



Reflection Pack:

The Value of Outdoor Play and Ways to Support it

Self-guided e-learning package for
Practitioners, Educators, Parents
& Caregivers

forest schooled

/'fɒrɪst sku:lɪd/

1. guided, challenged, humbled, and befriended by the features and forces of the natural world
2. inspired by a forest school ethos, including reflecting on and adapting practice to respond to community needs over time
3. taught a lesson related to Forest School (the hard way)

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Forest Schooled

www.forestschoolled.com

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in this e-learning pack! The following stories are excerpts from Forest Schooled, The Book with the additions of reflective questions. The intention is to help guide us in considering the topic more deeply, thereby improving the quality of the experiences we can provide for children (and ourselves). You can work through the pack at your own pace, and in whatever order feels best to you.

“The Forest School leader is a reflective practitioner and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too”

(Forest School Association, Full Principles and Criteria for Good Practice¹)

Note: Please encourage others who would be interested in this pack to purchase it through the website at www.forestschooled.com/e-learning. I acknowledge the ease with which a PDF can be shared with others and am trusting the community will support my work by buying it directly from the site. Thank you!

With Love,
Caylin (Forest Schooled)

If you'd like to read more collections of stories by Caylin, *Forest Schooled, The Book* is available for purchase on Amazon.

¹ www.forestschooolassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/

The Value of Outdoor Play and Ways to Support it



Play is not just about having fun...

"I'm the mother and you're the baby," said one girl to another.

"What am I?" said a third girl.

"You're the older sister," replied the first girl, "We're going to the toy store. Come on baby, get in the car."

The first girl (mother) then pretended to pick up the second girl (baby) and placed her on top of a rock (the car).

A fourth girl chimed in, *"I'm the cat! I'll stay at home doing cat stuff."* She then pretended to be busy licking her "paw."

I watched as the four girls, ages 6 to 7, acted out the scene of a family driving away in a car to go to the toy store (leaving the cat at home, of course). When they arrived, "mother" lifted "baby" out of the car and walked with "older sister" towards the store (another rock). The "cat" was still at home doing "cat stuff." All seemed to be one happy family until baby wanted to buy a barbie car from the toy store. Mother didn't want to pay for that and baby started to throw a tantrum. Mother got frustrated with baby and said, *"Never mind about the toy then, we're going home!"* Mother tried to pick up baby and take her back to the car, but baby wouldn't cooperate. This went on for a little while until all broke character and the girl who had been playing the mother said, *"If you won't come with me, then I'm not playing anymore."* To which the girl playing baby shouted, *"But you're not the boss of this!"* So, mother walked away angry and disgruntled and attempted to find something else to do.

Meanwhile, the cat stated, *"I'm going to the national cat convention! See you all later,"* and walked away.

My initially thought to all this was, *"Uh oh, I wonder if I should step in here. Maybe they need some help with learning how to work together..."* But I waited a moment to see what would happen next. I'm really glad I did.

The girl who had been playing the older sister began to gently speak to baby about her frustrations with mother. She said, *"Maybe if you don't like what she's doing you should speak to her and say 'Hey, I don't want to play it this way, can we do it this way instead?' People don't like it when you shout at them."* Baby was still feeling a bit annoyed, so she ignored this insightful piece of advice. She tried to get older sister to continue acting out the scene in the

toy store, but it was apparent that without mother, they could not play the way they had been before.

So older sister went over to mother who was sitting on another rock and spoke to her about what to do. It became obvious that older sister had become the mediator between the two feuding girls. Her manner was gentle and soothing, and she managed to stay neutral, as she went back and forth to speak to both parties about how to resolve the issue. After spending some time away from each other, the girls had cooled down a bit. Mother approached baby and they began to talk about what had happened. Mother said, *"You don't have to shout at me, I don't like that."* Baby said, *"I don't like it when you tell me what to do. I don't want to play with you if you're going to do that."* And they continued to talk it out until coming to a compromise which allowed them to play together once again.

I stood there, just a few metres away, genuinely amazed at what I had witnessed. Moments before, it had been a full-blown argument between two children. Now there had been mediation, discussion, and an attempt at compromise and cooperation. This was all done without any adult interference. It was a brilliant example of how play is not just about "having fun."

In *Free to Learn*², Peter Gray states, "The ultimate freedom in play is the freedom to quit. Because the players want to keep the game going, and because they know that other players will quit and the game will end if they are not happy, play is a powerful vehicle for learning how to please others while also pleasing oneself" (p. 141). Therefore, play is a key instrument in learning and practising how to navigate through life's issues, including disagreements between friends and dealing with strong emotions. Sometimes kids don't need us to learn these life lessons. Sometimes we just need to let them play.

Questions you could reflect on:

1. What do you notice in yourself when you observe children playing? What triggers your impulse to intervene?
2. Can you think of situations in the past where you think you could have stepped back and waited a little longer before intervening?
3. When a similar situation occurs again, try slowing your impulse to intervene (even just a few seconds). What happens?

² Gray (2013).