

To Learn with kindness, respect and friendship through God's love.

At St George's we are enhancing our early years outdoor environment through weekly 'Dark Woods' Forest School (FS) sessions. These sessions offer our youngest children the opportunity to develop in ALL areas of the Foundation stage curriculum whilst keeping the **'Characteristics of Effective Learning'** at the heart of everything we do.

**Having own ideas.**

**Making links**

**Choosing ways to do things.**

**Finding out and exploring.**

**Playing with what they know.**

**Being willing to have a go.**

**Being involved and concentrating.**

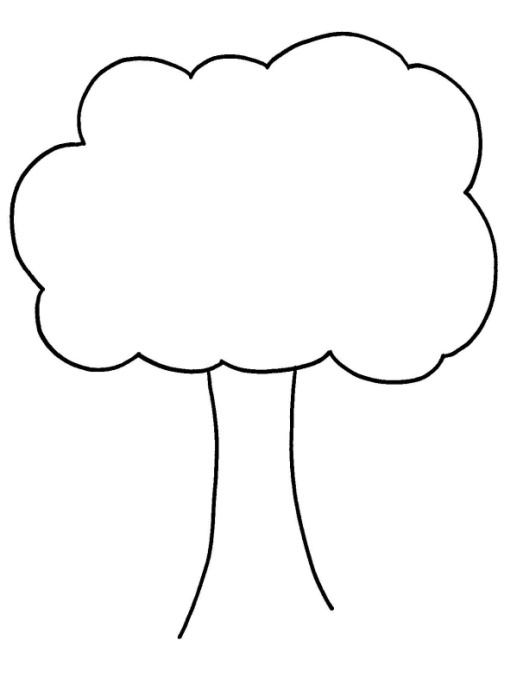
**To keep trying.**

**To enjoy achieving what they set out to** do.

We are very fortunate to have our very own Forest School site at the bottom of our school playing fields. The children have always called this area Dark Woods and so the name has stuck. Through our forest sessions the children will have the opportunity to develop skills and attitudes that can rarely be taught in an indoor environment. Through our Forest school experience we aim to encourage our children to......

Develop our confidence

Develop life skills



Solve problems

Explore

Be resourceful and independent.

Build and use our gross and fine motor skills

Learn.

Take turns and wait our turn.

Develop and use language skills

Make choices

Work Together - teamwork

Learn to take and manage risks.

Develop our physical skills

Have FUN!

Learn about and care for our environment

Test out our good ideas.

Develop our creativity

Although we are encouraging our children to take risks during our Dark Woods sessions, these risks have to be assessed and managed carefully. There are a few rules and 'things we need to remember' each session in order to maintain the safety of both children and staff. These **basic rules / general site safety** will be drawn up with the children during their first session in the woods and will be re-visited at the start of each session.

**Establishing Boundaries:**

* Staff will walk the boundaries of Dark woods with the children at the start of the programme. The children will have a clear idea of where they are allowed to go, how far they are allowed to explore independently and what the signal is for coming back to the group.
* If a member of staff needs to get the children back together a '1,2,3 where are you?' call will be given. The children answer immediately '1,2,3, I'm here'

adult will reply' '1,2,3 come back now. Children: '1,2,3 I'm coming'. This game will be played at the beginning of each session to remind the children of the signal.

**Picking up and playing with sticks:**

* Children must walk when carrying sticks.
* They can carry sticks shorter than their arm’s length and must be carried pointing towards the floor.
* Children should be aware of children around them when carrying sticks and never point them at other children.
* Sticks should never be thrown.
* Longer sticks can be dragged or carried with a child at both ends.
* Children should not pull a stick from a living tree.
* Children can collect sticks to aid with fire lighting (even if no fire is being lit) in 3 thicknesses - matchstick, pencil and thumb thickness.

**Picking up and playing with stones / bark.**

* Children can collect and use stones and bark if they need to.
* All stones and bark should be put back before returning to school.
* Stones and bark should not be thrown.

**Tree Climbing.**

An adult must be present when wanting to climb trees. (1:1 ratio)

* Adult to check the ground and remove any sharp objects and check the tree for dead/ broken branches.
* Children are encouraged to climb no higher than the arm reach of the adult watching, approximately 1.5 m.
* In Dark woods there are only a couple of places where trees are suitable for climbing. These will be shared with adults and children prior to the sessions.
* Dark woods has a designated climbing area with old roots and stumps for the children. These should also be checked at the start of each session for safety.
* Adults to supervise tree climbing but not interfere if possible. If the child can climb up them must be able to climb back down.

**Digging**

* In Dark Woods there will be an area designated for digging. Children should stick to this area and be discouraged from digging holes elsewhere in the woods.
* Adults should check the digging area before the session and remove any rubbish, sharp objects and check for animal faeces.
* Children should be encouraged to wash their hands when they have finished digging.

**Rope and String use:**

* Children are encouraged to help themselves to rope and string as and when necessary. (to make dens etc)
* Children are not allowed to use the rope to tie around themselves or other people.
* Adults can support the child when using rope by showing them the correct knot to use in different situations or if the children ask for help.
* Children and adults should be aware of other children running into the ropes.

**Toileting:**

* Children are all encouraged to go to the toilet before going into Dark Woods.
* Boys will be allowed to 'go' (for a wee only) if needed beyond the boundaries with an adult supervising. Girls can go too if they are comfortable to do so.
* Wipes and hand washing materials are provided in hygiene box if children do go to the toilet outside. Used wipes should be transported back to school in nappy sacks at the end of the session.
* School toilets are however close enough for the children to be taken by a CRB checked adult with the permission of the FS leader and in groups of 2 children minimum. Children are to be taken to the Yr 1/2 toilets.

**Carrying and Transporting Materials.**

* We encourage safe lifting techniques, bending our knees and keeping our backs straight.
* Children should be encouraged to roll, lift, drag and pull materials.
* They can use ropes to pull heavier objects.
* Very heavy objects should be carried with support from adults or carried in groups working together.

**Getting to the site.**

* As the site is at the end of our field the children will be able to walk to the forest site.
* FS leader will take the front of the group and assistant helper will take the back of the group.
* Children to help full the trollies and carry the boxes and equipment to the site. Children are to walk sensibly to Dark woods but must not go inside until all the group are together. See RA for getting to the woods for more information.

**Leaving the site.**

* Dark Woods should be left as we found it.
* All equipment should be counted back into the correct boxes and checked.
* Shelters should be dismantled and any rope, tarpaulin should be tidied away and stored back in school.
* Any natural artefacts should be left at the site however some small 'found' items can be brought back to school.

**Eating and Drinking Policy:**

* Children are not allowed to eat anything they find in the forest without the FS leaders consent.
* Children are to be made aware of the dangers of berries and seeds/ fungi etc.
* Adults are to keep reminding children about keeping fingers away from mouths.
* before snack time and any food or drinks are consumed, adults must help children wipe hands using wipes or the wash bowl and anti-bacterial gel.
* Children will have access to fresh water during their time in the forest and will be encouraged to sit down and have a group snack prior to returning to school. Snacks may include, biscuits, sandwiches, cakes and other non-cook items.
* These will be stored in our snack box and kept in a cool position.
* Drinks at snack time may include water, milk, hot chocolate (brought in a flask, adults to check temperature before handing to children).
* FS leader will check the medical records prior to the session for any allergies and food intolerances.
* All rubbish and food waste is to be disposed of into plastic bags and transported back to school at the end of the session.
* Used cups and utensils to be placed in hygiene box to be washed on return to school.
* **Cooking on a Campfire:**
* On occasion we may use the fire to cook - marshmallows, damper bread, sausages.
* All food will be checked to ensure it is cooked though and cool enough for the children to eat (adult helpers)
* A full Activity Risk/Benefit Assessment will be completed for any activity involving the preparation and/or consuming of food items.
* Where food is to be prepared adults will maintain high food hygiene standards ensuring their hands are clean, being aware of allergies and cross contamination of food.
* FS leader must supervise all cooking activities and maintain the campfire safety.
* Hand washing facilities must be in place - antiseptic gel, water, soap, towel.
* Basic Food hygiene procedures should be followed by the children - preparing, cooking and eating food.
* No child is allowed near the fire unless directed to by FS leader. No more than 2 children at a time to be near the fire. Children and FS leader must adopt the respect position when tending / cooking on the fire to allow easy movement away from the fire if needed.

**Risk assessments**

Forest School programmes may include activities that are considered higher risk than usual for children. It is the general approach of a Forest school to consider not only the risks of each activity but the potential benefits too. Our FS leader seeks to minimise risk by following appropriate procedures for more risky activities, such as tool use and fires, and by carrying out risk assessment covering key hazards that group members may come into contact with during a session.

**General site Risk assessment:**

This will be conducted by the FS leader before any sessions start. It will be completed on a seasonal cycle to take into account the changes that occur throughout the year. These will then be reviewed yearly and take into account the 4 layers that make up the woodland.

**Activity / Experience Risk assessment:**

This should includewhy the activity is being carried out and how to make sure the correct safety measures are in place to make the activity as safe as possible.

**Daily Risk assessments:**

Are carried out prior to each session and take into account the weather conditions and any hazards that can be seen that day. Children and parent helpers are also encouraged to watch for potential hazards during the session.

**Dynamic Risk assessments:**

These are completed after an impromptu activity or event that was not planned for prior to the session and where the FS leader has used professional judgement as to whether the activity should go ahead.

Copies of the risk assessments are kept within the Handbook file. Blank risk assessment sheets can be found in the appendix section of the handbook.

All risk assessments have to be approved by the Head teacher prior to the sessions.**Using and storing Tools**

Using a range of tools will be necessary in many FS sessions and we aim to use them safely and with as little risk as possible. Children should be able to use tools for a purpose and be encouraged to think about safety of both themselves and others. Each tool used has its own activity risk assessment and user procedures which will be read and signed by all adults helping before the programme starts. See tool procedures (In appendix section) for more detailed information on using bow saws, pruning saws, loppers, knives, hand drills and secateurs.

Each activity that uses tools will also have a risk benefit analysis and risk assessment attached that must be highlighted before the activity is undertaken.

**General rules:**

* Tools are to be counted in and out each session by FS leader.
* FS leader will check the safety and maintenance of tools prior to each session.
* Tools will only be used if deemed in safe working order.
* When not in use tools will be kept locked away from children.
* Tools are to be used only within a designated tools area.
* Tools will only be used in a ratio of 1:1 and by qualified FS leader only.
* Children will be taught how to carry and move around the site each time a tool is used. Walking with safety covers on at all times.
* Children will be briefed and reminded each time a tool is used, about the safety and safe handling.
* Safe working distances must be maintained at all times. This is the length of the child's arm plus length of tool all around them.
* If needed safety gloves should be worn on non-tooled hand.
* Children need to be shown how to use the respect position.
* Tools must have their safety protectors on at all times when not in use.
* All group members must wear suitable boots/shoes and outdoor clothing for the activity they take part in.

Storage: When not in use all tools are kept in the locked container

Be independent and

resourceful

Tools should be dried and cleaned by FS leader before they are put away. Tools to be oiled and stored after every 6 week block.

**Fire Safety Procedure.**

Fires are an important part of the FS sessions and the FS leader will ensure all group members participating in sessions with fires or Kelly Kettles, do so safely and with as little risk as possible.Fires will only be used when it is deemed appropriate to do so by the FS leader and when a number of conditions are met: If it is necessary for the activity,The weather needs to be calm no wind to avoid the fire blowing out of control and to avoid the smoke going onto the busy main road. (Light wind blowing away from the road is acceptable)The behaviour of the children and the experience of the children need to be taken into consideration. If these conditions are met then a small fire may be lit.

**The Fire Circle:**

* Children will be reminded how to walk around the woods.
* The fire circle will be a fixed part of the site and surrounded by sitting logs.
* Children must not walk across the fire circle, even if there is no fire.
* The sitting logs should be 1.5 m away from the fire circle.
* Children are to step over the sitting logs and place anything they are carrying behind the log walkaround the outside of the circle.
* No one will enter the inner fire circle unless directed to by an adult.
* The FS leader will be responsible for the lighting and supervising of fires.

**Safety equipment for fire use:**

* Fire blanket
* Water - in a bucket for immersing burns and a watering can for putting out the fire.
* Burn kit (in first aid bag) plus cling film.

**Fire Drill:**

* In the event of a fire becoming un controlled, the FS leader will coordinate the evacuation of group members.
* If necessary the emergency services will be called for assistance. The FS leader will then continue to monitor the situation.
* Fire exits out of Dark woods are: the main entrance (middle of the woods) and the far left of the woods. (If looking from school)

**Fire Drill in School:**

In the event of an un planned fire drill in school. School staff to take out a list of FS children with the register to ensure all children are accounted for. FS leader to ensure staff back at school know how many children remain in their care.

**Accident and Emergency Procedures**

First Aid:

Miss T Mawtus is the named first aider during Dark woods sessions. (Outdoor Paediatric first aid, 2 day course February 2015)

* Any injury or illness to be treated by FS Leader only.
* FS leader will delegate roles to other adults in the group these may include; ringing school, ambulances, taking the group to a safe place and ensuring others in the group are safe.
* Notify school office**0151 288 6630** and if necessary call for further assistance / emergency services**999**.
* Have medical details available in emergency bag including individual medical plans and any medication needed by individuals.
* All accidents, however minor need to be recorded in accident book.
* Follow up with parents in line with school policy.

**Contents of first aid kit:** Selection of bandages and dressings, plasters, burn gel, eye wash, gloves, antiseptic wipes, scissors, drinking water, tick removal tool.

FS Leader is responsible for ensuring items are replaced when used.

**Emergency bag:**

The fS leader is responsible for taking and carrying the emergency bag (**RED BACKPACK**) to and from the site. All adults and children are to be aware that this is called the emergency bag and know where to find it if it is needed.

**Contents of Emergency bag:**

* First aid kit, eye wash - sterile water.
* Burn gel, cling film.
* Survival blanket.
* Tissues
* Torch
* Whistle
* Small comfort toy.
* Accident book
* Spare clothing
* Medical information for children and helpers + any medication needed.
* Key for tool box
* Mobile phone.
* Emergency numbers.

**Safeguarding**

It is the responsibility of our school to ensure the safety of children and adults in our care.We are committed to creating an environment which is safe from abuse and any suspicion of abuse is promptly and appropriately dealt with. Please see school safeguarding policy.

**Staff and assistants:**

All school staff will have enhanced CRB checks done prior to working with the children. A copy of the CRB numbers will be held within the FS handbook.Parent helpers are requested to show an up to date CRB form before starting as a volunteer. Any parent wishing to participate on a more permanent basis will be asked to complete a school CRB check. Parents will be allowed to help out on FS sessions without a current CRB check but must work under the close supervision of school staff and will not be permitted to take children back to school for toileting etc.

Parent helpers should not put themselves or the children at risk and will not be left unsupervised with the children. Parents should also avoid being in a 1:1 situation with any of the children.

**Parental Consent**

Due to the nature of FS sessions, it is vital that the parents know what it is their children will be doing and what the risks and benefits are for participating in FS. Before the couse starts all parents will be invited to a presentation on what FS is and how it will be run. There will be an opportunity to ask any questions or voice any concerns. All parents must then sign a consent form to say whether they agree to their children being involved in the sessions. There will be a maximum of 15 in each session so places will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Consent will also be sought for photographs to be taken and used in publications. Parents will need to complete a medical form that states any medical needs of their child before starting the sessions. See copy of consent form appendix 1a)

**Ratios:**

The minimum adult to child ratios should be maintained. 1:5 to be increased if needed

due to the nature of the activities or to reflect changes in circumstances ie behaviour.

**Photos and Videos:**

Permission will be asked to take photos of the children during our FS sessions. This is obtained through our initial consent forms. Where permission is refused we aim to avoid taking pictures or faces will be blurred out of any promotional materials.

**Disclosures:**

When this occurs adults are advised to follow the procedures set out in the schools safeguarding policy. Any adult or staff member who finds that a child is telling them something that concerns them they should follow this course of action.

1, listen to the child. Ask NO leading questions, allow the child to lead the discussion.

2, Keep calm and offer reassurance. Accept what the child says without challenge.

3, Make NO promises, you cannot keep a secret and you should make this understood to

the child.

4, Inform the Safeguarding officer at school (Mr P Chapman or Miss E Moynihan)

5, Keep a written record of the conversation including the time, date and context the

conversation took place.

**Missing Child:**

* On discovery of a missing child use 1,2,3 where are you call procedure and recall the rest of the group.
* Check register / head count.
* Immediate search of area and notify school office for further assistance and an immediate search of the school with all available staff.
* Once school and immediate areas have been checked FS leader to phone for police assistance. (no more than 10 mins after noticing the child missing)

**Stranger or uninvited person:**

* Challenge intruder, asking them to leave immediately.
* Escort off site.
* Inform school office.
* If a child is involved they must be removed from the situation, the police may need to be called.

**Behaviour Policy and Procedure:**

At St Georges we consistently expect high standards of behaviour from both staff and children. All staff are to follow procedures as stated in the schools behaviour policy. All staff are to understand the rules before going into the forest and to encourage the children to follow the rules at all times. If any behaviour issues are not able to be addressed by adults in the group then the FS leader should be notified and the behaviour policy should come into force.

**Children should always:**

* Listen to adults in the group, and respond to 1,2,3 call immediately.
* Walk in and around the forest site.
* Be respectful to other people in the group and to the environment they are in.
* Follow the general rules as outlined in the ‘Things to remember’ section of the handbook.

**If children are not following the rules:**

* Talk to child involved, calm the situation.
* Remind the child of what is expected, what the rules are.
* Remove child to a calm, quiet place if necessary.
* Remove other children from area if at risk.
* Inform office, call for help if needed.
* Log incident.
* Inform parents / guardians after the session.
* Create / amend risk assessment if necessary.
* Close supervision and monitoring of behaviour.

Exclusion from the sessions will be as a last resort and only if FS lead deems the behaviour a risk to the child involved or other members of the group. Exclusion from the session is not to be used as a punishment for poor behaviour in school. It is widely believed that participation in activities such as FS will improve the behaviour of some children who struggle with their behaviour in school. This could be due to them havening the freedom to express themselves in the outdoors as well the sessions being largely physical in activities. As a school we believe that through running FS sessions the behaviour of all children especially the most demanding children can be improved back in school as they will look forward to our sessions and will improve in their attention, listening and following instruction skills.

**Confidentiality.**

All Dark Woods School Staff and volunteers are informed of the need to keep details of group members confidential

All discussions with participants of Forest School are confidential and must not be discussed with anyone outside of the Forest School establishment unless there is a Child Protection issue (see Child Protection Procedures for guidance).

All parental consent forms and medical details for each group are held by the Forest School Leader in charge of every session and accompany the group for each Forest School session. When the group are not attending Forest School their medical details and parental consent forms are kept within a locked cabinet within School office.

All medical records and confidential information will be shredded by the school when it is no longer required.

**Dark Woods Routine**

**Before session:**

FS leader will make a check of any tools and equipment needed for the sessions this includes counting the tools, checking for safety as stated in the tools procedures (see appendix)

FS leader to undertake a thorough sweep of dark woods site to check for any litter, glass, animal faeces etc. Any such items should be removed safely before the children arrive.

A written daily risk assessment will be recorded for each session. This will state what hazards were found and how they were dealt with.

A check of the weather conditions are also part of this daily check, if severe wind or stormy conditions a decision has to be made to cancel the session.

FS leader to brief adults on the activities for the day and any relevant information brought up in the daily risk assessment. Check that the ratio for adults and children are correct. Registers taken of children and staff present, and those staying behind.

All adults to remind the childrengo to the toilet and help them getting their outdoor clothing on. Waterproof trousers and coats, hats, gloves, wellies, sun hats, sun cream (depending on weather conditions)

Children to help adults take equipment to the site - using trolleys.Children to walk with adults up to the site and enter together.

**During the Session**

Set up safety equipment: emergency bag in prominent position, fire safety equipment in place. Tools in designated area.Hand washing facilities to be in place.Children to help where appropriate.

Children to all sit around fire circle at start of session. Play games to remind children of the basic rules in FS.

Children encouraged to engage in child initiated learning free time. Adult led activities outlined if needed. Identify resources and equipment available and session focus.

Adult helpers to assist in adult directed activities and supervise where necessary ie tree, log climbing, den making etc.

Adults to perform on-going risk assessments and to be vigilant for activities or objects that may cause a danger.Adults to report this to FS leader. FS leader to conduct regular headcounts or to advise adults to check head counts during the session.

Children come together for snack time - hand washing time.

Tidy up the area, leave site as we found it.

Have time to evaluate session, what they did, liked, didn't like.

**After Session:**

Collect resources in containers, count in tools and equipment.

Check forest is tidy.

All adults to conduct a head count and get the children lined up ready for the trip back to school.

Children to help take equipment back to school.

Remove outdoor clothing

Wash hands.

Feedback to parents if needed.

Discuss session with parent helpers, any observations or ideas for next steps planning.

FS leader to put all equipment away and clean / dry tools.

Daily equipment: Emergency bag, medical and contact details and emergency medicine.

Fire pit, fire box, fire blanket, bucket, water.

Insect box - magnifying glasses, collector jars, ID books and leaflets, pens paper.

Den Making - rope, tarpaulin, tape, scissors.

Hygiene - washing up bowl, soap, tea towel, wipes, antibacterial gel. Snack, cups.

**Parent Volunteers Policy**

Parent Volunteers are an important part of our Forest school team and essential to the smooth running of the sessions.

It is important that any volunteers know what it is that they are signing up for and that they believe and support the forest school ethos in our school.

Parent volunteers will have to attend the 'Dark Woods' briefing for parents in order to fully understand what it is they will be doing to support our children in the forest sessions.

General duties:

* Becoming familiar with the Forest School Handbook and all procedures contained within it.
* Take part in pre-session briefings from the Forest School Leader .
* Assisting groups with tasks such as den making, bug finding, making things.
* Promoting the ethos of forest school to raise self-esteem and confidence as an overarching aim.
* Reminding children of the rules, being good role-models.
* Assist in monitoring children when walking to and from Dark woods.
* Assisting children with their kit, including waterproofs.
* Observe, interact and extend the children's learning when needed, to feedback observations to forest school leader.

Parent volunteers will need to have read and signed that they agree to all the policies and procedures in the handbook before they can continue to assist in our dark woods sessions.

Parent volunteers must show current CRB check to forest school leader if volunteering for a few sessions. If Parents wish to become a permanent volunteer then they will be encouraged to apply for a school CRB check. Volunteers should be reminded to never let themselves be in a one to one situation with a child. If taking children back to school for the toilet they must be in a group of at least 2 children.

All Volunteers should sign in the visitor’s book prior to the sessions and sign out at the end. (Signing in book in main reception)

Parent volunteers are not permitted to use their mobile phones at any time.

**Ecological Impact**

During our Dark woods sessions we aim to limit the harm we do to our woodland, the local wildlife and plants. The site is likely to be affected due to increased footfall in the area causing compaction and disturbance. We aim to encourage the children to be responsible for the protection of our area and as far as possible enhance and develop the area – creating more animal habitats and teaching the children about the various plant and animal life. Please see our woodland Management plan for a 3 year overview for the woods.

**Complaints Procedure**

We aim to deal with any complaints or concerns as soon as they arise. Any complaint should be made in the first instance to the Forest school lead who will try and resolve the problem as soon as possible. If the complaint is not dealt with in a satisfactory manner then the next step would be to inform the Mr Chapman in school.

**Equal Opportunities**

Our School Mission Statement. ; ‘To Learn with Kindness, respect and friendship through God’s love’ Is an integral part of all that we do in Dark woods sessions.

We as a school are committed to help each child reach their full potential regardless of age, gender, background or disability. Our Dark Woods sessions are accessible to all children and can be accessed using wheel chairs with the 1:1 member of staff present. Any activities will be adapted according to need and age of the children.

**Cancellation Procedure:**

FS will cancel the session for the following reasons.

* Severe weather conditions - strong winds, thunderstorms.
* Leader illness/ absence.
* Incorrect staffing ratios.

If the session does have to be cancelled, the parents will be informed at drop off time and the children will have a normal session in school.