



Laois Forest School Policy and Procedure Manual

Note: This is a working document that will be reviewed and amended at regular intervals.

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B) Vision Statement

Laois Forest School envisions a thriving community deeply connected to nature, where individuals of all ages cultivate a profound respect for the environment, fostered through immersive outdoor experiences. We aspire to be a beacon of holistic education, empowering learners to develop resilience, curiosity, and stewardship, shaping future generations equipped to cherish, protect, and sustain our natural world. Laois Forest School aims to give all children the opportunity to learn through positive hands-on experiences outside and to develop holistically to their full potential. Laois Forest School works towards increasing learners' confidence and self-esteem while teaching them skills in the outdoor world and allows them to appreciate the wider, natural outdoor environment.

C) Policies and Procedures

Health and Safety Statement for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

At Laois Forest School, our paramount aim is to provide a safe and secure environment for all participants while fostering a deep connection with nature. Our health and safety policy is designed to mitigate risks, prioritise well-being, and ensure that every individual can fully engage in our outdoor activities with confidence.

Responsibilities:



Leaders/Volunteers/Staff: It is the responsibility of all leaders, volunteers, and staff members to uphold and implement our health and safety protocols at all times, prioritising the welfare of participants.

Participants: Participants are expected to follow instructions provided by leaders and adhere to safety guidelines to ensure their own well-being and that of others.

Ratios/Supervision:

Appropriate ratios of leaders to participants will be maintained during all activities to ensure effective supervision and prompt assistance if needed (Ratio Child: staff = 1:4 under 5's; 1:6 under 8's; 1:8 above 8's. There will always be at least 2 adults present at all times. Max 16 learners per group). Leaders will continuously monitor participants and the environment to address any emerging risks.

Risk Benefit Assessments (RBAs):

Tools/Activities:

Prior to engaging in any activity involving tools, equipment, or adventurous play, comprehensive risk benefit assessments (RBAs) will be conducted to identify potential hazards and implement appropriate control measures.

Site/Daily Checklist:

A thorough site inspection and daily checklist will be completed before each session to ensure that the environment is safe and suitable for planned activities.

Safe Equipment and Tools:

All equipment and tools used at Laois Forest School will be regularly inspected, properly maintained, and appropriate for the age and skill level of participants. Safety guidelines for tool use will be clearly communicated and enforced.

**Emergency Procedure:**

An emergency procedure will be in place, including protocols for incidents such as injuries, adverse weather conditions, or other unforeseen circumstances. Leaders are trained to respond promptly and effectively to emergencies, and all participants will be briefed on emergency procedures.

Incident/Accident Reporting:

Any incidents or accidents that occur during Forest School activities must be promptly reported to designated leaders or staff members. Detailed documentation of incidents will be maintained for review and analysis.

Health Conditions/Medication/Allergies/Intolerances:

Participants are required to disclose any relevant health conditions, allergies, medication requirements, or intolerances prior to participating in activities. Leaders will take necessary precautions and have appropriate measures in place to accommodate individual needs.

Review of Policy and Procedure/RBA Manual:

Our health and safety policy, including risk benefit assessments (RBAs), will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect best practices and ensure ongoing compliance with safety standards. All leaders and staff will receive training on updated procedures, and the RBA manual will be revised accordingly.

Equal Opportunities Policy for Laois Forest School**Aim/Policy:**

Laois Forest School is committed to providing equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic. Our aim is to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels respected, valued, and empowered to participate fully in our activities.



Discrimination:

Discrimination of any kind, including direct or indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or bullying, will not be tolerated at Laois Forest School. All staff, volunteers, participants, and visitors are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect, fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding.

Additional Needs:

We recognise that individuals may have additional needs that require specific support to fully participate in Forest School activities. Laois Forest School is committed to identifying and addressing these needs to ensure that everyone can access and enjoy our programmes on an equal basis.

Supports:

Laois Forest School will provide appropriate support and accommodations to individuals with additional needs, as far as reasonably practicable. This may include but is not limited to, providing alternative formats for communication, modifying activities to accommodate physical or sensory impairments, and offering assistance with mobility or personal care requirements.

We will work closely with participants and their families or caregivers to understand their specific needs and preferences, and to develop tailored support plans where necessary. Our goal is to ensure that all individuals can fully engage in our activities and benefit from the rich learning experiences offered by Forest School.

At Laois Forest School, we believe that diversity enriches our community and enhances the learning experience for everyone. We are committed to promoting equality of opportunity and celebrating the unique talents and contributions of each individual, fostering a sense of belonging and belonging for all.



Play Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

At Laois Forest School, we believe in the inherent value of play as a fundamental aspect of childhood development. Our play policy is founded on the principle that play is essential for learning, creativity, social development, and overall well-being. We are committed to creating an environment that fosters playful exploration, curiosity, and imagination, where children are encouraged to learn through hands-on experiences in nature.

Role of Leaders and Volunteers:

Leaders and volunteers at Laois Forest School play a crucial role in facilitating and nurturing play opportunities for participants. They are responsible for creating a safe and supportive environment where children feel empowered to engage in free and unstructured play. Leaders and volunteers will observe, listen, and actively participate in children's play experiences, providing guidance when needed while allowing ample space for self-directed exploration.

Encouraging Play:

We recognise the importance of providing diverse play materials and natural resources to stimulate children's creativity and imagination. At Laois Forest School, we encourage open-ended play experiences that allow children to interact with their environment in meaningful ways. Through activities such as building dens, climbing trees, imaginative role-play, and exploring natural habitats, children are encouraged to develop problem-solving skills, resilience, and a deep appreciation for the natural world.

Risky Play Procedures and Management:

Risky play is an essential component of children's development, fostering resilience, confidence, and risk assessment skills. At Laois Forest School, we embrace the benefits of risky play while prioritising safety and risk management. Leaders and volunteers are trained to assess the level of risk associated with play activities and to implement appropriate safety measures to minimise hazards.



We believe in empowering children to engage in age-appropriate risky play experiences, such as climbing, balancing, and exploring uneven terrain, under close supervision and with clear guidance on safe practices. Risky play procedures are designed to strike a balance between allowing children to take calculated risks and ensuring their safety and well-being at all times.

By embracing the principles of play-based learning and providing opportunities for adventurous exploration in nature, Laois Forest School aims to nurture confident, resilient, and creative individuals who are well-equipped to navigate the challenges of the world around them.

Behaviour Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

The Behaviour Policy of Laois Forest School is rooted in creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment where all participants can engage in learning and play with confidence. We are committed to promoting positive behaviour through clear communication, mutual respect, and constructive support, while also addressing challenging behaviour promptly and effectively.

Code of Conduct:

Leaders/Volunteers/Staff: All leaders, volunteers, and staff members are expected to adhere to a professional code of conduct, demonstrating respect, patience, and empathy towards participants at all times.

Participants: Participants are encouraged to follow behavioural guidelines that promote cooperation, kindness, and respect for themselves, others, and the natural environment.

Ratios:



Appropriate ratios of leaders to participants will be maintained during all activities to ensure effective supervision and to facilitate positive engagement. Leaders will monitor interactions and intervene promptly if necessary.

Positive Communication:

We promote positive communication techniques, including using "I statements" to express feelings and needs clearly. Clear expectations will be communicated to participants, and tasks and goals will be set at achievable levels, with opportunities for child involvement in decision-making processes.

Anti-Bullying Policy:

Laois Forest School has a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying in any form. Bullying behaviour will be addressed promptly and appropriately, with emphasis on fostering a culture of kindness, empathy, and inclusivity.

Behaviour Management:

- **De-escalation Techniques:** Leaders will employ de-escalation techniques to calm challenging situations, including using calm and reassuring language, maintaining a calm demeanour, and providing space for individuals to regulate their emotions.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Conflict resolution strategies will be employed to facilitate peaceful resolution of disputes, including encouraging dialogue, promoting empathy, and seeking mutually acceptable solutions.
- **Separation of Behaviour from the Child:** Behaviour management strategies will focus on addressing the behaviour while affirming the worth and dignity of the child.
- **Body Language:** Leaders will utilise positive body language to convey empathy, understanding, and respect.
- **Open-Ended Questions:** Open-ended questions will be used to encourage reflection, problem-solving, and communication.



- **Empathy and Active Listening:** Leaders will demonstrate empathy and engage in active listening to understand the underlying causes of challenging behaviour and provide appropriate support.

Bad Conduct or Serious Misbehaviour:

Instances of serious misbehaviour, such as running away, aggression, or endangering others, will be addressed promptly. Consequences will be implemented as necessary, with an emphasis on promoting learning and understanding rather than punitive measures.

Reporting and Documenting Behaviour:

All incidents of challenging behaviour will be documented in writing, including details of the incident, actions taken, and any follow-up actions required. Reports will be kept confidential and shared only with relevant parties.

Review:

Regular reviews will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of behaviour management strategies and to identify areas for improvement. Additional support will be provided to individuals or groups as needed, with a focus on promoting positive behaviour and fostering a supportive learning environment.

Weather Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

The Weather Policy of Laois Forest School aims to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants by providing guidelines for managing various weather conditions during outdoor activities. Our policy is designed to minimise risks associated with extreme weather while maximising opportunities for outdoor learning and exploration.

Extreme Weather Conditions:



Laois Forest School acknowledges the potential hazards posed by various extreme weather conditions, including:

- Sun: Risk of sunburn and heat exhaustion.
- Heavy Rain: Risk of hypothermia, slippery terrain, and reduced visibility.
- Snow/Cold: Risk of hypothermia, frostbite, and slippery conditions.
- Wind: Risk of falling branches, objects, or individuals, as well as wind chill.
- Lightning: Risk of electrocution and injury due to lightning strikes.

When Do We Cancel? Beaufort Scale:

Decisions regarding cancellation of Forest School activities due to extreme weather will be based on the Beaufort Scale, which measures wind speed and its effect on the environment. Activities may be cancelled or modified if weather conditions reach levels deemed unsafe for participants and leaders. Additionally, other extreme weather conditions such as heavy rain, snow, or lightning may also prompt cancellation or modification of activities. Laois Forest School session will also be cancelled if there is an orange or red wind warning or in red rain warning and will update attendees by email the day before a session if it is cancelled.

Responsibilities to Keep Participants Safe:

In the event of extreme weather conditions, leaders and volunteers at Laois Forest School have the following responsibilities to ensure the safety and comfort of participants:

- Providing shelters, such as tents or tarpaulins, to protect participants from sun, rain, or wind.
- Ensuring participants are dressed appropriately for the weather, with suitable clothing and footwear to provide warmth and protection.
- Providing additional warmth through blankets, hot drinks, and communal fire where permitted and safe.



- Monitoring weather conditions throughout the session and making informed decisions regarding continuation, modification, or cancellation of activities based on safety considerations.

By adhering to this Weather Policy, Laois Forest School aims to create a safe and enjoyable outdoor learning environment for participants, while also fostering an appreciation for nature in all its diverse weather conditions.

Cancellation Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

The Cancellation Policy of Laois Forest School is established to ensure clear communication and appropriate procedures are followed in the event of cancellations of Forest School activities. Our aim is to prioritise the safety and well-being of participants and staff while minimising disruption and inconvenience caused by cancellations.

Communicating Cancellations:

Laois Forest School is committed to providing timely and accurate information regarding cancellations to all stakeholders, including participants, parents or guardians, volunteers, and staff. Communication channels may include:

- Email notifications
- Social media announcements

Procedures:

In the event of cancellation of Forest School activities, the following procedures will be followed:



- **Assessment of Conditions:** Leaders and staff will monitor weather forecasts and assess environmental conditions to determine if cancellation is necessary due to safety concerns.
- **Decision Making:** The decision to cancel activities will be made by designated leaders or staff members based on safety considerations, taking into account factors such as extreme weather, hazardous conditions, or unforeseen circumstances.
- **Notification:** Once a decision to cancel activities has been made, all stakeholders will be notified promptly through the designated communication channels. Efforts will be made to provide advance notice whenever possible (generally by email the day before a session).
- **Rescheduling or Refunds:** Depending on the circumstances of the cancellation, Laois Forest School may offer options for rescheduling activities to a later date or provide refunds for cancelled sessions. Participants will be informed of any alternative arrangements or refund processes.
- **Client cancellation:** If a client is no longer able to attend a Laois Forest School session and requests a refunded ticket, the following refund policy applies:
 - Notice of cancellation 2 weeks in advance (10 full working days): 100% refund (excl. booking fee).
 - Notice of cancellation 1 week in advance (5 full working days): 50% refund (excl. booking fee).
 - Notice of cancellation 4 days or less in advance of a session: 0% refund.

By adhering to this Cancellation Policy, Laois Forest School aims to maintain transparency, accountability, and effective communication in the event of unforeseen circumstances requiring the cancellation of Forest School activities.

Food Safety and Hygiene Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:



The Food Safety and Hygiene Policy of Laois Forest School aims to ensure the health and well-being of all participants by providing guidelines for the safe preparation, handling, and consumption of food during Forest School activities. Our policy prioritises hygiene, dietary requirements, and responsible food management practices to minimise risks and promote a positive dining experience in the outdoor environment.

Dietary Requirements/Allergies:

Laois Forest School recognises the importance of accommodating dietary requirements and allergies to ensure the safety and inclusion of all participants. Leaders and staff will collect information regarding dietary restrictions and allergies prior to Forest School sessions and take appropriate measures to provide suitable alternatives or avoid potential allergens when preparing and serving food.

Hand Hygiene:

Maintaining high standards of hand hygiene is essential for preventing the spread of germs and foodborne illnesses. Leaders and staff will promote regular handwashing among participants and themselves, especially before handling food, after using the toilet, and after handling potentially contaminated items.

Safe Food Preparation and Storage:

All food preparation activities at Laois Forest School will adhere to safe and hygienic practices to minimise the risk of food contamination. This includes:

- Using clean and sanitized utensils, cutting boards, and surfaces for food preparation.
- Ensuring that perishable foods are stored at appropriate temperatures to prevent spoilage.
- Following guidelines for cooking and reheating food to ensure it reaches safe internal temperatures.
- Monitoring expiration dates and discarding expired or spoiled food items promptly.

**Waste Management:**

Laois Forest School is committed to responsible waste management practices to minimise environmental impact and maintain cleanliness in outdoor spaces. Leaders and participants will be encouraged to reduce, reuse, and recycle waste whenever possible. Proper disposal methods will be employed for food waste, packaging materials, and other waste generated during Forest School activities.

Wild Food/Foraging Policy/Toxic Woods:

Foraging for wild food can be an enriching experience, but it also carries risks associated with identifying toxic plants and mushrooms. Laois Forest School will implement the following guidelines:

- Leaders and staff will undergo training in wild food identification and safety before engaging in foraging activities.
- Participants will be educated about the risks associated with foraging for wild food and instructed to only consume plants and mushrooms that have been positively identified as safe by trained leaders.
- Avoidance of toxic woods or plants known to cause skin irritation or allergic reactions.

By adhering to this Food Safety and Hygiene Policy, Laois Forest School aims to promote the health, safety, and enjoyment of all participants while fostering a culture of responsible food management and environmental stewardship in the outdoor setting.

Environmental Considerations Policy for Laois Forest School**Aim/Policy:**

The Environmental Considerations Policy of Laois Forest School is founded on our commitment to environmental stewardship, conservation, and sustainable practices. Our



aim is to foster a deep appreciation and respect for the natural world among participants while minimising our impact on the environment during Forest School activities.

Wildlife Awareness:

Laois Forest School places a strong emphasis on wildlife awareness and education, encouraging participants to observe, respect, and appreciate the diverse flora and fauna found in natural habitats. Leaders and staff will provide opportunities for participants to learn about local wildlife species and their habitats, while also promoting responsible interactions and wildlife conservation practices.

Environmental Impact Plan:

Laois Forest School will develop and implement an Environmental Impact Plan to assess and mitigate the environmental impact of our activities. The plan will include measures to minimise waste generation, conserve water and energy resources, protect biodiversity, and reduce carbon emissions. Regular reviews and updates to the Environmental Impact Plan will be conducted to ensure ongoing compliance with environmental best practices.

Woodland Management Procedures:

Laois Forest School is committed to responsible woodland management practices that promote ecosystem health and vitality. Leaders and staff will follow guidelines for sustainable forestry, including selective tree harvesting, invasive species management, and habitat restoration initiatives. Our aim is to maintain healthy woodland ecosystems that support biodiversity and provide optimal learning environments for participants.

Leave No Trace Policy:

Laois Forest School adheres to the principles of Leave No Trace, which advocate for minimising human impact on natural environments. Leaders and participants will follow guidelines for responsible outdoor behaviour, including:



- **Pack in, pack out:** Participants will carry out all waste generated during Forest School activities and dispose of it properly.
- **Respect wildlife:** Participants will observe wildlife from a distance and avoid disturbing natural habitats.
- **Stay on designated trails:** Participants will stay on designated paths and avoid trampling vegetation or causing soil erosion.

Land Owners Agreement:

Laois Forest School has established clear agreements with the family landowners regarding access to and use of natural areas for Forest School activities. We will respect and abide by any stipulations or guidelines provided by landowners to ensure the protection and conservation of the land.

By adhering to this Environmental Considerations Policy, Laois Forest School aims to instil a sense of environmental responsibility and stewardship among participants, while also promoting the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources for future generations.

Staff Issues – Grievances, Health & Safety at Work Policy

Aim/Policy:

The Staff Issues – Grievances, Health & Safety at Work Policy of Laois Forest School is established to ensure the well-being, safety, and satisfaction of all staff members. Our aim is to provide a supportive and safe working environment where staff feel valued, respected, and empowered to address any concerns or issues they may encounter.

Policy and Procedures/Risk Assessments:

Laois Forest School is committed to implementing robust policies and procedures to promote staff health, safety, and well-being in the workplace. This includes:



- Conducting regular risk assessments to identify and mitigate potential hazards in the work environment, including those associated with Forest School activities.
- Providing appropriate training, resources, and support to enable staff to carry out their duties safely and effectively.
- Establishing clear protocols for reporting and addressing health and safety concerns, including procedures for incident reporting and emergency response.

Grievances/Reporting:

Laois Forest School recognises the importance of providing staff with a mechanism to address grievances and concerns in a fair and transparent manner. Staff members are encouraged to report any grievances or issues they may encounter, including but not limited to:

- Health and safety concerns
- Workplace harassment or discrimination
- Conflicts with colleagues or supervisors

Grievances can be reported through designated channels, such as:

- Direct communication with a supervisor or manager
- Submission of a written complaint to HR or management
- Utilisation of an anonymous reporting system, if available

All grievances will be taken seriously and handled promptly, confidentially, and impartially. Staff members will be provided with support and guidance throughout the grievance resolution process, and efforts will be made to address concerns and find satisfactory resolutions.



By adhering to this Staff Issues – Grievances, Health & Safety at Work Policy, Laois Forest School aims to foster a positive work environment where staff feel empowered to raise concerns, contribute to continuous improvement, and thrive in their roles.

Communication and Parents' Logistics Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

The Communication and Parents' Logistics Policy of Laois Forest School is established to facilitate effective communication between the Forest School and parents/guardians, ensuring clarity, transparency, and cooperation in logistical matters related to their child's participation. Our aim is to provide parents/guardians with essential information, address their concerns, and obtain necessary permissions to ensure the safety and well-being of their child during Forest School activities.

Info Flier/Email:

Laois Forest School will provide parents/guardians with an information flyer or email prior to their child's participation in Forest School activities. This communication will include details such as session dates, times, location, what to bring, health and safety information, and contact details for Forest School staff.

Consent Form:

[Please see the Consent Form below]

Medical Info/Medication/Special Needs/Allergies/Intolerances:

Parents/guardians will be required to provide detailed medical information on the Consent Form, including any medical conditions, allergies, intolerances, or special needs that may affect their child's participation in Forest School activities. This information will be kept confidential and shared only with relevant staff members to ensure appropriate care and support.



Parents Aware of Risky Play:

Parents/guardians will be informed about the nature of Forest School activities, including the potential for risky play and associated risks such as cuts, scrapes, minor and serious injuries, and loss. They will be encouraged to discuss any concerns or questions they may have with Forest School staff.

Parents Aware of Clothing and Food Needs:

Parents/guardians will receive guidance on appropriate clothing and footwear for Forest School activities, as well as information on any specific food or drink requirements for their child. This may include recommendations for waterproof clothing, sturdy footwear, and packed lunches/snacks.

Permission for Photos:

Parents/guardians will be asked to provide consent for the Forest School to take and use photographs of their child for promotional and documentation purposes. They will have the option to indicate their preference regarding the use of photos on the Consent Form.

Permission for First Aid/Medical Treatment:

Parents/guardians will be required to give consent for Forest School staff to administer first aid and seek medical treatment for their child in the event of illness, injury, or medical emergency during Forest School activities. They will also be asked to provide contact details for themselves and additional emergency contacts.

Parent and Extra Emergency Phone Numbers/Email:

Parents/guardians will be asked to provide contact details including phone numbers and email addresses for themselves and any additional emergency contacts on the Consent Form.



By adhering to this Communication and Parents' Logistics Policy, Laois Forest School aims to establish clear communication channels, obtain necessary permissions, and ensure the safety and well-being of all participants during Forest School activities.

Consent Form for Laois Forest School

- Child's Name:
- Date of Birth:
- Parent/Guardian Name(s):
- Contact Phone Number(s):
- Email Address:

Medical Information:

Please provide details of any medical conditions, allergies, intolerances, or special needs that may affect your child's participation in Forest School activities:

Risky Play Awareness:

I am aware of the potential for risky play during Forest School activities, including the risks of cuts, scrapes, minor and serious injuries, and loss. I have signed the Laois Forest School Risky Play waiver:

[] Yes

Clothing and Food Needs:

I understand the clothing and footwear requirements for Forest School activities and will ensure my child is appropriately dressed. I will provide suitable packed lunches/snacks for my child.

Permission for Photos:

I give consent for Laois Forest School to take and use photographs of my child for promotional and documentation purposes:



Yes

No

Permission for First Aid/Medical Treatment:

I give consent for Forest School staff to administer first aid and seek medical treatment for my child if necessary during Forest School activities. I also provide permission for my child to receive medical treatment in case of emergency:

Yes

No

Emergency Contact Information:

- Please provide contact details for yourself and any additional emergency contacts:
- Parent/Guardian Name:
- Phone Number:
- Email Address:
- Emergency Contact Name:
- Phone Number:
- Email Address:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Visitor Protocols Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

The Visitor Protocols Policy of Laois Forest School is established to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of all participants and staff by providing guidelines for managing



visitors and strangers on-site. Our aim is to maintain a secure and welcoming environment while minimising potential risks associated with external visitors.

Visitor/Strangers Onsite:

Visitors and strangers on-site at Laois Forest School may include parents/guardians of participants, guests, contractors, or members of the public. Unexpected visitors will be asked to leave the site immediately. Failing to do this, police will be called and emergency evacuation procedures followed to ensure learners' safety. All visitors are required to adhere to the following protocols:

Requirements:

1. **Identification:** Visitors may be required to provide identification upon arrival and to sign in/out of the premises. This helps to ensure accountability and traceability of individuals on-site.
2. **Pre-Arranged Visits:** Visitors are encouraged to pre-arrange their visits with Forest School staff to ensure that appropriate arrangements can be made and that they can be properly accommodated. All pre-arranged Laois Forest School volunteer helpers undergo a Garda vetting check and must familiarise themselves with the Laois Forest School handbook, Risky Play waiver and Volunteer Helper guidelines.
3. **Supervision:** Visitors must be accompanied by a staff member or designated leader at all times while on-site. This helps to ensure the safety and security of both visitors and participants.
4. **Awareness of Policies:** Visitors will be briefed on relevant Forest School policies and procedures, including health and safety protocols, environmental considerations, and behavioural expectations.
5. **Respect for Nature:** Visitors are expected to respect the natural environment and wildlife habitats present on-site, adhering to Leave No Trace principles and avoiding disturbance to flora and fauna.



6. **Emergency Procedures:** Visitors will be informed of emergency procedures and evacuation routes in the event of an emergency situation, and are expected to follow instructions provided by Forest School staff.

By adhering to these Visitor Protocols, Laois Forest School aims to create a safe, secure, and enjoyable environment for all participants, staff, and visitors. These protocols help to ensure that external visitors can contribute positively to the Forest School experience while minimising potential risks to the community.

D) Safeguarding Procedures

Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures for Laois Forest School

Safeguarding Statement:

Laois Forest School is committed to safeguarding the welfare and well-being of all children participating in our activities. We believe that every child has the right to be protected from harm, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and we are dedicated to creating a safe and nurturing environment where children can learn, explore, and thrive.

Child First/Garda Vetting/Ratios/RBAs/Daily RBAs/Emergency Plan:

1. **Child First:** The safety and well-being of children are our top priorities at Laois Forest School. All decisions and actions are guided by the best interests of the child. The TUSLA Child First course has been undertaken by the designated safeguarding officer for Laois Forest School.
2. **Garda Vetting:** All staff and volunteers working with children at Laois Forest School undergo Garda vetting to ensure they are suitable to work with children.
3. **Ratios:** Appropriate ratios of staff to children are maintained at all times to ensure adequate supervision and support during activities.



4. **Risk Benefit Assessments (RBAs):** Comprehensive risk benefit assessments (RBAs) are conducted for all activities to identify and mitigate potential hazards while maximising learning opportunities.
5. **Daily RBAs:** Daily risk benefit assessments are carried out before each session to address any new risks or changes in conditions.
6. **Emergency Plan:** An emergency plan is in place to guide staff in responding effectively to emergencies, including procedures for evacuation, first aid, and contacting emergency services.

Designated Safeguarding Officer:

Laois Forest School has appointed a designated safeguarding officer (Ailbhe Joyce) who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of our safeguarding policies and procedures. The designated safeguarding officer receives training in child protection and is the first point of contact for concerns or disclosures related to safeguarding issues.

Disclosure:

All staff and volunteers at Laois Forest School are required to disclose any previous convictions, cautions, or concerns related to child safeguarding as part of the vetting process. Failure to disclose relevant information may result in disciplinary action or termination of employment/volunteer status.

Reporting Procedure:

Any concerns or disclosures regarding the safety or welfare of a child must be reported immediately to the designated safeguarding officer. The designated safeguarding officer will follow established procedures for handling disclosures, including reporting to the appropriate authorities and providing support to the child and their family.

Staff Requirements: Volunteers/Staff:



- **Volunteers:** Volunteers working with children at Laois Forest School must undergo Garda vetting and receive training in child protection and safeguarding procedures.
- **Staff:** Staff members receive comprehensive training in child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures as part of their induction process. Ongoing training and support are provided to ensure staff are equipped to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively.

By adhering to this Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, Laois Forest School aims to create a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment where children can participate in enriching outdoor experiences with confidence and peace of mind.

Accident and Emergency Plan and Procedures Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

The Accident and Emergency Plan and Procedures Policy of Laois Forest School is established to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants and staff by providing guidelines for responding effectively to accidents, injuries, and emergencies. Our aim is to minimise the impact of accidents and emergencies through proactive planning, clear communication, and prompt action.

Emergency Plan/Coordinates/What Three Words/Doctors and Emergency Number:

- **Emergency Plan:** Laois Forest School has developed an emergency plan that outlines procedures for responding to various emergencies, including medical emergencies, severe weather events, and other unforeseen circumstances.
- **Coordinates:** GPS coordinates for the Forest School site are recorded and made readily available to staff and emergency services to facilitate location identification in the event of an emergency.
- **What Three Words:** What Three Words (W3W) addresses for specific locations within the Forest School site are provided to aid emergency responders in locating individuals in need of assistance.



- **Doctors and Emergency Number:** Contact information for local doctors, emergency services, and relevant authorities are prominently displayed and easily accessible to staff at all times.

Phone Reception/Credit/Numbers at Hand:

- **Phone Reception:** Staff members are advised to be aware of areas with reliable mobile phone reception on-site and to communicate this information to emergency responders if needed.
- **Credit:** Emergency credit is provided for staff members to ensure they can make emergency calls if necessary, even in the absence of mobile phone credit.
- **Numbers at Hand:** Emergency contact numbers, including those for local doctors, emergency services, Forest School management, and designated emergency contacts, are kept readily available to staff members at all times.

First Aid Policy: Laois Forest School maintains a comprehensive first aid policy that outlines procedures for administering first aid, accessing medical assistance, and managing medical emergencies.

First Aid Kit: A fully stocked first aid kit is available on-site at all times, with supplies regularly checked, replenished, and maintained to ensure readiness for emergencies.

Tick Procedure: Staff members are trained in identifying and safely removing ticks from individuals. Protocols for tick removal and monitoring for signs of tick-borne illnesses are included in the first aid procedures.

Insect Bites: Procedures for managing insect bites and stings, including bee stings, wasp stings, and mosquito bites, are outlined in the first aid policy. Staff members are trained in recognising allergic reactions and providing appropriate treatment.



Minor Accidents: Procedures for managing minor accidents and injuries, such as cuts, scrapes, bruises, and sprains, are included in the first aid policy. Staff members are trained in providing immediate care and assessing the need for further medical attention.

Accident and Report Book: An accident and incident report book is maintained on-site to record details of all accidents, injuries, and incidents that occur during Forest School activities. This includes information on the nature of the incident, individuals involved, actions taken, and follow-up procedures.

Emergency Plan for Laois Forest School

Assembly Points:

- Designated assembly points are established at safe locations within the Forest School site for participants and staff to gather in the event of an emergency.
- Assembly points are clearly marked and communicated to all participants and staff during orientation and regular safety briefings.
- Staff members are assigned roles and responsibilities for coordinating assembly and accounting for all individuals present.

Evacuation Procedures:

- In the event of an emergency requiring evacuation, staff members will initiate evacuation procedures immediately.
- Participants and staff will be directed to evacuate the area calmly and swiftly, following designated evacuation routes to reach assembly points.
- Staff members will conduct head counts to ensure all participants and staff are accounted for at assembly points.
- Evacuation procedures will be practised regularly through emergency drills to ensure familiarity and efficiency in response.



Notification of Emergency Services:

- In the event of a medical emergency or other serious incident requiring emergency services, staff members will:
- Call emergency services (e.g., ambulance, fire brigade, police) immediately to report the nature of the emergency, location, and any pertinent details.
- Provide clear and accurate directions to the Forest School site, including GPS coordinates and What Three Words (W3W) addresses, if needed, to aid emergency responders in locating the site.
- Designate staff members to meet emergency services at the entrance or access point to guide them to the scene of the emergency.

Notification of Parents/Carers:

- Parents/carers will be notified promptly in the event of a significant emergency or incident affecting the safety or well-being of their child.
- Communication channels for notifying parents/carers may include:
- Phone calls: Staff members will contact parents/carers directly to inform them of the situation and provide updates as needed.
- Text messages: If appropriate, text messages may be sent to parents/carers to provide brief notifications and instructions.
- Email: Detailed information regarding the emergency and any necessary follow-up actions may be communicated via email to parents/carers.
- Staff members will maintain open lines of communication with parents/carers throughout the duration of the emergency, providing reassurance, information, and support as needed.

Reunification Procedures:



- In the event of an evacuation or emergency requiring participants to be relocated from the Forest School site, staff members will coordinate reunification procedures with parents/carers.
- Designated reunification points will be established off-site where parents/carers can safely meet and collect their children.
- Staff members will ensure accurate records are maintained to facilitate the safe and orderly reunification of participants with their parents/carers.

Training and Review:

- Staff members will receive training in emergency procedures, including assembly, evacuation, and notification protocols, as part of their induction process and ongoing professional development.
- Regular drills and exercises will be conducted to practice emergency procedures and assess response effectiveness.
- The emergency plan will be reviewed and updated regularly to incorporate lessons learned from drills, changes in site conditions, and emerging best practices in emergency management.

By implementing this detailed emergency plan, Laois Forest School aims to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of all participants and staff during emergencies, while also maintaining clear communication and coordination with emergency services and parents/carers.

Lost Child Policy for Laois Forest School

Policy/Aim:

The Lost Child Policy of Laois Forest School is established to ensure the safety and prompt reunification of any child who becomes separated from their group during Forest School activities. Our aim is to maintain a proactive approach to preventing and responding to



incidents of lost children, prioritising their well-being and providing support to facilitate a swift and safe reunion with their group.

Procedure:

1. Prevention Measures:

- Staff members will conduct thorough participant briefings at the beginning of each session, emphasising the importance of staying with the group and following safety guidelines.
- Participants will be encouraged to stay within sight and earshot of staff members at all times, and to notify a staff member if they need to leave the group for any reason.
- Staff members will maintain vigilant supervision of participants throughout the duration of the session, conducting head counts and visual sweeps regularly to ensure all participants are accounted for.

2. Initial Response:

- If a staff member becomes aware that a child is missing, they will immediately notify other staff members and begin a systematic search of the immediate area.
- Staff members will remain calm and reassure the remaining participants while coordinating the search effort.
- If the child is not located within a reasonable amount of time, staff members will escalate the situation by contacting the designated emergency services and providing a description of the missing child, including any distinctive clothing or features.

3. Search Procedure:



- Staff members will conduct a thorough search of the surrounding area, paying close attention to potential hiding spots, trails, and landmarks where the child may have wandered.
- Additional staff members may be deployed to search designated sectors or areas of responsibility to cover more ground efficiently.
- Staff members will communicate with each other via radio or other means to coordinate search efforts and share information.

4. Reunification:

- Once the child is located, staff members will approach them calmly and reassure them of their safety.
- The child will be escorted back to their group and reunited with their designated staff member or leader.
- Staff members will conduct a brief assessment of the child's well-being and provide any necessary support or assistance.

5. Documentation and Follow-Up:

- Staff members will document the incident of the lost child, including details of the search and reunification process, in an incident report.
- Parents/guardians will be notified of the incident as soon as possible, and a debriefing will be conducted to review the circumstances of the incident and identify any areas for improvement in prevention or response procedures.

By implementing this Lost Child Policy, Laois Forest School aims to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants by providing proactive measures to prevent incidents of lost children and establishing clear procedures for responding effectively in the event that such incidents occur.



Welfare Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

The Welfare Policy of Laois Forest School is designed to ensure the comfort, safety, and well-being of all participants during Forest School activities. Our aim is to provide clear guidelines and support to ensure that participants' basic needs are met, promoting a positive and enjoyable experience in the outdoor environment.

Clothing Policy:

- Participants are required to wear suitable clothing and footwear for outdoor activities, including weather-appropriate attire such as waterproof jackets, trousers, and sturdy footwear.
- Clothing should be comfortable, durable, and suitable for movement and exploration in natural environments.
- Participants should also bring spare clothing and layers to accommodate changing weather conditions.

Toilets:

- Adequate toilet facilities will be provided on-site for participants' use during Forest School sessions.
- Toileting facilities will be regularly cleaned and maintained to ensure hygiene and comfort for participants.

Hand Washing Facilities:

- Hand washing facilities will be available on-site with soap and water for participants to use before and after meals, after using the toilet, and as needed throughout the day.
- Staff members will supervise and encourage hand hygiene practices among participants to minimise the spread of germs and prevent illness.

Food and Drink - Packed Lunch/Bag:



- Participants are required to bring their own packed lunch and snacks in a suitable bag or container.
- Participants should bring sufficient water or drinks to stay hydrated throughout the day, especially during warm weather.

Transport:

- Participants are responsible for arranging their own transportation to and from the Forest School site.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to carpool or arrange group transportation to minimise the environmental impact and promote community connections.

Drop Off and Pick Up Procedure:

- A designated drop-off and pick-up area will be established at the Forest School site for the convenience and safety of participants and their parents/guardians.
- Parents/guardians are required to accompany their child to the designated drop-off area at the beginning of the session and collect them promptly at the end of the session.
- Staff members will be present to greet participants and facilitate the drop-off and pick-up process, ensuring that participants are safely accounted for at all times.

By adhering to this Welfare Policy, Laois Forest School aims to create a supportive and nurturing environment where participants can fully engage in outdoor learning experiences with confidence and comfort.

Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy for Laois Forest School

Aim/Policy:

The Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy of Laois Forest School is established to uphold the privacy rights of participants, staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders, and to ensure compliance with relevant data protection laws and regulations. Our aim is to maintain the



confidentiality of personal information and protect sensitive data from unauthorised access, use, or disclosure.

Procedure: Data Collection/Storage:

1. Data Collection:

- Laois Forest School will only collect personal information that is necessary for the provision of Forest School services and activities, and for fulfilling legal and regulatory requirements.
- Personal information collected may include participant registration details, emergency contact information, medical records, consent forms, and other relevant data required for administration and safeguarding purposes.
- Data collection will be conducted transparently, with participants, parents/guardians, and other stakeholders informed of the purpose and scope of data collection, as well as their rights regarding the use and protection of their personal information.

2. Data Storage:

- Personal data collected by Laois Forest School will be stored securely and confidentially in accordance with applicable data protection laws and regulations.
- Access to personal data will be restricted to authorised staff members who require access to perform their duties, and appropriate technical and organisational measures will be implemented to prevent unauthorised access, loss, or disclosure of data.
- Electronic data will be stored on secure servers with access controls and encryption protocols in place to protect against cyber threats and data breaches.
- Physical records containing personal data will be stored in locked filing cabinets or secure storage facilities, with access restricted to authorised personnel only.



- Personal data will be retained for the minimum period necessary to fulfil the purposes for which it was collected, and will be securely disposed of in accordance with data retention policies and procedures.

3. Data Sharing and Disclosure:

- Personal data will only be shared with third parties or disclosed outside of Laois Forest School where necessary and lawful, and only with the consent of the individuals concerned or where required by law.
- Where data sharing or disclosure is necessary, appropriate safeguards will be implemented to ensure the security and confidentiality of personal information, including contractual agreements, data protection impact assessments, and anonymisation or pseudonymisation of data where possible.

4. Training and Compliance:

- Staff members, volunteers, and other individuals involved in the collection, processing, or handling of personal data will receive training on data protection policies, procedures, and best practices.
- Regular audits and reviews of data protection practices will be conducted to ensure ongoing compliance with data protection laws and regulations, and to identify areas for improvement or remediation.

By adhering to this Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy, Laois Forest School aims to safeguard the privacy and security of personal information, build trust with participants and stakeholders, and demonstrate accountability in the handling of sensitive data.