



Forest School Handbook

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Version Control

Version	Change(s) made	Changed/Reviewed by	Date	Next Review Date
V2.1	Added parent helper information to Visitor Procedure section	Managing Director	23 Nov 2025	23 Nov 2026
v2.0	Removed risk assessments and tool skills cards to ClickUp repository.	Managing Director	19 Nov 2025	19 Nov 2026
v1.1	Added Rocket Stove Risk Assessment and Paddling Risk Assessment	Managing Director	9 Mar 2025	9 Mar 2026
v1.0	Initial version	Managing Director	15 Oct 2024	15 Mar 2025

All Alaria CIC Forest School staff and volunteers should understand and adhere to the handbook's policies and procedures to maintain a safe and effective environment. Handbook reviews are required annually for leaders, every two years for regular supporting adults, and before initial participation for occasional volunteers or visitors. New staff must read the handbook within a month of starting. All individuals must sign a declaration confirming they have read and understood it, with updates reviewed within two weeks of notification. This policy promotes accountability, consistency, and high-quality sessions.

Please see the [Alaria CIC Forest School Handbook Reading and Review Policy](#) for further information.

[Declaration Form](#) to be completed by all supporting adults with a regular role.

1. Vision statement

At Alaria CIC, we believe that everyone – child or adult – is capable of growth, resilience, and discovery when guided by the wisdom of nature.

Our vision is to nurture an inclusive, compassionate space where individuals of all ages are supported to explore, learn, and connect with the natural world at their own pace.

Our Forest School practice is rooted in the six core principles of the Forest School Association:

- **Regular, long-term engagement** in natural settings.
- **Connection with nature** through woodland and outdoor experiences.
- **Holistic development** that builds confidence, creativity, and independence.
- **Supported risk-taking** that encourages safe challenge and learning.
- **Qualified practitioners** committed to reflective, ongoing professional growth.
- **Learner-centred processes** that place relationships and curiosity at the heart of every session.

At Alaria, we live these principles by offering consistent, learner-led experiences that foster confidence, imagination, and belonging.

Our approach is person-centred and neuro-affirming – every participant’s unique strengths, needs, and interests are valued. Through meaningful play, collaboration, and time in nature, we encourage self-expression, problem-solving, and empathy.

We believe play is not just an activity, but a pathway to self-awareness and growth. By connecting deeply with nature and each other, we cultivate lifelong learning, resilience, and care for the world around us.

Together, we are growing a community rooted in curiosity, kindness, and environmental stewardship.

2. Behaviour

We believe that each child is unique, capable, and deserving of respect. Our behaviour policy is guided by the principles of Child-Centred Play Therapy (CCPT), which emphasises empathy, unconditional positive regard, and a non-judgemental approach to each child’s individual needs. We understand that all behaviour is a form of communication, and our aim is to create a safe, nurturing environment where children feel valued, heard, and supported.

3. Environmental

a. Ecological Impact

Our Forest School runs in private gardens and paddocks. One of the principles that underpin Forest School is awareness of the environment and the promotion of sustainability. We aim to minimise our environmental impact and foster a sense of stewardship in the children who participate. Our conservation policy focuses on nurturing and protecting the biodiversity of these areas while maintaining their natural beauty.

- **Path Management:** We will establish defined pathways to prevent soil compaction and protect sensitive areas of the garden and paddocks. Children will help to maintain these paths, learning about responsible land use.
- **Biodiversity Protection:** The gardens and paddocks house a variety of plant and animal species, which we will actively protect by promoting a deep respect for all living things. Children will be encouraged to observe, not disturb, wildlife and plant life.
- **Sustainable Practices:** We will use **recycled and eco-friendly materials** wherever possible. All tools and resources will be selected with sustainability in mind, reducing our carbon footprint and promoting responsible resource use.
- **Minimising Fire Impact:** Fire use will be limited and controlled. We will restrict the collection of dead wood, which plays a critical role in maintaining healthy soil ecosystems and habitats for small animals and insects.
- **No Picking or Damaging Plants:** A strict “**Don’t Pick It, Don’t Lick It**” rule will be enforced, ensuring that nothing growing naturally is picked or damaged. This will foster an appreciation for plant life and its role in the ecosystem.
- **Animal and Plant Care:** We will involve children in caring for the gardens’ and paddocks’ existing flora and fauna. This may include light gardening, maintaining hedges, or learning about the importance of plants in sustaining animal life.
- **Waste Management:** All activities will conclude with a clean-up, ensuring that the site is left as it was found. Waste will be minimised and recycled wherever possible, and any materials brought on-site will be removed responsibly.

b. Landowner’s Agreement

The Managing Director is also the landowner and so permission to use the site is given.

c. Woodland Management

Our current Woodland Management/Stewardship Plan can be found [here](#).

4. Equality

We are committed to providing an inclusive and supportive environment where all children, regardless of their abilities or needs, can take part to the fullest degree. We believe that every child has the right to access outdoor education and therapeutic activities, and we are dedicated to breaking down barriers that might prevent children from attending and fully participating in our sessions.

Our policy and procedures ensure that all children, as far as possible, have equal access to our forest school environment. The policy outlines practical steps to accommodate sensory, social, communication and physical challenges, such as providing sensory-friendly spaces, using visual aids where helpful, and offering some structured activities. Individualised support plans are developed in partnership with parents to meet each child's unique needs. The goal is to create an inclusive, respectful, and nurturing environment where all children can participate and thrive.

[Alaria CIC Forest School Inclusion and Accessibility Procedure](#)

5. Health & Safety including Accident & Emergency (RIDDOR)

We recognize that taking appropriate risks is essential for a child's growth and development, as a life without risk would lack the opportunities needed to build resilience, confidence, and essential life skills. We ensure that all risky activities are thoroughly risk assessed to maintain a safe and enriching environment and engage in dynamic risk assessment during activities. We encourage children to be involved in age-appropriate dynamic risk assessment so that they learn to assess benefits and risks for themselves.

[Alaria CIC Forest School Accident and Emergency Policy](#)

6. Cooking including food hygiene

We recognise the value in supporting children to develop a strong connection with food – a source of nurture and connection with the earth. To this end, we will provide campfire cooking activities. Alaria CIC Forest School maintains high food hygiene standards in relation to the purchase, storage, preparation and serving of food.

- Forest School Leaders will hold a current Food Hygiene Certificate.
- A full Activity Risk/Benefit Assessment will be completed for any activity involving the preparing and/or consuming of food items. This will include attention to the

purchase, storage, preparation and serving of any food items to prevent growth of bacteria and food contamination.

- Cooking on the campfire will be undertaken with the closest possible attention to food hygiene guidelines.
- Food/ingredients will be stored at correct temperatures prior to the session and checked to ensure they are in-date and not subject to contamination by pests, mould etc. All ingredients requiring cooling must be used within 2 hours of being removed from the refrigerator.
- All utensils, crockery etc. will be checked to ensure they are clean before use.
- Waste food will be carried back to High Plewlands Farmhouse in sealed bags and disposed of in food waste bins.
- When food items are to be consumed during a Forest School session, running water in an outdoor sink with environmentally friendly soap will be provided for handwashing. Paper towels and a lidded bin for disposal will be provided. Children and adults will be required to wash their hands immediately prior to preparing any food items and/or eating.
- All medical records must be checked to ensure that no food item or ingredient is given to a child or adult with an allergy to it, and that any religious or moral observances required by group members are respected.
- Cooked food will not be re-heated.

Risk Assessments:

[Campfire Cooking Risk Assessment](#)

[Fire Hut Cooking Risk Assessment](#)

7. Extreme Weather

At Alaria CIC, we value year-round outdoor learning and adapt our sessions thoughtfully to changing weather and seasonal conditions. Safety and wellbeing always come first, and decisions about adapting, relocating or cancelling sessions follow our organisational Weather & Seasonal Conditions Policy rather than staff judgement alone. For full details of how we assess weather, define safety thresholds and make cancellation decisions, please see our [Alaria CIC Forest School Weather & Seasonal Conditions Policy](#).

8. Fire

Campfires play a key role in Forest School sessions and are a part of many activities. Sitting together around the fire, children learn, listen, sing, prepare, and share food cooked on the flames, creating a deeply communal and magical experience. This gathering

stimulates their senses, ignites their imagination, and nurtures their enthusiasm. Through these sessions, children also gain a strong understanding of fire safety and responsibility, learning the importance of respecting fire, recognising its dangers, and building a safe fire using the fire triangle (oxygen, fuel, and heat). Our primary goal is to ensure that all children and adults involved in Forest School activities can participate around campfires in a way that is safe and minimises any health risks.

Neighbouring properties to High Plewlands Farm are used to campfires at the property and so no advance warning is necessary of the intent to light a fire.

Documents:

[Alaria CIC Forest School Fire Safety Policy](#)

[Campfire Risk Assessment](#)

9. First Aid

Safety is central to everything we do at Alaria CIC. All outdoor sessions, including Forest School, are supported by at least one practitioner who holds an up-to-date Outdoor First Aid qualification, and our team follows clear procedures for responding to injuries, illness or emergencies in outdoor environments. We carry appropriate first aid equipment, complete regular checks and maintain robust communication systems on site. Full details of our training requirements, emergency procedures and equipment standards can be found in our [Alaria CIC Outdoor Working First Aid Policy](#).

10. Manual Handling

Our equipment is stored on site and so there is no need to transport equipment in. Tools are stored as indicated on the relevant [Practical Skills Tool Card](#). When equipment needs to be moved on site (e.g. axes moved from the tack room to their point of use), they should be carried as per the instructions in the Practical Skills Tool Card or transported in a trolley if a number of items are required and in order to avoid heavy lifting.

11. Risk Management

Alaria CIC aims to foster a safe, supportive learning environment where children and learners can develop their ability to assess and manage their own risks. We believe that encountering and managing risk is a vital part of the learning experience in a forest school setting, and our approach focuses on balancing the potential risks with the benefits of engaging in outdoor activities.

Our risk management process is based on the risk-benefit approach, which evaluates potential hazards in light of the positive outcomes for learners. In this context:

- A **hazard** is defined as anything with the potential to cause harm.
- **Risk** refers to the likelihood of harm occurring and the severity of its consequences.

Our aim is to identify and manage any significant risks, where significance is determined by the probability of an incident occurring and the potential impact of that incident.

[Alaria CIC Forest School Risk Management Policy](#)

All policies and procedures will be reviewed annually; risk assessments are reviewed bi-annually.

12. Risk Assessments

All Forest School activities at Alaria CIC are underpinned by careful, ongoing risk assessment. We use a combination of written risk assessments and dynamic, in-the-moment judgement to keep children and adults safe while still allowing for meaningful, adventurous learning. Our risk assessments are updated regularly, reviewed seasonally and adapted to reflect site conditions, specific activities and the needs of individual participants. Full and current versions of all Forest School risk assessments can be accessed in our [Risk Assessments Folder](#).

13. Tools

The use of tools is an integral part of our sessions, fostering practical skills, independence, and a connection to the natural world. We ensure that all tool use is carefully supervised and conducted in a safe, designated area with age-appropriate guidance and ratios tailored to individual abilities. Through tool-based activities, participants develop confidence, fine motor skills, and problem-solving abilities while learning to respect and handle tools responsibly. Safety is paramount, with thorough checks, clear instructions, and adherence to our “blood bubble” rule to maintain a secure working environment.

Tools We May Use:

- **Knives:** For whittling, carving, and splitting small pieces of wood.
- **Loppers:** For cutting branches up to thumb thickness.
- **Bow Saws:** For cutting larger pieces of wood.
- **Axes:** For splitting logs and creating pointed stakes.
- **Wooden Mallets:** For hammering stakes or splitting wood in conjunction with an axe.

- **Kelly Kettles:** For boiling water safely during outdoor sessions.
- **Rope and String:** Used in conjunction with tools for den building or tying knots.

[Practical Skills Tools Cards](#)

14. Transport

Families are responsible for bringing children onto the site and handing them directly to the Forest School Leader at our designated waiting area to the side of the car port (the paved area). Once all participants have arrived, a member of staff leads the group on foot through the main garden gate. Latecomers should be delivered directly to the Forest School Leader. At the end of the session, children are walked back to the waiting area and handed back to parents or carers as parents or carers make themselves known to staff. Full details of our arrival, handover and collection expectations can be found in our [Transport & Drop-Off Procedure](#).



15. Safety Around Substances

We keep children's safety at the centre of everything we do. Although Forest School rarely involves any substances that could pose a risk, we do follow COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) guidance to make sure everyday items are used and stored safely. We use natural firelighters rather than chemical alternatives, and any items

such as hand sanitiser are kept securely out of children's reach and stored safely between sessions. Our full [COSHH Risk Assessment](#) explains how we manage and minimise these risks.

16. Insurances

Alaria CIC is fully insured for all Forest School and outdoor activities. Our Public Liability and Employers' Liability cover is provided through Birnbeck Insurance and is kept up to date as part of our organisational compliance. Copies of our current insurance certificate are available on request.

17. Welfare

a. Clothing

Participants are required to wear appropriate clothing suited to outdoor activities and varying weather conditions. This includes waterproof jackets, trousers, sturdy footwear, and weather-specific layers (e.g., hats, gloves, sun hats). Families will be informed of recommended clothing prior to sessions to ensure children are well-prepared for outdoor exploration. We will have some spare clothing available (such as hats, gloves and waterproofs) in the event that a child arrives without suitable clothing.

b. PPE

We consider both gloves and waterproofs as Personal Protective Equipment and participants should have access to both. Where necessary, both will be provided if weather conditions dictate their necessity, and a participant arrives without them.

We will provide safety goggles for eye protection and dust masks if participants are sensitive to sawdust (e.g. Bowsaw activity).

c. Toileting

Before each session, children will have the chance to use the toilet in our indoor playroom area. During sessions, a compostable toilet is available in the stable block. If your child has any worries or difficulties around toileting, please let the Forest School Leader know so that we can make a supportive plan and ensure they feel comfortable and able to enjoy their session fully.

d. Food & drink

We will supply drinks and snacks at each session and will always have gluten-free and dairy-free options available. We will supply food and drinks that are properly prepared and comply with any child's dietary or culture requirements. Eating represents a social time for the children and is a time when adults promote the importance of healthy eating; children are gently encouraged to try all foods, but never forced to eat. We encourage snack time to be a calm time with quiet conversation where children develop independence through making choices and feeding themselves.

Food and Drink – procedures

- Drinking water is always available for children when they need it; it is kept at a height where they can help themselves
- Registration forms ask for any food and drink allergies or special health or cultural requirements these are then kept in the Forest school folder for all staff to be aware of
- We take care not to provide food containing nuts and are extra vigilant where we have a child who has a known allergy to nuts
- We organise our snack time so that they are a social occasion for the children and the staff together
- We promote age/stage appropriate independence at snack time by allowing children to serve themselves and make choices
- We vary our snacks dependent upon the time of year and the choice of cooking method within Forest school
- When eating and drinking children need to be stationary (reduces choking and accident risk, helps with waste management and preventing accidental littering, reduces risks of food contamination, promotes mindful eating, respect for the environment, social interaction, and gives a sense of routine)
- Cutlery used is appropriate to the children's age and ability
- Food is stored at the correct temperature between 0-5 degrees
- Food is checked beforehand to ensure it is in date
- Waste food is disposed of daily and composted whenever possible
- We have separate bowls for hand washing, washing up and cleaning
- Children do not have unsupervised access to the cooking facilities.

18. Safeguarding and anti-bullying

At our Forest School, safeguarding encompasses our commitment to protecting the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of all participants, staff, and volunteers.

This includes creating a safe and nurturing environment where children are free from harm, abuse, neglect, or discrimination. Our approach to safeguarding goes beyond addressing bullying; it ensures that all individuals feel respected, valued, and supported in their learning and development. Through clear policies, vigilant supervision, and an inclusive ethos, we strive to empower participants to thrive while maintaining the highest standards of care and protection.

Lead Person (Protecting Vulnerable Groups)

Dr Heather Bond is the organisational Lead Person for PVG Scheme Membership and will be responsible for ensuring all staff and volunteers are members of the PVG scheme.

[Alaria CIC Safeguarding Policy and Procedure](#)

[Alaria CIC Forest School Anti-Bullying Policy](#)

19. Data Protection, personal data handling, confidentiality

We are committed to handling personal data responsibly and in compliance with data protection laws, including GDPR. Our [Data Protection and GDPR Policy](#) ensures that all personal information, whether collected during forest school activities or therapeutic services, is securely stored and accessed only by authorised individuals. On-site, physical records (e.g., attendance sheets or consent forms) are kept in a locked, portable file box, while digital records are encrypted and stored on password-protected devices. Access to personal data is strictly limited to staff members who require it for their role. Data is only shared externally when legally required or with explicit consent.

20. Complaints and Grievance

We are committed to fostering a positive and supportive environment where concerns can be addressed promptly and fairly. Our [Complaints and Grievance Policy](#) ensures that any issues raised, whether by participants, parents, or staff, are handled transparently and professionally. We encourage open dialogue to resolve matters informally where possible. However, a clear process is in place for submitting formal complaints or grievances, ensuring thorough investigation and appropriate action. Complaints focus on service-related concerns raised by external stakeholders, while grievances address workplace issues raised by staff or volunteers. By adhering to this policy, we maintain trust, accountability, and the well-being of everyone involved in our Forest School.

21. Lost or missing child

The safety and well-being of the children in our care are paramount. Our policy outlines the procedures to follow in the unlikely event that a child goes missing during a forest school session. We will ensure that all children are adequately supervised and accounted for regularly. We will maintain a high staff-to-child ratio to ensure the safety of all children.

[Alaria CIC Forest School Lost or Missing Child Policy and Procedure](#)

Forest School Leaders should carry the printable card for Lost or Missing Child Procedure in their waist bag: [Printable Card for Lost or Missing Child Procedure](#).

22. Social Media protocols

We aim to ensure that Alaria CIC's social media use reflects our values, protects participant privacy and presents a warm, professional image of our work. Occasionally, we may share photographs or videos of sessions; however, children's faces and any identifying features are always covered with stickers or otherwise obscured unless explicit consent has been given. We follow families' individual media preferences, use secure devices and accounts, and share content thoughtfully to avoid over-posting. Our approach ensures that Alaria CIC's social media presence remains ethical, safeguarding-led and grounded in positive community engagement.

Please refer to [Alaria CIC Social Media Policy](#) for further details. All information will be managed in accordance with the UK GDPR guidelines. For additional information, please see our [Data Protection and GDPR Policy](#).

23. Staff, ratios, roles and responsibilities

Staff Ratios

Staffing shall be at a maximum ratio of 1:6 (1 adult to 6 children). For Therapeutic Forest School groups we will have a maximum ratio of 1:4. Ratios may vary depending on the type of session. For example, family sessions may require a higher ratio of adults to children.

Forest School Leaders

The Forest School staff team is comprised of 2 Forest School Leaders:

- Dr Heather Bond, PhD, MBACP (Accred)
- Cheryl McCann Smithson, BSc (Hons)

These staff are PVG cleared as part of their present roles and are both therapists with many years of group learning provision experience.

The Forest School Leaders will:

- Plan and lead forest school activities that align with the ethos and principles of forest schooling, sharing plans with relevant staff prior to sessions.
- Record observations of learners' processes and group dynamics, and review findings with staff.
- Reflect regularly on personal practice and pursue ongoing professional development.
- Adhere to the policies and procedures outlined in the handbook.
- Deliver basic training to staff and volunteers in the Forest School ethos, handbook use, in-depth health and safety assessments and basic practical tool use, such as knot-tying and working with a fixed-blade knife. This training will prepare staff to support the Forest School Leader in supporting the learners but will not be intended for solo use: especially in areas of tool and fire use; all activities will be directed by the Forest School Leader.
- Ensure welfare needs (e.g., toilets, appropriate clothing, handwashing, food, and drink) are met.
- Check tools and equipment for safety and store them appropriately.
- Conduct site assessments, daily risk assessments, and risk-benefit analyses.
- Perform ecological surveys of the site to monitor environmental changes.
- Maintain up-to-date certifications, including:
 - Outdoor First Aid
 - Food Hygiene
- Regularly review and update all forest school policies.

Responsibilities of Assistants and Helpers

- Understand and adhere to the core principles of Forest school.
- Read and follow relevant policies, procedures, and risk assessments.
- Support Forest School Leaders in planned activities.

24. Visitor Protocol

At Alaria CIC Forest School, we warmly welcome the contributions of visitors to enrich our sessions while prioritising the safety and well-being of both our participants and visitors.

[Alaria CIC Forest School Visitor Policy and Procedure](#)

Parent Helpers

Sometimes a parent joins a session as a Parent Helper, attending alongside their own child and offering light, supportive involvement. Parent Helpers help create a warm, welcoming atmosphere by joining in play, helping children settle, assisting at snack time and supporting the flow of the group. They do not take responsibility for other children or supervise higher-risk activities, but their presence adds greatly to the sense of community during sessions.

Parent Helpers receive a short on-the-day briefing and follow our simple expectations to help keep everyone safe. Full details are available in our [Parent Helper Guidance Sheet](#).

25. Communication/Information

We believe clear and open communication is key to ensuring a positive and enriching experience for all participants. Before the start of a Forest School program, parents, carers, and young people will receive comprehensive information outlining the purpose, structure, and practical requirements of the sessions. This includes:

Purpose of Forest School: An explanation of our Forest School ethos, focusing on fostering resilience, confidence, and connection with nature through hands-on, outdoor learning experiences.

Program Duration and Schedule: Details of the program's length, session dates, times, and locations to ensure families can plan accordingly.

What to Bring: A checklist of essential clothing and items needed for each session, such as waterproof jackets, trousers, sturdy footwear, hats, gloves, water bottles, and snacks.

Health and Safety: Information about our commitment to safety, including supervision ratios, risk assessments, and emergency procedures.

Consent and Medical Forms: Parents/carers will be asked to complete consent forms, provide medical information, and highlight any dietary requirements or additional support needs their child may have.

Updates and Communication: Regular updates on the progress of the program will be shared with parents/carers via newsletters, emails, or informal feedback. Parents/carers will also be informed via WhatsApp or SMS of any changes to session plans due to weather or unforeseen circumstances.

26. Daily Operating Procedure

Before the Session

- The Forest School Leader plans each session in a flexible, child-led way, drawing on observations, interests and learning from previous sessions rather than using formal session plans.
- Any activities that may require specific risk–benefit considerations are reviewed beforehand, and staff familiarise themselves with anything relevant for that day.
- Staff keep up to date with the latest seasonal Site Risk Assessment and make any quick adjustments needed on the day.
- The Forest School Leader checks that enough adults are present and that weather conditions allow the session to proceed safely.
- Main areas of the site are given a quick check for animal mess or anything that needs to be cleared.
- The fire pit, seating areas and tarpaulins are prepared as needed, depending on weather and planned activities.
- A brief Daily Risk Assessment is completed before the group leaves the waiting area.
- Any equipment needed is gathered and taken to the site.
- Children arrive following the Transport Procedure and gather in the waiting area, where staff carry out gentle, informal emotional check-ins as part of the welcome.

During the Session

- A headcount is taken on arrival at Forest School and whenever the whole group comes back together.
- Staff use dynamic risk assessment throughout the session, responding to changes in weather, environment or group needs to keep everyone safe while allowing for exploration and appropriate challenge.

After the Session

- A final headcount is taken before returning to parents and caregivers.
- Staff check tool bags to ensure everything is accounted for.
- Once children leave, the Forest School Leader cleans and maintains tools as necessary, returns them to the locked outdoor storage box, and checks the site for any lost property.
- A short Session Evaluation is completed to record key observations, reflections and anything useful for future planning.

Site Map (boundary marked in red):

