



RISK ASSESSMENT – FOREST SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Last Review Date	October 2025
Policy Reviewer	Director – Kane Wilson
Version	V2 14/10/25
Changes since last review	-
Next Review Date	October 2026 (unless an incident occurs requiring an update to procedures)
Covers	Children, staff and volunteers

INTRODUCTION

This risk assessment identifies potential hazards and control measures for Forest School and woodland activities at The Ark Smallholding Ltd. It ensures the safety and wellbeing of children, staff, and volunteers while maintaining outdoor learning opportunities. All procedures align with Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Leeds Local Authority, and Forest School Association guidance. The focus is on managing risk sensibly rather than eliminating it, fostering safe exploration and hands-on learning.

GENERAL WOODLAND RISKS & CONTROLS

Hazard	Persons at Risk	Risk (Before Controls)	Control Measures	Risk (After Controls)
Slips, trips, and falls on uneven ground or roots	Children, staff, volunteers	Medium	Pre-visit site inspection. Clear obvious trip hazards. Ensure appropriate footwear (boots). Mark rough terrain. Supervise movement.	Low
Falling branches or trees	All	High	Inspect trees before session. Avoid working under unstable branches. Mark 'no-go' zones where needed.	Low
Insect stings or bites (bees, wasps, ticks)	All	Medium	Check for nests during site sweep. Long clothing recommended for tick bite season. Know allergies; have epipens available.	Low

Poisonous plants, nettles, brambles, fungi	Children	Medium	Identify and mark hazardous plants. Educate children not to touch unknown species. Use gloves when necessary.	Low
Exposure to weather (heat, cold, rain)	All	Medium	Check forecast. Ensure suitable clothing, shelter, hydration, and sun protection.	Low
Getting lost or separated	Children	Medium	Define boundaries. Use buddy system. Maintain supervision ratios. Use radios or mobiles for communication.	Low

DEN BUILDING (ROPES, BRANCHES, TARPS)

Hazard	Persons at Risk	Risk (Before Controls)	Control Measures	Risk (After Controls)
Rope entanglement, trips, or rope burns	Children, staff	Medium	Use low-stretch ropes. Supervise tying/untying. Avoid slack lines and tangles.	Low
Falling branches or collapsing structures	All	Medium	Use only sound branches. Test stability before entry. Avoid high winds.	Low

Tarps or shelters collapsing	All	Medium	Secure with strong knots and stakes. Avoid overhead tension points.	Low
Splinters or sharp branches	Children, staff	Low	Use gloves. Trim sharp ends if possible. Supervise closely.	Very Low

NATURE WALKS & IDENTIFICATION (PLANTS, FUNGI, TREES)

Hazard	Persons at Risk	Risk (Before Controls)	Control Measures	Risk (After Controls)
Contact with poisonous or allergenic plants/fungi	Children	Medium	Identify and avoid hazardous species. No foraging unless approved by leaders.	Low
Trips and slips on paths	All	Medium	Use clear routes. Walk at controlled pace. Highlight hazards.	Low
Allergic reactions (pollen, spores)	All	Medium	Check medical records. Carry antihistamines if required.	Low

FIRE LIGHTING & OUTDOOR COOKING

Hazard	Persons at Risk	Risk (Before Controls)	Control Measures	Risk (After Controls)
Burns from fire, sparks, hot utensils	Children, staff	High	Fire circle boundary. Clear area of debris. Only adults light fires. Fire blankets, extinguisher and water available.	Medium
Smoke inhalation	All	Medium	Position group upwind. Move away if smoke intense.	Low
Food hygiene / contamination	All	Medium	Use clean equipment. Wash hands before handling food. Cook thoroughly.	Low
Fire spreading to surroundings	All	Medium	Clear area of combustible material. Keep water or extinguisher nearby. Never leave fire unattended.	Low

TOOL USE

Hazard	Persons at Risk	Risk (Before Controls)	Control Measures	Risk (After Controls)
Cuts or lacerations	Children, staff	High	Only trained users handle tools. Supervise closely. Wear gloves and goggles.	Medium
Unsafe tool handling or throwing	All	High	Demonstrate safe technique. Establish tool zone. One user per area. Close supervision. Tools used on 1:1 basis. Tools stored securely away when not in use.	Medium
Tool breakage or malfunction	All	Medium	Inspect before use. Maintain tools regularly. Replace damaged tools.	Low

GENERAL CONTROL PROCEDURES & PROVISIONS

- First aid: At least one qualified first aider on site with a stocked kit (including burn and sting treatments).
- Emergency plan: Clear procedure for contacting emergency services and managing missing persons.
- Supervision ratios: Age-appropriate and activity-based ratios maintained at all times.
- Site inspections: Carried out before every session to identify new hazards.
- Medical and allergy information: Gathered before participation and reviewed regularly.
- PPE and clothing: Weather-appropriate clothing, boots, gloves, eye protection when needed.
- Training: All leaders trained in fire safety, tool use, and risk assessment.
- Behaviour expectations: Clear safety rules communicated at each session.
- Environmental respect: All litter removed, minimal impact on flora and fauna.
- Documentation: All incidents and near misses logged and reviewed. Assessment updated annually or post-incident.