



# Health & Safety Policy: Tree Risk Management

## Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to set out the responsibilities of staff and parents with regards to managing the risk posed by falling trees and branches and the measures that Wildwood Nature School takes to minimise this risk.

## Context – Risk vs Benefit

The various woodlands used by Wildwood Nature School are wild natural environments. And while they vary in their level of management, none of them are intensively managed for safety, so there is an inherent risk of injury or death from trees or branches falling. Trees, even healthy ones, naturally drop branches from time to time. And it is very difficult to predict which trees will fail completely and fall to the forest floor.

It is important to remember that the woods are a dynamic, natural and relatively unmanaged environment, and are therefore inherently more risky than a tightly controlled environment like an indoor classroom, although not necessarily less safe.

So why go into the woods? Because most people judge that it is a small risk that is worth taking. There are well established benefits for the children of being in the woods, in particular in terms of their physical and emotional development and their connection to nature – see the Wildwood Nature School [website](#) for a fuller description of the benefits. It is important that children and adults benefit from being in the woods, and this significant benefit means that some low level of risk is acceptable.

## Responsibilities

Wildwood Nature School leaders will assess the risk factors, design measures to mitigate the risk, and then assess the risk on a daily basis and decide what measures to take. They will do this in consultation with wood owners and keepers, and with tree management specialists. Members of staff will implement those measures.

Parents of children must judge, based on this policy and their own general approach to risk, whether the risk is worth taking, and therefore if they want their child to attend Wildwood Nature School.

## Level of risk

For the average person, the probability of being injured by a tree or branch falling is incredibly low, and of being killed is almost negligible – about 1 in 10 million for the latter (5-6 people per year die in the UK). This probability lowers still further if high wind incidents are discounted; Wildwood Nature School will not take children into the woods when high winds are forecast (please see our [Health & Safety Policy: Extreme Weather](#)).

Even for frequent wood users, the probability of injury or death will still be very low, in terms of risk analysis, and will be within what the Health and Safety Executive term ‘tolerable’ – meaning that the activity should go ahead with the risks managed down to ‘as low as reasonably practicable’.

However, the probability for frequent wood users, though very low, will be higher. It is not possible to set an accurate figure but parents and staff need to understand that this is the case and that Wildwood Nature School cannot guarantee no injury or death from trees or branches falling, but instead puts in place measures to make the risk as low as possible.

## Risk factors and mitigation measures

The risk of any given tree falling at any given time is a combination of two sets of factors – the health of the tree and the external, environmental factors acting on it (the most significant of these being the weather). In general, a healthy tree (healthy roots, no significant defects) will not fall unless due to an extreme event – such as a severe storm. The Wildwood Nature School measures address these areas of risk.

## Health of the trees – tree monitoring

It is not practicable for Wildwood Nature School or the wood owners to monitor every single tree in the woods we use. Therefore, we consider the trees from which we are at most risk due to the amount of time we spend in their vicinity – those in and around our camps. These trees are formally and informally monitored to ensure that the tree and its limbs are not vulnerable due to significant defects. This protects the camps to a significant degree, as it means that even with slightly elevated risk due to environmental factors (see below), the trees should not be a problem.

It is important to note, however, that tree inspections are not a guarantee that a tree or limb will not fall. They are a formal assessment of a tree's visible defects, followed up in some cases with a detailed inspection. This gives us a good idea of whether a tree is likely to fail at any time, or in high wind, but it does not offer any kind of guarantee.

## Weather

The main weather condition that causes trees and limbs to fall is high wind. Excessively high rainfall in a short period of time is also a risk factor and can contribute to a tree falling. The tree becomes heavy with water, and the roots can lose their grip if the soil is waterlogged. High wind exacerbates this risk.

Whether a tree has its leaves is a related factor, as trees with leaves retain more water and offer more wind resistance, meaning that they might fall more easily due to wind or waterlogging. Again, these factors are more likely to cause a tree with defects to fail than a healthy one.

When assessing the risk due to weather, at any given time, Wildwood Nature School staff members and leaders will take into account all of these factors.

'Summer branch drop' is a phenomenon when trees lose one of their lower limbs during the Summer months. This usually happens when there has been a hot dry spell, followed by significant rain which is again followed by a hot dry period, and seems to affect mature oak trees, which drop large limbs.

See Appendices below for details of measures.

**Policy review**

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Last review:

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## Appendix 1: Measures to minimise risk

Risk Factor	Measure	Person
Significant defects on trees in and around camps	Formal monitoring of trees, with detailed monitoring of any suspect trees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Every 12-15 months (variable to allow for seeing different natural phenomena)</li> <li>- Ensure all used and potential camp sites are marked with blue cones for the inspection</li> <li>- Carried out by a certified specialist (arboriculturist or experienced wood keeper)</li> <li>- Specialist to report back in person to leadership and Health and Safety Lead, to ensure clarity of reporting and for professional development</li> </ul>	Health and Safety Lead
	Move camp site if problem or suspect tree identified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Notify wood owner</li> <li>- Inspect new camp informally straight away and formally ASAP</li> <li>- If remedial work is undertaken in previous camp, return after checking by specialist</li> </ul>	Head of School  Health and Safety Lead
	Informal monitoring of trees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thorough informal check of camp site areas by Wildwood Nature School staff or woodkeepers after all high wind events</li> <li>- Staff are encouraged to check trees on an ongoing basis to look for any obvious defects that a lay person could spot</li> <li>- Staff report any suspect trees to management who request a visit from a specialist</li> <li>- Training to develop staff knowledge of obvious defects held at staff meetings.</li> </ul>	All staff  Head of School  Health and Safety Lead
	Hanging deadwood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staff check camp sites at the start of every day (at setup) for hanging dead wood. If dead wood identified that cannot be removed, head of school informed and group moves to a different camp</li> <li>- Staff check trees above areas where their group stays and plays when on walks, for hanging deadwood. They move on immediately if any seen.</li> </ul>	All staff  Head of School  Health and Safety Lead
Dangerous weather conditions forecast: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High wind</li> <li>- Excessive rainfall in a short</li> </ul>	Health and Safety Lead and Head of School assess the weather conditions on a daily basis to judge if it is safe for the children to be in the woods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wildwood Nature School does not operate in the woods* when the wind is forecast to gust at or above 35mph</li> <li>- If the wind is due to gust below these speeds, the Health and Safety Lead and Head of School take into account the wind and recent</li> </ul>	Health and Safety Lead  Head of

<p>period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Combination of both factors</li> </ul>	<p>rainfall, condition of the trees (leaves or not) to judge a combined risk level and decide if it is safe. If it is deemed not safe, the children will not be taken into the woods but will stay at the school premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents will be given an explanation of why they judge the risk to be too high.</li> </ul>	<p>School</p>
<p>High wind develops unexpectedly</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All groups of children and staff immediately move into Highgate Wood and walk to the field, staying on main paths the whole way. They stay and play on the field, away from the edges</li> <li>- Head of School assesses whether the session should continue, based on current and recent conditions and the forecast.</li> </ul>	<p>All staff</p> <p>Head of School</p>
<p>Summer branch drop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- During the months May–July, camps are not situated directly beneath large low oak limbs. Health and Safety Lead checks this</li> <li>- During the months May–July, groups do not linger (stop and play) beneath large low oak limbs when out of camp, on walks</li> </ul>	<p>All staff</p> <p>Health and Safety Lead</p>

\* For the purposes of these descriptions, ‘woods’ means any of the natural outdoor areas used as locations for the normal running of the Forest School sessions – Queens Wood, Hampstead Heath and Mortimer Terrace Nature Reserve.

## **Appendix 2: Management of woods used by Wildwood Nature School**

### **Queens Wood**

Queens Wood is relatively unmanaged for safety. The wood is owned by Haringey, and the trees are surveyed periodically, but with long intervals between. Wildwood Nature School makes its own arrangements for tree inspection in Queens Wood, employing an arboriculturist to conduct formal surveys.

### **Hampstead Heath**

Hampstead Heath is actively managed by City of London woodkeepers, who are very knowledgeable in terms of tree safety and tree condition, with support of arboriculturists.

There are designated zones in the wood, with the trees being regularly surveyed between intervals of 6 months to 2 years.

### **Mortimer Terrace Nature Reserve**

While Mortimer Terrace Nature Reserve is owned by Camden Council, the management of the trees is largely left to the private tenants. Wildwood Nature School makes its own arrangements for tree inspection in the nature reserve, employing an arboriculturist to conduct formal surveys.