



Frequently Asked Questions

“What do you do when it rains?”

Play!! Remaining warm and dry is the most important element in enabling happiness and creative play in all weathers. Whilst the woods themselves afford shelter (and our practitioners know where to go to obtain maximum shelter from the prevailing wind), we also have large, lightweight tarps that we rig up to provide extra protection - and a dry place to eat lunch. We are fortunate to have a yurt with a wood-burning stove that is really toasty in even the coldest conditions, and we can access this whenever required.

“What about toileting?”

We have a specific area at each play camp where we erect a tarp to offer shelter and privacy for toileting. We compost our faeces waste, offering the children the opportunity to witness the transformational process of poo into apples! Children not used to toileting outside quickly adapt, and staff are on hand to assist as needed.

“How will you assist my child in settling in at the Secret Garden?”

We appreciate what a huge step it is for both children and parents/carers to enter into pre-school education, and acknowledge that fears may be manifested by both the child and adult. Our aim is to support your child as best we can as they enter this new world.

After your initial visit to meet staff, ask questions and explore a bit of the woods with your child, we then invite you back a week prior to your child's first day, for a two-hour pre-start visit. This visit will be on a day on which your child will ultimately attend, in order that they meet the adults who will be caring for them, socialise with the children they will play with, and also take part in the lunchtime routine.

Then, on your child's first day, we ask that you bring them to the play park at the foot of Letham village with enough time to play and socialise before walking up the hill. If your child is anxious we may ask that the drop off be as swift as possible, if this feels like the right approach for your child. This may sound counterintuitive, but in our experience, often the swifter the separation the quicker your child will settle down. For other children, it may be helpful for a parent or carer to stay a little while. Our staff are very skilled in managing this transition, and will advise you, and support your child, in the best way possible. If on your departure your child is crying, be assured that they will be cared for in an exemplary way. We find that compassionate, empathetic listening helps the child to connect with the staff, and release any feelings of sadness or fear, allowing him/her to step into play quite quickly. We will contact you via a phone call or text message to keep you informed as to how your child is getting on, and how the staff are supporting them.

All of our staff have done the introductory course in Parenting by Connection and are very aware of the importance in recognizing and supporting a child's emotions, particularly during the settling in stage.

“My child comes home frustrated that he can't climb the trees - could you help him please?”

We have a policy of not physically assisting children to climb up trees. We love explaining the best way to use their bodies to succeed as they climb, but are wary of helping them reach a goal that they are not yet physically or emotionally able to achieve. Many of the self-taught activities of the Secret Garden rely on physical experience and strength, a lot of watching peers, and a huge amount of perseverance, all of which help develop emotional resilience. When your child does succeed in climbing the tree, or jumping on the swing, the sense of achievement is phenomenal for both child and staff!

Top tips from parents/carers:

Weather:

“No matter what you think about the weather on a given day, try to be positive, as this will rub off on the children. Turn rainy days into lots of puddles to play in, a drink for the plants, and good news for the farmers who are growing crops....”

“Adults often need a little reminder that children see things differently, and that we are not being cruel by exposing them to all weathers. We are creating opportunities and memories which will stay with them.”

“There is no such thing as bad weather, just inappropriate clothing.”

Drop-off and mud:

“Be prepared for an initial sense of doubt on dropping your little one(s) off in the pouring rain as you dash back indoors as quickly as possible. Enough to say as confidence grows with staff (and with your own child's resilience), it soon passes.”

“Don't worry about sending your child to the Secret Garden in muddy clothes! They don't have to look immaculate as they certainly won't be at the end of the day!”

“If you're heading to work after dropping your child off at the park, keep a pair of wellies in the car. This saves you having to clean your shoes in the sink at work!”

Pick-up and mud:

“If you like to have a clean car, keep an old car mat in the boot and stand your child on it next to the car to take off their wellies and dirty clothes. Alternatively, change in the lovely mud shelter in the park. A trug in the boot is handy for really muddy clothes.”

“Check the label before washing waterproofs. Some have a coating and you shouldn't use a detergent as it strips away the waterproofing. If you must wash them, a warm water-only wash in your machine does just as well.”

“Be on the look-out for hidden twigs, stones, fungus, flower heads, etc. in pockets and rucksacks before putting items in the wash!”

Rucksack:

“The rucksacks provided are great but not fully waterproof. Put spare clothing in a waterproof dry bag (eg. those by Exped) inside the rucksack (plastic bags leak!)”

“Put a spare carrier bag in the rucksack in which to put wet or soiled clothing.”

Lunch-box:

“Little food flasks to keep spaghetti, macaroni, beans, pasta, etc. warm are handy, but a food flask and a drink flask together may be a bit too heavy.”

“Food and drink containers should be easy to open - think cold fingers on small hands - this encourages independence as your child is less reliant on adult help.”

“A small flask of hot chocolate goes down a treat on winter days!”

“Only fill your child's water bottle with as much water as you think they will realistically drink - this will help keep the weight of their rucksack down, and you can also get away with including a wee flask of hot chocolate too without overloading your little one!”

“It's useful to pop small items such as cutlery together in a small bag to stop them disappearing to the bottom of rucksacks!”

“If it's a very cold day, try filling your child's bottle with hot water, which will then be a nicer temperature to drink as the day unfolds.”