

Risk benefit assessment: fire skills session

Activity

Using a fire steel to start a fire. The session will involve the children making and lighting a fire using a fire steel. They will start by practicing getting sparks from the steel, then practice lighting some tinder (in the form of cotton wool) with it, then progress to making their own small fire using the tinder and kindling wood. They will be in 3 groups of around four children, but each pioneer will make their own individual fire. Fire steels, cotton wool, wood etc will be provided. We will finish with some communal marshmallow toasting around a separate larger fire that will have already been lit. (Thanks to Simon Harding of <http://www.broomheath.co.uk/> for advice on the session.)

Participants

Around 12 Pioneers (children aged 10 – 12). Some children may have some additional needs. There will be at least 3 additional adults on hand to help, allowing me to ‘float’.

Relevant Woodcraft Folk policy

No stated policy on risk-benefit. Conventional risk assessment forms are generally used. This RBA has been drawn up on the assumption that Woodcraft Folk supports managed risk-taking, and recognises the value of bushcraft activities (including learning fire skills) and of allowing children to take appropriate responsibility for their own safety.

Question or issue	Risks	Associated benefits	Local factors	Precedents and comparisons	Judgement and actions
Dangerous behaviour	Child/ren run near fire, wave burning sticks around etc	Children who take part in or witness dangerous behaviour may learn the consequences of it	Possibility of some boisterous/excitable children	Cudham: children are expected to comply with adult directions when around fire pit	State to children that they are not to run or wave burning sticks around, and that they have to do what adults ask them to. Make clear that if they do not, they will sit out the rest of the session. Risk of injury outweighs benefit of allowing dangerous behaviour.

Question or issue	Risks	Associated benefits	Local factors	Precedents and comparisons	Judgement and actions
Location of fire areas	Congestion and risk of collision/pushing if areas too close together	Learning to be responsible when near a fire	As above	Cudham fire pit	Logs used to define all fire areas – fires to be set and started only within log space. Leave c. 1m space around each of 3 small fire areas. Control access to larger fire (adult permission needed)
Clothes are set alight	Clothes catch fire from dangling into fire	None	As above	As above	Adults to check clothing at start of session for hanging fabrics. Arrange fire areas so children cannot walk over fires. Have bucket of water, towel and garden hose to hand. Designate top of garden as gathering area in case of incidents, and make this clear to all.
Burn injury	Hand/arm/face burn from stick	Children learn from minor, easily healed injuries	As above	As above	Reduce risk of falling into fire by arranging activity so that children are low to the ground and, if they become unbalanced, would go backwards. Have bucket of water, towel and garden hose to hand. Have first aid kit to hand.
Eye injury	Risk from use of sticks for toasting marshmallows	Children need experience to learn how to manage a stick responsibly	As above	Cudham:	Monitor children's behaviour with sticks and intervene as appropriate.
Trip hazards	Risk of falling; slight risk of falling into fire area	Learning to be responsible when near a fire	Garden has some uneven paving	None	Light path with tea lights, and fence off garden so there is only one route from patio to fire area.
Weather	Wind makes fire harder to control	None	Garden is sheltered	None	Make smaller fire if wind is a problem.

Checklist for start of session

- Check arrangement of fire areas
- Set up bucket, towel and garden hose
- Ensure first aid kit is to hand
- Check children's clothing as they arrive
- State gathering area once everyone has arrived
- State expectations re: behaviour, and sanctions

Tim Gill

www.rethinkingchildhood.com

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