

The benefits of Forest school for Primary children

The Forest of Avon Trust

We are a local charity working in and around Bristol with community groups, businesses and schools to connect people to trees and woodlands through activities and tree planting. We work with schools to:

- Lead woodland activity and Forest School days for schools, pre-schools and other groups
- Provide OCN-accredited training for teachers, support staff and early years practitioners
- Run tailored Inset, development and taster days for schools pre-schools and nurseries.

What is Forest School?



Forest School developed in the mid 90's to support Early Years education through providing activities in the natural world that promote learning and personal development. It is now a well recognised and established approach to engaging people of all ages and abilities in nature, increasing their physical and social confidence.

"Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self-esteem, through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees." Forest School Association

The benefits of Forest School for primary-aged children

The Forest of Avon Trust has delivered a range of Forest School activities with primary schools and primary-aged children in the wider Bristol area. The evaluation of these sessions has provided the following observations relating to the learning and the development of those that took part.

1. Self-confidence and resilience

Forest School is child-lead allowing children to build confidence by informing decisions and trying new things in a supportive environment. Forest School takes place throughout the year which builds resilience and independence as children come prepared for cold or wet weather. It also allows them to experience seasonal change close-up.

Observations and comments:

In the first week H had been reluctant to leave the path and stayed with the adults. By week 4 she had gone off exploring with L.

In the first session C said, 'I'm not the muddy type', by week five C said, 'this is the most squelchy puddle I've ever been in.' R said, 'It's the first time I've ever got muddy'.

'I can always go now' (J had been reluctant to go to the toilet behind the screen in the woods at first but by the 4th session felt a sense of independence that she was confident enough to do so).



2. Working with others

Spending time as a group in the woods helps children to connect with each other through activities, games and shared experiences in nature. Activities, such as blindfolded 'meet a tree', encourages them to work together, trusting and caring for each other.

Observations and comments:

'Look for the up and do it like this' (H teaches J how to use fire steels to light the fire).

'Here hold it flat and do what Jon said and put it near the wool' (L helps R with fire-lighting)

L clearly describes his game to the group before they start to play.

3. Concentration, motivation and creativity



Woodlands provide rich sensory experiences and frequently prompt individuals to comment on and discuss what is around them. The range of activities on offer provide opportunities to gain practical skills e.g. fires provide a way for children to become more safety aware and work as a group.

Observations and comments:

'I wish we could do plant exploring', C admiring some ferns, wants to find out more.

'Something's changed about the woods since we were last here'

'I'd prefer to live in a forest than a high tech city as you can imagine lots of stuff'

4. Relationship with the outdoors and respect for nature



Being in the woods helps children to understand the world they live in and their connection to it. Children have the opportunity to pursue their interests in nature e.g. bug hunting, watching birds, finding and identifying plants.

Observations and comments:

H found some small white eggs on a log and showed the adult helpers, 'I'm going to put it back where I found it'. He shows the other children before doing this.

'I can't tell a conker from a chestnut. How do you do it?' L wants to learn how to identify things in the woods.

'Wow that's amazing', said C when looking at a big beech tree.

5. Physical confidence



Both the activities and the woodland environment encourage a high level of physical activity and increased physical confidence. Trees, logs and uneven ground provide both a challenge and a great opportunity for developing increased fitness and agility. In addition woodland crafts and tool support the development of fine motor skills and help develop new skills.

Observations and comments:

'I'm superior towards all trees', S balancing and climbing up the side of an old tree.

Interested in exploring further?

- Contact Jon Attwood to find out about tailored sessions and Inset days for your school.
- Jon also offers guidance to help you develop your own Forest School.
- The Forest of Avon Trust runs OCN-accredited Forest School Level 1 and 3 training.
- Visit the website for Ofsted reports and national research into the benefits of forest school www.forestofavontrust.org/training/nature-benefits/.

Email: jonattwood@forestofavontrust.org Telephone: 0117 9633383
The Estate Office, Ashton Court Estate, Bristol, BS41 9JN www.forestofavontrust.org