

The Sallygate School RESOURCES



The Sallygate Parent Guide Series

Forest School at Home

Bringing the magic of Outdoor Learning into everyday family life

Understanding children. Supporting families.



Introduction

"We don't live near a forest. Can we still do Forest School?" Absolutely.

One of the biggest misconceptions about Forest School is that it only happens in woodlands. The truth is that Forest School isn't really about forests.

It's about children.

It's about giving them opportunities to explore, solve problems, take managed risks, develop confidence and connect with the natural world.

That can happen in a woodland, a park, your garden, the beach or even a small patch of grass outside your home.

At Sallygate, we believe children don't need perfect environments.

They need meaningful experiences.

This guide will show you how to bring the spirit of Forest School into everyday family life.

What Is Forest School?

Forest School is a long-term, child-centred approach to learning that uses the natural environment to develop confidence, resilience, independence and wellbeing.

Children are encouraged to:

- explore
- investigate
- create
- solve problems
- assess risk
- develop practical skills
- build relationships
- learn through experience

Forest School isn't about rushing from one activity to another.

It's about slowing down and allowing curiosity to lead the learning.

Why Does Forest School Matter?

Children today often have fewer opportunities to explore independently than previous generations.

Forest School gives children permission to:

- get muddy
- climb
- build

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- wonder
- ask questions
- make mistakes
- try again

These experiences help develop the skills that matter for life, not just for school.

Why Forest School Supports Children with SEND

Many children with SEMH, autism, ADHD and communication differences flourish outdoors.

Nature offers:

- fewer sensory demands than many indoor environments
- opportunities to move
- predictable routines
- meaningful physical activity
- space to regulate emotions
- opportunities for success beyond the classroom

For some children, the outdoors becomes the place where they feel most confident.

Forest School at Home Principles You

don't need to copy school.

Instead, focus on five simple ideas. 🌿

🌱 Be Curious

Let your child lead.

Instead of giving answers, ask questions.

"I wonder why that leaf is different?" "What do you think lives under that log?"

Curiosity develops confidence.

🌳 Slow Down

Children don't need a packed timetable.

Sometimes the best learning comes from spending twenty minutes watching ants or listening to birds.

🔧 Let Children Solve Problems Avoid

fixing everything immediately.

If a den falls down...

Ask

"What could we change?"

Problem-solving builds resilience.

👥 Learn Together

You don't need to be an expert.

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Children enjoy learning alongside adults.
It's perfectly okay to say "I don't know."
Shall we find out together?"

Celebrate the Process

Forest School isn't about making perfect things.
It's about trying.
Exploring.
Learning.
Growing.
Celebrate effort far more than outcomes.

Twenty Forest School Activities at Home

Explore

- ☐ Nature scavenger hunt
- ☐ Tree identification
- ☐ Wildlife spotting
- ☐ Cloud watching
- ☐ Bug hunting

Create

- ☐ Build a den
- ☐ Make nature art
- ☐ Build stick sculptures
- ☐ Create leaf pictures
- ☐ Build a miniature fairy or animal home

Practical Skills

- ☐ Learn simple knots
- ☐ Use a tape measure outdoors
- ☐ Collect natural materials
- ☐ Learn how to identify trees
- ☐ Cook outdoors safely (where appropriate)

Mindfulness

- ☐ Sit quietly for five minutes
- ☐ Listen to birds
- ☐ Notice five different smells
- ☐ Watch the clouds ☐
- Watch the sunset

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Conversations That Build Curiosity

Instead of asking: "What colour is that leaf?" Try:

"What do you notice?"

Instead of: "What animal is that?"

Try:

"What makes you think it lives here?" Instead of teaching facts... Explore ideas together.

Risky Play

One of the most valuable things children can learn is how to assess risk.

This doesn't mean exposing children to unnecessary danger.

It means helping them develop judgement.

Examples include:

- balancing on logs
- climbing appropriate trees
- carrying sticks safely
- building shelters
- using simple tools with close supervision where appropriate

Children who experience managed risk develop confidence, decision-making skills and resilience.

Creating a Forest School Mindset at Home You

don't need to go far.

You don't need expensive resources.

You simply need to notice the opportunities already around you.

Your child probably won't remember every worksheet they complete.

They may remember:

The den you built together.

The bird you spotted.

The muddy walk.

The campfire.

The stick that became a fishing rod, a magic wand and then a dinosaur bone. That's where memories—and learning—often begin.

What This Looks Like at Sallygate

Forest School isn't a weekly reward.

It's part of our curriculum and our therapeutic approach.

Children use Outdoor Learning to:

- build confidence
- regulate emotions
- strengthen relationships

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- solve problems
- develop independence
- experience success The same principles can be used at home.

Not to recreate school.

But to create meaningful moments together.

Frequently Asked Questions We don't have a garden.

That's okay.

Local parks, beaches, woodland walks and community green spaces all provide wonderful opportunities.

My child doesn't like getting muddy.

That's okay, too.

Forest School is about choice.

Some children enjoy observing nature quietly rather than climbing or digging. Both are valuable.

What if I don't know much about nature?

You don't need to.

Curiosity is more important than expertise.

Learning together is one of the greatest gifts you can give your child.

Is Forest School only for younger children?

No.

Children and young people of all ages benefit from spending time outdoors, particularly when activities are adapted to their interests and stage of development.

Final Reflection

One of the biggest shifts in my own thinking has been recognising that children rarely ask us to create extraordinary experiences.

They ask us to notice the ordinary ones.

A puddle.

A feather.

A stick.

A ladybird.

A campfire.

A walk with someone who listens.

Those simple moments often become the memories that stay with us.

Forest School reminds us that learning doesn't always begin with a lesson.

Sometimes it begins with curiosity.

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At Sallygate, we've seen children discover confidence, resilience and joy through Outdoor Learning because it gives them permission to explore the world—and themselves—in their own way.

That's something every family can nurture.

Not by recreating school at home, but by creating opportunities to slow down, explore together and enjoy the natural world.

Because childhood doesn't need to be complicated.

Sometimes it simply needs fresh air, muddy boots and someone to share the adventure with. **This is Sallygate.**

Evidence Base

This guide reflects recognised Forest School principles and current evidence relating to Outdoor Learning, child development and therapeutic practice. It is informed by research demonstrating associations between sustained Outdoor Learning and improvements in confidence, resilience, wellbeing, communication, motivation and social development, while recognising that outcomes are strongest when programmes are regular, child-centred and delivered by trained practitioners. It also aligns with evidence-informed approaches to supporting children with SEND through movement, sensory regulation, relationship-based practice and meaningful, experiential learning.