

Forest School – Spring 2024

In my autumn 2023 update, I focused on one of the six principles of forest school (the Nature principle) which addresses the importance of nurturing the relationship between the learner and the natural world. This time, I'd like to look more closely at the Risk principle:

Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

This principle is embraced at St Mary's forest school in many ways, most importantly through the use of tools. As Greenways Forest School, Hackney state in their online article – 'the use of tools in forest school sessions, particularly in the UK, offers children a unique and engaging learning experience.' At St Mary's we use a variety of tools: pruning saws, palm drills, hand drills, knives, steel strikers and secateurs to help children develop essential life skills. So what are the benefits of using tools in a forest school environment? I refer again to Greenways' interesting article to help answer to this:



Fine Motor Skills Development

One of the main benefits of using tools in a forest setting is the development of **fine motor skills**. Handling tools such as saws and hatchets requires a certain level of dexterity and control, which can help to improve children's hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills. This is especially important for young children, who are still developing these skills.

Problem-Solving Skills

In addition to developing fine motor skills, the use of tools in a forest setting can also help children to develop problem-solving skills. For example, if a child is using a saw to cut a piece of wood, they may encounter a number of challenges, such as the wood being too hard or the saw blade getting stuck. This requires children to think critically and come up with creative solutions to these problems.

Safety Awareness

Another benefit of using tools in a forest setting is the opportunity for children to learn about safety. When children are using tools, it's important that they understand how to use them safely. This can involve learning about proper tool maintenance and handling, as well as understanding the potential risks associated with using tools. By learning about safety, children can develop a sense of responsibility and develop the skills they need to use tools safely and effectively.

Sense of Accomplishment

The use of tools in a forest setting can also help to foster a sense of pride and accomplishment in children. When children are able to complete a task using a tool, such as building a shelter or carving a piece of wood, they can feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in their work. This can help to boost their confidence and self-esteem.

Respect for the Natural World

In addition to these benefits, the use of tools in a forest setting can also help children to develop a sense of respect for the natural world. When children are using tools, they are interacting with the natural environment in a meaningful way. This can help to foster a sense of appreciation and respect for the natural world, as well as an understanding of the impact that humans can have on the environment.

There is evidence to support the benefits of using tools in a forest setting. One study, conducted by the University of Glasgow, found that children who participated in a forest school program that included the use of tools had improved problem-solving skills and were more likely to engage in risky play.

Rest assured that here at St Mary's, safety is always a top priority when we are running forest school sessions and tool activities are always supervised 1:1 by trained adults who explain how to use the tool safely. Comprehensive risk assessments are done at the start of the year, we always take first aid equipment with us and we have numerous members of staff who are first aid trained, myself included. With all of this in mind, the use of tools in a forest setting becomes a fantastic opportunity for children to learn and grow in a hands-on and meaningful way. Have a look at the photos that show how much your children enjoy using tools amongst other things! Maybe try using some tools at home together... it's surprising what your children can achieve!

Mrs McInnes

Reference: <https://www.greenwaysforestschool.com/post/the-importance-of-tool-use-at-forest-school>



