

Key Concepts Behind Forest School

Forest school is child-led and play-based

- You are a mentor for the children.
- You model the behaviours that you would like to see.
- Your job is to create routines and set up / visit environments that help the group learn.
- Use questions to guide children's explorations instead of providing answers.

Forest school is about having the time and space to play

- Life is busy for many children. Forest school is about having time to explore your own interests and to play freely outdoors. Allow the children to connect with their environment.
- Model skills and behaviours.
- Create rules (some with the children) that encourage children to challenge themselves safely
- Manage mess instead of discouraging it
- Watch and document.
- Be guided by the children's interests. Resist the urge to over teach!

At forest school, your place is one of the primary teachers

- At forest school, nature is not a field trip. It is a classroom.
- Connecting over time with the same place allows children to develop a deep relationship with and understanding of that place.
- How will you choose or construct this classroom so that children have opportunities to develop as people in that environment?

The Forest School “Curriculum”

Math

- Recognizing patterns in the environment (leaves, spider webs...)
- Measuring natural materials using other natural materials
- Building items and measuring before you build

Music

- Creating musical instruments with natural materials
- Setting up items that will move in the breeze
- Listening to the sounds in your environment
- Singing and dancing together

Art

- Making land art with leaves, rocks, sticks
- Weaving with sticks
- Felting
- Creating cordage
- Painting with natural materials
- Pounding flowers and leaves onto fabric
- Experimenting with natural dyes
- Creating “costumes” with natural materials

Literacy

- Creating a story about your place
- Finding letter shapes in natural materials
- Writing messages with natural materials.
- Local / First Nations stories about plants and animals
- Songs, rhymes and picture books about local plants and animals
- Circle stories with the group
- Using loose parts from the forest to tell an oral story
- Learning animal languages
- Sharing your personal stories about natural experiences
- Narration in play

Science

- Creating homes for real and imaginary animals
- Caring for animals and learning about their life cycles
- Finding animal homes (looking under logs)
- Engineering bridges, teeter totters, and equipment
- Understanding seasonal patterns

Sensory Play and Experiences

- Mud kitchen
- Playing with water on a tarp
- Eating plants after we get to know them
- Learning about campfires and how to use them

Large Motor Skills

- Climbing and playing in castles and forts
- Building shelters
- Throwing leaves and water into the air from a tarp
- Digging
- Balancing on logs and rocks

Fine Motor Skills

- Whittling with potato peelers
- Weaving – we like to do this with sticks
- Creating cordage
- Making baskets from leaves and other materials

Social

- Discussing where to go and what to do
- Talking about challenging situations and our comfort levels (“weapon” play)
- Making rules and setting limits as a group
- Problem-solving and working together on projects
- Hunting and gathering activities – searching for things together
- Integrating others into free-form, imaginary play

Reflection and Integration

- Looking for animal tracks and signs
- Being deeply in an environment and getting to know its patterns
- Journaling or reflective art
- Sit spots

Elements of Forest School Classrooms

- Water
- Mud
- Different sizes of rocks, including boulders and sand
- Rotting logs
- A variety of trees
- Food plants
- Plants that provide “loose parts” like leaves, cones, seeds
- Habitat plants for animals
- Sheltered areas where children can hide

Clothing

- Layers are important. Use wool, silk, or fleece inside and create several layers, with a waterproof layer on the outside.
- Have backup clothing in the adult’s pack and some backup clothing with the child (socks and gloves).
- Warm, waterproof gloves and boots make people happy. Abeko gloves or two layers of gloves work well. Bogs and Kamik make warm, waterproof neoprene boots.
- Hats are very important. Heat leaves through your head. Choose one that allows you to use your peripheral vision.
- Ask part participants to donate old gear to make it affordable to all families

Forest Schools

- Cedar Song Nature School: www.cedarsongnatureschool.org/
- Fresh Air Learning: www.freshairlearning.org
- Maple Ridge Environmental School: <http://es.sd42.ca/>
- Soaring Eagle Nature School: www.soaringeaglenatureschool.org
- Sooke Nature Kindergarten: <http://naturekindergarten.sd62.bc.ca/>

