adults OR with one such adult and at least two other children.

For older groups at Wheatfen, such as Mighty Oaks (for 11-15 year olds), they may take themselves the short distance to the toilets after first informing a member of forest school staff.

Where Forest School is taking place in a different venue, appropriate arrangements will be made.

For sites without toilet facilities, the following procedures have been proven to work effectively and to comply with current child protection recommendations:

- Encourage everyone to use the toilet before coming on site.
- Identify and prepare a suitable location away from the work area in advance of the session. A screen can be used to provide privacy and a toileting bag placed at this location.
- Introduce wild toileting to the group – encourage participants to use a trowel to bury faeces and tissue if necessary - and deal with any queries or uncertainties. At all times the emphasis needs to be on discretion and encouraging participants to do as much as possible independently.
- If a guardian/carer/parent who knows a participant is not available to help with their toileting, then ensure that they are supported by two DBS checked members of staff.
- Hand washing facilities should be available but if this is not possible hand sanitizing gel can be used.

Toileting kits contain:

- Toilet paper
- Hand sanitizing gel
- Nappy bags
- Small trowel
- Tarp

Parental Consent

Parents/carers will be asked to fill in an electronic enrolment and consent form before their child begins at Wheatfen Forest School. There will be a tick box on the form for Parents/Carers to confirm they have read the safeguarding policy. The completed consent form will give relevant medical details of the child, consent for the child to take part in the forest school activities and permissions to administer medicines and creams, and to admit the child to hospital for emergency treatment. Guardians will also be asked to provide details of allergies or relevant illnesses and to supply medicines where necessary (such as an epi-pen or asthma inhaler). Where a guardian does not give permission for medicines and creams to be applied, their wishes will be adhered to by the Forest School staff.

The form also provides emergency contact details and optional permission to take and use photographs of the child for promotional or educational purposes.

The forest school leader will keep copy of the information with them at all sessions attended by the child.

Tool Safety and Tool Operating Procedure

Using tools can help children and young people build confidence, self-esteem, achieve high levels of satisfaction and enjoyment! They learn safe practice; the right tool for the job; which materials are sustainable; which are best for which purpose; how to collect them; and how to make things from them.

A number of tools are used across a range of activities. We aim to ensure that all participants using tools do so safely and with minimal risk to their health.

The following guidelines are to be followed when using tools:

- The FS leader in charge of tools will check all tools are fit for continued use before the session.
- The FS leader in charge of tools will risk assess the tools, working area and activity before the session.
- Tool training and assessment of individuals should always take place prior to working with tools.
- Only tools that are in safe working order, of an appropriate size for the child, shall be supplied for use.
- Correct and safe use of sharp tools will be demonstrated to all staff and participants.
- Tools should be counted at the beginning and end of the session.
- All groups are to be supervised closely by competent leaders until deemed competent to work independently or with limited supervision.
- Tools should be kept in a designated safe area when not in use - none should be left unattended outside this area. The forest school leader will establish clear rules for accessing tools.
- All knives and axes will be sheathed immediately after use.
- Saw guards will be replaced immediately after use.
- Walking around with open/ unmasked tools will not be permitted.
- Safe working distances are maintained at all times. A safe working distance is defined by the 'blood bubble'. Leaders demonstrate to participants how to measure the 'blood bubble' using a sheathed tool. Holding, for example, a knife, they straighten their arm to full length in front of them and say "Imagine the tip of this knife is touching the inside of an imaginary bubble." They then move their outstretched arm in a circle. "If I were to move this all around my body this would mark out my blood bubble. We call this the blood bubble because, if anyone were to step inside it while I am working, there could be blood! And we don't want bloodshed at Forest School." They then ask the participant to mime the same action with a sheathed knife to mark out their blood bubble. "If someone is getting too close to you say "Get out of my blood bubble!" If you are going to be using a tool, look at who's around you and make sure you are a safe distance away from them before getting a tool out."
- The "blood bubble" for a tool with a throwing action is larger (size depends on the size of tool) and oval shaped. This will be clearly demonstrated by the experienced FS leader giving instruction on the tool.
- Suitable ratios must be maintained at all times. This will vary with age, size, disposition and experience.

Details of how individual tools are to be used and maintained are described in the table below.

Personal protective equipment will be used as necessary. Learners may need to wear safety boots or gloves for certain activities. This will be identified in the activity risk assessment, and sometimes in an individual risk assessment.

Fixed-blade Knife - Fixed-blade knives are used for whittling and to perform a power cut.

How to use it safely

Knives should always be sheaved firmly when not in use or when carrying. The staff member in charge of the tool area must count the knives out & back in again at the end. Ensure that participants have had a demonstration before use - including grip and body position – and that they are given the most appropriate knife for their age; size; dexterity; and the job in hand, and the leader is confident of participants’ ability. Knife work is always supervised by a responsible adult who is appropriately trained – eg. to L3 or a very experienced L2. Each person using a knife must sit well out of reach of others (blood bubble). Designate a specific zone for those using knives. Always pass knife with sheath firmly on. Always assume a safe, stable stance. As a rule, participants do not wear gloves and are instructed not to cut towards themselves. *There are some rare occasions where a person may need to wear cut-proof gloves – for example if they have sensory processing differences which cause them to push hard on the knife - and risk slipping and cutting themselves - or if they want to do the activity but have an extreme fear of cutting themselves. These are two rare but real-life situations in which WFS participants have been allowed to wear cut-proof gloves. These gloves, and arm guards, can be found in the PPE box should the need arise.* Keep the holding hand as far away from the blade as possible but always maintain control of material to allow cuts to be safe. Cut away from yourself and down towards the ground with minimum force. When participants have attained a high skill level, they may learn new cutting techniques to create more complex products, which can include cutting towards themselves. This will only happen under the tutelage of a highly experienced and competent tool teacher when the learner is ready.

How to conduct a tool safety check

Check that there are no cracks in the sheath. Visually look for any signs of denting, rust etc. Check the sharpness of the blade by drawing a thumb sideways across it at right angles. The whole blade should look dark. The blade should feel rough. Use the knife to further test its sharpness. Check that the handle and attachment are adequate and do not wobble.

How to maintain, clean and store the tool

Clean the knife with a rag. Rust is more likely to appear on a high-carbon blade and needs to be sanded off. When packing away the tools at the end of a session, make sure that the knife and guard are dry. Sharpening stones can be used or a kitchen knife tool. When using kitchen knife tools, the knife may need to be replaced more often. Make sure the blades are sharp, because they are safer sharp – set up your learners to succeed.

Axe/Billhook - This tool is used for pointing off or splitting wood.

How to use it safely

This tool requires a throwing action so it is important to keep the area in front and behind the person using the tool clear. Adopt a stable stance and appropriate working distance. Carry it down by your side with the blade facing forward. Never leave the axe on the ground, firmly bury the whole of the blade in the end grain of a chopping block or put cover back on and return to tool box. This tool should be transported in a sturdy canvas bag with the head cover in place.

How to conduct a tool safety check

Examine the integrity of the wooden handle for cracks and do not use tool with a painted handle. Look for signs of the head shifting, take the guard off and twist to check for security. Look at the top of the handle and check that the wedge, pin and rivet are firmly in place and that there are no signs of moving. Examine the blade for chips, fractures and carefully check the sharpness of the blade by running your thumb over it at a 90 degree angle, just as you would with a knife.

How to maintain, clean and store the tool

Dry the sheath, guard and axe. Use oil or waxes on the handle and if the axe has a high carbon blade use water displacing oil such as WD40. This tool should be stored in a safe, controlled place.

Bow-Saws

A bow-saw can have two types of blades. Pegged and even teeth are used for seasoned and dry wood. The raker blade is specifically designed for cutting green wood with every third or fourth notch having a V shape. This saying helps to remember which is which “Rake the green grass and peg it out to dry.”

How to use it safely

Bow-saws are carried down by the side with the teeth pointing downwards and the guard firmly in place. Saw covers should always be on while carrying or whilst in tool bag. Never leave a saw flat on the ground, hang them up with the covers on, on a saw horse or leaning against a tree. Use new saw blades yourself to wear them in before use with young children. Set aside a quieter area for working the bow saw, ideally on a saw horse which will provide a physical barrier between the holding hand and the sawing hand. The working space should be clear without any trip hazards. The saw should not be used in a position where the user has to stretch or could cause injury if they tire.

Three grooves should be made, by pulling the saw towards you, before starting sawing back and forth. In some instances, 2 children can use a bow saw, if the cutting is hard work, or for younger children for example. They can face each other and either ‘push’ or ‘pull’ the saw in turn. Both children should have a safe grip, away from the blade of the saw. If pair sawing with an adult and child – make sure the child has the handle end with the finger guard. Sawing together and feeling each other’s rhythm can also help promote empathy.

If a saw is being used to fell a small tree, the maximum allowable trunk diameter is 6” and it must be felled from the ground using a step cut.

When you have finished using the saw and cleaned it, replace the clip-on mask over the blade and return it to the tool box.

How to conduct a tool safety check

Check that the blade is securely clipped on and there is no wobble. Inspect the teeth of the bow saw after each use to make sure none are missing. Missing teeth may cause irregular cuts or damage tree limbs while pruning. If the saw blade is damaged, consider replacing it. Broken or damaged teeth also get caught on wood easier, making pruning or sawing through thick limbs more difficult.

How to maintain, clean and store the tool

Clean saw blades after every use. Build-up of sap or debris can dull the cutting surface, resulting in more work and less effective cuts. Brush off dry debris with a paintbrush. If the blade is sticky, give the blade a wipe with a damp cloth and then a dry cloth. Wipe a rag dipped in oil over the blade every few uses to keep it lubricated and clean. Replace blades when necessary. Store the tool somewhere dry, controlled and safe. Saws are usually supplied with plastic clip-on masks that fit over the blade. Alternatively, make a mask from a split length of hosepipe.

Loppers and Secateurs

Secateurs are used for cutting twigs and small branches, loppers are used for bigger branches.

How to use them safely

Always assess if the correct tool has been selected for the job. Loppers should be carried at the side holding on to the bottom handle, making sure that the blade has a “smiley face”. With bypass secateurs and loppers the curved blade is at the top. With anvil secateurs or loppers, the blade is at the top and the flat part or ‘anvil’ is at the bottom. The tools should be transported in a sturdy bag of appropriate size. Always have both hands on the handle. Set up a secure working area and keep at a safe distance, called a blood bubble. When passing tools follow a script where eye contact is maintained. The person passing the tool asks “Are you ready?” on affirmative reply say “I am passing you the tool” before doing so.

How to conduct a tool safety check

Examine handles and hinges. Make sure there are no signs of displacement, cracking or rusting. To check the blade on a lopper make sure it cannot close on you by using your body as a bar. Draw your thumb at right angles over the blade, it should feel rough. Visually examine the blade for any light shining through, in which case the tool will have to be discarded. Secateurs have an extra closing mechanism, make sure this is working properly. Open up the secateurs and place over knee to make sure they cannot close as you check the blade.

How to maintain, clean and store the tool

To clean the tools make sure you cannot be damaged, use a cloth to wipe the blade. Oil the tool and use sharpening stones when required.

<p>Palm drill Palm Drills are used to drill holes in green or seasoned wood.</p>
<p>How to use them safely The item to be drilled should be placed and held securely on a firm, flat surface. If the children are very young or using the palm drill for the first time, the item should be held in place by an adult. To bore a hole simply twist the palm drill in a clockwise direction. Work in a designated working area at a safe distance from others (blood bubble). Carry these tools by your side facing downwards and remember only to walk.</p>
<p>How to conduct a tool safety check Examine the drill bit, pinch between your fingers and give it a wiggle to check that it is securely attached to the handle. Check it is not corroded. Check the handle for cracks.</p>
<p>How to maintain, clean and store the tool Safe, very temporary, storage is to store the blade pushed downwards into the soil. Brush any sawdust off the drill bit after use and wipe it with a lightly oiled cloth.</p>

Fire Procedure

WFS aims to ensure that all people participating in sessions with fires will do so safely with minimal risk to their health and the environment. Fires will only be used where appropriate and where there has been an agreement with the site owner prior to the session.

Siting the fire

- A designated fire area will be established in a suitable place (eg. avoiding tree roots, overhanging branches, peat soil, deep leaf mould, rough ground) with a fire surround or a fire pit to contain the fire.
- There will be a minimum distance of 1.5m between the fire surround and seating logs.
- Seating logs will have escape routes between them.
- A fire will be at least 4m from any shelter built from easily combustible materials.

Lighting the fire

- Children will be shown how to select the right materials to build the fire with. The Forest School leader will explain the importance of using only dead wood for fires. The likelihood of smoke inhalation is reduced by using dead wood but it is also an important habitat.
- Fires will not be lit in excessively windy or tinder dry conditions.
- Children will only be allowed to light fires under direct supervision of the forest school leader using suitable materials and equipment.

Managing the fire

- A lit fire will be supervised by an adult at all times, as will all cooking activities.
- The height of the flames will be restricted to knee-height.
- Fire safety equipment, including heat-proof gloves, tongs, a fire blanket, a burns kit and a 'plunge bucket' of water will be placed near the fire. A watering can makes a handy plunge bucket.

Safe behaviour

- Clear rules about how to move around the fire safely will be established with children, and their understanding will be checked, before lighting a fire.
- Children must move around the fire behind the seating logs and must not run or play in the campfire zone (the area between the fire and the seating logs). One nice way of setting boundaries is by playing a game of 'fruit salad'.
- Hair should be tied back, and loose clothing tied, rolled up or fastened.
- Those in smoky areas will be encouraged to move to less smoky areas.
- *Children with attentional difficulties will need extra care and supervision around the fire.*

Extinguishing the fire

- All fires will be fully extinguished with water at the end of a session.
- Depending on where the Forest School is happening the fire brigade may need to be informed before lighting fire.

Food hygiene procedure

- The Forest School Leader holds a current food hygiene certificate and regulations will be followed.
- Wheatfen Forest School is registered with South Norfolk Council as a food provider.
- Wheatfen Forest School conducts regular food safety checks and has a Food Allergen Management System. See appendix 14 & 15.
- Children will be provided with soap and water and encouraged to wash their hands before eating.
- Non-toxic wood, which has had the bark removed (using a knife and scraping action), will be used if making skewers or marshmallow roasting sticks.
- Food waste will be disposed of appropriately; either in the fire, or taken from site.

Campfire cooking procedure

Cooking is great fun and extremely rewarding if the children have built the campfire themselves. As with all Forest School experiences, the working area and activity will be risk assessed.

- There are different ways to cook food on a campfire. Food should be placed on and removed from a grill using a protective glove, and this will be done by an adult or a competent child under close supervision.
- If the children are using sticks to toast marshmallows these will be long enough that the children can sit a safe distance from the fire.
- Children will always kneel when approaching the campfire.
- Food will be checked by an adult to see that it is cooked before consumption.
- Cooked food will not be reheated.
- Foods that need a lot of fat to cook in will be avoided.
- Details of food allergies and dietary requirements will be collected prior to the session and adhered to.

Transport to the Forest School Site

WFS does not provide transport. When groups are coming to Wheatfen, the forest school leader will meet the group in the reserve car park at a prearranged time and take the group back to be collected at the end of the session.

When WFS are operating off-site (such as Ents visit to another nature reserve) individual plans will be made and risk assessed as necessary, participants will be met and collected at a designated location, shared with parents / carers.

7. First Aid & Emergencies

First Aid is the responsibility of the forest school leader in charge. However, any adult who holds a current First Aid certificate may support the administration of First Aid. The forest school leader will ensure that kits carry essential items and that procedures are followed according to the guidelines below.

Emergency contact details and medical information for the group are kept by the forest school group leader in the register. Accident and incident forms are also kept with the register. Each member of staff wears their own whistle.

The first aid kit will be checked prior to Forest School sessions against the content checklist. Items will be replaced as used and out of date medical items should also be replaced.

The following essential items will be included in the emergency & first aid kit:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ● Plasters | ● Gauze | ● Emergency Procedure |
| ● Micro-pore tape | ● Burn Gel & Burn Bags | ● Roll mat |
| ● Bandages | ● Water | ● Emergency bag (for warmth) |
| ● Plastic bags | ● Tweezers | ● Antihistamine cream |
| ● Gloves | ● Tick remover | ● Covid-19 PPE – masks, |
| ● Scissors | ● Medication for individuals | aprons |
| ● Antiseptic wipes | ● Emergency fire kit | |
| ● Sterile water (for washing wounds /eyes) | | |
| ● Welfare kit (wet wipes, hand gel, drinking water) | | |
| ● Walkie-talkies (mobile reception is poor. One is kept by leader on site, the other is taken by staff leaving the FS area.) | | |

- Forest phone (Kept in the pocket of the group leader with sound on – adults must switch off and put their personal mobile phones away in their belongings while working.)

In the event of an accident a child will be assessed by a trained outdoor first aider and treatment given as appropriate. An accident form will then be completed and parents/carers or the child's school are informed at home time, or sooner if appropriate. In the case of an injury that may require medical treatment, but does not require immediate medical attention, parents/ carers / school will be contacted as soon as possible to collect the child and seek further medical help, if necessary. Accident or incident forms must be completed before the end of the session and returned to the office before leaving, either in person or using the black Wheatfen mailbox next to the front door. Where the injured party is coming from a school, the school must be given a copy of the accident form. If the accident involved more than one child and they are from different schools, they must each be given a copy with the child from the other school anonymised.

Before carrying out a Forest School session it is vital that any prior medical issues are known. Parents or school complete an enrolment form for the child including medical details and medical consent, and these details are kept confidentially in the group leader's register. Staff and volunteers should be made aware of medical needs, such as the use of an epi pen or inhalers and allergies. Individual medicines should be kept in a box with the medical consent form, clearly labelled with the child's name. In instances where a child is used to self-administering (such as with inhalers) they will be allowed to do this with parental / school consent.

Emergency & Serious Incident Procedure

At all Saturday group sessions for children there are a minimum of 4 trained FS leaders and assistants, all with outdoor first aid qualifications, and a maximum of 20 participants (usually around 15). At parent and toddler sessions, and at alternative provision sessions there will be a team of 3 forest school staff, with two leaders on site. At least two of any team will have Level 3 qualification. This means that if a FS leader is injured another forest school leader can take charge, and activities will still be insured.

In the event of a serious incident, which could arise as a result of an injury, illness or threat, emergency services should be contacted and the following procedures followed:

1. **Secure the safety of the whole group** from further danger. Stop all work/activities if safe. Call in using the whistle retreat as agreed with group in advance. If possible, remove whole group from any further danger or threat of danger.
2. **First Aider to attend to any casualties** with an adult helper and with regard for maintenance of required supervision ratios for the rest of the party. A record of changes in casualties' state and anything administered to them to be made if possible.
3. **Emergency services contacted as necessary**, ideally by an adult helper. Charged mobile phones are carried by staff along with walkie-talkies (up to 10km radius) to mitigate for poor reception in rural area. Despatch an adult helper to meet emergency vehicle at the Ted Ellis Trust car park where necessary. Give following grid reference to 999 operator: [Nearest location accessible by Emergency Vehicle: TG 32454 05661](#) **What3words: [skies.quilt.compliant - FS area: dangerously.ghosts.panel](#)**
4. **Safety of the rest of group** will be maintained by the remaining staff and adults away from the scene of the incident.
5. **Informing next of kin or school** should be carried out as soon as practicable after the incident by the forest school leader.
6. **Inform landowner** of any major incident as soon as possible.
7. **Incident and/or accident report** should be filled in on site if possible and then stored confidentially at the WFS office. Report forms are kept in the group leader's folder and replenished termly. This should be filled in whenever the emergency plan is used even if no one was harmed and it was just a near miss.

A laminated copy of this emergency procedure will be kept in the emergency kit which will be accessible to all staff and volunteers.

If an adult is hurt during a session, the above procedure will still apply, with the welfare of the casualty and the rest of the group appropriately delegated and disseminated. If the leader is injured, the assistant/ other designated adult will contact parents or school for children to be collected as soon as is practical.

Legislation

- Ensure that all equipment involved in an accident or incident is retained in an unaltered condition in case it is required by the police.
- Don't focus on who is at fault. In all cases keep a careful written record i.e. a log of all facts, events, times and circumstances. Retain this record until all matters are finally settled. If possible, take photos.
- Do not allow anyone to interview any party member without an independent witness being present.
- An incident report must be completed, signed and dated (at Wheatfen Forest School office, if not done on site).
- Incidents leading to admittance to hospital for more than 24 hours or resulting in an injury preventing a person working for 3+ days afterwards need to be [registered online with RIDDOR](#) within 24 hours.
- First aid kits must be restocked after use and a stock check carried out every 6 months.
- Any incident or near miss must be subsequently investigated by Rose Hoare to review existing controls and procedures.

Lost or Missing Person Procedure

Woodland sites can be disorientating if a child is unused to them, and are rarely surrounded by fences. This sense of freedom can be beneficial to all, but it is possible that someone might get lost. To prevent this:

- Encourage children to take an interest in their surroundings so to help them find their bearings.
- Encourage children to stay reasonably close to the rest of the group.
- Boundaries will be chosen, clearly marked with blue ropes and made known to the group.
- Children will be instructed to stay within the agreed boundaries, which are in eye sight of adults.
- Children may only go outside the boundaries as a group with a designated responsible adult.
- Children will be trained to follow a whistle retreat and know to immediately gather around the adult if the whistle is blown.
- Children should be reminded of Forest School rules, boundaries and of the whistle retreat ahead of each Forest School session until they know them by heart.
- A register will be taken at the beginning and end of the session, and a head count at other relevant points in the session – particularly after off-site activities or ones that include members splitting up.

In the event of a suspected lost or missing person:

1. All the group will be immediately called back in, by the whistle being blown, and counted and the missing member identified. The time will be noted.
2. The Forest School Leader must ensure the safety of remaining pupils. At least two adults must stay with them at all times.
3. One or more adults should immediately start searching for the missing group member – calling and whistling as appropriate.
4. If the missing group member is not found within 5 minutes, the Forest School Leader must contact the police by telephoning 999 and giving an exact location grid reference or what.three.words. This will result in the emergency procedure - detailed above - coming into action.

A laminated copy of the emergency procedure is contained in the emergency bag.

Leaders must recall and write down a description of what the missing person was wearing and any distinguishing features. Any information on their last known location and time should be noted. Also if they have any special medical or learning needs then these need to be noted down. All information then must be passed to police or other agencies.

8. Safeguarding

WFS takes safeguarding of children seriously. All staff are trained in first aid and safeguarding, hold a clear enhanced DBS check for the child workforce, leaders are qualified to lead.

We operate a safer recruitment policy, and all staff and volunteers are aware of the child protection policy including procedures in place to respond to disclosures or allegations. Any incidents are recorded in writing by Forest School Leaders and discussed with the designated child protection officer as soon as possible.

Rose Hoare and Lisa Bicker are the Designated Safeguarding Persons for Wheatfen Forest School.

Any disclosures made to the Forest School leader during a session will be treated with sensitivity. A safe space will be made available and a 1:1 conversation will be had. All information will be recorded, and it will be explained that notes will need to be taken. Children, young people, and adults making disclosures will be made aware that confidentiality cannot be held to protect vulnerabilities and where a crime may have taken place. Information may need to be shared with relevant authorities.

Permission to take photographs of children at Forest School (for learning and development purposes or publication) is required from parents on the consent form.

The Forest School Leader has a duty of care to promote the well-being and security of the whole group.

Disclosure

If a child/young person approaches you with a disclosure (uncovering or revealing private and sensitive information) it is important that you follow these guidelines:

- Tell a member of staff that you have been approached by a child/young person who would like to talk to you and the staff member will advise or support you from there.
- Make sure that you sit where you can be seen by that member of staff at all times.

All staff are trained in how to respond to a child that discloses sensitive information.

The basic principles are.

- Reassure the young person that they were right to tell you and that you take them seriously.
- Let the young person know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what might happen.
- Immediately report the matter to a member of staff or the designated safeguarding leaders.

Verbal reporting

If you suspect child abuse, tell your designated safeguard leader and Forest School leader. Your concerns could be significant and must be addressed by the appropriate person.

Written Reporting

You will be asked to write a description of the conversation. You will need to be as specific as possible, preferably quoting what was said. *Safeguarding Report form in the appendix.*

Allegations against staff

If an allegation is against a member of the WFS Forest School team (directors, paid staff, volunteers or consultants) the allegation must be reported immediately to one of the WFS designated safeguarding persons (DSPs). If the allegation is against a DSP, then the allegation must be reported to WFS Director, who will then report the allegation to the local area designated officer (LADO) on the same day. If you prefer to contact the LADO directly the number is 0300 123 2044

Responses to Disclosure

Appropriate responses

Do not examine or interrogate the child.

Do not ask leading questions - allow the child to tell their own story.
Take seriously what the child says (however unlikely the story may sound)
Keep calm Look at the child directly.
Be honest.
Let them know you may need to tell someone – don't promise confidentiality.
Never make false promises
Reassure them they are not to blame for the abuse.
Be aware that the child may have been threatened.
Never push for information – listen and reflect back to them what they have said so they know you have heard
Ask questions for clarification only; avoid asking leading questions that suggest a particular answer.
Show that you accept what the child says.

Helpful things to say.

"I am glad you have told me".

"It's not your fault".

"I will help you".

Inappropriate responses

"Why didn't you tell anyone before?"

"I can't believe it".

"Are you sure this is true?"

"I am shocked!"

"Don't tell anyone else".

The full Safeguarding policy and procedures is available from our website.

9. Play Policy

Policy statement

We believe that play is a vital learning process for everyone and is important for healthy physical and emotional development.

We believe that the Forest School setting provides many excellent opportunities for play, exploration and development.

At Wheatfen Forest School we aim to facilitate and provide stimulating opportunities for play. Play is what we are aiming for.

What is play?

Play is an activity which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. The process of play will take different forms for different people at different times.

Staff and volunteers at Wheatfen Forest School will therefore:

-Take a holistic view of play. Recognise that play takes many forms and may be quiet or loud, sociable or alone, physical or social.

- Observe and listen to the interests, needs and wishes of individual participants and the group. Use these observations to support and facilitate play and allow participants to extend the control they have over their play.
- Provide a space, resources and activities which allow for a diverse range of play.
- Value processes over products. Play and experimentation may not be the most efficient route to a given outcome or product but have value in themselves to participants.
- Be mindful of staff and volunteers' role in participants' play and recognise how we can affect the play cycle. Our involvement is often not necessary or helpful to play; standing back allows participants greater choice and control.
- When participants require skills-based help, try to offer suggestions rather than give directions. Modelling techniques instead of taking control can be less disruptive to participants' play.
- Manage the balance between the value of risk and the need to keep everyone safe from harm. Testing physical and social-emotional boundaries is an important part of play and learning.

10. Behaviour Policy

Staff, volunteers and participants at Wheatfen Forest School all have a responsibility to protect their own and others' safety during sessions.

We aim to promote awareness, acceptance, respect and care of oneself, other people and the natural environment.

We aim to promote a culture of community rather than a culture of compliance.

"he has done something bad; he must see the consequences by something bad being done to him" (compliance)

"we have a problem here, how are we going to solve it together" (community)

Kohn, A. (1996) Beyond Discipline: from compliance to community. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia.

What is behaviour?

We see behaviour as an expression of an individual or group attempting to meet their needs. While some behaviour may be unsafe or challenging, we believe that no one is inherently bad or naughty. We therefore aim to welcome each participant in a non-judgemental way. We think that the freedom offered by the Forest School environment allows for a holistic interpretation of what constitutes good or bad behaviour.

Expectations for participants

During the first session for any group or individual we will introduce three core expectations which are: to look after yourself, to look after others and to look after the environment. Staff will explain that any rules at forest school are rooted in our need to prevent harm to people and the environment.

Every participant will have the opportunity to express their feelings and listen to the feelings of others during Forest School sessions. Expression, listening and reflection will promote awareness, acceptance and respect of oneself and others, and promote behaviour which meets the needs of the group to make sessions safer and more fun.

Expectations for staff

In order to keep everyone safe and promote a culture of community, WFS staff and volunteers will aim to:

- Be a positive role model for participants, respecting every person and the environment.

Is my behaviour setting a good example?

- Value risk but be vigilant with regards to safety and dynamic risk assessment.

Could this cause physical or emotional harm?

- Practise authenticity.

Am I being honest with myself and others?

- Avoid unnecessary rules and rigidity.

Why am I asking/enforcing/denying something? Can I communicate this to participants?

- Practise non-judgement.

Am I responding to someone's behaviour or am I judging the person themselves?

- Avoid using manipulative behaviour management, such as sanctions and rewards.

Why am I praising, rewarding, punishing or criticising? Is there an alternative?

- Practise empathy.

How does this person feel and why?

-Reflect on observations and practice.

Could I have done something differently?

- Facilitate problem solving, discussion and conflict resolution by participants.

Do I need to get involved and if so, how?

De-escalation and conflict resolution

If participants' behaviour threatens their own safety or the safety of an individual or the group then staff will aim to de-escalate the situation and facilitate discussion.

Begin by making a simple, factual observation about unsafe behaviour. Explain how this makes you feel and explain the underlying need to keep the group safe. If necessary, make a simple, clear request.

Ask those involved how they feel about the incident/behaviour and listen to them. It may be best to give time and space before a conversation. It may be necessary to speak to people separately or it may feel appropriate to facilitate a discussion. Encourage participants to:

-Think about how they are feeling and why.

-Imagine how someone else feels and why.

-Listen to how others feel.

-Think about what they want from the situation.

-Listen to what others want from the situation.

-Explore strategies for achieving what people want.

-Discuss and try strategies.

Physical Intervention

Physical intervention will only be used by staff to avert imminent harm to a person or people and must maintain the safety and dignity of all concerned. Any occasion where physical intervention is used will be recorded in an incident report and parents/carers/teachers will be informed on the same day as the incident. Staff will attend Step On/Step Up training, if deemed necessary, to learn appropriate and respectful techniques.

Reporting, recording & discussing

Staff and volunteers will share any concerns about participants' behaviour with the forest school leader. If an incident has caused harm, the forest school leader will complete an incident report form and where necessary inform parents/carers/teachers. The forest school leader may choose to discuss unsafe or concerning behaviour with parents/carers/teachers and the participant together or with parents/carers/teachers when the participant is not present.

Pausing or stopping participation

We want Wheatfen Forest School to be as inclusive as possible and provide a safe, positive experience for all. However, if a participant puts themselves or others at significant risk of harm and if - working with the participant and their parents/carers/teachers – we are unable to reduce this risk to an acceptable level then that person's participation at Forest School may have to pause or stop.

11. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023

Adapted from Forest School Association policy with kind permission of the FSA

Context

Globally, 2020 brought a unique set of challenges, and particularly to marginalised groups: the impact of Black Lives Matter rippled through society; the #MeToo movement saw prominent figures called out for discriminatory behaviour. In our own sector, lockdown highlighted an inequity of access to nature.

We recognise that a lack of diversity is an issue across many sectors of employment. For example, research by the UK's National Autistic Society (NAS) shows that the figures around employment of people with autism in the UK are still very low. According to Policy Exchange 2017 only 0.06% of environmental sector professionals are Visible Minority Ethnic (VME), which is the second lowest ranking obtained in this study.

As a result of these events and statistics, many significant organisations in the outdoor sector are acknowledging and addressing this lack of diversity by rewriting policies and implementing new strategies.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

In line with our values, Wheatfen Forest School CIC is committed to providing 'Quality Forest School for all' as promoted by the FSA.

It is committed to developing an organisation that is free from all forms of unlawful or unjustifiable discrimination. "The Equality Act 2010 brings together, harmonises and in some respects extends existing equality law. It aims to make the law more consistent, clearer and easier to follow in order to make society fairer." 1

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. Along with the FSA, Wheatfen Forest School CIC also adopts the requirements of the public sector's Equality Duty in recognition of the extent of our work with the education and health sectors: to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

The 2010 Equality Act lists the following characteristics as protected and must be considered:

- Ethnicity
- Gender
- LGBTQ+
- Disability
- Age
- Pregnancy and Motherhood
- Marriage or Civil partnership status
- Religion or Belief (including lack of belief)

The FSA believes that this policy will also positively impact those who identify as:

- Visible Minority Ethnic
- of a low socio-economic standing
- having mental health issues
- neurodivergent.

We are committed to addressing issues of discrimination in relation to the mental wellbeing, political belief, gender and gender identity, sexual preference or orientation, disability, marital or partnership status, race, nationality, ethnic origin, heritage identity, religious or spiritual identity, age or socio-economic class of individuals and groups working for and engaging with Wheatfen Forest School CIC.

The emerging values within the FSA should be reflected in this policy and its ensuing strategy.

The Forest School approach, as defined by the ethos and principles, is intrinsically inclusive, having its roots in a broad base of educational and environmental thinking from around the globe. Whilst Forest School delivery has reached rural and urban, SEND, ethnically and gender diverse groups, Wheatfen Forest School CIC beneficiaries, staff and board do not yet reflect this diversity.

In order to ensure that those who work for and engage with Wheatfen Forest School CIC are truly reflective of the diverse demographic of the UK, and to achieve 'quality Forest School for all', we need to update our strategy and ensure its implementation.

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers and directors in all of their activities on behalf of Wheatfen Forest School CIC.

Aims

- To increase the diversity of the WFS's staff, board, and participants to reflect our society at large by promoting equity and valuing diversity.
- To ensure that our forest school provision will be accessible for all members of society who may wish to access them.
- To advocate for the needs of all our staff and participants, and to treat all people with respect.
- To do our part to support the wider Forest School community in the pursuit of making quality Forest School accessible for all.
- To build strong, cohesive Forest School practise and to promote positive community relationships.
- To collaborate with other organisations promoting equity and valuing diversity.

This policy is an intentionally brief statement of the values and commitments of the Wheatfen Forest School CIC. It will be reviewed annually, taking a lead from the FSA.


Glossary of terms & abbreviations

- **Equity** – equity is often conflated with the term “Equality” (meaning sameness). In fact, true equity implies that an individual may need to experience or receive something different (not equal) in order to maintain fairness and access.
- **Diversity** – the recognition that there are many different groups of people in society; the practice of including and involving people from a range of different groups, including but not limited to, social and ethnic backgrounds, different genders, sexual orientations, and disabilities.
- **Inclusion** – the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised. It is the process whereby different groups or individuals are culturally and socially accepted, valued and welcomed. This is an organisational effort.
- **VME (Visible Minority Ethnic)** – the sum of people who self-define their ethnicity as other than White British. Includes the Asian, Black, Other and Mixed categories only.

- **LGBTQ+** – including, but not limited to, individuals who self-define as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Ally, Pansexual, Agender, Gender Queer, Bigender, Gender Variant, Pangender.
- **Neurodiversity** – the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits regarded as part of normal variation in the human population. Neurodiversity is the idea that neurological variations are known and valued as any other human variation. These variations can include, but are not limited to: Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD or dyspraxia), Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC), Tourette Syndrome (TS), Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA), Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) and others.

[1]

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85022/vcs-association-perception.pdf

Signed  Date 9th September 2024 Due to be reviewed: As required

12.Complaints

We will ensure any complaint will be taken seriously and referred to the group leader or manager

- If the complaint is from a participant about a Wheatfen Forest School session, the complaint should be made at the time to a member of Wheatfen Forest School CIC staff, so that corrective action can be taken if appropriate.
- If the complaint is about a group leader, it will be passed onto Lisa Bicker or Rose Hoare
- If the complaint is about Lisa Bicker or Rose Hoare, it will be passed onto a Director of Wheatfen Forest School CIC board using the email director@wheatfenforestschool.co.uk
- The person making the complaint will receive written acknowledgement of their complaint within five working days including details of how it is being dealt with.
- Within 30 working days the person making the complaint will receive resolution or details of what has happened so far.
- If there are delays to resolving the issues the person making the complaint should be kept as fully informed as possible.
- There may be a need to identify a third party or higher authority to approach if the person making the complaint is unhappy with the outcome to their complaint.
- At all times the welfare of the child is of the utmost importance.

Daily Operating Procedure

Equipment

Brew Kit	Fire lighting kit	PPE	Tool box
Den Kit	First Aid Kit	Register	Walkie Talkies
Emergency Plan	Fresh water	Risk-benefit analysis	Wildlife ID kit
Fire blanket, gloves,	Handwashing kit	Ropes	
Watering can	Mobile phone	Spare clothing	Forest Phone

Before the session

Check weather forecast

Carry out a daily site risk assessment and advise/act accordingly

Carry out activity risk assessments and advise/act accordingly

Ensure that there is correct staff to child ratio and that all staff are familiar with this handbook

Brief staff and volunteers – provide them with risk assessments

Collect necessary equipment

Check & restock first aid where necessary

Check equipment and count tools

Check phone signal

Meet and register group

Opening the session

Take the group to the Forest School area

Opening circle

New groups only

- Introduce boundaries and key safety rules, make aware of hazards / medical considerations
- Check that all participants are wearing suitable clothing and footwear
- Describe or walk the boundaries
- Engage children in the development of an agreement for the day / term

Established groups

Make aware of hazards / medical considerations

Describe the day's activities

During the session

Ongoing dynamic risk assessment

Visually check all equipment before use

Check on pastoral needs of group

Conduct a head count, as needed

Ensure appropriate personal protective clothing is worn

Closing the session

Closing circle including some type of reflection with the group

Walk the group to the pick-up point & bid them farewell

Compulsory staff circle to capture any important info (pastoral / safeguarding / learning) for next session

Extinguish any fires properly

Clean and count any tools used into their box

Remove structures & check for litter

Collect, check and pack away equipment so that it is dry, tidy and ready for the next session, including replacing anything that has been used up, and letting the office know about anything that needs replacing.

Communication Strategy

This communication strategy explains how participants, parents, those involved with delivering the forest school programme and other stakeholders are kept informed with the delivery and outcomes.

Participants

Participants will routinely reflect on and evaluate their forest school experience through discussion at circle time. Here they can express how they feel things are going and to engage help develop the future sessions.

Participants' parent or carer

Parents/carers of each participant will be asked to complete a consent form, in which they provide medical and behavioural information about the participant.

The forest school group leader in charge will keep in touch with the contact person regularly regarding day-to-day matters in general and their child in particular via email, phone or in person. Parents will receive information about the sessions via email, verbally or through posts on our facebook page. Rose Hoare will communicate with parents termly via email regarding bookings and payments.

Assistants & Volunteers

When staff and volunteers initially engage with Wheatfen Forest School, they will be provided with a Safeguarding Induction Leaflet and a Guide for assisting at Forest School, along with this Handbook.

New staff and volunteers will be recruited following our safer recruitment policy and procedure.

All adults present at the forest school must sign a form to confirm that they have read, understood and agree to comply with Wheatfen Forest School's Handbook including the Safeguarding Policies before the start of the programme or session they will take part in.

Assistants and volunteers will give feedback and take part in group session evaluation at the end of each session once children have left. They will then be informed of the plan for the next session via Basecamp and have the opportunity to respond or provide input.

Supporting the learning of others

Wheatfen Forest School are committed to supporting the learning of others where possible. This helps to grow the forest school movement, our own organisation and range of activities, and leads to more quality forest school provision for more children.

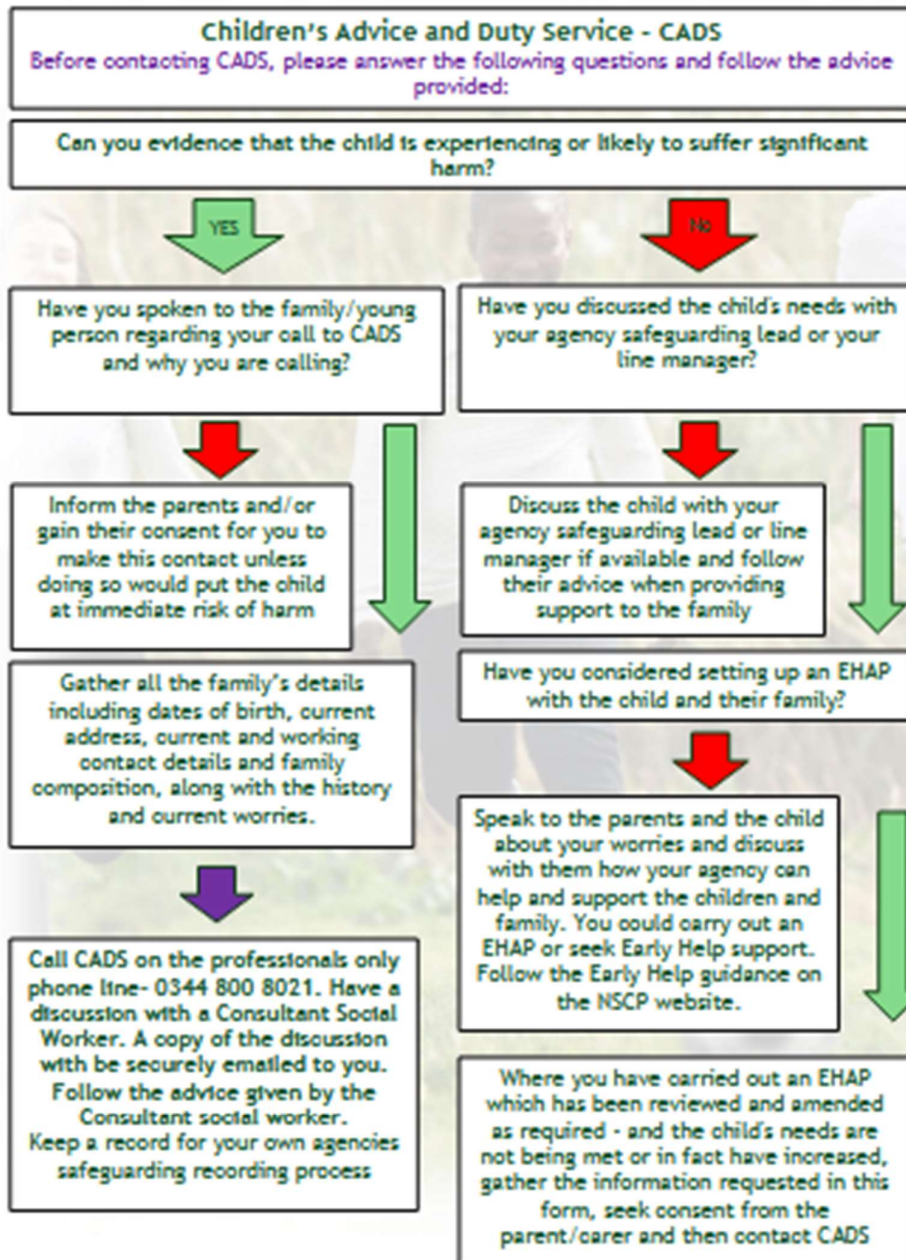
Supporting a student or other volunteer properly is a substantial time commitment for Wheatfen Forest School staff, and in recognition of that we expect a reciprocal time commitment from those we take on. Level 1 students will be required to commit to at least a full term with one group (6 sessions on average). This requirement will be the same for volunteers who are not Forest School students. Level 2 students will be required to commit to 2 terms (12 sessions on average). Level 3 students who are seeking a placement for their final delivery assessment will be required to commit to volunteering a minimum of once a fortnight for 3 terms, or equivalent.

Volunteers will be asked to fill out the Volunteer Questionnaire, and their participation will be subject to receiving or providing suitable references and a clear DBS check as per our safer recruitment policy.

Appendices

Appendix 1: CADS Flowchart

Children's Advice and Duty Service
(CADS) Practice Process - Flowchart -
September 2023





Appendix 2: Safeguarding Concern Record

Safeguarding Concern Record

Name of Adult reporting	
Your role at The Wheatfen Forest School	
Contact telephone Number	
The Learners Details	
Full Name	
Address	
Telephone Number	
Date of Birth	
Relevant details about the child e.g. family circumstances, physical/mental health, communication difficulties	
Parent/guardians/carers details Name Contact details	
Details of the disclosure/allegation/suspicion	
Are you recording: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclosure made directly to you by a child? Y/N • Disclosure or suspicions from a third party? Y/N • Your suspicions or concerns? Y/N 	
Date this form has been written	
Time at which this form was written (24 hour clock)	
Date of the disclosure	
Time of the disclosure (24 hour clock)	
Date of incident	
Time of the incident	
Details of the disclosure/allegation/suspicion (State exactly what you were told/observed and what was said. Use the persons own words as much as possible)	

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Action Taken so far

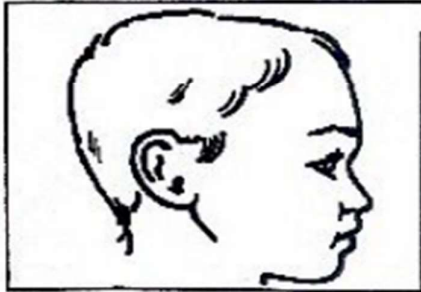
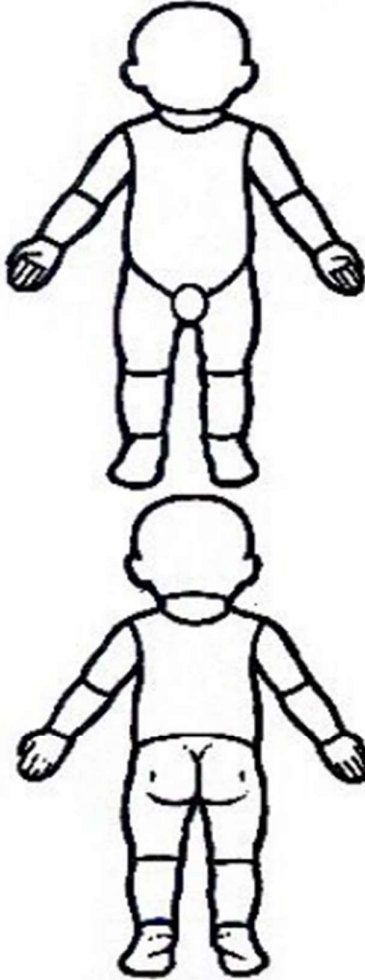
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Please complete the section below if the concern relates to a school pupil attending alternative provision

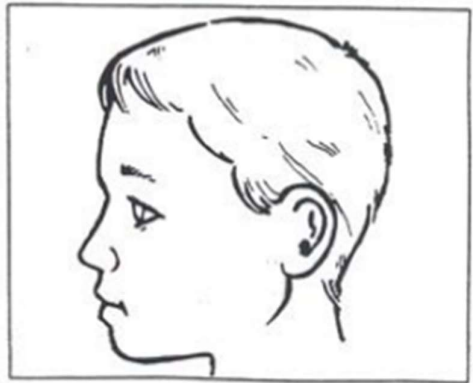
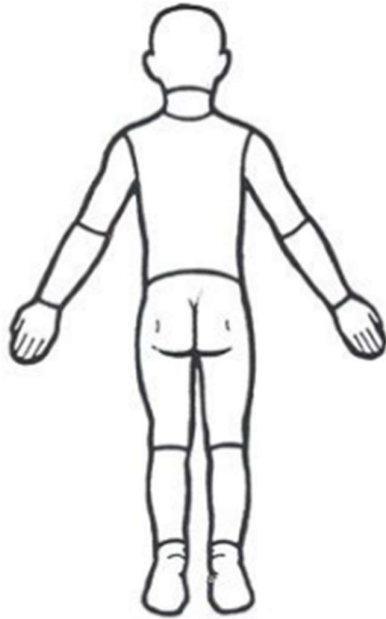
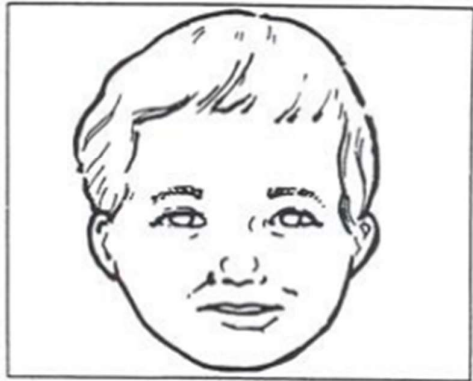
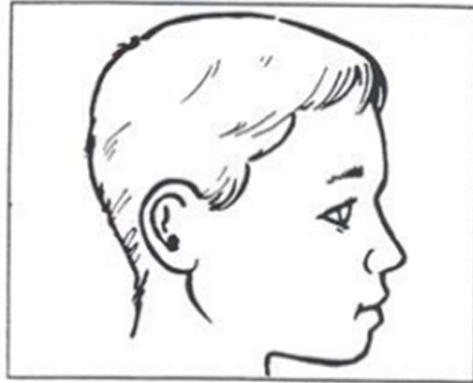
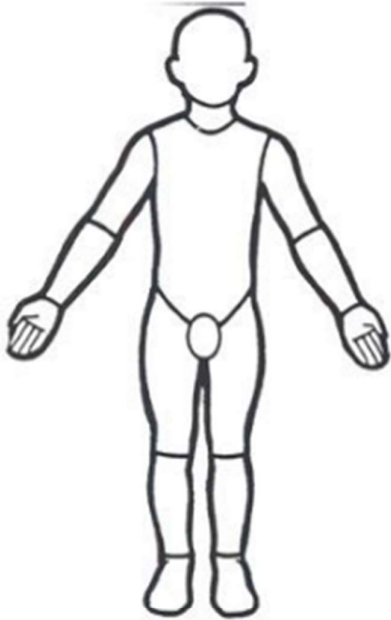
Name of School	
Date & Time school was contacted	
School staff details Name Contact details	
School contacted by whom?	
Contacted how?	
Signed	Date

Indicate clearly where the injury was seen and attach this to the Recording Form

Young Child





Older Child



Indicate clearly where the injury was seen and attach this to the Recording Form

Appendix 3: Daily Risk Assessment Checklist

Nature of Hazard	Uncontrolled Outcome	Precautions to be taken (planning/group guidance)	Date 							
Very cold, wet, hot or windy weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure & dehydration Injury from falling branches Hypo/hyperthermia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise all to wear appropriate outdoor clothing. Leave woodland in high winds Cordon off area under leaning trees or loose branches 								
Slippery/muddy or uneven underfoot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sprain, fracture or concussion Falling from a height 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise group to wear appropriate outdoor footwear Advise all to walk carefully, no running Nobody aided in climbing higher than head-height Brief group on slipperiness of logs 								
Poisonous or thorny plants, berries or fungi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stings, rashes & sickness Infected wound Damage to clothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All to be briefed on contact with plants Group instructed not to eat anything not presented by a group leader Advise to clean hands before eating or drinking Advise to wear appropriate clothing 								
Stinging and biting insects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stings leading to allergic response Tick bite leading to Lyme disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief group on potential for bee and wasp stings and possibility of ticks in the woodland Ask about any history of allergic responses Ask group to check skin for any bites at home and if rash, red halo, or flu type symptoms occur go to doctor Advise to keep skin covered 								
Animal faeces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animal borne disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader to check and clear area Advise all participants to wash hands after an activity Gloves, disposal bags and wipes to be available 								
Public present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confrontation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site away from main paths Raise awareness of visitors Leaders to have mobiles 								
Lost member of group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure, panic, injury, shock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walk boundaries with group Ask group to stay within boundaries Highlight boundaries using marker flags Staff familiarise selves with Lost or Missing Person Procedure Train children to follow whistle retreat 								
Fires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep a clear space free from equipment or undergrowth around the fire area Have extra water available to put out fire Have burns kits available Have heat-proof gloves and fire blanket available Safety briefing on fire 								
Food preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food poisoning Food allergy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask group if anyone has food allergies Ensure all food stored correctly prior to cooking Ensure all wash hands correctly before cooking Insure cooking equipment clean 								
Signed 										

Appendix 4: Incident log sheet

Complete the form for every accident leading to injury, violent or aggressive incident, ill health, disease, behaviour which could have resulted in injury, or near miss.

Incident date and time:	Location:
Group:	Group leader:
Person injured or subject of aggression:	
Relationship to Wheatfen Forest School:	
Was the incident: <input type="checkbox"/> an accident leading to injury <input type="checkbox"/> a near miss <input type="checkbox"/> ill health/disease <input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="checkbox"/> a violent or aggressive incident <input type="checkbox"/> behaviour which could have resulted in injury	
What happened (describe below including the nature of any injury/illness):	
Was anyone else involved (note names if so)?	
Was anything damaged (e.g. vehicle)?	
What action has been taken to prevent a recurrence?	
Name of person completing form & relationship to Wheatfen Forest School:	
IF APPLICABLE: School contacted: Yes / No By who? When? How?	

Code of Conduct

I will

- Treat all children and young people with respect and dignity
- Ensure that children and young people’s welfare and safety is paramount at all times
- Always act in a professional way
- Liaise openly with parents and carers
- Adhere to Safer Working Practices at all times eg. by understanding my responsibilities, understanding how to raise a concern and taking responsibility for my own actions and behaviour.
- Be a positive role model for participants, particularly regarding respecting each person and the environment
- Encourage and reinforce caring and nurturing behaviour
- Avoid unnecessary rigidity or petty rules
- Avoid coercive or manipulative behaviour management (such as sanctions and rewards), or that based on personal negative messages.
- Listen to, and act upon, any disclosures, allegations or concerns about the welfare of children
- Attend Safer Programme training every 3 years
- Make sure we all have fun

Name:.....

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Appendix 10: Code of Conduct: Anti-Bullying Policy

Bullying is deliberate behaviour that is offensive, intimidating, malicious, abusive or insulting which makes the individual feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable.

Any child or young person who has been subjected to bullying will be supported by staff or volunteers who will undertake a risk assessment to ensure that the victim, other children and the perpetrator are kept safe.

Procedures:

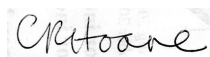
- Report bullying incidents to the Designated Child Protection Officer
- Serious incidents will be recorded by staff and volunteers
- In serious cases the parents/carers should be informed and invited to discuss the problem
- If necessary, the police will be consulted
- The bullying behaviour or threats of bullying must be investigated and the bullying stopped quickly
- An attempt will be made, using non-violent communication, to help the bully understand the impact and change their behaviour as per WFS behaviour policy.

Outcomes:

- If non-coercive methods do not succeed in enabling the bully to gain insight into their bullying behaviour and desist from it, and other group members continue to feel or be under threat of harm, the perpetrator will miss a subsequent session or sessions.
- In serious cases, where there are continued incidents of bullying behaviour, and this has not been able to be resolved using Forest School methods, the child or young person may be asked to leave the group.
- If possible the children will be reconciled
- After the incident/s have been investigated and dealt with, each case will be monitored to ensure there is no repeat of the bullying behaviour

Name: Rose Hoare

Signed:



Organisation: Wheatfen Forest School CIC

Date: 6th September 2024

Date for review: When LA notifies of any changes we should make through the Safer Programme.

Appendix 13: Complaints Policy

When children, young people, parents, volunteers and staff are unhappy it is vital they are able to complain.

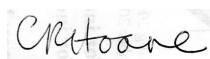
This procedure also links in with the 'whistleblowing' and handling allegations policies and procedures to ensure decisions are made appropriately, especially when the welfare of children/young people is implicated.

We will ensure any complaint will be taken seriously and referred to the group leader or manager

- If the complaint is about a group leader, it will be passed onto Lisa Bicker or Rose Hoare
- If the complaint is about Lisa Bicker or Rose Hoare, it will be passed onto a Director of Wheatfen Forest School CIC board using the email director@wheatfenforestschool.co.uk
- The person making the complaint will receive written acknowledgement of their complaint within five working days including details of how it is being dealt with
- Within 30 working days the person making the complaint will receive resolution or details of what has happened so far
- If there are delays to resolving the issues the person making the complaint should be kept as fully informed as possible.
- There may be a need to identify a third party or higher authority to approach if the person making the complaint is unhappy with the outcome to their complaint
- At all times the welfare of the child is of the utmost importance

Name: Rose Hoare

Signed:



Organisation: Wheatfen Forest School CIC

Date: 6th September 2024

Date for review: When LA notifies of any changes we should make through the Safer Programme.

Appendix 14:

Allergen & Special Dietary Needs Management System

What we do

Wheatfen Forest School operates closed groups of children and young people, who go through a registration process before attending.

Parents fill out an enrolment form in which they are specifically asked to identify any allergies, intolerances or special dietary requirements that their child has. To enrol, they also have to agree to our terms and conditions, which state that they are required to give us this information.

Once enrolled, the child's details go into a register which is kept by the forest school leader. Pertinent details are shared with other staff members on a need-to-know basis.

The group leader informs team members of any allergies, intolerances or dietary requirements of the children.

We don't always serve or make food and we don't have a fixed menu.

The forest school group leader plans any cooking or snacks taking into account the safety and dietary requirements of the group.

Foods that are unsuitable one child are often omitted from the group. For example – if a child has a dairy allergy, we will buy dairy-free hot chocolate and biscuits for the group.

On occasions where there are two versions of something – for example a savoury pancake with vegan cheese and one with real cheese – the food will be cooked and plated separately for the child/ren with a food allergy.

We use the product information on the packaging.

Cutlery and crockery is washed in the dishwasher and left to air dry.

Cutting boards are washed and rinsed before use before use.

Work surfaces are cleaned and sanitised before food is prepared.

All staff are aware of our Allergen Management System.