



Forest School Training Guide

What is Forest School?

Forest School is a unique outdoor education programme run by qualified leaders. It gives children and young people the chance to explore, learn and discover at their own pace, developing their confidence and self-esteem in a safe and supportive space.

Forest School is different from most other forms of environmental education or outdoor learning in that it involves regular sessions in the same woods and the activities are mainly determined by the children and are predominately play based.

The skilful Forest School leader will use the children's own interests to extend their knowledge and skills, thereby increasing the next generation's appreciation and care of the natural world.

The ethos is shared by thousands of trained practitioners across the UK and beyond. Its roots reach back to early years pioneers in outdoor learning and across the sea to Scandinavia.

Why choose Surrey Wildlife Trust?

Promoting the reconnection between people and their natural environment is at the heart of Surrey Wildlife Trust's Forest School ethos, and this is reflected in all areas of our courses.

We recognise the vital importance of promoting an understanding of the natural world and see the Forest School training programme as an ideal medium for delivery. As the only local charity that is concerned solely with the conservation of all forms of wildlife, we have expertise in biodiversity protection, botanical surveys and habitat management plans. Being a local training provider, we are often able to support new leaders on a personal level throughout their training and in the establishment of their own Forest Schools.

We offer support in terms of free resources, regular mentoring sessions for students, onsite visits and observations. Our trainers are all experienced providers of environmental education and have been delivering Forest School programmes to children in Surrey from schools, nurseries, youth and community groups for many years.

We are active members of the Forest School Association (FSA) and the local Surrey group.

The Awarding body for our training courses is AIM.

In addition to Level 2 and Level 3 courses, we provide a CPD programme to support Forest School practitioners, which covers everything from First Aid to Tree Identification.



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Which level of training should I choose?

There are different levels of training in Forest School:

Level 2

Level 2 is designed to qualify the learner to become a Forest School Assistant, enabling them to take a proactive role in helping a Forest School Leader plan and deliver a Forest School programme and supporting the learners.

It involves:

- 4 days of training at our site
- Completing your portfolio workbook, with optional mentoring days
- 3 consecutive Forest School sessions in a Forest School setting of your choice
- 6 months to complete the course.

Level 3

Level 3 is designed to qualify the learner to become a Forest School Leader, able to set up and run a Forest School programme. Level 3 covers how to facilitate groups in a learner-centred way, and how to manage a Forest School site sustainably. You do not need to have the Level 2 qualification in order to complete Level 3.

It involves:

- 6 days of initial training at our site
- 1 individual training session in your setting
- 2 days skills assessment at our site
- Completing your portfolio workbook, with optional mentoring days
- Minimum 6 sessions programme in your own Forest School setting
- 12 months to complete the course.



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Learning Outcomes

Level 2

1. Understand the Forest School ethos, principles and holistic approach to learning and development.
2. Know how experiences can support learning and development at a Forest School – understanding characteristics of play and building a community of learning.
3. Be able to perform the role of Assistant at a Forest School in relation to the Forest School ethos, principles and criteria – planning, delivery, evaluation and observation of a learner.
4. Know how to reflect on own Forest School training.
5. Understand the structure of woodlands.
6. Know how to identify a range of flora and fauna and understand the importance of identification.
7. Be able to manage the ecological impact of a Forest School programme, identify and mitigate impacts.
8. Understand the role of risk assessment at Forest School and be able to carry out a site risk assessment and a risk-benefit assessment.
9. Be able to apply a range of practical skills relevant to a Forest School Programme eg fire, knots, tool use.

Level 3

All of the Level 2 learning outcomes, plus:

1. Understand the development of Forest School – influencing factors, networks, research.
2. Create a management plan for your woodland.
3. Create a handbook for your programme, including policies and procedures, communication strategy and rationale.
4. Demonstrate how to use practical skills with your client group.
5. Plan, facilitate and evaluate an introduction to Forest School programme of at least 6 sessions with your own client group, including observation of learners.
6. Understand relevant theories of learning and development and their application to Forest School.
7. Understand the impact of behaviour on learning and development at Forest School.
8. Understand the management of woodlands as a sustainable learning environment.
9. Understand the importance of the relationship between Forest School and the woodland environment – evaluate research on wellbeing and understand nature connectivity.



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Course Entry Requirements

Level 2 Award for Forest School Assistants (Accredited by AIM Qualifications)

- Participants should be over 18 years old and have some experience of working with young people or adults, for example youth workers, teaching assistants or teachers.
- All participants must be DBS checked.
- Be able to attend the 4 days of theory and practice.
- Be able to assist with the planning and delivery of 3 Forest School sessions.
- Be able to complete a workbook of evidence.
- Course commitment approximately 60 hours.

Level 3 Certificate for Forest School Leaders (Accredited by AIM Qualifications)

- The minimum age to start this qualification is 19 years old. Participants must have significant experience of working with young people or adults, for example youth workers, teaching assistants or teachers. The minimum age to practise as a Forest School Leader is 21 years old (this is a Forest School Association and Department of Education requirement).
- When leading a Forest School you will need a First Aid qualification, this can be either First Aid at Work (3 days) or Outdoor First Aid (2 days). Due to the outdoor nature of the work, an Outdoor First Aid qualification is strongly recommended, especially if forest school sessions take place in remote locations. We run First Aid courses throughout the year as part of our CPD for forest school practitioners, please contact adult.learning@surreywt.org.uk for more information.
- All participants must be DBS checked.
- Be able to attend the initial 6 days of theory and practice.
- Be able to set up and run a forest school programme of at least 6 sessions to a target client group within a woodland setting (your woodland setting must be located in Surrey). We will arrange an on-site individual training visit to your setting during 1 of your sessions.
- Be able to complete a portfolio of research and written tasks.
- Be able to attend 2 skills assessment days about 4 months into the Level 3 course - this will include cooking over a fire and shelter building. This is also a great opportunity to discuss any challenges, share tips and ask questions.
- Course commitment approximately 180 hours.



Forest School or Outdoor Learning?

We offer Leadership courses in both Forest School and Outdoor Learning, and we want you to take the course that is right for you and your setting. Both courses equip you with the skills and confidence to take your young people outside and reap the benefits that fresh air, full senses, and the freedom to move can bring.

Forest School is a radically different approach to education which has become very popular, with lots of schools and providers embracing it wholeheartedly. However, for some of our Forest School courses, we discover that for one or two students, it's sometimes a case of "mistaken identity" and what they really needed was to be on our Leader in Outdoor Learning course instead! The questions below should help you decide which course will give you the right training for your situation. "You" in the text below refers both to you personally and to your setting.

Are you able to provide regular outdoor sessions for students over a long period of time (e.g. fortnightly during term-time over a school year?)

- While we as the Wildlife Trust would love you to get the children outside as much as possible, Outdoor Learning Leaders are free to take their class(es) out once a week or once a year, whatever fits with their timetable and curriculum requirements.
- A core principle of Forest School is that it is a long-term programme. Perhaps because Forest School Leaders are asked to complete a programme of 6 sessions as part of their qualification, the idea has proliferated that blocks of 6 sessions are 'enough' to offer children. If you are seeking to introduce Forest School, we would encourage you to consider how you could implement much longer programmes, enabling children to connect to the natural world throughout the seasons.

During these outdoor sessions, do you need to stick to an adult-led agenda or are you able to follow children's interests?

- Outdoor Learning usually involves lessons designed by teachers to meet specific learning outcomes.
- Forest School is 'learner-centred'. This means that you as the Leader take on the role of facilitator, enabling your individual participants to deepen their own learning by doing what is interesting to them. This may be something you consider to be educational, but it may not – process, not product, is key.

Do you need to fulfil curriculum objectives directly in your outdoor sessions?

- Outdoor Learning Leaders design outdoor lessons with the same process and attention as they do indoor lessons. All subjects can be taught outdoors, at least in part, and often the learning will be deeper and the memory of it sharper when it's taken outside the classroom.
- While you may find that Forest School activities link back to the curriculum and inspire better work in the classroom, the sessions themselves are child-led and focused on holistic development rather than academic progress.



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Do you have an accessible outdoor space with some natural features (e.g. trees?)

- Outdoor Learning can be done anywhere, from a patch of tarmac to a vegetable garden to a woodland. The Leader in Outdoor Learning course teaches you to utilise parts of your school grounds you may not have considered before to enliven lessons in every subject area.
- You might think that to deliver Forest School, you need a forest. Well, the truth is that Forest School can be done in any (semi-)natural environment – a woodland is ideal because it's the biggest and best free toy shop there is, but the heart of Forest School is its philosophy, and that can be applied anywhere. Bear in mind though that if your space is limited in the resources it offers, you may need to import wood and other loose materials.

Are you willing to reframe classroom rules regarding behaviour?

- Outdoor Learning may require a re-evaluation of your ground rules to ensure they suit the wall-less classroom, but essentially the teacher-student dynamic remains unchanged.
- Forest School encourages more autonomy and responsibility for our own actions than is typically found in classroom environments. Learners are allowed more time to work through their challenges and are supported to recognise the consequences of their actions, rather than being instructed what to do and corrected if they deviate from the instruction.

Are you comfortable with your learners taking appropriate risks?

- Outdoor Learning may include riskier activities than you would engage in in the classroom, but this is at the discretion of the leader rather than an integral element of the programme.
- Learners being encouraged to take appropriate risks is woven into the ethos of Forest School, and sessions should provide children with regular opportunities to develop both their awareness of risk and increase their confidence in managing risk. This may even mean climbing trees, working with tools, or cooking on a fire, for example.

How much time are you willing to commit to your training?

- Leader in Outdoor Learning (Level 2) is a 2-day accredited course. You will have 6 months to complete a workbook and run 3 outdoor learning sessions.
- Forest School Assistant (Level 2) is a 4-day course leading to a nationally recognised qualification. You will have 6 months to complete a GCSE-standard portfolio and assist with 3 forest school sessions. When you achieve the qualification, you will be able to work as a Forest School Assistant (alongside a qualified Forest School Leader).
- Forest School Leader (Level 3) is an 8-day course, plus an onsite training session, leading to a nationally recognised qualification. You will have 12 months to complete an A-level standard portfolio and run a block of 6 forest school sessions. When you achieve the qualification, you will be able to work as a Forest School Leader.



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Thinking of booking onto a course?

Call or email us at our education centre if you would like to chat further about which course is right for you and your setting.

Surrey Wildlife Trust Education Centre

p: 01372 379 509

e: education.centres@surreywt.org.uk

Check our website **What's On** pages for the dates of the next course

<https://www.surreywildlifetrust.org/whatson>

Sign up to our **Educators' E-News** for latest news on dates and CPD:

<https://www.surreywildlifetrust.org/education-e-news>



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