

Accessible Education Provision for Neurodivergent Children  
through graduated interventions and academic support.



*An organisation that aims to improve every child's life  
by being closer to nature,  
providing equality in learning  
and promoting well-being*

# FOREST SCHOOLS POLICY FOR RAW LEARNING

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## **1. Introduction**

The contemporary forest school movement was brought to the UK from Scandinavia in the 1990s but it is predated by many British traditions, such as the Woodcraft Folk, Scouting and Guiding. It draws inspiration from these traditions, along with various educational philosophies, including Rousseau, Froebel, Steiner and Montessori.

## **2. What is Forest School?**

The ethos of Forest school is based on a fundamental respect for children and young people and their capacity to investigate, test and maintain curiosity in the world around them. It believes in children's right to play; the right to access the outdoors (and in particular a woodland environment.); the right to access risk and the vibrant reality of the natural world; the right to experience a healthy range of emotions, through all the challenges of social interaction, to build resilience that will enable continued and creative engagement with their peer and their potential.

Forest school is based more on the process of learning than it is on the content - more on the how than the what.

This means that genuine forest school practice steps boldly out of the shadow and limitation of planned activities and ventures collaboratively into the realms of the unplanned, unexpected and ultimately unlimited. Children and young people are given encouragement to direct their own learning – this often requires catalysing on the part of the forest school leader either through stimulating play in the outdoors or through scaffolding a child's learning, but mostly through simply observing how children are in the outdoors.

Significantly, and on many levels, a woodland environment is central in supporting this very dynamic approach to learning; the passage of time from the changing of the seasons, to the contemplation of an ancient tree; the dynamic nature of an outdoor environment- an infinite source of smells, textures, sounds and tastes; a

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range of visual stimuli from near to far, high to low, very big to very small; and the infinite layers of historical, cultural, spiritual and mythological significances that speak to our deep relationship with trees and woodland through the ages.

### **3. Our Ethos**

Raw Learning would like our forest school programme to foster self-esteem, independence, emotional resilience, co-operation, personal responsibility, autonomy and motivation, as well as a deeply personal knowledge, respect and care for our environment. The approach of Raw Learning is learner-led, play-centered, holistic and experiential. When taking part in our forest school programme a participant is engaging with nature in wild spaces in an exploratory, sensory and physical way.

We believe it is important to create, where possible, a long-term relationship between a location and a group of participants - giving all participants a chance to get a feel for how an environment changes over time.

Participants will be encouraged to take constructive risks in order to develop skills, good judgment and to learn and develop through managing their own and others' risks. In planning activities, we consider not only the risks but also the potential benefits for the learner.

### **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

All facilitators involved in the forest school programmes are conscious that it is an exploratory experience for the group. They allow the group to play and learn as independently as possible, often without demonstrating or suggesting. If invited to provide support then they do, but otherwise merely observe, allowing the experience to be learner-directed.

It is the role of the forest school leader(s) to take a lead in planning, delivering and evaluating the forest school programme. They also take primary responsibility in ensuring that policies and procedures, rules and guidelines are adhered to. Volunteers and other adults may help with these responsibilities where they wish to and are able and/or qualified to.

### **5. Evaluation**

Evaluation is ongoing throughout each session.

### **6. Health and Safety Policy**

Forest School programmes may include activities that are considered higher risk than usual for participants. It is the general approach of Raw Learning to consider not only the risks of each activity but the potential benefits too. However, Raw Learning seeks to minimise risk by following appropriate procedures for more risky activities, such as tool use and fires, and by carrying out risk assessment covering key hazards that participants may come into contact with during a session.

### **7. Legislation**

Raw Learning fully accepts its legal obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The purpose of this act is to promote, stimulate and encourage high standards of health and safety at work. It protects not only all people at work, but also the health and safety of the general public who may be affected by the work activities.

### **8. Facilitators and Training**

All our Forest School Leaders are professionals with relevant qualifications and experience and have undertaken current enhanced DBS checks. At least one member of the on-site team will hold an up to date first

aid qualification. We will also aim to provide adequate training and support to ensure all facilitators, volunteers and freelancers are confident and competent when following the policies and procedures we have set out in the Handbook.

## **9. Risk/Benefit Analyses**

We believe that, while there are risks that must be considered, there are also a wide range of potential benefits that can be gained by those involved. We also recognise that taking risks is an important part of learning and developing and we want to provide a safe and supportive environment in which participants can learn about risks, challenges and personal safety. Consequently, we will use a risk/benefit analysis in our assessment of our sites and activities.

## **10. On Site Risk Assessment Procedure**

Forest School sites must be safe and easily accessible, so whenever possible we will visit and assess sites before activities take place. During our assessment we will seek to identify significant hazards and take action or precautions to reduce the risk to a safe level.

We will make agreements with the landowner and explore specific site issues if necessary. Whilst doing this we will identify any hazards and implement the necessary controls, check for mobile phone coverage and access in case of emergency, and assess toilet facilities. We will ensure all facilitators are provided with a copy of the risk assessment prior to an activity.

When and where possible, we will carry out a last check of a site prior to the arrival of a group. Changing weather conditions and visitors to the site can create new challenges, such as fallen branches and litter. These will need to be assessed and may alter previously arranged activities. Where checks are not possible prior to groups' arrival a site sweep and assessment will be made with the group upon their arrival.

There are five steps to risk assessment:

1. Look for the hazards, such as windblown trees or litter
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
4. Record the findings
5. Review the assessment and revise if necessary

## **11. Emergency and Serious Incident Procedure**

Emergencies are never wanted, but they are a possibility, and so we at Raw Learning ensure that all leaders are familiar with appropriate emergency procedures. Most emergencies can be resolved on-the-spot by the leader removing the group from potential threat and providing first aid. However, 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 safety of whole group** from further danger. Stop all work/activities if safe. Call in and locate group promptly as agreed with group in advance. If possible, remove whole group from any further danger or threat of danger, preferably to one of the huts.
2. **First Aider to attend to any casualties** with adult helper and with regard for maintenance of required supervision ratios for the rest of the party. At least one first aider must be on site at all times. 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 facilitators. Dispatch a designated person to meet emergency vehicle at the entrance where possible/necessary. Give following grid references to 999 operator:

Rochford Site, Doggetts Chase, Rochford SS4 3RN

Grid reference Q880920

4. **Safety of the rest of group** will be maintained by the remaining facilitators and adults away from the scene of the incident.
5. **Informing next of kin** should be carried out as soon as practicable after the incident.
6. **Inform management.** The manager of Raw Learning must be informed of any major incident as soon as possible. Following this, as soon as is possible, the landowner of the site should also be informed.
7. **Incident report and/or first aid book** should be filled in on site if possible and then logged back at the Raw Learning office, (some visiting group facilitators may fill out their own incident report form) – see first aid kit for report form. This should be filled in whenever the emergency plan is used even if no one was harmed and it was just a near miss.

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 facilitators team to review existing controls and procedures.

## **12. Lost or Missing Person Procedure**

Unknown woods can be disorientating, especially if a participant is unused to this kind of environment. Many woodland sites are not surrounded by walls or fences, and whilst we appreciate this sense of freedom can be beneficial to all, there is also the possibility that a participant may get lost. There are a number of ways we can prevent this:

- We encourage all our participants to take an interest in their surroundings so as to help them find their bearings. Ultimately, we would like to inspire all who are able to become responsible for their own safety with respect to staying close to the rest of the group.
- Boundaries will be chosen, clearly marked and made known to the group. Going outside the boundaries will require all of the group to go or a subgroup, with at least one leader – allowing at least two leaders to stay with remainder of group.
- The group will be counted in and checked at start and end of day, then at other relevant points in the day – particularly after activities that include members splitting up.
- Good communication within the group will encourage collective responsibility for each other's safety – leaders are always approachable and should be made aware if there are any concerns as to a participant's whereabouts.

In the event of leaders fearing that a member of the group has gone missing:

1. All the group will be immediately called back in, by prearranged call or whistle, and counted and missing member determined. The time will be noted.
2. The Group 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 group Leader must contact police by telephoning 999 (this will result in the emergency plan coming in to action).

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.

### **13. Tools, Fires and Activity Guidance**

#### **Tool Use Procedure**

Using a range of tools will be necessary in many site-based activities and is an important part of our work as it enables participants to develop new practical skills that help develop self-confidence. Raw Learning aims to ensure that all people participating in sessions with tools do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. Tools that may be used include potato peelers, bow saws, pruning saws, loppers, knives, drills and hatchets. The following guidelines are to be followed when using tools:

- The forest school leader will check all tools are fit for continued use before the session
- Only tools that are in safe working order shall be supplied for use
- Correct and safe use of sharp tools will be demonstrated to all facilitators and participants
- Tools should be counted when handed out and counted back in again when finished
- All groups are to be supervised closely by competent leaders until deemed competent to work with limited supervision
- Tools should be kept in a designated safe area when not in use - none should be left unattended outside this area
- All knives will be closed/ sheaved immediately after use
- Saw guards will be replaced immediately after use
- Walking around with open/ unmasked tools will not be permitted
- Safe working distances and suitable ratios must be maintained at all times

All group members will wear suitable boots/shoes and outdoor clothing for the activity they take part in. Where any cutting or felling is taking place, helmets should be worn, and gloves provided.

#### **Guidance on Knife Use**

- Designate a specific zone for those using knives
- Always carry knife with sheath firmly on
- Always pass knife with sheath firmly on and in demonstrated manner
- Always keep knife in sheath when not in use
- Leader to count knives out & back in
- Ensure participants have had demonstration before use (and leader is confident of participant's ability) including grip and body position
- Knife work is always supervised by a responsible adult
- Each person to sit well out of reach of others (blood bubble)

#### **Fire Procedure**

Fires and the use of storm kettles are an important part of Forest School and other sessions. Raw Learning aims to ensure that all people participating in sessions with fires and/or storm kettles will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. Fires will only be used where it is appropriate to do so and where there has been an agreement with the site owner prior to the session.

- Leaders will explain to participants the importance of using only dead wood for fires and also of the importance of dead wood as a habitat
- Smoke inhalation will be reduced by burning dead wood. Those in smoky areas will be encouraged to move to less smoky areas
- Fires will only be lit in suitable defined spaces or in a fire wok
- Participants will only be allowed to light fires under direct supervision of a trained leader using suitable materials and equipment

- All participants will be given clear guidelines about how to behave and move around the area when the fire or kettle is lit
- A lit fire will be supervised by an adult at all times, as will all cooking activities
- Related safety equipment, including heat-proof gloves, a fire blanket, a burns kit and water will be kept within close range of fires
- All fires should be fully extinguished and all traces removed at the end of a session, except where the landowner has agreed that a designated fire pit may be used repeatedly

## **14. Food Hygiene and Eating**

All participants on activities will be encouraged to wash their hands with water and soap, which will be provided, before eating food.

During some sessions, we may cook items such as popcorn, damper bread or marshmallows over the fire. Facilitators will ensure that safe procedures are undertaken accordingly

**Facilitators to be aware of allergies when cooking**

## **15. Weather and Clothing**

Clothing advice will be given to participants and their parents/carers prior to the visit e.g.

Winter: waterproofs/coats, fleece/jumper, hats and gloves

Summer: waterproofs, fleece, sun hat, sun cream, long sleeved tops and trousers

Footwear: wellies or strong/sturdy (ideally waterproof) outdoor shoes and warm woollen or manmade fibre socks.

**Children/facilitators not to wear open toed Sandals or flip flops due to health and safety reasons especially when The alpacas come to visit.**

Where possible, we will keep spare sets of waterproofs in case of a participant arriving without adequate protection.

## **16. Toileting**

**The site that Raw Learning uses has a toilet block on site that is easily accessible. Facilitators are available to assist with any toileting requirements. Hand washing facilities are also provided and encouraged**

Rachel is going to order portable toilets. I have put a note on my calendar to check with her.

## **17 Hazardous Plants and Fungi**

Part of the risk assessment will be to identify any particularly hazardous plants and point them out to the group so that all members are aware of the dangers. The sap or hairs from some plants can cause rashes and blistering when in contact with skin, or after the skin is then exposed to sunlight.

Most rashes are caused by stinging nettles, though giant hogweed may also be a problem. Both of these plants are easily distinguishable and if either is seen growing on site all members of the group will be taught how to distinguish and avoid coming into contact with it.

Serious poisoning from ingestion of leaves, berries or mushrooms rarely occurs, even when curious children are involved.

However, ingesting even small amounts of some species can cause nausea, vomiting, and stomach cramps; and large amounts are potentially fatal. Consequently, we disallow all participants from foraging and eating anything that has not been agreed safe by a Forest School leader.

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If a member of the group is exposed to a hazardous plant or fungi, so that they have a reaction a leader must be informed and appropriate First Aid given. If the nature of the reaction is more serious the Emergency and Serious Incident Procedure must be followed.

## **18. Biting and Stinging Insects**

Insect bites and stings can be common, particularly in spring and summer, and usually cause only minor irritation. In rare cases, people can have a serious allergic reaction to a bite or sting that requires immediate medical treatment - if this is the case then a leader will refer directly to the Emergency and Serious Incident Procedure.

If there is prior knowledge to suggest that a participant will have an allergic reaction if bitten, then the Forest School Leader, must be informed before any activities take place on site.

If ticks are known to exist in proximity to a site, then all participants need to check or be checked for ticks as soon as possible following any activity on site. Where a tick is found on a participant, a plaster should be placed over it and parents/carers informed at the end of the session so that they can remove it safely.

Information on safe removal of ticks can be found at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/694158/PE\\_Tick\\_Leaflet.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/694158/PE_Tick_Leaflet.pdf)

## **19. Lone Working**

When preparing for a session, it may be necessary for one person to visit a site alone. In these circumstances, anyone carrying out the work should inform a Raw Learning facilitator before departing and ensure that each have the mobile and home/work telephone numbers of the other. The lone worker should leave details of where they will be working and at what times. Contact should be made when the lone worker leaves the site. If the lone worker changes location, they should inform the designated Raw Learning facilitator of the change.

If no contact has been made by the lone worker at the agreed end of working time, then the designated facilitator should attempt to contact them. If they are unable to contact the lone worker, then they should try their home number and inform the manager of Raw Learning.

If no contact has been made in 24 hours, the manager of the designated facilitator should contact the police.

## **20. Administering First Aid**

Permission will be sought from a guardian to give their child first aid. These permissions will be included in the *pro forma* consent form. 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).

## **21. Reporting: Incidents and Accidents**

Any accidents that involve injury will be recorded into a first aid book. Major injuries that constitute 'reportable injuries' will be reported to the Health and Safety Executive via RIDDOR. Parents will be notified of injuries in keeping with the 'Emergency and Major Incidents' policy.

## **22. Photos and Videos**



Permission will be requested via *pro forma* consent for Raw Learning facilitators to take photographs of participants for monitoring and evaluation purposes and suitable use in publications for leaflets/materials/website. Where permission is refused, we will aim to avoid photographing and videoing that child and blur out faces wherever they do appear in recorded material

This policy was adopted by	Raw Learning
On	20 <sup>th</sup> May 2024
Date to be reviewed	20 <sup>th</sup> May 2025
Signed on behalf of the provider	<b>Rachel King</b>
Name of signatory	Rachel King
Role of signatory	Director

