



Forest School Family Handbook

Welcome/Wadda Mooli

Enkindle Village School Families!

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Wulkurukaba and Bindal Peoples, and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging. We are committed to integrating First Nations perspectives into our program and fostering a connection with the land and its stories.

We are excited to welcome you to our Forest School program, where we connect with nature every day, rain or shine. This handbook will guide you through the key information you need to support your child's journey with us. At Enkindle Village School, we offer off-site Forest School sessions. We make use of natural play spaces in Wadda Mooli Creek using our two base camps, 'Bush Base Camp' and 'Rainforest Base Camp'.

Our Forest School Philosophy

Forest School is a philosophy that embraces nature-based, child-led learning. It doesn't even require leaving The James Cook University Campus —children can engage in **Forest School** in Wadda Mooli creek which runs directly past Enkindle Village School.

This holistic approach views children as capable and competent learners (Williams-Sieghfredsen, 2017). It focuses on **regular, uninterrupted, child-directed play in nature**, where children explore their environment and engage in **risky play** in all safe weather conditions (Button & Wilde, 2019; Coe, 2017).

On a typical day your child will likely be involved in a range of exciting activities, such as:

- Playing in freshwater creeks
- Going on bush walks and observing wildlife
- Building cubbies, bridges, or swings
- Using hand tools
- Climbing trees
- Creating artworks or journaling in their nature journal
- Storytelling with loose parts
- Practising mindfulness
- Making patterns with leaves
- Cooking in the mud kitchen
- Bush cooking

Forest School

Forest School is central to our ethos at Enkindle Village School, providing children with the opportunity to engage in adventurous, risky play. This approach supports crucial

developmental areas, including psychological, perceptual, physical/motor skills, and social development (Sandseter, 2010).

- **Forest School sessions in Wadda Mooli Creek:** We aim to, weekly, take each class to explore our base camps along Wadda Mooli Creek with full safety and risk-benefit assessments in place.

Adventurous Play: A Developmental Necessity

We believe that adventurous play, sometimes referred to as **risky play**, or **play with risk** is a natural and essential part of childhood. Children need opportunities to:

- Challenge themselves
- Test boundaries
- Explore and manage risks

This type of play promotes the development of **resilience, decision-making, motor skills, and self-confidence** (Sandseter, 2007; Little & Wyver, 2008).

Children encounter risks daily. Rather than removing these risks, we assess them to determine if the benefits for their development outweigh the potential harm. We then work with children to help them navigate these situations safely, ensuring they learn important life skills in a controlled environment. Daily safety checks and risk assessments are part of our routine to maintain a safe space for exploration. Our educators ensure a balance of challenge and safety, allowing children to grow into capable, resilient individuals (NQF, 2013).

Your child will have the opportunity to:

- Use real hand tools eg. hammers, drills, whittling knives (this is always supported by a staff member and students are inducted in how to use these tools safely)

- Build cubbies and tie knots
- Learn to cook using a gas cooker in the creek
- Climb trees
- Play in and around water

Please consider your comfort level with these activities, as they are an essential part of our Forest School program.

Learning from Nature and First Nations Perspectives

Through daily interaction with natural environments, children learn to respect the living and non-living elements of their world. Our program fosters a deep connection with nature, while also helping children gain a better understanding of **First Nations cultures**, particularly the connection between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the land, water, and sky.

Outdoor spaces offer endless possibilities for:

- **Open-ended play**
- **Risk-taking**
- **Physical activity**
- **Connection with nature**

This emphasises the importance of sustainability and environmental education in child development.

Benefits of Forest School

- **Foster a sense of belonging** and a strong attachment to their environment (Cumming & Nash, 2015).
- **Establish a connection with nature**, cultivating a deeper understanding of sustainability (Kelly & White, 2013).
- **Engage in meaningful dialogue** with educators, enhancing communication skills (Cumming & Nash, 2015).
- **Enhance language and social skills** through engagement, collaboration, and compromise with peers (Harris, 2017).
- **Encourage creativity and imagination** by allowing children to slow down and explore their ideas (Elliott & Chancellor, 2013).
- **Provide opportunities to take safe risks**, fostering risk assessment skills and building resilience (Gill, 2010).
- **Improve fine and gross motor skills**, along with enhanced proprioception and vestibular development (Sandseter et al., 2012).
- **Build confidence** as children develop self-awareness and independence (Duhn, 2012; Maynard, 2007).

Forest School Base Camps

Our Forest School sessions will take place both at our Bush and Rainforest Base Camps in Wadda Mooli Creek. As Forest School is a philosophy, it can be practised anywhere:

Our sessions happen every day (each student attends weekly) within the boundaries of our base camps. Here, children can explore natural loose parts, enjoy our mud kitchen, and use tools safely

A timetable will be provided at the start of each school year, outlining your child's days for Forest School. This timetable is flexible and may change at any time. All sessions will be held within school hours.

For **Forest School Sessions**, there is a consent form:

For your child to participate in **Forest School**, which takes place outside of Enkindles school gate on James Cook University Campus, you will need to sign a **consent form** before your child's first session at Enkindle Village School. This form will cover your child's attendance for the entire year.

All forms must be signed before your child can attend any **Forest School** sessions.

Attendance

When Shouldn't My Child Attend?

We ask that parents and guardians carefully assess whether it is appropriate for their children to attend Forest School. Children should not come to Forest School if they are unwell, excessively tired, or if there are concerns regarding their well-being due to forecasted weather conditions e.g. Asthma.

Forest School Independence (a parent and guardian free zone)

While we deeply value your involvement in your child's learning, Forest School sessions are intentionally **child-led and parent/guardian-free**. This allows children to:

- Make choices and solve problems on their own
- Take manageable risks in a safe environment
- Learn to trust their own abilities and judgment
- Develop resilience by navigating challenges independently
- Build strong peer relationships and social skills

Parents and guardians play a crucial role in supporting children outside of sessions and celebrating their achievements. By stepping back during Forest School, we help children

grow in confidence and independence, ensuring they return with pride in what they have accomplished.

Staff

Our Forest School program is led by Jessica Hay, a highly experienced practitioner with a Level 3 Forest School Certificate and a Certificate in Advanced Training in Bush Kindy Education. Jess brings a wealth of knowledge, passion, and expertise in outdoor learning, ensuring that each session is safe, engaging, and designed to nurture children's independence, curiosity, and confidence. Our classroom teacher aides will be assisting during each Forest School session. All educators present have been inducted and are dedicated to supporting children's learning in natural settings.

Forest School sessions may be cancelled at short notice; in this case, children will remain on-site at Enkindle Village School. Possible reasons for cancellation include extreme weather or staff illness.

Clothing and Preparation for Forest School

Parents are responsible for determining appropriate clothing based on the weather forecast for their child's session. It is essential that children wear suitable and protective clothing and enclosed footwear that:

- Allows freedom of movement for activities such as heavy lifting, climbing, balancing, and running.
- Consists of play clothes that can get dirty or muddy.
- Keeps them warm and dry in cold or wet weather.
- Protects them from harmful sun exposure and UV rays during warm and high UV conditions.

To ensure your child is well-prepared for their day at Enkindle Village School, please pack the following items in their backpack daily.

- **Lunch:** A nutritious lunchbox as students are usually very hungry after a morning at the creek (we ask you consider the environment by not including any packaging where possible).
- **Water Bottle:** To keep them hydrated throughout the day (there will be access to drinking water to supplement this when required off-site).
- **Wide Brimmed Hat:** For sun protection during outdoor play.
- **Closed-in Shoes/Water Shoes:** For safety and comfort during various activities, preferably not gumboots (inexpensive ones from stores like Kmart are suitable).
- **Raincoat/Poncho:** To stay dry in wet weather.
- **Two Spare Changes of Clothes:** For any spills or accidents/water play
- **Spare Underwear:** To ensure they're always prepared.
- **Wet Bag:** For storing wet items.
- **Sunscreen & Insect Repellent (labelled with your child's name)**
- **Quick Dry Towel:** To dry off (again you can get these at Kmart)

The following table provides examples of recommended clothing, clothing that is not recommended, and unacceptable clothing:

Warm Weather	Cold Weather / Rain
Recommended Clothing and Footwear	Recommended Clothing and Footwear

Light, loose-fitting short sleeved tops and pants , broad-brimmed hat or legionnaire's hat, closed-toe shoes	Raincoats/waterproof clothing, long pants, long-sleeved top
Not Recommended	Not Recommended
Skirts or dresses, jumpers/warm clothing	Jeans, skirts and dresses
Unacceptable Clothing and Footwear	Unacceptable Clothing and Footwear
Open-toe shoes, sandals, thongs, crocs, singlet tops	Open-toe shoes, sandals, thongs, crocs, singlet tops

Please apply sunscreen and insect repellent to your child before the start of every school day.

Medical Conditions and Medication

Parents and guardians of children with diagnosed medical conditions must provide a Medical Management Plan completed by a registered medical practitioner before their child begins at Enkindle Village School at the start of the year. Other medications may be signed into Administration upon arrival at Enkindle Village School in accordance with

Enkindles Administration of Medications Policy. These will then be taken along in our off-site medication First Aid kit.

Staff will ensure that all medications for children participating in Forest School, along with their individual action plans, are taken along to each session. Educators will also carry a comprehensive First Aid Kit and Snake Kit that includes emergency medications for all children participating in that session.

Training and Awareness Sessions

All staff members attending have completed an Enkindle Forest School Induction and a minimum of two staff members attending each session have certifications in First Aid and CPR. Before participating in Forest School sessions, children will receive daily safety briefings to ensure they are familiar with safety protocols prior to commencing their session.

Safety and Risk Assessment

Forest School encourages children to engage with risks in a managed and safe environment. From climbing trees to using hand tools, we work with children to build their confidence in assessing and managing risk. A minimum of two staff members attending each session hold CPR and first-aid qualifications, and a full risk benefit assessment (base camp risk assessment) is conducted for every location.

Upon arrival at the Forest School Base Camp, staff will conduct a safety sweep before allowing the children to play (which is recorded). Additionally, the children will receive a safety briefing regarding the site and the opportunities available for that day before they begin their session.

In addition, a role will be taken before attending the creek, head counts will be conducted at the start of each off-site Forest School session, during and again at the end

of the session. This practice ensures that all children are always accounted for, enhancing safety and providing peace of mind for parents and educators alike. At each Forest School session a boundary is set and students are informed of this boundary and staff members will supervise these boundaries during the session.

Transportation

We will explore the natural world beyond our grounds through walking to our Forest School Base Camps. If another mode of transport is used (example. A bus) then a separate one off excursion form will be given to parents and guardians and consent will be required.

When walking, children will pair up, with one educator leading at the front and another at the back; if there are three or more educators, one will be positioned in the middle. A roll is taken as we leave Enkindle and is taken to each session. For bus travel, headcounts will be taken upon boarding, during the journey, and when exiting the bus.

Communication During Off-Site Programs

Our educators will always carry mobile phones during Forest School sessions, ensuring they can be easily contacted. This allows them to communicate directly with parents and Enkindle Village School and reach any necessary services as needed.

Your child's safety and well-being are our top priorities, and we encourage you to reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

In addition, please ensure that your mobile phone is turned on and reachable during Forest School sessions (and during all school hours) in case we need to contact you.

Emergency Evacuation and Lockdown

There may be times when it becomes necessary for Forest School participants to lockdown on-site, or evacuate to a safer location to ensure the safety and well-being of the group. In such cases, Forest School staff will adhere to our emergency procedures. They will relocate to the safe area/base camp identified at the start of each session and wait until the emergency situation has improved before deciding whether to continue activities or return to Enkindle Village School.

Reasons for relocation may include, but are not limited to, the following: fire or bushfire, a missing child, aggressive dogs off-leash, other animal intrusions, uninvited individuals or strangers posing threats or disturbances, and natural events such as extreme weather, floods, severe winds, thunderstorms, or medical emergencies.

Inclusion of All Children

At Enkindle Village School, inclusion is central to our philosophy. Every child, regardless of ability or specific needs, deserves a safe and nurturing environment to explore, learn, and thrive. We are committed to continually enhancing our support systems to meet the diverse needs of our community and to fostering strong partnerships with families to ensure each child feels valued and supported.

If your child requires additional support, please speak with their classroom teacher. We work closely with families to provide equitable access to education, care, and participation.

As part of our inclusive approach, we ask for your understanding and cooperation with the following:

For some students, a full Forest School session may occasionally be overwhelming. If a child is having difficulty with self-regulation, following instructions, or maintaining safety,

their participation may be adjusted to best support their wellbeing. This may include shorter sessions or remaining at Enkindle Village School during Forest School time. Such decisions will be made through **restorative conversations** involving the student, educators, and, where appropriate, parents or guardians. Families will be informed of any adjustments. These measures ensure each child's experiences remain safe, positive, and supportive of their individual needs.

Partnership and Support

We strive to maintain a safe and supportive environment for all children. Your collaboration is essential to these efforts. This may involve early pickups during challenging sessions.

Thank you for your understanding and support as we work together to create the best possible environment for your child and all the children at Enkindle Village School.