



## Tree Climbing Policy

### Purpose

This policy aims to set out Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School's stance on tree climbing, in terms of pedagogy and safety.

### Scope

This policy relates to all staff and pupils.

### Why is tree climbing important?

Steiner-Waldorf education places an emphasis on experiential learning and use of the outdoors. The DfE Guide to Early Years Foundation Stage in Steiner Waldorf Settings refers to tree climbing and its importance.

Allowing children to find their own limits regarding physical movement in a safe environment with supportive adults lets them develop a healthy relationship with their own bodies and an understanding of their capabilities.

Too often, children in modern society either run headlong into risks without assessing them first or fail to extend their experiences for fear of taking risks. A sterile learning and play environment which is devoid of risks has the potential to exacerbate this problem, offering few opportunities to learn from risk-taking. Many organisations have urged schools and councils to reverse the trend towards risk-free playgrounds for these very reasons. (For examples, see: ROSPA's campaign of 'As much as necessary, not as much as possible'; Go For IT Awards for adventurous play; Sir Digby Jones' paper 'Cotton Wool Kids').

We need to navigate a sensible balance between allowing children to take risks but ensuring we are taking our safety responsibilities seriously. Tree climbing provides an opportunity to allow children to learn to manage and assess risk. It also provides children with an opportunity to genuinely overcome fear – a metaphor for other encounters with fear in later life.

Tree climbing embodies the above issues. In the last 30 years it has become rare to see children climbing trees. In fact, it is common to see parents berating their children for getting muddy in the park, let alone climbing a tree. In Steiner-Waldorf education, play is seen as children's work. It is important for us to provide an environment that facilitates real play.

## **Risks**

As with any climbing on playground equipment, climbing trees can entail significant risks, resulting in injury or death. Factors increasing risks associated with tree climbing at Elmfield include:

- Climbing above hard surfaces such as stone paths and fences
- Climbing in areas out of sight of a supervising adult
- Taking ropes or other equipment up a tree
- Lack of education for children about tree-climbing risks
- Fighting or dangerous play at height
- Lack of awareness among staff regarding safe play
- Climbing on weak branches (i.e. thinner than pupil's thigh)

## **Requirements to manage risks**

The laws of England and Wales require that employers assess risks and put measures in place to control them (e.g. Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999).

Ofsted requires that all schools manage the safety and welfare of all pupils.

## **Measures undertaken to address risks**

- Tree climbing is restricted to four manageable areas (next to the estates hut, the laurels next to the hall, the laurels leading down to the hard-court and the yew and willow tree at the end of the bottom field and the single oak tree at the opposite end of the bottom field), to maximise visibility for play supervisors and minimise risks of falling onto fences and paths. This will be reviewed from time to time. The only circumstance in which trees can be climbed outside the three designated areas is forest school sessions where small groups of children are supervised during tree climbing.
- The designated climbing areas should not be surface-dressed in any way (e.g. with woodchip). In line with advice provided to the school, surface-dressing introduces a significant risk in itself by insulating the root system and thereby infecting the roots, weakening the tree and increasing the likelihood of the tree collapsing. Instead, risks will be minimised by regular education, good supervision and clear rules.
- At break times a minimum of 2 adults will be present in the play areas where tree climbing is permitted.
- Educational sessions on tree-climbing are run for pupils annually, with the aim of helping children enjoy the activity and becoming good at perceiving and managing risks themselves. For children joining the school after the September – October education sessions have taken place, further sessions will take place before the Easter holidays.
- Clear rules regarding outdoor play are provided for all staff to enforce. These include it being forbidden to take anything up a tree such as large toys and skipping ropes. Play supervisors ensure tree climbing is restricted to designated areas and that there is no horseplay at height or goading of children to climb higher. Children wearing hoods must tuck the hood in before climbing.
- Supervising adults may exercise their judgment to intervene or ultimately ban children from tree climbing if they deem it appropriate to do so.

## **References**

Department for Education (2009) Guide to the Early Years Foundation Stage in Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Settings.

Sir Digby Jones (2007) Cotton Wool Kids. Issues Paper 7. Releasing the potential for children to take risks and innovate. <http://www.hti.org.uk/pdfs/pu/IssuesPaper7.pdf>

HTI (2011) Go For It Awards. <http://www.hti.org.uk/leadership-development/pupil-voice/go4it>

ROSPA (2013) Playground safety inspections.

Simon Shackleton (2013) Report on Playground Safety, Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School.

Wicksteed Playscapes (2008) An essential guide to BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177. Children's Playground Equipment and Surfacing.

**Policy last reviewed September 2017**

**Lesley Taberer, Bursar**

## Tree climbing education session

Teachers should use this form to guide sessions with their class. Tree climbing has an important pedagogical role in Waldorf education but it can also cause serious injury or even death. A session must be delivered to each class annually, before the October half term. Sessions should ideally be run outside so that children can see things for themselves.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Pupils present</b>                                       | <b>Date of session</b>                                     |
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 300px;"></div> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px;"></div> |
|   | <b>Teacher leading session</b>                             |
|   | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px;"></div> |
|   | <b>Teacher's signature</b>                                 |
|   | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px;"></div> |

### Topics to be covered (teacher to tailor according to age):

- **Respect and care for nature.** Looking after trees. (How old is this tree? How should we treat it? Is it ok to whack it with a stick?)
- **Risks.** (Climbing can be fun, but if you fall what can happen? Serious injury. That's why these rules are important)
- **Areas where tree climbing is allowed** (3 designated areas only, point them out)
- **Soft landings** (Climbing over stone paths & fences not allowed. Why?)
- **When is it safe to climb?** (Is the branch thinner than your thigh? Test branches to see if they'll carry your weight. Slippery/wet?)
- **Ropes and other objects** are not allowed up trees. (Why? What can happen with ropes up a tree?)
- **Hoodies. We must tuck hoods into our tops** (Why? If you jump from a tree and your hood is hooked onto a branch, you're left hanging...).
- **Goading** beyond limits. (Is it ok to dare friends to go higher and higher? Why not?)
- **Arguing or fighting** whilst up a tree is unsafe. (Why?)
- **If in doubt, stay near the trunk and hug it!**

*Please hand this to Joanne Claridge, H&S Admin, when complete.*