



POLICIES AND PROCEDURES HANDBOOK



Last Updated: Sept 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Ark Smallholding Ltd aims to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all ages and abilities. We focus on the social and emotional wellbeing of our students while carrying out the day to day tasks of running a smallholding.

We do this by setting small achievable tasks to help build confidence, self-esteem, and awareness and knowledge of wildlife and their own natural environment.

We encourage a level of risk-taking, always under close adult supervision, and actively foster friendships and collaboration between all children and adults.

This booklet outlines the specific policies and procedures relating to The Ark Smallholding. Our safeguarding, risk assessments and health and safety policies are provided separately.

THE SITE

The Ark Smallholding is situated within 5 acres of green pasture next to St Oswald's Church in the parish of Collingham. We have access to local wildlife and river walks, a designated fire pit, horse paddocks, sheep and goat paddocks, a vegetable garden, chicken enclosure and a variety of other small animal enclosures.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

The Ark Smallholding sessions are organised and run by Helen McGloughlin.

All staff and volunteers have undergone an appropriate selection process to assess their skills and suitability for working with children and have been subject to enhanced DBS checks. All sessions are staffed by a qualified first aider and all staff have access to a recommended first aid kit.

A TYPICAL SESSION

A typical day at the smallholding involves meeting in the hut to have a chat and discuss the tasks that need to be carried out for the day and explain the processes involved. These can range from the simple feeding and cleaning requirements of the animals, to other more hands on tasks such as trimming hooves, brushing horses or helping with lambing.

Once the daily tasks have been explained and questions answered we head outside to start the daily feeding routine.

After the animals have been fed and watered, we take a short break for a drink and snack.

There are then generally some cleaning jobs to do, such as mucking out stables or cleaning out our small animal enclosures.

We then take a break for lunch.

For the remainder of the session we try to focus on activities based on the interests of the group. These can be forest school activities like campfire building and outdoor cooking, or river and wildlife walks. Or they can be arts and crafts based like painting or music.

ANIMAL WELFARE

As we are a working smallholding we raise a variety of livestock for the purposes of education, to provide a means of delivering therapies and for the production of meat, eggs and dairy. The welfare of our animals is incredibly important to us.

The site also serves as a habitat for a variety of rare and local wildlife.

The welfare of farmed animals is protected by the 'Animal Welfare Act 2006', we have a duty of care to our animals and must meet their needs:

- for a suitable environment and place to live
- for a suitable diet
- to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- to be housed with, or apart from, other animals (if applicable)
- to be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease

Unlike commercial farms, livestock at The Ark Smallholding have contact with large numbers of people, many of whom have no experience with livestock and may not know how to behave around farm animals. We monitor our animals closely for signs of distress.

FEEDING AND HANDLING LIVESTOCK

All our livestock have been handled as though they were pets. Although this means they may be calmer, friendlier and more inquisitive than their rural counterparts, they are still not domestic animals and need to be treated with caution. Children are at much greater risk than adults as they don't have the skills and experience to recognise risky situations.

- Children must not feed any of the animals without permission or supervision.
- Safe and appropriate handling techniques for each of our animals will be demonstrated by a supervising adult.
- Children handling livestock must be supervised at all times.

- After handling livestock, children must wash hands thoroughly to help stop the spread of any disease.
- Adults supervising the handling of livestock must be familiar with the signs of transmissible disease and prevent children from handling the livestock in the case of such an event.

CAMPFIRE SAFETY POLICY

Roasting marshmallows over an open campfire is one of our favourite forest school activities. It allows the children to enhance their learning and development with a risk-based activity. Encounters with risk help children manage their coping strategies and explore the world through real life experiences. However, this activity will only be carried out when leaders are confident the group can listen to instruction and follow safety procedures.

- Fires must only be lit within the designated fire pit area.
- There must always be a trained adult present while a fire is in progress or hot embers remain.
- Fires must only be lit by a group leader, or by children under close supervision of a trained adult.
- An adequate supply of water, sand or soil must be available to extinguish the fire.
- There must be a circular radius 2m, clear of obstacles and flammable materials, around the fire pit.
- Seating will be placed at least 2m away from the fire and children are not allowed to cross this inner circle.
- There should be no more than 2 people within the fire circle and next to the fire at any one time.
- The best position for cooking is on one knee allowing the child to move backwards away from the fire and remain in a stable position.
- Long hair should be tied back, and scarves removed.
- A fire blanket will be on hand should any clothes catch light.

USE OF TOOLS PROCEDURE

We use a variety of hand tools around the smallholding for carrying out daily tasks, from mucking out forks to repairing structures with hammers, drills and saws.

- When not in use, tools are kept in a secure area locked away and must only be used under adult supervision.
- Correct usage and handling techniques will be demonstrated before use.

- Use will be closely supervised until we are comfortable with the children's ability and behaviour to allow them independent use.
- We will demonstrate the two arms and a tool rule to establish a safe working environment around the tool user and bystanders.
- Tools are checked regularly and well maintained. Any faulty items will be repaired or disposed of.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

It is the responsibility of the designated safeguarding lead and accompanying adults to ensure the safety of children when visiting the smallholding. We are committed to creating an environment in which children are safe and free from harm. It is the role of the designated safeguarding lead to minimise the risk of abuse taking place:

- By educating children how to stay safe and speak out
- Taking appropriate action should any allegations arise
- Following our child protection and safeguarding policy, adults working within the sessions need to appreciate that when children feel comfortable and content, when their instinct to trust and risk take is encouraged, they may disclose information which they might otherwise keep to themselves. Any volunteer or member of staff who finds that a child is telling them something which concerns them should:
 - Listen to the child, allowing them to lead the discussion.
 - Keep calm and offer some reassurance and accept what the child says without challenge.
 - Make NO promises. You cannot 'keep a secret'. You should make it understood that there are limits to confidentiality at the start of the disclosure.
 - Inform the designated member of staff.
 - Keep an accurate, written record of the conversation including the date, time, the location and what was said by the child and yourself. Keep it secure and hand the record to the designated member for child protection as soon as possible. Any suspicion of abuse will be promptly and appropriately dealt with in accordance with the Safeguarding Children Policy.

Additional Policies:

'Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy'

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

We encourage children to develop their own risk management skills and will support them to become responsible for themselves and others around them. Children will be reminded of rules and safety if they are behaving in a dangerous manner. Ratios on the smallholding will be 1 adult to 3 children. Risk assessments of the site will be carried out before each visit and for the use of tools and equipment deemed appropriate for each group.

Additional Policies:

‘Health and Safety Policy Booklet’

FIRST AID PROCEDURE

- There is at least one qualified first aider on site at all times. First aiders will administer the care needed.
- The first aid kit is located inside the entrance to the main hut and checked regularly.
- Whilst dealing with a first aid incident, the leader will ensure the safety of all other children within the group by advising other adults present of the situation and ask them to monitor the other children. If necessary, all children will be taken indoors.
- Seek emergency help if needed.
- There will be a first aid kit carried by the first aid leader during river walks and campfire building sessions.
- Parents will be contacted, and accident report forms completed.
- Ensure all staff are aware of medical conditions of the children on site and inhalers, epi pens etc. are on hand.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

All children will be included with all activities and no form of discrimination will take place. Reasonable adjustments will be made to make it inclusive for all. Inclusion is a thread which runs through all our activities regardless of a child's ability, disability, gender, race, culture or background.

FOOD SAFETY AND HYGIENE

During cooking activities food hygiene regulations will be adhered to.

Before any food or snacks are consumed hands must be washed with soap and water or sanitised with alcohol sanitising gel.

Children must sit on the outdoor picnic benches or indoor seating area while eating.

Drinking water will be supplied.

TOILET FACILITIES

We have a single composting toilet on site. Children who need the toilet can go in pairs or be assisted by an adult.

Wet wipes and hand sanitising gel are available for personal use.

Sanitary towels are always available.

ADVERSE WEATHER PROCEDURE

As an outdoor learning environment, we follow the ethos of ... 'there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing!'.

However, it is also our responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children and adults.

- If a child arrives dressed inappropriately for the weather conditions we can provide waterproof over-suits, wellington boots, warm gloves and hats.
- During periods of prolonged wet or cold spells, we plan activities to keep the children warm and active with plenty of breaks to allow them to take shelter in the main hut.
- If there are periods of heat with risk of sun stroke or heat exhaustion, we keep physically demanding tasks to a minimum, staying hydrated and in the shade.
- In the case of extreme weather events such as flooding, thunder and lightning or heavy winds. We may have to close. Please see 'Emergency Closure Policy'.

SUN PROTECTION POLICY

The sun's rays are particularly strong over the summer, and they can cause damage children's skin.

- During forecasted sunny spells we ask that children bring with them a hat and their own labelled water bottle.
- We also ask that parents apply a high factor sun cream to their child before arriving and provide additional sun cream if required.

MISSING PERSON PROCEDURE

- As soon as it is discovered that the head count does not agree with that taken at the start of the session, the designated safeguarding lead must be informed.
- A further head count must be taken to ensure all other members are still present.
- An adult will take on a 10 minute search of the immediate area, and return to an agreed meeting place after that time.
- If the missing person is still not found after this agreed length of time, a second search party of members who know the site must be organised.
- If the missing person is still not located by this second search the police and parents and schools must be informed.
- After the incident is over, complete a full report using the 'Incident Report form'.

EMERGENCY PRODECURE

In the event of an emergency the following will happen:

- Emergency whistle blown
- Children must put all tools down safely and await further instruction
- Group leader will assess the situation and remove any immediate hazards.
- Staff will escort children to the designated assembly point.
- The designated assembly point is by the main gate entrance.

FIRE PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire that cannot be put out quickly and safely by a member of staff:

- Blow emergency whistle.
- Gather everyone together and conduct a head count, evacuate to the designated assembly point by the main gate entrance.
- Group leader to call fire brigade and give directions to site.
- Arrange for a member of staff to wait by the main road to direct emergency services.

This policy booklet will be reviewed annually, or before, should any incidents arise or laws and policies change.