

# Forest School Handbook



**NORTHERN**  
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

*Building Brighter Futures*



# Overview

The Forest School is an initiative that grew out of a movement in the United Kingdom that was adopted from Scandinavian practices. Forest School follows six guiding principles:

1. Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.
2. Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
3. Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
4. Forest School offers learners the opportunity to go and take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
5. Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.
6. Forest School uses a largerange of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

Despite the opportunities that we have quite close at hand within Australia to experience the natural bush and natural environment it can often be hard to fit some of these experiences into already busy schedules. There can also be limitations set due to concerns about safety leading to children not having gaining the relevant experience and support to safely make appropriate decisions and interactions with the world around them later in life. Having regular, supported visits to the bush and natural spaces in a relatively safe setting helps to address some of these challenges.

In implementing the program at Northern Christian School there is also an added component of providing an opportunity for students to experience and interact with God's creation.

## Our Site

Northern Christian School has a great advantage of having being situated on a bush block. This allows for easy and regular access to a natural bushland that is contained within the property. It also provides an excellent habitat for native fauna including wallabies and various species of bird. There is also a bonus of having a mix of low eucalypt forest, dry eucalypt and woodland on the site providing variations in habitats for local fauna.

# Inquiry Learning

*Inquiry-based learning is an education approach that focuses on investigation and problem-solving. Inquiry-based learning is different from traditional approaches because it reverses the order of learning. Instead of presenting information, or 'the answer', up-front, teachers start with a range of scenarios, questions and problems for students to navigate.*

*Inquiry-based learning prioritises problems that require critical and creative thinking so students can develop their abilities to ask questions, design investigations, interpret evidence, form explanations and arguments, and communicate findings. (Department for Education, Skills and Employment, 21 June 2021)*

The Forest School program is based on the principles of inquiry-based learning. There is not an end goal that students have to achieve or a set program that will follow a predesigned set of steps to achieve a predetermined outcome. Instead, it creates opportunities for students to engage with their own interests and questions. During each session, students will be taught skills and given knowledge on particular topics. Students then take the skills and knowledge to apply it in their own investigations and activities. Through both the observations made by the educators and the reflections at the end of each session students interests, wondering and questions are then used to guide to resourcing and set up of the following sessions. Students are also guided through an investigation, challenge or scenario and encouraged to problem-solve, share understanding and research with the adult-only stepping in when necessary.

## General Capabilities and Cross Curriculum Priorities

The Forest School program ties in closely with several of the General Capabilities and Cross Curriculum Priorities identified in the Australian Curriculum, including Sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.



# Rules of Forest School

We are called to be stewards of God's world and one way that we can do that is to treat all of creation with respect. We also need to care for ourselves and each other. To help us achieve these things we have put into place a few rules. At Forest School we have three rules:

1. Don't pick things that are growing
2. Don't put anything in your mouth
3. Stay within the boundaries

These rules are linked in with the following principle of "Look after yourself, each other and our Forest School".

## Personal Responsibilities

Throughout the session educators and participants will need to take on various responsibilities to help the session run smoothly and to assist in being able to react to emergencies in a prompt, efficient manner. The expectations that go along with the roles and responsibilities may also include duties or actions to be taken either before or after a session.

### Forest School Leader

- Responsible for the overall planning and conduct of session
- Ensure that children are appropriately dressed for the session
- Conduct safety sweep of area to be used
- Ensure that equipment is serviceable and appropriate for use during session
- Guide, support or direct other educators or volunteers in their roles throughout session
- Maintain records and evaluate each session
- Deal with emergency situations as they arise according to appropriate policies and procedures
- Enact and reinforce through own practice the ethos and principles of Forest School

### Forest School Assistant

- Support the Forest School leader
- Observe participants, taking photos and recording observations from each session
- Maintain appropriate supervision of participants in designated area
- Assist in setting up and packing up each session as necessary
- Assist the Forest School leader in dealing with emergency situations as they arise according to appropriate policies and procedures
- Enact and reinforce through own practice the ethos and principles of Forest School

## Helpers and Volunteers

- Support the Forest School leader
- Assist in observing participants, taking photos and recording observations from each session
- Assist the Forest School leader in dealing with emergency situations as they arise according to appropriate policies and procedures
- Maintain appropriate supervision of participants in designated area
- Enact and reinforce through own practice the ethos and principles of Forest School

## Routines of Forest School

We have a number of routines that need to be conducted before, during and after each session. It can be expected that while different sessions and locations may change the routines in general are to be followed to minimise disruptions to the session and help ensure safety. The order of the routines may vary depending on the situation.

### Pre-session

- Thorough sweep of site to be completed before session using site checklist
  - a. Include removal of litter, animal faeces, etc as required
  - b. Check trees and branches for potential falling or protruding branches
- Record of sweep to be signed and dated
- Boundaries checked and marked as required for session
- Check predicted weather conditions
- Check for wildlife
- Check sun safety requirements
- Check any tools or resources required for session

### Session

- Collect any required resources
- Check participants have appropriate clothing and footwear
- Walk to area as a group
- Count of participants
- Discuss any safety issues before entering area as required
- Walk to base camp
- Discuss/remind rules and safety issues
- Listening activity
- Review previous session as necessary

- Introduce new activities and previous activities on offer
- Children choose activities
- Teachers and helpers supervise as required throughout session
- Children can access drink/snacks throughout session following appropriate hygiene procedure
- Return to base camp
- Count of participants
- Discuss session and allow opportunities for sharing and feedback
- Collect any required resources including counting tools back into storage
- Exit area as a group
- Return to class

## Post-session

- Check cleanliness and serviceability of resources and tools used during session
- Conduct post-session sweep of area as required
- Return resources and tools to storage
- Collate notes and observations from session

# Work Health and Safety

The Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (the WHS Act) provides a framework to protect the health, safety and welfare of all workers at work. It also protects the health and safety of all other people who might be affected by the work.

All workers are protected by the WHS Act, including:

- Employees
- Contractors
- Subcontractors
- Outworkers
- Apprentices and trainees
- Work experience students
- Volunteers
- Employers who perform work

The WHS Act also provides protection for the general public so that their health and safety is not placed at risk by work activities.

The WHS Act places the primary health and safety duty on a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU). The PCBU must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers at the workplace. Duties are also placed on officers of a PCBU, workers and other persons at a workplace. All duties under the WHS Act are qualified by the term 'reasonably practicable'

The WHS Act also sets out the requirements for the following:

- Incident notification
- Consultation with workers
- Issue resolution
- Inspector powers and functions
- Offences and penalties

## Duties

### Person conducting a business or undertaking

The Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of their workers while at work in the business or undertaking.

This includes:

- Provision and maintenance of a work environment without risks to health and safety provision and maintenance of safe plant and structures provision and maintenance of safe systems of work
- The safe use, handling, storage and transport of plant, structures and substances
- provision of adequate facilities for the welfare at work of workers in carrying out work for the Business or undertaking, including ensuring access to those facilities
- Provision of any information, training, instruction or supervision that is necessary to protect all persons from risks to their health and safety arising from work that is carried out as part of the conduct of the business or undertaking
- Health of workers and the conditions at the workplace are monitored for the purpose of preventing illness or injury of workers arising from the conduct of the business or undertaking

### Workers

Workers are classified as any person who carries out work, in any capacity, for a PCBU.

Workers must:

- Take reasonable care for their own health and safety
- Take reasonable care that their conduct does not adversely affect the health and safety of others
- Comply, so far as they are reasonably able with instructions
- Co-operate with reasonable health and safety policies or procedures that have been notified to workers



## Other persons at the workplace

A person at a workplace, whether or not the person has another duty under this part must:

- Take reasonable care for his or her own health and safety
- Take reasonable care the his or her acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of any other persons
- Comply, so far as the person is reasonably able, with any reasonable instruction that is given by the PCBU

Further information can be obtained at: [legislation.tas.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2012-001](http://legislation.tas.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2012-001)

## Sun Policy

At Northern Christian School we have an approved SunSmart policy that also covers our Forest School program. All participants are expected to adhere to the policy. A copy of this policy can be found at the back of this handbook or accessed via the school office.

## Travel Policy

Any sessions that require travelling away from the school property will require that all transport is arranged and conducted under the appropriate Christians Schools Tasmania and Northern Christian Schools policies.

## Evacuation

In the case of an emergency, such as serious injury, severe weather or some other threat, the following process will be used (over the page).

- Forest School leader calls all participants to base camp (If the base camp is deemed as not safe then the leader will nominate another).
- Appropriate location at their discretion.
- Forest School assistant to conduct sweep for participants as required.
- Roll call is taken and all participants accounted for.
- Contact office or relevant contact to inform of situation as required.
- If appropriate then all tools and equipment are packed up to return with group.
- Leader takes group either to designated evacuation or collection point.

If there is a situation that requires the Forest School leader to remain with a particular participant, such as a first aid incident, or is otherwise not in a position to oversee the above process then the Forest School assistant will take the necessary steps to complete follow the procedure.



## Injury or Illness

If an adult or child should be injured or become unwell during a Forest School Session then the Forest School leader or assistant will follow the following procedure.

- Get another adult to accompany if necessary.
- Assess participant and treat with first aid as required.
- If the participant is able to remain or return to the group then they may do so.
- If the participant needs to sit out or take a break then they are to be given an appropriate place where they can be monitored by an adult.
- Should a student need to leave the session then the following call will need to be made:
  - c. If there are enough adults to supervise the student returning to the school then the session can continue, though some activities may need to stop until the adult is able to return.
  - d. If there are not enough adults to supervise the student returning to the school then the whole session may need to stop and return to the school.
  - e. If the injury or illness is severe enough then the session will be cancelled with the appropriate evacuation process being followed.

## Snakes

Due to the nature of the Forest School sessions being held in a bush setting there is always the possibility that a participant may encounter a snake.

The risk of this possibility is minimised with the following strategies:

- High-risk areas avoided during mating season or times of year with high snake activity (February to March).
- Base camp will have minimal cover for snakes to hide.
- Daily sweep will include checking base camp and paths leading to and from school. Participants will be encouraged to use "heavy feet" when heading to base camp and new areas.

Prior to first entry to Forest School area participants will be taught basic safety procedure.

- Stand still, legs together, arms crossed over chest in an "X" and head looking up.
- When asked to do so by leader slowly back away from area (this may involve walking backwards with leader guiding) maintaining "X".

Return to base camp or designated area and wait for further instructions by leader.

In the event that a snake is encountered the following procedures will be followed:

- Call is made "Freeze" or whistle is blown (three short, sharp blasts).
- Everyone remains where they are and adopts the safe stance.
- Leader ascertains the location of snake and proximity to participants.
- If determined safe to do so the leaders approach participants individually and have them back slowing away from snake before returning quietly to base camp.
- If the snake is too close to a participant for the participant to move away safely then the participant is asked to remain still until the snake has moved away.
- If the snake is located near the base camp then leaders are to remove participants to another location deemed appropriate by the Forest School Leader.
- Leader to then contact office to request snake catcher if appropriate.

## Play and taking risks

Why do many of the various activities that happen within the Forest School program involve both play and risk-taking? What are the reasons and advantages of these aspects of the program? Both play and appropriate risk-taking are recognised as being important parts of child development and learning. This is reflected in documentation from the National Quality Standard, Early Childhood Australia and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Health and Physical Education curriculum refers to the following statements in the achievement standards (over the page):

*“They identify actions that help them be healthy, safe and physically active. They identify different settings where they can be active and demonstrate how to move and play safely.*

*They select and apply strategies to keep themselves healthy and safe and are able to ask for help with tasks or problems. They demonstrate fundamental movement skills in a variety of movement sequences and situations and test alternatives to solve movement challenges.”*

In talking about taking risks through play we can note the following:

*“No play space is risk-free. No matter how much we try to remove the risk of children being hurt, children (and adults) can still get hurt. We can have the super smooth soft fall surfaces in our children’s centres and school playgrounds, but when children walk out into the real world the surfaces they come into contact with are anything but that. The greater risk is not providing children with the skills and abilities to identify and mitigate risk when they come across it so they can engage with the big wide world.*

*A risk is something that is possible to negotiate and may be appropriate for particular situations and children.*

*A hazard is something that is inherently dangerous and needs to be remedied, such as a climbing structure with sharp edges or loose boards that could seriously injure children if they play on it.”*

— NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM

E-NEWSLETTER NO.58 2013

In the risk management guide published by Play Australia, “Getting the balance right”, there are several key points made in relation to play and being outside in the natural environment.

- Freedom is essential.
- Risk/Benefit Assessment is the practice of ‘weighing up’ the benefits and hazards associated with risky outdoor play.
- Learning life skills.
- Outdoor play offers dynamic, open-ended, varied opportunities for learning, development and problem-solving.

So, what is the value of risk in play?

## **Risk and Engagement = Curiosity**

One of the most important benefits of 'risk' is its appeal in encouraging children to spend time outdoors. Developing the curiosity to try new experiences, make independent judgements, learn and master new skills is invaluable for a child's confidence and development.

Psychologically, 'risk' of the unknown and the opportunity to test and explore an environment independent of adults more fully encourages children's participation. As an example, activities such as rock climbing are high in terms of exposure to risk, however the activity's benefits include physical exercise, balance, strength and agility training, confidence and judgement.

## **Risk and Physical Activity = Health & Well-Being**

Physical activity is invaluable for confidence-building and development, good health and wellbeing. With declining outdoor activity and increasing national health concerns for children including obesity and other related medical conditions, the opportunity to be 'more active' is imperative. More 'risky' environments generally encourage a wider range of exposure to physical challenges as the young person pushes themselves beyond their mastered skills and experience. As a result high impact activity, increased upper body strength, agility and balance all improve a child's weight, stamina, strength and concentration. Forming better habits in childhood, leads to better health outcomes as adults.

## **Risk and Judgement = Leadership**

Self-esteem (self-value) and confidence are very much linked to children's abilities to make their own independent judgements about their environment and new situations. These are the beginnings of leadership, highly valued by the adult world. Leadership can best be developed in flexible, challenging environments where children are given the freedom to practise communication skills, make their own decisions, and work together with their peers to problem solve. Successful adult leaders make a difference because they have the awareness to recognise new opportunities when they arise and the courage to take them. They are also astute at seeing strengths in themselves and others and playing to those strengths. Foremost they understand limits and boundaries, learning through practice to make good judgements when faced with a risky situation.

## **Risk and Mastering of Skills = Confidence and Resilience**

The freedom to experience and explore is essential for young people to develop critical life skills. Young people gain satisfaction from learning to deal with new challenges and situations. Mastering a new skill or taking on a challenge in play will sometimes be an end in itself and other times an opportunity to go somewhere or find something or someone. Creating flexible, diverse and challenging environments in playgrounds provides many different alternatives and opportunities for testing and mastering these skills. However for these opportunities to be fully valuable we must also give children the freedom to explore. Failure will often be part of this process and result in disappointment, frustration, and embarrassment or possibly minor injury. This teaches young people resilience, the knowledge that in life we aren't always successful at everything the first time around and sometimes we need to try again when we fail and work to achieve success.

## Risk and Creativity = Innovation

Creativity is intrinsically linked to having the confidence to 'try things out' and the resilience to 'try again' and 'think differently' if something fails. Creativity is fostered at an early age in flexible, challenging play environments where solutions need to be found to master a new skill or work together to build something or develop a new game to play. Building on experiences and information gathered young people begin with small tasks that require independent problem solving moving on to larger more complex problems as they mature. If young people are unable to develop the capacity for innovation either because of a lack of exposure to risky environments or a lack of adult-free autonomy, they are more likely to form rigid behavioural patterns and find many unexpected life challenges as adults difficult to navigate.

## Essential Equipment

The following items are required for all sessions:

- Register with emergency numbers and contacts (For onsite class groups this is maintained at the office)
- Medical Forms
- For onsite class groups this is maintained at the office
- Mobile Phone
- UHF Radio (if needed to maintain contact on site)
- First Aid Kit (including snake bite kit)
- Protective gloves
- Relevant emergency medication

The following items may be required depending on time of year and location of site being used:

- Sunscreen during first and last term.
- Water for drinking or washing hands (if cooking or situated too far from school building).

## Clothing List

It is expected that all participants have the following items of clothing:

- Trousers
- Jumper/coat/long-sleeved top
- Appropriate walking shoes or boots
- Sun hat (during first and last term)

The following items are encouraged:

- Warm hat (during second and third term)
- Spare socks
- Gloves

Spare clothes are not provided for students. Please note that inappropriate clothing may result in students not being allowed to participate in the program.



# Tools

## Risk assessment on tools

General rules for tool use:

- A risk assessment for the use of tools completed before use.
- All tools must be stored safely at school with nominated Forest School Leader responsible for storage and access.
- All tools must be stored in a safe, appropriate manner at the Forest School site with Forest School Leader responsible for access and use.
- Never walk around with tools.
- Always make sure tools are clean and sharp before using them.
- Students should only use tools with the Forest School Leader.
- Tools should be only be used in a designated tool area which will be marked off during the session.

Knives/Peelers:

- Must be with Forest School Leader.
- Always sit down when using the knife or peeler.
- Ensure knife is either closed and locked or replaced in sheath when not in use
- Open folding knives away from you while sitting down with plenty of room around you. Always use the knife or peeler away from your body.
- Always ensure the students are supported when using the knife or peeler on a one to one or one to two ratio dependant on age and experience.

Bow Saw:

- Ensure guard is in place when not in use.
- Must only be used with a Forest School Leader.
- Always used in the designated tool area.
- Using the Bow Saw with a saw horse where possible.
- Talking with the students about the way you hold the Bow Saw.
- Ensure safe storage and safe handling in Forest School.

## Safety Sweep

Before each Forest School session there will be a safety sweep of the Forest School site to look for and assess immediate risks. All safety sweeps will be recorded and filed by the Forest School Leader.

If the safety sweep is conducted and the area is deemed not safe for the session then a secondary site will be assessed for its appropriateness. In the case that the primary and secondary sites are not deemed safe then the session will be postponed or cancelled until the situation can be rectified.

# Safety Sweep Record Sheet

Date and Time

Location

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Weather

Person Conducting Sweep

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	Checked (Y / N)	Comments
Access to and from area		
Fallen branches		
Wildlife		
Weather effects		
Sun/Wind – Shelter		
Hazardous plants		
Base camp		
Glass or hazardous rubbish		
Boundaries		
Tool area		
Snake check		
Equipment ready		
Emergency plan		

**Other hazards**

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**Action taken**

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**Other comments**

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# SunSmart Policy for Northern

## 1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 Northern Christian School has a duty of care to ensure that sun protection is provided for students while they are on school premises during school hours or undertaking school activities.
- 1.2 There is a shared responsibility between schools and parents/carers that the latter must acknowledge and accept.
- 1.3 This policy refers specifically to students. However, for their own protection, staff are also encouraged to follow this policy and guidelines developed by the school. Staff, in providing for their own protection, are also providing a role model for students.

## 2. Rationale

- 2.1 Damage to the skin builds up year after year and overexposure can lead to premature ageing and increases the risk of developing skin cancer as an adult.
- 2.2 Inappropriate sun exposure in the first 18 years of life contributes significantly to the lifetime risk of developing skin cancer. However, some skin exposure to the sun's UV rays is needed for the production of vitamin D, vital for maintenance of healthy bones, teeth and general good health.
- 2.3 Being SunSmart is a whole-of-year approach. It means using sun protection when the UV is 3 and above (September to April), and safe sun exposure for vitamin D (May to August).

## 3. Aims

- 3.1 Ensure that children and staff maintain a healthy UV exposure balance all year round.
- 3.2 Encourage sun protection when UV Index levels reach 3 and above and smart sun exposure when UV is low for vitamin D levels.
- 3.3 Educate staff and children on appropriate sun protection measures.
- 3.4 To provide a safe environment for ALL students within our school community.

## 4. Strategies

### Managing the physical environment

- 4.1 Staff are encouraged to check the sun protection times on a daily basis at:
  - [cancertas.org.au](http://cancertas.org.au)
  - [bom.gov.au/tas/uv](http://bom.gov.au/tas/uv)
  - [myuv.com.au](http://myuv.com.au)
  - The free SunSmart app or widget
- 4.2 During high UV periods, from September to April, all sun protection strategies will be used with special care being taken at peak UV times of day from 10.00am to 3.00pm (during daylight saving).
- 4.3 Northern Christian School will consider the availability of shade when planning and programming for outdoor experiences or excursions.

## Shade

- 4.4 The school community is committed to providing shade in areas where students gather such as for eating, outdoor teaching and popular play areas.
- 4.5 Students are actively encouraged to use available areas of shade when outdoors.
- 4.6 Availability of shade is considered when planning excursions and all outdoor activities.
- 4.7 A shade audit is conducted regularly to determine the current availability and quality of shade.

## Hats

- 4.8 Children will be required to wear the Northern Christian School uniform legionnaire's hat that protects their face neck and ears when they are outside during peak UV.
- 4.9 Children without hats during September to April during peak UV periods will be restricted to only in shaded areas outdoors.

## Sunglasses

- 4.10 Close-fitting wrap-around sunglasses that comply with Australian Standards AS1067:2003 (Category 2, 3 or 4) are encouraged, but *optional*.

## Clothing

- 4.11 Northern Christian School uniforms are designed to be SunSafe and are required to be worn at all times in line as per the schools uniform policy.

## 5. Staff OHS, role modelling and education

- 5.1 When UV is 3 and above staff will role model sun protection behaviours when outside by using the combination of sun protection measures outlined above.
- 5.2 Families and visitors are encouraged to use a combination of sun protection measures when participating in and attending outdoor school activities.
- 5.3 Programs on skin cancer prevention and vitamin D are included in teaching programs for all year levels
- 5.4 SunSmart behaviour is regularly reinforced and promoted to the whole school community through newsletters, meetings, assemblies and upon enrolment.

## 6. Review and Evaluation

This policy will be updated when:

- 6.1 Changes are made to regulations or legislation
- 6.2 We become aware of information indicating that best practice requires us to make
- 6.3 alterations to our existing policy
- 6.4 As part of the Northern Christian Schools normal policy review cycle and SunSmart every three years.









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