

Visiting The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery

Many thanks for your interest in visiting The Secret Garden.

The day at the Secret Garden begins at 08.30 with children being dropped off at the park at the foot of the village. We depart from the park at 09.30 reaching the woods and setting up 'base camp' by 10.30.

We invite you to join us in the woods at 10.30 to watch the first adventures and play of the day emerging and you may stay with the group until 14.00. Please leave your car at the bottom of School Brae by the copper beech tree

As a visitor to the Secret Garden:

- You must not be alone with any child. Staff will be aware of your presence and may ask you to move to an area where they have better view of you. Equally, if you notice that you have inadvertently wandered into an alone space with a child step back into the area with staff immediately.
- You must not assist a child with toileting, please inform a member of staff if a child in need of help.
- Feel free to take time away from the group for yourself; perhaps to explore other areas of the woodland or simply to have a break. Staff will be taking breaks but this in no way impacts on whether you are present or not.
- And finally, we would like you to be aware of the impact that your presence may have on both the staff and children and with this in mind please take time to read the information below.

Since 2004, when Cathy Bache first began working outdoors with preschool children, a distinct ethos has been developing which includes developing:

- a quiet, strong, non invasive adult presence that allows children to find their own play and inspiration in the outdoor environment
- independence, creativity and resilience within each child,
- a spaciousness of play that has potential of risk but not of actual danger,

The children of the Secret Garden are physically and mentally active and take a delight in sharing their insights and experiences with adults, which is marvellous for all. This delight, however, can lead to a distortion of the experience that the child has the potential of having and that the adult can witness when we have visitors.

On a normal Secret Garden day on arrival to the woods and 'base camp' the children step out into the natural space and slowly begin to engage with the environment and each other. One child may be playing alone; perhaps looking for bugs, entranced by leaves, trying to master an activity that defeated him/her on a previous occasion. Our staff will be watching the child but, unless support is asked for, will stand way back and watch what emerges.

A group of children may leap into role play: assigning roles, tasks, ideas, concepts. Again these children are observed from a non invasive distance so that adult concepts don't halt the potential of magic that can occur in such a spacious play space.

Consider for a moment how your presence may affect this slow emerging of play, discovery, learning, and delight.

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We would like to ask that on first arriving in the woods you stand WAY back from the play. Staff can identify a good watching post for you – think David Attenborough and animal watching. Our first 30 minutes in the woods are crucial for laying down the most auspicious energy for individual and group creativity – if it begins with adult focus and support this may last for the day.

Lunchtime is an opportunity for sitting in the circle with the children; listening more closely to conversations, engaging, asking for thoughts and ideas but still be careful about what your role becomes at this moment: are you driving the children or are you allowing them to find their way? After lunch be open to and very aware of the change of energy that occurs.

Some children are quieter, needing a break. If you enjoy telling stories please step into this role with a group of children but be aware of how long you're holding the space and power. Be aware of when you need to step right out of the action and play and go back to watching post role to allow the children the freedom of becoming the motivators once more.

Some children step out from lunch with renewed energy and sparks, and play can be very physical and wild. Interact but again be aware for how long. Set the children off in a particular direction in play and then find the correct moment for stepping out and watching it all happen before your eyes. There is a subtlety of 'power over' and 'power with' that we observe at the Secret Garden – power with is what we aim for in all interactions.

Let us empower the child rather than disempower;
let us enable the child rather than disable.

Lunchtime, snack time, the end of the day are all moments when there are tasks to be achieved . . . usually involving rucksacks. As staff we use language to assist the children rather than always physically helping: offering ideas of how to achieve the aim, offering solutions, strategies; a common one is 'can you find someone that could help you?' Watch what the children can do for themselves, think about how you can assist so that they do achieve for themselves.

Please bring with you suitable clothing for being outdoors: warm and waterproof. We spend a lot of time close to the ground so waterproof trousers are often necessary. If you are unsure about clothing don't hesitate to contact us, we do have spare adult clothing.

Please bring your own lunch, snacks, and drinks but be aware that if you wish to eat food other than at lunch (11.30) we ask you to take yourself away from the group.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Secret Garden.
Cathy Bache & Lesley Creevy