
PLAY POLICY

CONNECTION, GROWTH, EXPLORATION, SUSTAINABILITY

"Play is the highest form of research " Albert Einstein

At **Canopy Forest School** we understand how important and valuable "play" is and we treasure, celebrate and honour the learning that takes place through child initiated play. We recognise that "play" is a process which encompasses a broad variety of behaviours and contexts. We understand that play is an instinctual behaviour and is the most vital component for human development. We know that "play" is the means through which all animals express their joy in life, explore, learn, and discover the world and that it creates the right conditions for children and adults alike to test the world, to make sense of it, to grow the skills needed to communicate, to negotiate and express their inner selves.

At **Canopy Forest School** "play" is an essential part of our learning programme. During each session all participants have the opportunity to engage in free, self-initiated play. The role of the forest school leader during this time takes on many different forms depending on the activities and the needs of the participants. We follow, observe and watch the intrinsic play motivations of the group and then reflect, build and scaffold these and develop them in future sessions. The Forest School Leader has to know when to step in, when to advise and when to not. At **Canopy Forest School** we believe it is important to protect the child's need for risky play. To allow this to take place we use risk/benefit assessments which are clearly communicated and shared with participants. This allows us to help our learners to move inside and out of their comfort zones.

Each **Canopy Forest School** session is unique and will follow the ideas and interests of the group. During our reflection time at the end of each session we discuss what we have learnt and then we plan how we would like to extend our learning further. Consequently, our planning is organic in form and the journey that the children take us on is always exciting, inspiring and child driven. We promote holistic development and support the "whole" child in their learning through play and this is achieved through a long-term process of regular sessions which are 2 hours long.

At **Canopy Forest School** we use a flexible learning structure which starts with a welcome and a collective group meeting where our plans for the session are shared over a snack and a drink. We then inspire the group usually using a story which is based on the chosen theme and raise a powerful question in their minds. Then we partake in an active activity/game based on the theme which helps us to move and bond as a group. After this we usually break off into focus groups where we take part in activities that are based on the chosen theme. The learners then break off into child initiated play. Finally we come back together for a snack and a drink and then move into our reflection time and plan what we would like to explore in our next session. This session structure can move and alter depending on the activities, weather, feelings and motivations of the group.

Throughout all sessions we draw upon the natural environment that surrounds us and our core values of connection, growth, exploration and sustainability are entwined and threaded through all that we do.

Canopy Forest school is a community where participants learn to work as a team, support and nurture each other's growth and development. Play is the main vehicle through which our learning takes place and the child is at the heart of each session.