

Practical Tips for Forest School Practitioners

Tools, Fire, Cooking, Weather, Sites & Activities

Tools - general

- We advise that you don't use tools or light fires in your initial sessions.
- Become confident in yourself and your abilities before teaching others.
- If you have no previous experience of using tools, constructing shelters, lighting fires etc, ***practice, practice, practice***.
- For woodland management skills BTCV, National Trust etc have volunteer weekends.
- This is not a tools based programme, using tools is only a small part of what we do.
- Children need to become confident in the environment before becoming confident with tools.
- Train children to use and become confident with tools. This could be by initially introducing safe alternatives eg using *potato peelers to peel vegetables* such as cucumbers, carrots and potatoes! (*never* use potato peelers on wood, use knives on wood – it is a matter of using the appropriate tool for the appropriate material and job), hack saw blades in saws for small pieces of wood.
- Before using tools make sure that they are safe and sharp.
- Be inventive, work out exciting ways of introducing new ideas, concepts and curriculum.

Before using any tools always:

1. Risk assess tools, working area and activity.
2. Check tools before use and sign out to individuals.
3. Tool training and assessment of individuals should always take place.
4. Keep a safe working distance.

Practical Tips - Saws

Before using the saw always:

1. Risk assess tools, working area and activity
 2. Check tools before use and sign out to individuals.
 3. Tool training and assessment of individuals should always take place.
 4. Keep a safe working distance.
 5. Use an A-frame to hold the work steady and protect the holding hand
- Use new bow-saw blades yourself to wear them in before use with young children.
 - Safety boots and hard hats must be worn when coppicing, thinning and felling.
 - Use hard hats if any spars, poles or branches extend above head height.
 - Maintain that there is always a safe working distance and clear flat area
 - Saw covers should always be on while being carried or in a bag.
 - Never wear a glove on the tool hand, a safety glove should be worn on the non tool hand if this hand is not protected against saw slip (remember that things can sometimes slip in a gloved hand).
 - Never cut on flat surfaces. Use an A-frame or a natural V in a tree to avoid movement.
 - Be aware of the effects of compression and tension in timber and make sure the saw cut is opening to avoid blade jamming.
 - Never leave a saw flat on the ground, hang them up with the covers on, on an A-frame or leaning against a tree. Do not leave hanging in a tree.
 - Store in a dry place either strong bag or locked cupboard
 - There are many types of bow-saw on the market our recommendation is Bahco as these have excellent covers, a good clearance and more robust than others on the market.
 - Folding pruning saws need to lock securely when folded out for use and it is good to get a pruning saw that locks when folded away.

Practical Tips - Axes

Remember:

1. Safety boots and should be worn when axing if it involves any swinging of the axe etc.
 2. Risk assess axe, working area and activity. Good solid chopping block at appropriate height.
 3. Check axe before use, handle, sharpness and head is not loose in handle
 4. Sign out to individuals.
 5. Tool training and assessment of individuals should always take place.
 6. Keep a safe working distance.
- When splitting timber, making mallets etc with an axe work on a chopping block
 - Use the correct stable stance
 - Axes should always be carried in a tool bag or a hessian sack with the head cover on.
 - Never wear a glove on the tool hand, a safety glove can be worn on non tool hand (remember that things can sometimes slip in a gloved hand).
 - Don't use axes to coppice, use a saw.
 - Never leave an axe on the ground, bury the whole blade in the end grain of a chopping block or put cover on and put back in toolbag.
 - Only use axes with metal wedges in that keep the head on the handle

Practical Tips - Knives

Before using any tools always:

1. Risk assess tools, working area and activity.
 2. Check tools before use, sharpness and knife blade and sign out to individuals.
 3. Tool training and assessment of individuals should always take place.
 4. Keep a safe working distance.
 5. Always work away from the body.
- We recommend fixed blade or folding knives with a strong spring and a non slip handle,
 - Safety boots should be worn if any large objects can fall on feet.
 - Knives should always be sheathed when not in use or being carried.
 - Never wear a glove on the tool hand, a safety glove can be worn on non tool hand (remember that things can sometimes slip in a gloved hand).
 - Never cut towards yourself.
 - Keep the holding hand as far away from the blade as possible but always maintain control of material to allow cuts to be safe.
 - If using a knife when sitting avoid cutting motions towards legs.

Practical Tips - Weather Conditions

- Use a local forecast
- A rough guide is don't enter woods in winds of force 4 increasing to 5.
- In windy conditions keep a watchful eye on the surrounding tree branches.
- Be aware that it is possible for tree limbs and branches to drop on any day.
- Check Young Peoples clothing before going out on cold days.
- Carry spare clothing and a shelter sheet.
- If the children are getting too cold either warm them up through exercise, shared shelter, sitting by the fire or going inside.
- Storms and lightning should cancel sessions.

Useful websites:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/>

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/>

Practical Tips - Fires

- Establish a fire area and train young people how to approach and leave before lighting a fire.
- Site your fire carefully; avoid tree roots, peat soil & deep leaf mould, rough ground etc.
- Don't light in windy or tinder dry conditions.
- Have at least 1.5m between fire surround and seating logs.
- Seating logs should have emergency escape routes between them
- Keep fires approx 4m from any shelter built from easily combusting materials
- If a shelter is designed to have an integral fire establish safety rules and multiple exits before use (check design with an expert and have keep a record of this)
- **Never leave a fire unattended.**
- Fix fire surround and seating to avoid accidents.
- Have water and fire blanket or a soaked bath towel in a bucket available to extinguish the fire. Also hang a fire blanket near the fire.
- Have a bucket full of fresh water for immersing a burn (fire brigade and first aid recommendations, if trained keep burn gel and cling film in first aid kit).
- If young people have fires restrict flame height to equivalent of your knee.

Practical Tips - Cooking

- Risk assess working area and activity.
- Food hygiene regulations should be followed.
- Carry antiseptic wipes or soap and water for hand washing.
- Split open food and check it is cooked before consumption.
- When cooking with a stick use green wood and remove bark before cooking using a knife and scraping action.
- Don't re-heat cooked food.
- Avoid foods that need a lot of fat to cook in case of pan fire.
- Get young people to tuck in long hair and tie, roll up or fasten loose clothing

Practical Tips - Sites

- Be aware of environmental impact and rotate sites.
- Every site should have an environmental survey.
- Every site should have an environmental plan.
- Risks assess every site annually and keep a record
- Carry out a four level Risk assessment of the site every day before groups arrive.
- Record this daily risk assessment and keep in a safe place.
- Continually carry out visual risk assessments.
- A safe zone of 30m diameter should be established around any base camp and continuously used areas.
- Safe entry and exit pathways should be established.
- Use of the woodland surrounding the safety areas should only be considered after a weather check and risk assessment.
- If you have water on site make appropriate risk assessment and control actions.
- Avoid public access if possible. If you have public access on your site make appropriate risk assessment and control actions.
- Avoid large drops or holes on site. If you have drops or holes on your site make appropriate risk assessment and control actions.
- Always have some way of communicating with schools, parents other leaders etc.
- Log nearest access to phones, doctors, hospitals and establish the nearest point for ambulance entry to your site.
- Be first aid trained and carry an emergency rucksack with first aid kit, young peoples medical details.

Practical Tips - Activities

- Risk assess all activities.
- Establish boundaries in the wood by using 123 where are you, boundary games etc.
- Establish routines i.e. dragging long sticks and not carrying them, where and how to sit.
- Play games to establish rules i.e. come to me, stop, never be out of sight of an adult, strangers in the wood etc.
- Plan an activity from the child's perspective, i.e. get down on your knees and work out the approach, doing the activity, and leaving the activity.
- Keep activities small and simple, Don't set young people or yourself unattainable targets.
- A completed activity is only an outcome, understand and plan the process.
- Be flexible, If it's not working change it.
- Observe young people during the process, this is when we learn about them.
- All activities can adapted to be age specific.