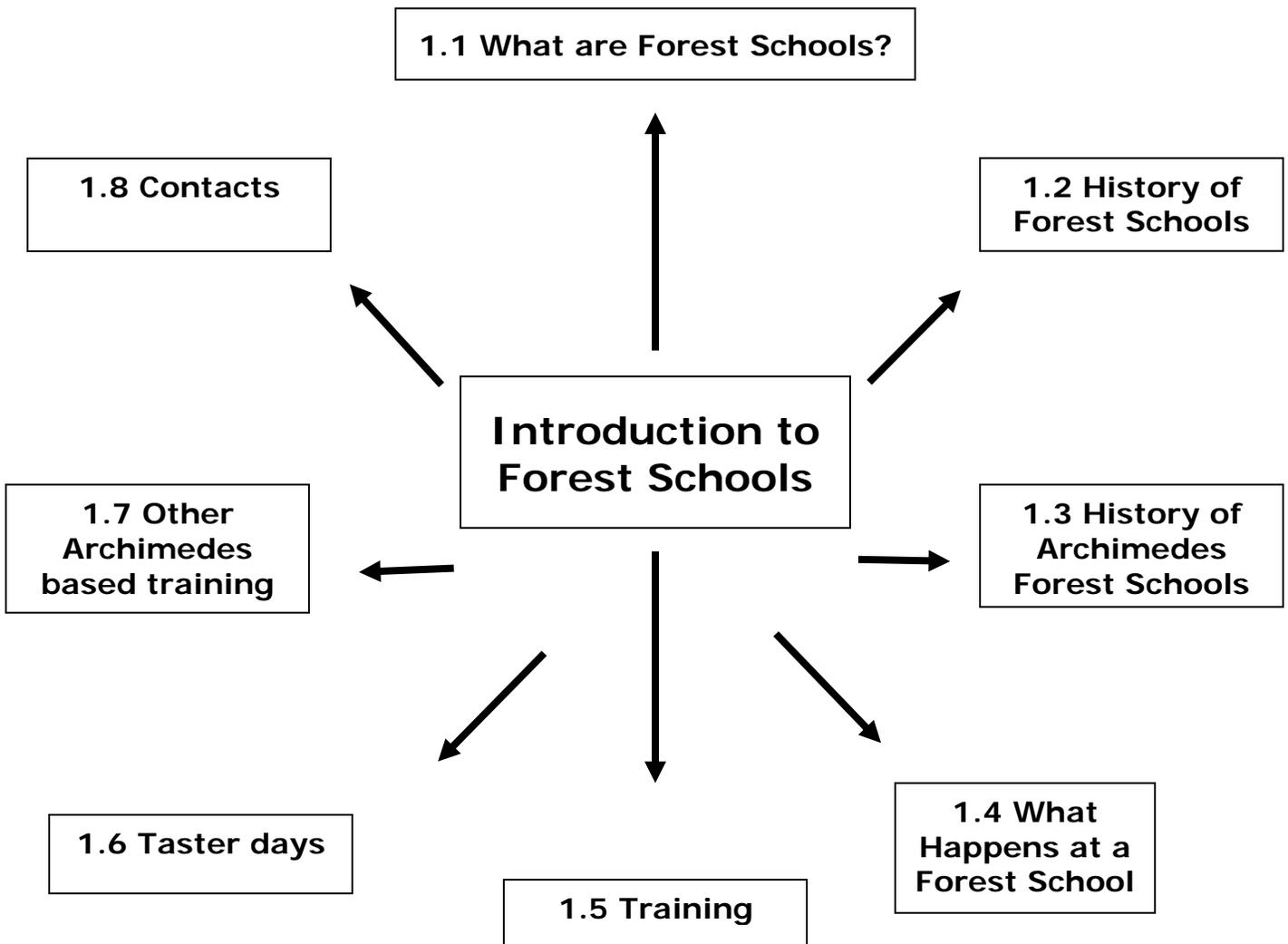




# Introduction to Forest Schools

INTRODUCTION	
<b>What?</b>	A regular visit to a wild space area (bush, forest or woodland) where children participate in a sustained program of child initiated education, play and learning opportunities and games designed to build self-esteem, communication skills, independence and self-confidence through a developmental process and increased appreciation of the natural environment.
<b>Why?</b>	To encourage physical and emotional development through outdoor opportunities.
<b>How?</b>	Qualified Forest Schools Practitioners ensure that all policies and procedures are in place to run a safe and effective Forest School
<b>Where?</b>	Your grounds, local outdoor wild space bush or woods.
<b>When?</b>	Sessions running on a regular basis weekly, for a morning or a whole day



# 1.1 What are Forest Schools?

**'Forest Schools is an innovative educational approach to outdoor play and learning.'**

The philosophy of Forest Schools is to encourage and inspire individuals of any age through positive experiences and participation in engaging and motivating achievable tasks and activities in a woodland environment, helping to develop personal, social and emotional skills:

- Independence
- Self-discovery
- Confidence
- Communication skills
- Raised self-esteem

Forest Schools has demonstrated success with children of all ages who visit the same local wild space, bush land or wood land on a regular basis and through play, learn about the natural environment, how to handle risks and most importantly to use their own initiative to solve problems and co-operate with others. Programmes run throughout the year going to the woods in all weathers (except for high winds). Children use full sized tools, play, and participate in a variety of learning opportunities, learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation. Forest School, through its application of up to date education and learning techniques and application neuroscience creates a unique learning vehicle, which is used to encourage a range of individuals, community groups and larger organisations to utilise their local open space for interactive play, health, recreation and personal development uses.

Children need time to thoroughly explore their thoughts, feelings and relationships. This develops understanding of the world, the environment and everything within it through use of their emotions, imagination and senses. Reflective practice is an essential process developed and used throughout all sessions to ensure transference of learning potential.

## 1.2 History of Forest Schools

Originally a concept developed in Denmark for pre-school children (under seven years). Children attending Forest Schools were arriving at school with strong social skills, the ability to work in groups effectively, and generally children had high self-esteem and confidence in their own capabilities. All these attributes proved to be an effective foundation that raised academic achievements. This ethos was introduced to the UK during the 1990's and has been taken on as an effective educational tool in a variety of settings. Today, learners travel from all over the world to become Archimedes Forest Schools practitioners and Archimedes are now running courses internationally with recent success in Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia.

Since its introduction in the UK Forest Schools has developed opportunities in an outdoor setting for children and adults of all ages to develop a variety of life skills; independence, self-discovery and communication, all of which assist individuals to grow in self-esteem and confidence. Participants gain confidence in their own ability.

Kinesthetic learners [learning by doing] are particularly suited to learning in this woodland outdoor environment.

## 1.3 The History Archimedes Forest Schools

Sarah Blackwell is now the CEO of Forest Schools Education (formerly Archimedes Training) and has been pioneering Outdoor Learning and specifically Forest Schools training in the UK for the past 10 years and is now head of our strategic development team. Sarah has run successful Forest School projects with children and young people across the country, ranging from pre-school, through to middle school and high school. Sarah has also worked endlessly to develop inclusion strategies for children with special needs groups, those with Autism and ASD as well as having a specific and dedicated interest in working with those at risk of exclusion, or those not in education employment or training including the probation services and prolific offenders.

Sarah's passion for the Forest Schools ethos and philosophy lead her to develop an industry specific training course that would ensure that Archimedes Forest Schools were being delivered to the highest of standards. Forest Schools Education is the only UK training organisation to have developed and accredited a level 4 OCN Forest Schools trainers Award to allow trainers to become associate trainers for Forest Schools Education.

Sarah's intention is to provide the highest quality training that meets the specific needs of those working in the out of doors and has devised our Forest Schools Education training programmes to go above and beyond those offered by other providers both in the training materials that we provide and in the emotional development and dedication and commitment Sarah and her staff give to our learners.

Sarah constantly investigates pioneering concepts and theories to ensure all the courses she designs are innovative with up-to-date and relevant information delivered in a motivating style. This immense passion and dedication to the expansion of personal development, outdoor play & education supported by her wide experience of developing environmental and Professional Development programs, results in a character that inspires not only the people who attend her courses but also the people she works with.

The Forest Schools ethos and philosophy has spread throughout Britain and beyond with many interested in participating in training coming from a range of countries including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, China, Malaysia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Spain, France, Belgium, to name a few. In response to this increased international demand Archimedes has developed Bush Schools in Australia and New Zealand in order to meet this global need.

## 1.4 What Happens at Forest Schools



A Forest School develops by individuals in a setting becoming qualified Forest Schools Practitioners or drawing down funding to bring in a qualified Forest Schools Practitioner that specialises in the delivery of Forest School programmes.

Initially projects run from a settings own grounds/gardens/bush or woodland allowing the children to become comfortable with an outdoor approach to education and play whilst in familiar surroundings. Allowing relationships based around trust and self-exploration to develop with the Forest School Practitioners who start to facilitate a more child inspired outdoor curriculum.



When the group is ready and if the local wild space is within walking distance a session to familiarise the group with the route to the wood either on foot or if it is bit further away by bus.

The group then have their introductory sessions in the wild space, bush or woodland exploring the site establishing physical and behavioural boundaries, safety procedures, hygiene and routines.

Once a group is established in the new woodland and routines are set up, the project develops through a child inspired approach with opportunities for projects to be taken back to the indoor setting for continuation and extension. The Forest Schools Practitioner observes the children and will record patterns of behaviour to create a baseline assessment which, after the six week assessment phase will look at any specific areas of development that would support the child in the development of its holistic development.

## THE FOREST SCHOOL SITE

Each Forest School site is unique, designed to meet the needs of the group and to fit the environmental constraints of the location. (All safety guidelines for site construction are given in the handbook provided on the FSE Forest School Practitioners Training Courses).

The site is usually in a clearing or cleared area of the wild space, bush or wood avoiding major trip hazards and dense ground flora, such as brambles and overhead hazards. Sites range in complexity from no fixed features to a fully constructed shelter and maybe a cooking or fire area with specially designed areas for hygiene, creative art, tool use, fast games, throwing games, water collection, flora monitoring freedom and discovery. Generally sites have a circle seating area (benches) around a cooking or safe fire area, sometimes with wind breaks if these can be easily constructed around the benches to provide protection from the wind and to create a cosy and safe enclosed area for a calm time around the central social area. A group shelter is either constructed or a point designed to winch up a tarp to create a waterproof roof for any downpours and to store kit under.

A network of people and groups supporting Forest Schools often develop mutually beneficial partnerships. On two of our Archimedes Forest School sites, older groups have constructed work areas for kindergarten groups to use, building small people benches and hanging artwork up in the trees. This has given a focus to the older groups and created a magical space for the younger groups that is safe and effective.

## FOREST SCHOOL SITE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is policy within all Archimedes Forest School sites that the environment being used is not detrimentally effected. This is done through ongoing consultancy with the land owners and designing programmes to fit in with the open space Management Plans.

Sites are used on a rotational basis, this means that they are constructed and deconstructed within a given time span. This time period depends on the sensitivity of the wood and the frequency it is being used. For our sites that are visited frequently the site is constructed from the first term onwards and is deconstructed at the end of the last term taking usable materials to a new site and creating habitat piles with the old materials. This process works well with the groups who see a full cycle the site being developed then being returned to a state promoting flora and fauna development.



## MEETING BASIC NEEDS

It is fundamental that children's basic needs are met before any higher learning can take place.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:

- **Warmth** – Correct clothing provided or protection from the sun or other elements
- **Food**- Health Snacks and meal
- **Drink** – Hydrated water /hot drinks
- **Safe** – Individuals feel safe both physically and emotionally

## HEALTH AND SAFETY CHECKS

The Forest Schools Practitioners ensure that each member of the group has appropriate clothing and footwear.

A safety brief pitched at an appropriate level is given to the group and to the accompanying adults at the site entrance or emergency evacuation point. A dynamic Risk Assessment of the site is carried out to make sure no major changes have happened since the last visit that might cause problems. This is recorded and an appropriate action taken if necessary. It is important to take into consideration though that all Risk Assessments are weighed up against the Benefits Analysis for all sessions.

## OFF WE GO

Often the Forest Schools sites are away from main entrances that require the group to walk this distance and terrain differs depending on the abilities of the group. A hard surface approach may be necessary for Wheel chairs and buggies. The walk in is an activity in its self - observing how the wild area land has changed, telling a story at different points, a treasure hunt or trail during this walk in is often used to set the theme for the day.

Once at the site, the group have a toilet visit (different processes are used for different sites), clean hands and a sit down for a hot/ cold drink and a healthy snack (meeting basic needs). This time is often good time for calm discussion often about what happened last time they were in out of doors (reviewing) and then about the session ahead.

## SESSIONS

All sessions are designed around the needs of the client group, ensuring that they are learner-led. Sessions are designed around a theme; themes are sometimes subtle such as evolving or exploring the site or more obvious such as cultural history, butterflies, spies, fairies or nature investigators. Many areas of a Curriculum are intrinsically covered, in the Forest Schools experience without the programmes needing to be curriculum led. The activities are set up so they are within the capabilities of every person within the group (Small Achievable tasks). Teamwork skills are developed through games and activities. Individual skills and self-esteem are heightened

throughout activities such as hide and seek, shelter building, tool skills, lighting fires or environmental art, the list is endless. Each activity develops intra and inter-personal skills as well as practical and intellectual skills.

Tools are used in Forest Schools in a traditional woodland manner and are introduced gradually with a structured safety base that children become familiar with. The use of tools in the wood promotes trust and self-confidence within the client; it develops motor skills and fine motor skills. Activities are constantly evaluated and re-adjusted throughout the day to meet each client group's requirements, at the end of the day a final review is carried out. This is a very important part of the day. The children may be asked to shout out, draw, act or play a game to review the day they have just experienced, reflecting about what they have done during the day.

## **TAKING SOMETHING HOME**

Each time the children leave the Forest Schools site they take something with them to encourage parental interest and communicative interaction (continuation of the review process). This also leads to enhanced communication within school, with friends as well as with parents or guardians.

Individual's progress is observed / monitored and a thorough evaluation process is used to ensure that aims and objectives are being met.



## **1.5 Training**

### **Forest Schools Practitioner Award Levels**

We deliver training to pre schools, middle schools, high schools, for courses organized and funded by councils, education authorities, private groups and individuals so that they can become Forest Schools Practitioners and be qualified to take children out into the wild space, bush or woodland safely for Forest Schools programs.

Our courses are run over consecutive days. Detailed below are the courses that we deliver and the levels attainable. Many people from around the world have travel to the UK for this training, however we are also looking for people who are interested in participating in Level 3 training to be delivered at new International centres. For our course diary please go to [www.forestschoools.com](http://www.forestschoools.com) or call the office on +44 (0)114 2834060 or email [info@forestschoools.com](mailto:info@forestschoools.com) for further information about courses in the UK and abroad.

All our courses are accredited at present through the Open Awards.

### ***Level 1 is an introduction of 3 days.***

This is aimed at individuals with little or no experience of working in the outdoors, and aims to build knowledge and confidence in the safe use of equipment and tools. Though Archimedes has now developed the Certificate in Outdoor Learning which is a two day course and we feel is a wonderful and more successfully appropriate training to introduce the learner to the theoretical principles in developing outdoor learning.

### ***Level 2 qualifies you to become an Assistant Practitioner.***

This is a 5-day course, which is aimed at individuals who want to assist a Forest School Practitioner (Level 3) in the delivery of Forest School sessions in a wild, bush or woodland environment.

### ***Level 3 qualifies you to become a full Forest Schools Practitioner.***

It is held over two separate weeks called a training week and (approx 8-10 months later) an assessment week and it qualifies you to become a full Forest School Practitioner and equips you with the skills to do so. This Level 3 course is aimed at individuals who have experience in Youth Work, Child Care, Teaching, and experience of practical activities in the outdoors. It is also recommended that you opt for The Forest Schools First Aid course at an additional £99 when booking your Level 3 course.

### ***Level 4 Trainers course.***

We are running courses for those wishing to be able to teach Forest School training levels to others. This will be a course for those already with a level 3 qualification who want to deliver not just Forest Schools as projects, but to deliver their own training courses their own adult customers.



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## **1.7 Other Archimedes based training**

### ***Beach Schools***

The Beach Schools Practical Skills and Environmental Management course is intended for any individual who is already working with children and wishes to utilise beaches for outdoor play and learning. This qualification can be utilised independently to assure practitioners and those employing them that children's safety is paramount and the use of the marine shores and beaches can be sustained for future generations as well as being productive in educating our children with their unique qualities and habitats.

### ***Certificate in Outdoor Learning Course***

The Certificate in Outdoor Learning is intended for any individual who already has a passion for using the outdoors or those who want to develop the confidence to do so. This is principally a hands-on course to inspire you to get outside with your children, irrespective of the setting or environment in which you find yourself. The intention is to give a framework for outdoor learning as well as the key skills needed in which to practice safely and promote quality learning opportunities for your children.

### ***Outdoors & Up For It!***

This one day course is a highly practical course to enable participants to quickly learn a wide range of activities they can start running with their children straight away. Whilst other courses will cover the theory and pedagogy associate with outdoor play and learning this course purely about learning new activities and will assume the participant is already working with groups of children. A recipe booklet of all the activities is provided.

### ***Bespoke Inset and Consultancy Days***

We provide bespoke Outdoor Learning, Bush Craft, Forest Schools and Beach Schools Training days at your site for up to 48 members of staff. Whether an introduction to the Forest Schools ethos or a session designed to introduce staff to the amazing world of outdoor play and learning an inset day will inspire and motivate your staff and provide grounding in outdoor learning.

## **1.7 Contacts**

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