

Wild Arts Forest School Policy

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1. Introduction

Wild Arts Atelier, aka 'Wild Arts' is an outdoor educational approach that aims to foster holistic development in children through regular sessions in natural environments. Wild Arts operates over two main areas: Our Atelier (art studio) and yard where we hold workshops, and the wider areas of field and woodlands.

We believe learning about our woodland and the wildlife it holds, offers invaluable benefits for both children and adults. Engaging with nature fosters environmental awareness, hands-on learning, benefits physical and mental health, and a deeper connection to the land. Participants gain valuable knowledge and skills for preserving natural habitats and biodiversity. By integrating these elements into our curriculum, our sessions empower individuals to become thoughtful stewards of the environment and active participants in conservation efforts.

This policy outlines our commitment to providing a safe and enriching Forest School experience for all participants.

2. Sustainability and Respect for the Natural World

At Wild Arts, we recognise the profound interconnectedness between humanity and the natural environment. We align with the land owners mantra '*connect to protect*'. By educating children about the natural world we in return hope they will appreciate it and work with it, rather than against it in their futures. Sustainability is at the core of our philosophy, so we prioritise the following principles

- **Environmental Stewardship:** We instill in participants a deep respect for the natural world, emphasizing the importance of conserving and protecting our ecosystems for future generations.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Our activities are designed to minimize our environmental impact, from using renewable resources for craft activities to practicing 'Leave No Trace' principles during outdoor excursions.
- **Nature Appreciation:** Through immersive experiences in nature, we aim to cultivate a sense of wonder and appreciation for the beauty and diversity of the natural world. We ask children to not pull at plants or wildlife as they play an important role in our ecosystem.
- **Ecological Awareness:** Participants learn about the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of biodiversity in maintaining healthy ecosystems.

- Resource Conservation: We encourage responsible use of resources, including water, wood, and energy, and promote recycling and upcycling whenever possible.
- Community Engagement: We actively engage with our parents and local community to promote environmental awareness and stewardship, collaborating on conservation projects and advocating for sustainable practices.
- To support these values almost all of our tools and art materials are sourced from sustainable suppliers, if not foraged or created directly by ourselves.

By fostering a culture of sustainability and respect for the natural world, we seek to empower participants to become thoughtful stewards of the environment and active agents of positive change in their communities.

3. Activities

At Wild Arts we offer a diverse range of activities aimed at supporting holistic development and deepening connections with the natural world. Our Reggio Emilia inspired approach is child-led, meaning we set up materials and provocations that follow on from the children's interests or needs in order to provide them with the knowledge or skills they need to develop their practice. No child is pressured to use the materials or recreate examples provided, each child is free to use the materials in a way that suits them provided they are not causing harm to themselves or others. Some of our forest school activities children may choose to partake in include but are not limited to:

- Art and Sculpture Work: Children express themselves artistically using natural materials found in the forest environment, promoting creativity and environmental awareness.
- Material Making: Children create their own art materials using natural and scrap materials around the land.
- Woodland and Traditional Craft: Participants engage in traditional crafts such as weaving, carving, and basket making, connecting with cultural heritage and craftsmanship.
- Fire Lighting: Under the guidance of trained leaders, children safely learn the art of fire lighting, emphasizing responsibility and respect for fire safety protocols.
- Tool Use: Children explore the use of tools such as knives and saws in a supervised environment, developing practical skills and confidence. Tools

have a designated tool box/bag and are expected to be returned to their position immediately after use.

- Studying Wildlife: Participants observe and learn about local flora and fauna, fostering an appreciation for biodiversity and ecological systems.
- Team and Group Games: Cooperative games encourage teamwork, communication, and leadership skills in an outdoor setting.
- Sensory Activities: Activities stimulate the senses, fostering mindfulness and connection with nature.
- Tracking Games: Participants learn to track animals and interpret signs left by wildlife, honing observation and critical thinking skills.
- Cooking on an Open Fire: Children engage in outdoor cooking, learning about fire safety and nutrition while enjoying the rewards of their culinary efforts.
- Shelter Building: Participants learn to construct shelters using natural materials, promoting teamwork and problem-solving skills.
- Using a Kelly Kettle: Participants learn to safely boil water using a Kelly Kettle, promoting self-sufficiency and outdoor cooking skills.
- Rope and String Work: Creative activities with ropes and strings encourage fine motor skills and imaginative play.
- Developing Stories and Drama: Imaginative activities involve storytelling, role-playing, and drama, stimulating creativity and language development.
- Physical Movement Activities: Outdoor activities promote physical fitness, coordination, and spatial awareness in a natural setting.

Through these activities, Forest School aims to provide enriching experiences that foster curiosity, resilience, and a deep connection to the natural world.

4. Plant and Mushroom Safety

Participants will be educated on plant and mushroom safety to minimize the risk of accidental ingestion or contact with harmful species. This education will include:

- Identifying and avoiding poisonous plants and fungi commonly found in the forest environment.
- Encouraging participants to ask a Forest School leader for assistance in identifying unfamiliar plants or mushrooms.
- Prohibiting the consumption of any plants or mushrooms found during Forest School sessions unless approved by a Forest School leader or knowledgeable adult.
- A **no-touch** rule is in place for any fungi species even if a child is able to positively identify any species. If we deem it safe and want to collect a

specimen, a forest school leader will provide gloves and tongs.

5. Animals in the Forest

While exploring the forest, it's important to remember that animals generally fear humans and will avoid interaction. However, they can also be unpredictable, and some may bite if they feel threatened or cornered. Children are encouraged to remain calm and cautious, keeping a respectful distance from wildlife and remembering that they are guests in the animals' home. Through observing animals in their natural habitat, participants gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity and beauty of wildlife, fostering empathy and understanding towards all living creatures.

6. Tree Climbing

Tree climbing benefits children by improving physical fitness, coordination and balance as well as enhancing problem-solving skills, reducing stress, fostering creativity, and encouraging a deeper connection with nature.

At Wild Arts,, managing risks associated with tree climbing is paramount to ensure the safety of the children. We emphasize the importance of adhering to a three-point contact rule while climbing trees, which requires maintaining three points of contact with the tree at all times to ensure stability and balance. Prior to climbing, children are encouraged to assess the strength of the tree, taking note of its branch distribution, texture, and any signs of decay or instability. Additionally, they are taught to be mindful of the presence of fungi and wildlife that may inhabit the tree, ensuring that they do not disturb or endanger any creatures. By incorporating these safety measures into our policy, we aim to promote a safe and enriching experience for children engaging in tree climbing activities during forest school sessions.

7. Fire Safety

Fire safety is a crucial aspect of Forest School activities. When incorporating fire into sessions, the following guidelines will be observed:

- Only designated Forest School leaders will be responsible for lighting and maintaining fires.

- Children may be invited to take part in the process once their listening and understanding has been established and when they demonstrate full understanding of the safety boundaries in place, and work 1:1 with the adult.
 - Children take part in risk assessing the area and identifying potential risks of fire prior to commencing.
 - Children and adults hair will be tied back and any loose fitting clothes tucked in, with long sleeves rolled back if necessary.
 - Children will be introduced to all elements of fire making including wood chopping and tool use including but not limited to: knives, mallets, fire strikers, tongs, upon assessment of their motor skills and understanding. All fire tools live in the designated Fire Bag and are expected to be returned immediately after use. Practitioners will demonstrate how to use a tool properly prior to any children participating.
 - Fires will be built in designated fire bowls or pits, away from flammable vegetation and structures.
 - A fire's height will not reach above adult waist height when within the raised bowl.
 - The area surrounding the fire will be checked and cleared of dry matter prior to starting a fire.
 - Participants will be instructed on proper fire safety protocols, including maintaining a safe distance from the fire and avoiding horseplay.
 - A log circle is present around a fire and becomes a safety area, clear of matter. Children must walk around the outside of the log circle if they wish to move places. No running or climbing should occur in this space.
 - Anyone who can not respect the above rules will be asked to leave the fire area.
 - A Colour dragon approach will be used for children under 7 years old or where forest school leaders deem appropriate.
 - 'Green dragons' are safe children sitting at a safe, designated distance from the fire.
 - 'Orange dragons' are when children are invited to help the adult with fire-making.
 - 'Red dragons' are for children who are not being safe so need to return to their seats.
 - A water bucket will be readily available during all fire-related activities.
 - Fires will not be made during very dry or windy conditions.
 - When leaving the forest, fires will be put out as much as possible by practitioners breaking up and separating any remaining logs/embers and pouring water over the fire until hot embers are eliminated.
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8. Weather Limitations

Forest School sessions will generally proceed in all weather conditions, except in cases where conditions pose a significant risk to the safety and well-being of participants. Weather limitations may include:

- Extreme temperatures (e.g., excessive heat or cold).
- Severe weather events (e.g., thunderstorms, high winds over 40 miles).
- Hazardous environmental conditions (e.g., flooding, wildfires).

Decisions regarding the cancellation or modification of Forest School sessions due to weather will be made by the Forest School leaders, who will prioritise the safety of all participants.

9. Ticks and Clothing Recommendations

There is always a possibility of encountering ticks in the forest environment, in particular between April and July. Parents are advised upon sign-up to dress their children in long sleeves and long trousers to minimize the risk of tick bites. Additionally, we recommend the use of insect repellent on exposed skin as an added precaution, but do not provide this due to individual allergens.

Clothing Recommendations: Weather-appropriate clothing is essential for a comfortable and safe Forest School experience. Parents are encouraged to ensure that their children are dressed appropriately for the weather conditions, including:

- Hot Weather: Sunhats, sunscreen, and light, breathable clothing to protect against sun exposure.
- Wet Weather: Waterproof jackets, trousers, and wellington boots to stay dry and comfortable during rainy conditions.
- Cold Weather: Thermals, layers, hats, gloves, and sturdy footwear to stay warm and insulated in colder temperatures.

By following these clothing recommendations and precautions regarding ticks, we aim to ensure the comfort, safety, and enjoyment of all participants during Forest School activities.

10. Emergencies and Safety Protocols

At Wild Arts, the safety and well-being of our participants are paramount with no exception. We have established comprehensive emergency procedures and safety protocols to ensure a safe and secure environment for all.

- **Adult Supervision:** We adhere to the practice of always having at least two adults present during Forest School sessions to avoid lone working and maintain high adult:child ratios (1:5).
- **Training:** Our staff are trained in child protection, safeguarding, fire lighting, and first aid, and DBS checked, equipping them with the necessary skills to respond effectively to emergencies.
- **Continuous Supervision:** We continuously observe children and engage in ongoing risk assessment throughout sessions, ensuring that no child is left unattended. If a child needs space from others this is completely fine however an adult will remain at a distance to check on the child's wellbeing. Having a quiet space within nature can be one of the greatest tools for children feeling overwhelmed or anxious.
- **Communication and Boundary Awareness:** We emphasize clear communication with children, including ongoing discussions on safety protocols, including rules such as "stay where we can see you and hear you." In case a child wanders too far, we use a designated call to prompt their return and utilize whistles as additional communication tools.
- **Emergency Equipment:** Both Forest School leaders carry charged mobile phones equipped with what3words for precise location identification in case of emergencies. Both practitioners carry mini first aid kits on their person at all times. First aid kits are also present in the stable yard atelier and Charmill cottage.
- **Emergency Response:** In the event of an emergency, one practitioner will take responsibility for providing first aid or searching for a missing child, while the other calmly escorts the rest of the group to a safe location away from potential danger. See missing child policy.
- **Emergency Services:** Emergency services will be contacted immediately in the event of a severe injury or any situation requiring external assistance. Followed instantly by parents unless both practitioners are in a position to divide phone calls. Staff on the campsite are available to help in any emergency situation.
- **Emergency access:** The site has a private road leading from Long Furlong Road which passes the atelier area, right up into the camping field which borders the forest.
- **First Aid:** Cuts and scratches are to be expected when working in a wild environment. Instead of closing this opportunity we risk assess with the

children in the moment and any small wounds are treated calmly and promptly, with staff providing first aid and reassurance to the child. Parents are informed of any incidents involving their child either in moment or at handover.

- Contact numbers:
 - Samantha Sheldrake **07515110296** Mariana Peron **07871219774**
 - Josephine **07968810067** (Land Owner)
 - Bill Woodfine **07887768988** (Campsite Support + Fire Safety)

Other Important numbers are as follows:

- Doctor: Lime Tree Surgery, BN14 0DL (approx. 2 miles away)
Phone: 01903 264 101
- Hospital: (24 hour A&E service) Worthing Hospital (approx 5 miles, or 12 minutes by car) Lyndhurst Road, Worthing, BN11 2DH
Phone: 01903 205 111 Emergency: 999

By implementing these emergency procedures and safety protocols, we strive to create a secure environment where participants can explore and learn with confidence, knowing that their safety is our top priority.

11. Child Behavior

At Wild Arts, we believe in fostering positive behavior and respect for both peers and the natural environment. We embrace the Reggio Emilia-inspired perspective, where challenges are seen as cognitive knots, offering opportunities for exploration and learning. Our expectations for child behavior reflect this philosophy: Our expectations for child behavior include the below but please see our full policy for more information:

- Respecting others opinions, personal space and belongings, treating others how we would like to be treated.
- Respecting diverse perspectives by engaging in reflective dialogue.
- Approaching challenges and conflicts as opportunities for inquiry and collaboration.
- Treating plants, animals, and natural resources with care and respect. We cultivate curiosity, creativity and resilience in the natural world.
- Practicing good environmental stewardship, such as minimizing littering and avoiding damage to vegetation. We foster empathy and social responsibility towards the environment
- Communicating openly and respectfully with peers and adults.

- Children must follow instructions from Forest School leaders where any safety is concerned.

In cases where a child's behavior poses a risk to themselves or others, discussions with parents/guardians will be had and where conflicts can not be resolved potential suspension from Forest School activities may occur if necessary.

12. Legislation

Wild Arts operates in accordance with essential legislation related to childcare and outdoor education such as The Health and Safety Act at work 1974, The Childrens Act 1989 and The Equality Act 2010. This includes adhering to national regulations regarding child protection, safeguarding, health and safety, and risk management. Our staff undergo regular training to ensure compliance with these regulations and to maintain a safe and secure environment for all participants. Additionally, Forest School activities are designed to align with educational standards and frameworks, promoting holistic development and learning outcomes for children. By incorporating essential legislation into our policy, we prioritize the well-being and welfare of all participants while providing enriching and educational experiences in the forest environment.

Wild Arts has public liability insurance up to 5,000,000

13. Conclusion

By adhering to the principles outlined in this policy, we aim to provide a safe, enjoyable, and educational Forest School experience for all participants. Continuous review and improvement of our practices will ensure that we uphold the highest standards of safety and well-being in our outdoor learning environment.

This policy will adapted and expanded depending on the specific needs and requirements of the environment, staff and children participating in the programme.