

The Benefits of Forest School to the Emotional Well-being of Children

The natural environment offers children opportunities to establish the deep thought processes that are needed in order to assimilate into their lives, the causes and consequences of distressing occurrences. These processes need time, space, peace and freedom, which are less available in the indoor environment. Creating a forest school environment and ethos for children in early years settings helps children to develop the strength and resilience needed to cope with emotional difficulties.

Children taking part in forest school sessions quickly show evidence of a greater emotional maturity. Great empathy for the living environment may emerge, with much tree hugging and care taken not to disturb animals and growing plants. The children frequently show concern for each other and take responsibility for ensuring each other's safety, they may remind each other of areas of risk or spontaneously use familiar safety games to ensure everyone remains within hearing.

Stronger bonds often emerge between children, resulting in greater support for each other, both at forest school and during regular early years sessions.

The Benefits of Forest School to the Physical Well-being of Children

A forest school environment gives children the space and freedom that may not otherwise be available in their lives. Children are growing all the time and need space to experiment with their changing size and strength. Some children's lives have little space to move, houses are smaller, parents are more cautious, classrooms are too full and expectations within them are restrictive, but developing strong bones and muscles requires space for physical challenges and extended movement opportunities.

The greater movement possible outdoors helps to limit the effects of the poor nutrition that is the diet of many children in a country where salt, sugar and chemical laden things that were once food, are actively promoted as good for the very young.

The natural environment promotes the development of children's learning through their senses and can help to protect those senses. The latest research, for example, shows evidence that spending time engaged in activities in a natural environment helps to prevent the deterioration of children's eyesight.

Many behavioural difficulties have their roots in children's struggles with physical and emotional issues. While the ethos and expectations of forest school sessions may help children to control the consequences, the natural environment offered by forest school can also go some way to enabling children to cope with the causes of their behavioural difficulties.

Meeting the Requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage through Forest School.

A Unique Child

'Every child is a competent learner' but children have preferred learning styles. Forest school activities provide opportunities for visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning within each activity.

Forest school activities are flexible, enabling all children to achieve with a degree of challenge, building confidence and self-esteem and encouraging the perseverance that will help to build resilience.

Positive Relationships

'Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships.' Forest school activities encourage children to form bonds with children and adults as they work together to achieve.

Children learn the need to take responsibility for themselves and for others as well as developing their sense of self preservation.

Just as the natural environment can be calming and reassuring to children so can it also for the adults involved. We should not underestimate the impact of this on children's behaviour and expectations, children easily pick up on adult's emotional state – calm adults can equal calm children.

Enabling Environments

'The Environment Plays a Key Role in Supporting and Extending Children's Development and Learning.' At forest school children have an environment that is rich, varied and ever changing. Less restrictive than a classroom it enables confident exploration in a safe but challenging environment.

Forest school enables children to develop their awareness of safety and to take control of their environment.

Learning and Development

'Learning and Development are Equally Important and are Interconnected'

Children learn best when they are engaged in active learning and possibility thinking, exploring, 'what can I do with this?', 'How can I do this?'

Forest school is full of opportunities for exploration, which is at the heart of learning. Children discover connections and find new and innovative ways of doing things and achieving, supported by adults to think critically.

Forest school and forest school activities support the holistic nature of children's exploration and learning.