



Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd

Staff Code of Conduct Policy

Our Mission Statement:

“Everyone is afforded equal opportunities to succeed in an alternative environment”

Our core values are that of respect for others, our natural environment and ourselves. Forest School gives learners the chance to have first-hand opportunities within the woodland setting. The experiences in the woodland allow them to take safe and controlled risks, which help build their self-esteem and desire to find out more about the world around them. Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd provides learners of all ages, a very different environment in which they can find new ways of learning and have a chance to have a great sense of achievement.

Forest School provides an opportunity for young people to develop their emotional intelligence and well-being, through their interaction with the woodland and with each other. Forest School provides a unique ‘unstructured’ platform for learning, in which the opportunities that arise, stem from the discoveries by the young people and the ‘unexpected’. The Forest School Leader provides a safe and encouraging environment and sessions are very much based on the children’s prior knowledge and desires.

This policy is written in conjunction with the Staff Handbook.

Introduction

At Little Acorns Forest Schools (LAFS) we believe in creating a whole forest school culture that is safe and inclusive. A Staff Code of Conduct is designed to give clear guidance on the standards of behaviour all staff are expected to observe. Staff are in a unique position of influence and must adhere to behaviour that models the highest possible standards for all the learners within the forest school. As a member of an education community, each employee has an individual responsibility to maintain their reputation and the reputation of the Forest school, whether inside or outside of working hours.

Our aims underpin the forest school culture: to develop a happy, friendly, secure and safe atmosphere and to encourage a caring, respectful and trusting relationship between all children and adults. This code of conduct sets out the key principles for the creation and maintenance of a safe forest school culture.

Objectives of a safe forest school culture:

- To safeguard learners and protect staff
- To make explicit expectations of performance and conduct
- To minimise opportunities for abuse
- For all staff to have confidence to report concerns with full confidentiality
- To respond promptly to concerns: we always investigate and address issues
- To exercise appropriate sanctions

- To create and maintain an ethos of mutual respect, openness and fairness

1. Our Code of Conduct

All staff are expected to follow Little Acorns Forest schools policies: including behaviour and anti-bullying in all interactions in forest school. Learners and staff are expected to work together to build a forest school whose relationships are characterised by mutual and appropriate respect. Praise and building on the positive should always come first. Where firmness/admonition is called for this should be exercised calmly, and staff should avoid shouting at learners unless there is a Health and Safety risk. LAFS behaviour policy and associated documents establish expectations and approved sanctions. All new staff should be issued with a copy of these policies, and any behaviour concerns should be dealt with in line with them. Where a member of staff is having difficulties managing learner behaviour, they should discuss this matter with either the Director, Administrator or Lead Practitioner at the earliest opportunity.

2. All staff should be aware of what physical contact with pupils is appropriate:

- Staff should only exercise physical restraint as a last resort to prevent injury.
- Staff are allowed to comfort a child who is hurt/distressed in a manner appropriate to the age of the child.

Adults should not initiate any physical contact unnecessarily, and there should be clear boundaries:

- Children should not be picked up. (unless medically necessary or being restrained to prevent injury or harm to themselves or others)
- Adults should avoid being alone with a child away from other learners.

If you need to talk to a child, position yourself within sight of another adult.

Toileting

Any children who need to use the toilet during a session may do so independently where the toilet is located within the area they are using, as staff will be nearby and aware. If the toilet is not within the immediate session area, a practitioner or member of school teaching staff will accompany the child to the toilet and wait outside, then accompany the child back to the session.

3. All staff are expected to treat each other with respect

Relationships between staff should be characterised by fairness, openness and respect. This means valuing all contributions, acknowledging differences, and working together to build a climate of continuous improvement. Politeness and respect are essential ingredients: where differences occur they should be dealt with calmly and fairly.

4. All staff should treat resources responsibly, and exercise due financial care

All staff have a responsibility to look after the resources provided by Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd. This includes: not wasting resources unnecessarily, following the

principles of 'reduce, re-use, recycle' where appropriate; signing out for items taken from the premises and updating any equipment on the staff Inventory for equipment and clothing. All money handled should be clearly labelled and sent to the administrator as soon as possible.

5. Acceptable use of ICT Equipment

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Online Safety, GDPR/Data Protection, Policy and Safeguarding Policy. Staff who are in contact with learners should not use their mobile phones in forest school during their directed hours / paid hours of employment, unless it is for work purposes such as photos, booking information and emergencies. Outside of these times, mobile phones should only be used in areas of the school where learners are not present. Any photograph/video must be taken after permission has been sought (or by checking Bookwhen for photo consent). Staff must delete images once these have been sent to and saved by the administrator.

6. Social Media, Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Staff must use social media responsibly and in a manner that upholds the reputation of Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd. Confidential information, photographs, videos or details relating to learners, families or colleagues must never be shared on personal social media accounts.

Staff must not use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, applications or platforms to upload, process, store or analyse confidential learner information unless expressly authorised by management and compliant with data protection legislation. Staff should remain aware of emerging online safety risks associated with AI-generated content, misinformation, impersonation and data security.

7. Online Safety

Staff have a responsibility to promote online safety and safeguard learners from digital risks. Any concerns relating to online abuse, inappropriate content, cyberbullying, exploitation or misuse of technology must be reported in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

8. All staff are expected to behave professionally and exercise confidentiality

All staff are expected to behave thoughtfully and responsibly. Staff should be punctual and well-prepared, and should carry out tasks to the best of their ability, taking pride in their work. All absence should be genuine. Staff are expected to dress appropriately; all staff should set a good example in what they wear. Staff should exercise due confidentiality towards matters that are either discussed or overheard. Staff must exercise caution when using information technology and be aware of the risk to themselves and others. Staff must have no personal contact with former learners until they reach the age of eighteen, and they have not been a learner at Little Acorns Forest Schools for a minimum of seven years. Staff must not engage in

inappropriate use of social network sites which may bring themselves, the forest school community or employer into disrepute.

9. Conduct Outside of Work

Staff must not engage in conduct outside work which could seriously damage the reputation and standing of the forest school or the employee's own reputation or the reputation of other members of the forest school community. Any such conduct could lead to dismissal. In particular, criminal offences that involve violence or possession or use of illegal drugs or sexual misconduct are likely to be regarded as unacceptable and will lead to dismissal. Staff must exercise caution when using information technology and be aware of the risks to themselves and others. Staff must not use social media e.g. Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/Snapchat with learners or former learners unless the former learner is aged at least eighteen and has not been at the forest school for over seven years. Staff must not engage in inappropriate use of social network sites which may bring themselves, the forest school community or employer into disrepute. Staff may undertake work outside Little Acorns, either paid or voluntary, provided that it does not conflict with the interests of the school and is not to a level which may contravene the working time regulations or affect an individual's work performance. Where families or learners are known to staff members in a personal capacity, it is the responsibility of the staff member to ensure that a declaration is made to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or the Director in the case of the DSL.

10. Confidentiality

Where staff have access to confidential information about learners/students or their parents or carers, staff must not reveal such information except to those colleagues who have a professional role in relation to the learner/student. All staff are likely at some point to witness actions which need to be confidential (e.g. where a learner/student is bullied by another learner/student/member of staff), this needs to be reported and dealt with in accordance with the appropriate forest school procedure. It must not be discussed outside Little Acorns, including with the learner's/student's parent or carer, nor with colleagues in the forest school except with a senior member of staff with the appropriate role and authority to deal with the matter. However, staff have an obligation to share with their manager or the Director any information which gives rise to concern about the safety or welfare of a learner/student. Staff must never promise a learner/student that they will not act on information that they are told by the learner/student.

11. Staff should seek to establish a good and open relationship with parents

Staff should aim to create a welcoming and open relationship with parents. All parental concerns should be treated seriously and dealt with promptly.

12. Position of Trust

All staff, volunteers, students and contractors working on behalf of Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd are in a position of trust and must maintain appropriate professional boundaries with learners and their families at all times. Staff must not use their position to gain favour, exert influence, or develop relationships that could be perceived as inappropriate. All interactions should be conducted in a manner that safeguards the welfare, dignity and rights of learners and maintains public confidence in the organisation.

13. Professional Boundaries and Communication

Staff are expected to maintain professional relationships with learners, parents, carers and commissioning organisations. Communication must be transparent, appropriate and related to Forest School activities or learner welfare. Staff must only use approved communication channels and must not communicate with learners through personal social media accounts, private messaging applications, personal email accounts or personal telephone numbers unless authorised by management and recorded appropriately.

14. All staff need to be aware of the policy and procedures for Safeguarding and Child Protection

It is essential that all staff have regular training in Safeguarding and Child Protection issues and know the procedures for dealing with and reporting concerns. All staff have a duty to look out for signs of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect of pupils in the light of a child's behaviour. Staff must pass any concerns on to the DSL or deputy DSL. Avoid trying to involve yourself too closely with any issues: always pass concerns on.

Low Levels of Concern (please see additional policy)

The term 'low-level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant. A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' – that an adult working in or on behalf of the school or college may have acted in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work.
- Does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.
- Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:
 - Being over friendly with children
 - Having favourites
 - Taking photographs of children on their mobile phone, contrary to school policy

- Engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door
- Humiliating children.

We will achieve the purpose of this policy by:-

- Ensuring their staff are clear about what appropriate behaviour is, and are confident in distinguishing expected and appropriate behaviour from inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour, in themselves and others
- Empowering staff to share any low-level safeguarding concerns
- Addressing unprofessional behaviour and supporting the individual to correct it at an early stage
- Handling and responding to such concerns sensitively and proportionately when they are raised
- Helping identify any weakness in the safeguarding system.

Sharing concerns:-

All staff are asked to inform the DSL of any low-level concerns. The DSL should then notify the Headteacher (if within a school) and Director of all the low-level concerns and in a timely fashion according to the nature of each particular low-level concern. The headteacher or the Director should be the ultimate decision maker in respect of all low-level concerns, although it is recognised that depending on the nature of some low-level concerns the Headteacher or Director may wish to consult with the DSL and take a more collaborative decision-making approach. If an individual is in any doubt as to whether the information which has been shared about a member of staff as a low-level concern in fact meets the harm threshold, they should consult with their LADO. All low-level concerns should be recorded in writing. The record should include details of the concern, the context in which the concern arose, and action taken. The name of the individual sharing their concerns should also be noted, if the individual wishes to remain anonymous then that should be respected as far as reasonably possible.

15. All staff need to exploit the potential of the forest school ethos to develop a proactive approach to behaviour and child protection issues.

Staff need to take a proactive approach towards both safeguarding and behaviour policies, through the creation of a positive learning environment where all children are respected. This includes not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. The expression of extremist views by staff will not be tolerated and should be reported to the

Director or Administrator, who will contact relevant authorities if necessary.

16. All staff need to be aware of how to record/report concerns (“whistleblowing”).

Staff have a duty to raise concerns where they believe conduct, practice or behaviour may place learners, colleagues or the organisation at risk. Concerns should be reported through the appropriate management, safeguarding, whistleblowing or grievance procedures. Staff will not suffer detriment for raising genuine concerns in good faith.

Where staff have any concerns about another member of staff, these should be reported immediately to the Director. Where the concern is about the Director, it should be reported directly to the Administrator. All concerns will be investigated thoroughly and confidentially, and appropriate action taken.

17. Dress Code and Identification

As an outdoor learning provider, staff are expected to wear practical, weather-appropriate and professional clothing suitable for Forest School activities. Clothing should promote safety, allow freedom of movement and reflect the professional standards of the organisation. Staff and volunteers should wear or carry identification where appropriate (especially in schools) and ensure they can be readily identified by learners, families and visiting professionals. Staff will wear the issued Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd uniform to be easily identifiable to families and visiting professionals.

18. Gifts, Rewards and Hospitality

Staff must not offer gifts, rewards or incentives that could be interpreted as favouritism, coercion or an attempt to secure compliance from a learner or family. Any gifts offered by learners or families should be of nominal value and declared to management where appropriate.

19. Bribery and Corruption

Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd operates a zero-tolerance approach to bribery and corruption. Staff must not offer, accept, request or receive any financial or other advantage that could influence, or be perceived to influence, professional decision-making. Any concerns regarding potential bribery or conflicts of interest must be reported immediately to management.

20. Favouritism and Equality

Staff must treat all learners, families and colleagues fairly, consistently and with respect. Decisions regarding support, supervision, opportunities and access to activities must be based on individual needs, risk assessments and professional

judgement. Staff must avoid behaviour that could be perceived as favouritism, discrimination or preferential treatment.

21. Search and Seizure

Staff do not have a routine role in searching learners or their belongings. If a member of staff has concerns that a learner possesses an item that may present a risk to themselves or others, they must follow the organisation's safeguarding and behaviour procedures and seek support from the Forest School Leader. Staff must never carry out intrusive or intimate searches.

22. CCTV

Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd does not currently operate CCTV at any of its Forest School sites. Should CCTV be introduced in the future, staff will be expected to comply with all relevant policies, data protection requirements and operational procedures relating to its use.

23. Transporting Learners

Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd does not transport learners as part of its provision. Staff and volunteers must not transport learners in personal vehicles unless exceptional circumstances arise, prior authorisation has been obtained from management, appropriate safeguarding measures are in place, and insurance requirements have been verified.

24. All staff should take care of their physical and mental wellbeing

All staff are encouraged to look after their physical and mental wellbeing. This includes maintaining a healthy work-life balance. We take issues of stress very seriously, and look to provide appropriate support and help in these cases.

25. All staff should have access to counselling and support

Staff needing support are encouraged to discuss issues and concerns with the Lead Practitioner or Directory in confidence. Support can be provided internally (eg through the provision of a mentor).

26. Conclusion

All staff are expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct. By adhering to this code of conduct staff can be assured they are playing their part in safeguarding learners and protecting themselves. It is our expectation that all staff should sign a copy of this code of conduct.

Policy written by: Kate Morison (Lead Practitioner)

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