



# Modelling best practice in Forest School training

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Imagine your ideal day in the woods, and what would that be like? The sound of children busy tapping sticks and laughing, woodpeckers drumming; the smell of bluebells and wood smoke; the sight of friends dragging logs to the ditch to build a bridge; the sound of wellie boots squelching in the mud, and the taste of wild toast cooked over the campfire.

Who wouldn't want to offer the opportunity to build memories like this for the children in their care? This is why people come to

the Sussex Wildlife Trust to train as Forest School leaders and it is our job to help them make this happen.

What makes our training unique is that we have run Forest School programmes with participants of all ages and abilities, including parent and toddler groups, pre-schools, nurseries and child minders. We work throughout the seasons in all kinds of weather and in a variety of settings from a wild corner of a field to ancient woodlands across Sussex.

Within the Forest School community it is understood that: "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 local woodland or natural environment with trees."

This is only achieved if the practice is underpinned by the six principles of Forest School, and the key to effective Forest School is modelling expectations.

What makes us different? Our training models the six principles for our participants, because we know this approach will cascade from our trainees to the children that they work with.



**Principle 1:** Forest School is a long term process with frequent and regular sessions in a local natural space, not a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements.

Through observation of the group and individuals within it, we tailor our training to their needs. We look at how comfortably the person interacts within the woodland and its resources, and we share our experience to help them to fill their own 'Forest School tool box' with ideas and knowhow to support and inspire the children in their care.

We go out and observe trainees in their setting; looking at what they do and how they, the children and the site all interact. We are then able to support the development of their Forest School in their own setting because we are there to share their experience and reflect upon it.

**Principle 2:** Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

Our training offers experience of two very different woodland settings, and the opportunities for learning and development within.

All the training takes place in the woodland, which further nurtures an emotional attachment with nature, which we know practitioners will want to share with the children they work with.

**Principle 3:** Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

We work with the whole person, in a woodland all day every day, helping them to look at the habitat in a different way; identifying the opportunities within the landscape and the loose parts it offers to inspire creativity and free play. Full days build resilience, and honing practical skills builds confidence.

**Principle 4:** Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and themselves.

We model best practice interactions with tools, fire, landscape and natural materials, so it is clear for our trainees to see that the benefits of being outside at Forest School far outweigh the risks that they will learn to manage safely and with confidence.

**Principle 5:** Forest School is run by qualified Forest School Practitioners who continuously develop their professional practice.

We are confident trainers because we are reflective practitioners and have been running Forest School sessions and training for over ten years, regularly updating our own professional practice.

Visiting hundreds of Forest School settings through supportive observations constantly informs our training programme and helps us to meet the needs of future practitioners.

**Principle 6:** Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

Play and choice are at the heart of our training, putting the individual at the centre of our community for learning.

Uniquely, we provide an opportunity during the training for trainees to practice their newly acquired skills with a group of children, supported and observed by us. We also visit all of our learners in their own settings at least once to further the development of their Forest School. This is vital in achieving the goal of confidently taking the training into their own setting and creating a Forest School learning environment in which children can thrive.



### Why choose us?

- Theory and practice all takes place in the woods
- Up to five additional mentoring days
- Supportive observation of trainees in own setting
- We are the leading nature conservation organisation in Sussex

For training in and around Sussex this summer, please visit: [sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/forestschool](http://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/forestschool)

Or contact: [mikemurphy@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:mikemurphy@sussexwt.org.uk)

Outside of Sussex contact your local Wildlife Trust at: [www.wildlifetrusts.org](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org)