

Handbook for Blacknest (reviewed and revised 28 June 2020)

The following policies have been drawn up for the use of a private woodland for FS activities. The owner and the FS Practitioners using the site will accept their legal responsibility to comply with statutory guidelines set down by the Government Health and Safety Executive.

When following procedures in this handbook volunteers, staff and helpers are asked to follow the approaches and ethos laid out below.

Learning by Doing

- Start the journey of discovery from the first moment, use every opportunity to engage and involve participants.
- Work with the participants to set up and clear up where possible.
- Allow participants to take the time to work it out, get it wrong, learn by doing.
- If comfortable allow problem solving to result in different solutions from your first choice.
- Encourage participants to deepen their awareness of skills and risks by teaching a new task to another, eg to a peer.
- Lead by example.

Positive and Enjoyable Experience

- Use positive language.
- Focus on achievements.
- Put forward small achievable tasks.
- Gently challenge negative perceptions and stereotypes.
- Encourage positive self images for individuals and groups.
- Offer praise and encouragement.
- Allow participants to reinvent themselves in the Forest School setting, allow re-evaluation of pre-set patterns of behaviour and opinions by individuals and groups.
- Be willing to change direction to meet the needs of the group.
- Care for individuals and manage group interests and energy.

Emergency procedures

- Prior to the session the leaders will agree on their roles in an emergency.
- Emergency roles:
 - Keep the group calm and occupied and ensure no further accidents or a worsening of the emergency situation.
 - Assess casualty and administer first aid. First Aid trained person on site for all sessions
 - Make call for emergency help. One person to have mobile phone on her person.
 - First Aid kit set in place for easy access in case of need.

Discussion Notes

These procedures are updated to reflect the standards of safe practice and practical working/ having an adventure. We have small groups making it easier to control the atmosphere in the group should anything serious occur.

Adults/parents do not attend FS sessions unless for a short time at the beginning.

Policy Name	Health and safety policies
1	Site assessment will be undertaken on each visit/session. During Covid19 children are taught 2m social distancing rule and hand gel is given on arrival, before eating and after using toilet.
2	Check for and remove any hazards after a heavy storm or high winds.
3	On this site, ensure children do not visit pond alone, and that they understand they need to ask an adult to go with them.
4	Set boundaries with the children and staff.
5	First Aid kit carried at all times along with daily register with parents phone numbers. First Aid trainer person always on site.
6	All children are asked to be appropriately dressed for the weather so that they can take a full part in activities

Policy Name	Initial Session Communications
1	Children must listen very carefully to the boundaries, instructions and any rules set out for them as these are primarily linked to their safety. The adults must always make time for comments and questions at the beginning of each session with regards to rules and safe boundaries.
2	Talk about basic hazards and hazards that might arise with participants. Cover Call and Response routines Climbing hazards No pick no lick - awareness of poisonous plant in season/ flowering The pond – danger of falling in water – if there is water in the pond
3	Leader has mobile phone fully charged and list of emergency contact details and medical information for each child.
4	All children should be adequately dressed so that they can take a full part in activities. Take appropriate action if a child has inadequate warm clothes or footwear.
5	Ensure that children or adult groups also understand the importance of nettles, foxgloves and brambles for wildlife and do not see these plants as hostile.

Policy Name	Lost Child Procedure
1	Staff to ensure that children and young people have practised a call and response, such as “123 where are you?” at the start of the sessions in open areas.
2	Staff will perform regular head counts at every opportunity during the day, and will monitor behaviour and put boundaries in place where needed.
3	If the group is split into sections, each section leader is responsible for performing regular and frequent head counts of their group. Sections will stay close, within a minutes walk.
4	If a child goes missing all children/groups will be recalled back to last spot together to locate the missing person. Children will remain there within sight until missing person is found. This is a private woodland with safe boundaries. If a missing person is not found after a search,

and within 10 minutes of absence being noted, parent and emergency services to be contacted.
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Daily Risk Assessment

The site is a large, private woodland. There are no members of the public on site so there is no need to comb the site for litter or other signs of public use. If there has been strong winds or storm an inspection will be carried out for storm damage.

Therefore, the daily risk assessment focuses on the impact of the weather on the activities, and consideration of where any group might go with regards to the different challenges on site. The age and composition of the group may determine such things as tool use and whether to make a fire.

1. Weather impact on the day

- a) rain. Slippery for tree climbing; put tarpaulin in place, locate activities in deep shelter
- b) heat. Locate activities to keep in shade. Water available. Consider playing water game.
- c) cold. Are children adequately dressed? Start with a warm up game. Is fire appropriate? Are materials in place for a fire, including water bucket etc
- d) wind. Keep out of the trees during high winds and locate in open or in the field?

2. Planned activities -eg tool use.

How appropriate for the age and size of the group? Are materials to hand so no leader has to leave the group to collect? Is there an alternative activity if not everyone can participate at one time.

3. Use of the site.

Consider whether the tree house, the swings, the tree climbing, the pond, the high stumps are suitable for that weather and age group.

4. Fire.

Is there going to be a fire? Are the materials to hand – dry kindling etc, fire bucket

5. Children.

Any that have special needs/medication to remember.

Risk assessment – benefit analysis

Scenarios/ risk	Benefit Analysis	Management of Risk
Dead wood standing and in canopy.	The fallen tree is a wonderful natural playground, full of climbing, swinging opportunities and bugs to be found. Balance, coordination	This is an exceptionally well tended and safe woodland, and any tree/branch deemed a potential danger in the near future is felled.
Adults not associated with the FS group.	Adults are not invited to come on site. FS assistants may be on site to widen the range of activities that can be safely supervised	A private woodland. Adults not associated with the session may be asked to leave.
Pond	The shallow pond is a rich source of invertebrates and plant life to be explored and learnt from. Problem solving, awareness and helping each other	No child to visit pond without an adult present.
Bees hives on site – might sting	Children discover about bees and their important role as pollinators.	Keep children at a safe distance from hives. Ask parents if child is allergic and ensure safe distance maintained.
Climbing on deer watch hides. Made of rough wood so danger of splinters.	Children get a wonderful vantage point from which to see the woods. They are closer to the canopy and bird life. Balance and coordination skills gained in climbing and getting down.	Rub down with sandpaper rungs where hands will go. Check children are capable of climbing down backwards safely the first time they go up.
Tree house	Wonderful place to create a “home” and feel at home in the wood. Good for climbing skills and creativity, free from adults. Balance, resilience and helping each other.	Teach little ones how to get down the steps safely on initial climbs. Leader to check the slipperiness of steps at the start of session and scrape off mosses.
Swings that have been set up in the wood	Helps physical dexterity, balance and coordination. It gives high sense of enjoyment to swing high in the woods. Often seen as a great piece to have a go on along with other branches to climb.	Swings need to be supervised by an adult. Be ready to stop pushing. Keep a clear safety area around the swings. Do not use swings that rise up to or higher than 6 feet from the ground.
High stump of fallen tree, accessed by rope ladder and wooden ladder	The achievements of climbing to this tall point is considerable. The vantage point is exciting	Only 1-2 children allowed to climb to the top at one time. Adult supervision at the base of the rope and wooden ladder at all times.
Trip hazard from protruding roots and dips in the ground	The children learn that the woods are full of natural things like roots and encouraged to look where they are going. Improved observations skills.	In specific areas children are warned about roots sticking out, warned when going into area of stinging nettles. Risk from uneven ground not considered high risk

Building dens/shelter	Activity offers great scope for creativity and building skills. Very popular with all ages. Good for cooperation and team work	Sticks may fall over if not properly secured. Show them how to wedge in cross branches of rhododendrons or similar. No heavy sticks to be used on the “roof”. Adult supervision.
Fire - burns	Great enjoyment from learning to light a fire, and then cooking a marshmallow or similar. Silly behaviour near the fire strongly discouraged – see below	Proper fire circle rules observed at all times for movement around the fire. Cold water bucket always to hand. First aid with burns gel always on hand. Teach children to wait before eating hot marshmallows.

Fire Risk Assessment

These Fire safety rules and procedures (referred to in Table 4 a numeric risk assessment).

1. Create and maintain a sitting /squatting circle an appropriate distance from the fire depending on the size of fire and the number, ability and age of people present. Expand the circle as necessary if the fire or group become larger. Maintain an inner fire pit area that individuals are invited to for cooking or warming up.
2. All participants to practice and understand rising from the circle and stepping outside the circle when moving to a new place in the circle. Entering the fire circle by permission or invitation only. Children with nylon or floaty dresses will be asked to remove these when near the fire.
3. A cooking fire will be maintained in a low gentle condition. Easily controlled, with pieces of wood close to the ground and placed so that there is no risk of burning wood falling, keeping it safe to approach. If the fire needs building up the circle will be moved back to a safe distance before the fire is built up.
4. A bucket of water will be placed in a close convenient location before a fire is lit.
5. A burns kit will be on hand when a fire is lit.
6. Explain to children what the fire bucket is for. Explain that any burn however minor will have to be held in the bucket and gently moved in the water for 5 to 10 minutes to take the heat out. Offering knowledge and responsibility and the understanding of the serious amount of time sat at the bucket in case of burns and an awareness of the possibility of burns.
7. Group fires, once groups are used to behaving carefully and responsibly around a fire they may be invited to build their own very small fires for practice or to cook on. They will be asked to create a fire pit area, marked out with sticks or logs and to have a small container of water nearby.
8. One adult to be supervising the fire or fire area at all times.

The fire will be made on bare earth, in an area where fires have been for many years. The site is cleared up at the end of the session.

Woodland Risk Assessment: Blacknest

Hazard	Harm	Probability 1-5	Severity 1-5	Ratings P x S 1-25	Measures to take		
Climbing fallen tree	Falling	4	2	8	Supervision at all times. Small children guided to see how to get up and down safely	Avoid climbing in wet weather when slippery	All
Climbing up watch ladders.	Falling. Also splinters from wood	3	3	9	Supervision at all times. No more than 2 to climb at one time		All
Pond	Slipping into shallow water	3	2	6	No child by pond without adult present. Teach them care in keeping to the edge	Avoid this area when water level high ie spring time	All
Bee /wasp	Sting	3	3	9	Anti sting cream in first aid kit. Call parent if reaction is strong	Staff awareness of signs of strong reaction	All
Tree house	Falling out	2	4	8	Supervision until sure all children can handle the steps, showing how to come up and down	Avoid after heavy rain as slippy	All
Rope swings	Flying off	3	3	9	Supervised activity. Tell children not to swing higher than 6ft. Tell them what can happen.		All
High stump	Falling	2	5	10	Supervised at all times. No more than 3 children to climb or stay at the top at one time.	Prohibit access if group is too young or too excited.	All
Fire burns	Burns from hot marshmallows or fire	3	3	9	Cold water bucket available at all times. Fire circle rules enforced.	No fires in high winds or conditions not suitable.	All
Protruding roots	Trip hazard	4	2	8	Show children the roots before playing games in areas of roots	Leaders to assess risk for the age of children.	All

Lifting and swinging stick	Hitting another child. Hurting back from heavy load	4	2	8	Rule enforced every time. Shown how to safely manage a stick	Remind children during the day when creating with sticks	All
Fungus and poison plants	Poisoning	2	4	8	Strongly enforced during initial rules talk. Show the plant to avoid and why (seasonal changes)	Leaders to be aware of plants to avoid/not touch.	All

Whittling with Vegetable Peelers and Knives Numeric Risk Assessment.

Hazard	Harm	Likelihood	Severity	Risk Factor	Measures put in place	Likelihood	New Risk Factor
Sharp blade of potato peeler	Small cuts	1	1	1	Teach full good practice knife skills.	1	1
Sharp blade of knife	Cuts	4	1	4	Teach good practice knife skills and only allow knives to be used by children when they demonstrate these well and consistently when using a potato peeler.	1	1
Sharp blade of knife	Deep cut	3	1	3	As above.	0/1	0/1
Accidental closing of penknife blade	Deep cut to finger/s	4	2	8	As above. The kit will not include pen knives without locks.	1	2
Push or nudge to whittler. Walking in front of whittler	Cut to self or other	3	2	6	Explain tool use safety bubble and personal responsibilities to participants. Keep atmosphere around tool use areas quiet and calm.	0/1	0/2
Step, sit or put hand on blade of Knife left out on ground	Cut	1	1	1	Count out knives and other tools. Explain responsibility to return tool to leader or kit. Provide sheaths for fixed blade knives. Count back in.	1	1
Lack of attention	Cut to self or other	3	1	3	Teach good knife practice regarding distractions.	1	1

Key: Measuring the likelihood of occurrence

Not likely. Less than once in a life time.	1
Possibly. Once a year	2
Occasional	3
Common. More than 3 times a year	4
Likely	5

Measuring the severity of a hazard

Low, minor injury to one person	1
Slight. One person off work for 3 or more days	2
Moderate. Injury or disease capable of keeping more than one person off work for 3 or more days	3
High. Death to individual	4
Very high. Multiple deaths	5

Interpreting the Risk Factors (multiplying severity with likelihood of occurrence)

Low	1-2
Medium. Improve as soon as possible	4-9
High. Address and reduce risk to an acceptable level before commencing activity or desist.	10+

1	<p>Whittling</p> <p>Teach good practice knife skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit on log. • Ensure quiet space all around and no one is in reach of knife should hand slip. Name this with children - 'Safety or blood bubble'. • Ensure no part of own body is in reach of knife should hand slip. • Point stick to be whittled and knife downwards towards ground. • Anchor non-whittling arm to leg just above knee, so that working hand will be outside of body area. • Stop work if anyone walks into safety bubble. • Do not walk into or near anyone else's safety bubble. • If distracted by noise or other activity or view – stop work and point knife downwards to ground or place in sheath on the ground between your feet or in front of you. • Always return knife to leader when finished using it. <p>Knives will be kept in good working condition. Knives will have bright coloured handles or bright cord attached for ease of seeing.</p> <p>Knives will be used only where the leader is confident of children's ability to work calmly and to use a knife well as demonstrated by use of potato peelers. Knives will generally only be used where children are attending several sessions or are in small groups.</p>
2	<p>Poor weather procedures</p> <p>Weather forecasts to be checked for strong winds, and gust speeds, and lightning storm that is close or overhead when working under large trees. If extremely strong gusts or winds are forecast sessions will be moved to open grassland.</p> <p>Rain, cold and heat are all manageable with good clothing, and appropriate activities.</p> <p>Leader to consider the best option for the group. Since an indoor learning centre is available, if the leader thinks the group has been outdoors long enough, given the weather,</p>

	<p>the group's ages, abilities, tolerances and clothing then they can go indoors for an indoor activity. Keep the group challenged but happy.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Stick Safety</p> <p>Surprisingly sticks are a main cause of accidents among children new to outdoor play. All adults are asked to be vigilant in maintaining the following rules and ensuring good safety with sticks.</p> <p>Stick safety rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When holding sticks, sit or walk. ● Hold sticks pointing down or hold staffs upright. ● Do not point or throw towards others. ● Do not run with sticks. ● Do not wave around near faces or other people. ● Be especially careful to put sticks down when next to others, never allow your stick to go anywhere near another person's face. ● Unsafe behaviour with a stick will result in the stick being confiscated. After initial warnings this may be temporary at first but may be permanent if repeated. <p>Explaining stick safety rules to children establishes care and awareness of others when using sticks.</p> <p>Stick safety demonstration used when den building with long branches, illustrates clearly the following:</p> <p>When moving a long stick hold stick with one hand over one of the ends and drag other end on ground careful not to trip others. Or use two people to carry, each with a hand over an end.</p> <p>Set down carefully.</p> <p>Front person lead. All communicate.</p> <p>For heavy sticks: Bend knees and lift with legs, place carefully down, take hands off stick one person at a time so no one lets go crushing other's fingers or hurting backs.</p> <p>To get stick into a tree make sure no one is inside den, nor beneath stick.</p> <p>Check stick is secure, make sure no one is inside or beneath and then shake.</p> <p>When dismantling make sure no one is inside den or beneath stick.</p>

Safeguarding Children

Everyone at Blacknest Forest School has a responsibility in relation to child protection. We are committed to:

- taking all reasonable measures to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child and young person (pupil) in our care
- the practice of safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children and young people
- protecting each pupil from any form of abuse, whether from an adult or another pupil

Our aims:

- to raise awareness of individual responsibilities in identifying and reporting possible cases of abuse
- to ensure that any deficiencies or weaknesses in child protection arrangements are remedied without delay
- to ensure that safe recruitment procedures are operated
- to contribute to the operation of appropriate health and safety procedures
- to have regard to and be consistent with relevant statutory and regulatory requirements and guidance. In addition, adults working within Forest School need to appreciate that when children feel comfortable and content, when their instinct to trust and risk take is encouraged, they may be moved to disclose information which they might have otherwise kept to themselves. Any volunteer, or member of staff, who finds that a child is telling them something that concerns them should follow the course of action set out below in simple steps:
- Listen to the pupil but ask NO leading questions or press for details. – Accept what the child says without challenge.
- Make NO promises. You cannot ‘keep a secret’. You should make it understood that there are limits to confidentiality at the start of the disclosure. A record will be kept of any such conversation.

* When a child goes into the house/log cabin to use the toilet, any staff must stay outside at all time. When child returns to the group, the FS leader may ask if everything is OK. There are no other opportunities for a child to be alone with an adult in a potentially compromising position.