



 worcestershire  
county council

# WFSI Information Sheet Number 6 November 2007

## Risk Assessments!

Don't be alarmed! I know that sometimes the thought of risk assessments puts everyone into a panic and the more you think about things the more you begin to worry about what the risks are. But that is not the idea of risk assessments they should make you feel good about the safety procedures already in place and a means to review these procedures continually. Hopefully, after completing or reviewing your risk assessments you will feel confident in using outdoor environments, tools, having fires, building shelters and beyond. In this information sheet we have included step by step processes, governmental guidance as well as areas of concern highlighted by Forest School Leaders.

### Where to start!

First of all think about what needs to be risk assessed.

- The site and all aspects of the site (this can be done on 1 or several risk assessments)
- The experiences that any child might indulge in whilst at Forest School this can range from touching natural material to using knives and saws.
- The user group may influence the risk assessment e.g. the age of the children, specific children with SEN or even adults at Forest School such as pregnant women.



### Did you Know!

- If you are using a site with deer you need to be aware of the risks of Lyme Disease from the ticks that live on the deer.

- Children respond really well to being involved in risk assessing which is important as we can not eliminate all aspects of risks. Discussing with the children what risks are and how we can reduce risks is all part a parcel of Forest School with the onus being on the children to assess what they are doing and keep safe!

### Top Tips!

- **Dedicate time to risk assess!**  
Risk assessments must be reviewed annually. However, your risk assessments should be constantly updated when new risks arise or new procedures have been adopted.
- **Work with others!**  
Two heads are definitely better than one! Your risk assessments will be more detailed and thought through if you are discussing all the hazards and precautions.
- **Be at the Forest School Site**  
If you are at the actual place where Forest School takes place you are much less likely to miss key safety issues regarding the site. It will also help you think about all the possible experiences your children may have and then record the risks involved.
- **Written records must be kept**  
A written record of your risk assessments must be kept. Modified and assessed risk assessments as well as a record of your daily check should all be kept.





### **Step 1 - Hazards!**

Every risk assessment asks you to identify the hazards. This means what harm can be done to your user group! This could be anything from the smallest cut to a major accident!



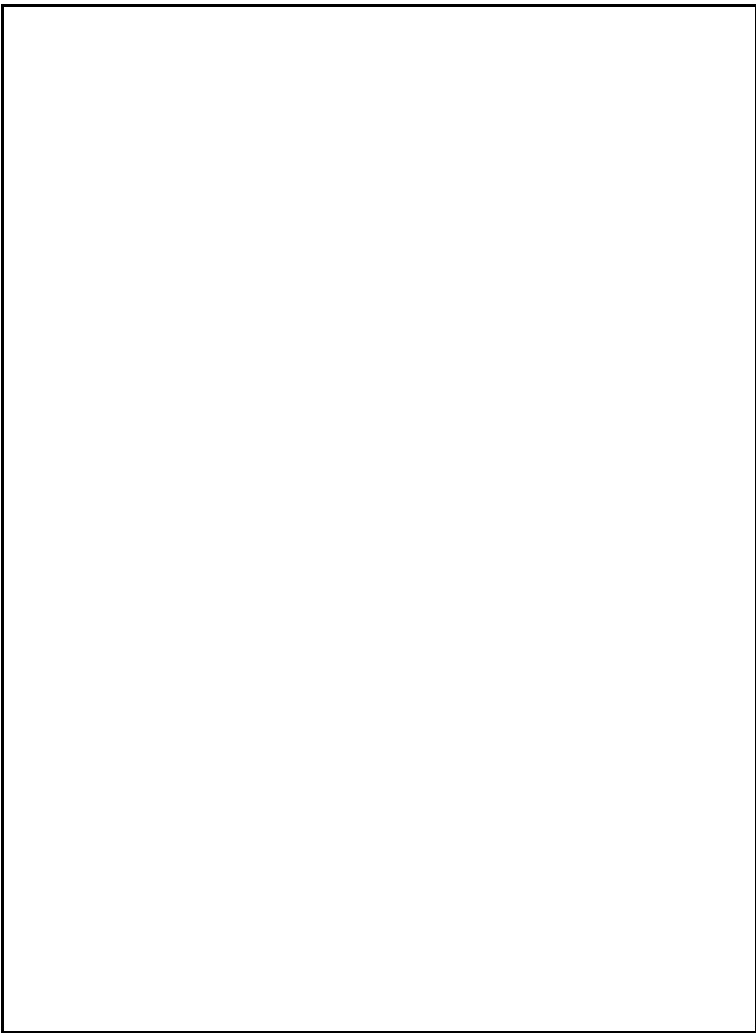
### **Step 2 - Calculate the risk!**

Most risk assessments ask you to calculate the risk by thinking of the probability of the risk occurring and multiplying that by the severity. The important thing to consider here is that this is the probability and severity if no precautions have been put in place. Eg. For stick carrying the probability is calculated by predicting how many children would hurt themselves on sticks if they had not been given any instruction. The probability is a number between 1-5 with 1 being the hazard is rare and 5 meaning the hazard would happen continuously. The severity of the injuries must be predicted with 1 being a slight bump or scratch and 5 being a major accident. These two numbers are multiplied to give a risk.



### **Step 3 - Precautions**

With almost all risk assessments the risk can be reduced by putting precautions in place. In most cases the level of risk will need to be reduced for an activity to be able to take place safely. These precautions can be anything from a verbal instruction to 1:1 adult supervision to lower risks. The important thing is to think through carefully every aspect of risk and try to eliminate as much as possible. All these things must be noted down e.g. with stick carrying a precaution is that sticks need to be carried by their side or large sticks must be dragged along the floor as well as behind the child. The severity stays the same but the level is lower after the problem has been reduced.



### **Advice from the Early Years Foundation Stage Matters**

*"The following Worcestershire County Council statement has been agreed with the Local Authority Health and Safety for those employed by Worcestershire County Council.*

#### Specific Legal Requirements:

The provider must conduct a risk assessment and review it regularly - at least once a year or more frequently where the need arises.

The risk assessment must identify aspects of the environment that need to be checked on a regular basis: providers must maintain a record of these particular aspects and when and by whom they have been checked. Providers must determine the regularity of these checks according to their assessment of the significance on individual risks.

The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that hazards to children - both indoors and outdoors - are kept to a minimum"

#### *General Guidance*

**Employees are bound in law first to consult and follow their employer's Health and Safety Guidance.**

For school-based Worcestershire County Council employees this is the '**Handbook of Safety Information**' 1999/2000. Other Worcestershire County Council employees (e.g. those in Children's Centres) should refer to the '**Central Services Safety Manual**' 2006.

If learning is to take place away from the normal base, staff must follow the guidance given in '**Off-site Visits, Field Studies and Outdoor Education Guidelines**' (WCC 2005).

Copies of the appropriate documents are held by all County Council schools and centres, but if any difficulty in accessing them is encountered, please contact Children's Services Health and Safety on 01905 766189.