



# Health & Safety: Risk Management Policy

## Forest School/Outdoor activities

### Purpose of the policy

This policy outlines how Wildwood Nature School keeps its staff and children healthy and safe while doing Forest School and other outdoor activities.

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### 1. Health and safety responsibilities

Overall responsibility for health & safety is that of the head of school, who is responsible for reviewing health & safety policies and procedures, and carrying out the risk assessments alongside the other members of staff. However, all members of staff have day to day responsibility for ensuring that the policy is put into practice and bringing health & safety concerns to the attention of the head of school. Failure by the staff to apply this policy can lead to disciplinary proceedings.

### 2. Managing risk

#### Steps taken to reduce risk

- Staff risk assess all activities, sites and the weather (see Extreme weather policy).
- Staff follow safety routines (see below).

- The head of school communicates with the duty wood keeper to share information about any potential hazards, including weather.
- Staff inform colleagues, volunteers, children and visitors of potential hazards and agreed methods of working in order to minimise their risk.
- The head of school ensures that all staff, volunteers and children are aware of the emergency procedures for all sites.
- The staff teach children skills in order to keep themselves safe.
- All staff are aware of the school's emergency procedures and know how to call the emergency services.
- Off-site trips (i.e. to locations other than the woods) are risk assessed by the head of school. Also, risk assessments and liability insurance for the premises to be visited are requested/checked.
- Parental consent is requested before taking children on trips away from the woods.

### 3. Risk assessment

All activities are risk assessed either formally or informally. Staff are required to make a judgement about all activities that the children undertake during a session. Anything that might be medium risk or higher does not take place until it has been formally risk assessed first, using the Wildwood Nature School risk assessment process. This involves using a standardised format to identify potential risks and put in place measures to reduce the risk. If it is not possible to achieve low risk then the activity will not take place. The risks and measures to reduce them that relate to a specific activity (from the risk assessment) are kept alongside the daily plan and all staff are required to read and implement them.

### 4. Awareness

- Our induction training for staff and volunteers includes ensuring all staff have read and understood the *Health and Safety Policy*, and understand their shared responsibility and accountability for health and safety. The induction training covers matters of staff well-being, including safe lifting.
- Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own health and safety through discussions, safety routines, and talking about possible risks of activities they plan. (See Children learning section below).
- Reviewing safety practices is on the agenda for all staff meetings, to ensure our practice continues to develop.

## 5. Safety routines and practices

This section details the agreed safety practices that all staff must carry out in every Forest School session.

### **General safety practices – Forest School / outdoor activities**

- Overall staff ratios – maximum of 8 children per adult.
- Group sizes – under normal circumstances one adult with a maximum of 8 children, although in special circumstances an adult may need to supervise more children to ensure the safety of the group (see handovers below, and emergency procedures policy).
- Groups stay together except in exceptional circumstances.
- All children and adults wear colour-coded high-visibility vests. All the children and adults in a group wear the same colour.
- Group leaders have primary responsibility for the children in their group, unless they have officially handed them over to another staff member (see below).
- Group leaders must be completely certain about who is in their group and where they are at all times, including (but not restricted to) when they have been handed over to another staff member, are eating lunch, waiting to be picked up or start the session.
- All group leaders check their children have been signed out at the end of the day.
- All teachers are aware of the deployment of the other teachers at all times during all sessions, so that if one teacher is leading an activity, the other will take an overview of the camp or children on the walk.
- The children are supervised at all times.

### **Safety lead teacher**

One teacher is the **first safety lead** for each day. There is also a second safety lead who assumes the role when the children split into the walking group and camp group – one safety lead with each group.

Safety leads are responsible for:

- Knowing how many children are in the group at all times.
- Ensuring that the register is with the appropriate person.
- Making sure the other staff are aware of the numbers.

- Telling all staff at the start of each day who the high risk children are (children most likely to wander/run off and go missing).
- Reminding staff about safety practices and monitoring their practice.

### **Safety in camp**

- We risk assess the site by carrying out safety sweeps before each session.
- Staff setting up the camp mark the boundary with cones, no more than a metre apart. Children are taught not to cross the boundary.
- Staff ensure that there are no major blind spots in the camp where children might be difficult to see.
- Group leaders count all the children in their group (including those relaxing or reading in tents) every 2 minutes while in camp.
- Children are not allowed outside the boundary unless with a teacher.
- Group leaders should not take some of the group outside the boundary leaving the rest inside the boundary, even for a short period, unless they officially hand-over the remaining children.

### **Safety on walks**

- There will be an adult at the front and back of the group at all times.
- Group leaders do a head count on leaving and returning to/from a walk.
- Group leaders count all the children in their group every 2 minutes.
- Children are not normally allowed to stay in camp if their group goes for a walk. If there is no alternative, then an official handover must take place.
- Once on a walk, all children stay within 10 metres of the group leader at all times.
- Group leaders must be able to see all their children all of the time. They think about where to position themselves so that this is always the case. For example, the children should not be following behind their group leader.
- The children are trained to stop when called. If they do not stop, wait and come back when called, they will be asked to stay very close to an adult (i.e. holding hands) until they can be trusted to do this.
- When crossing roads, all children hold on to a partner's or adult's hand. A member of staff is at the front and back of the group, and if possible, a third in the middle. Use pedestrian crossings whenever possible.

- When the walking group stops to stay and play in any one place (i.e. they decide to stop and play for a while rather than continuing the walk, taking bags off), blue cones are used to cone off any obvious exits (all around if need be) to the location, to stop children wandering off.

### **Safety at pick-up and drop-off**

- The safety lead signs in children using the registers on the mobile phone app, as whoever is dropping off leaves.
- The safety lead signs out children just before they leave with their parent at the end of the day.
- Parents tell the safety lead (who notes it on the register) if a person other than themselves is picking their child up. A code word is given to the person picking up. Without this, they are not allowed to pick up the child.
- When a child arrives, they are signed in, put on their hi-vis vest and enter camp straight away.
- There is a member of staff on the gate of the walkway signing children in and stopping children leaving, and keeping count of the number of children in the walkway at any one time. They do an official head count every 2 minutes. There is another member of staff in the walkway playing with and supervising the children. The ratio is never more than 8 children to 1 adult.

### **Lunchtimes**

- Staff formally hand over children from their group if they are leaving to go on a break.
- Supervising staff head-count every 2 minutes.

### **High-risk times**

During certain activities or times of the day there is an increased risk of a child going missing. On an ongoing basis, during each session, safety leads decide when there is an increased risk and designate one teacher to continually count all the children.

### **Hand-overs**

When a member of staff is fully occupied by a number of the children in their group, and for whatever reason cannot supervise all the children they have responsibility for, they officially hand over responsibility for the other children to another member of staff. This is a verbal exchange in which the receiving member of staff repeats back the names of the children they are taking responsibility for.

Staff hand over children when they begin any activity that will prevent them from counting their children in accordance with this policy.

## 6. Children learning about safety

- Children are taught the emergency procedure twice during the first week of every half term.
- Children are taught about the importance of safety in the woods. They are taught and practise safety rules, for example:
  - not crossing the camp boundary,
  - stopping and returning when called,
  - knowing their colour and group leader,
  - staying with their group.
- Children and adults are taught about specific dangers and the safest way to deal with them, including:
  - poisonous plants, berries and fungi;
  - spiky, stinging plants, insects, processionary moths;
  - dogs;
  - strangers;
  - checking dens are safe and secure before going in or climbing on.

## 7. Staff safety

- Staff do not work not on their own in the woods.
- Staff are given regular supervision meetings in which they can raise concerns about their own safety.
- Staff are reminded of safe manual handling techniques (e.g. lifting).

### **Policy review**

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