



January 2026

Foresters Outdoor Pre School – Safer Sleeping Policy (Ages 2–5)

Informed by The Lullaby Trust and current child development research

1. Policy Statement

At Foresters Outdoor Pre School, we are committed to safeguarding children's physical, emotional, and developmental wellbeing through safe, respectful, and responsive sleep practices. Our policy is grounded in guidance from The Lullaby Trust and supported by research into early childhood sleep science. We recognise sleep as a biological necessity, not a behavioural choice, and prioritise uninterrupted, natural sleep for every child. Our outdoor learning environment is enriching and can be physically demanding, and we remain responsive to children's increased need for rest during the day.

2. Policy Aims

- To ensure all children sleep in a safe and secure environment.
- To meet the individual sleep needs of children without unnecessary restriction.
- To prevent harm that may result from interrupting natural sleep cycles.
- To empower staff with knowledge and training around safe and developmentally appropriate sleep practices.

3. Why Uninterrupted Sleep Matters: Research Insight

Numerous studies have shown that interrupting a child's natural sleep cycle can have short- and long-term negative effects on their wellbeing:

- **Cognitive Impact:** According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, interrupted sleep can impair memory consolidation, attention span, and emotional regulation in young children (Owens, 2004).
- **Physical Development:** Growth hormone is primarily secreted during deep sleep (slow-wave sleep). Disruption of this phase may hinder physical development (Jenni & LeBourgeois, 2006).
- **Emotional Regulation:** Sleep disruption has been associated with increased tantrums, emotional dysregulation, and social difficulties (Touchette et al., 2007).
- **Stress Response:** Waking a child prematurely may cause disorientation, increased cortisol levels (stress hormone), and irritability (Mindell & Owens, 2015).
- **The Lullaby Trust** and NHS guidance both advise that sleep should not be cut short unnecessarily, as consistent, uninterrupted rest is vital for mental health, immune function, and neurological development.

4. Safe Sleep Environment

- We provide calm, quiet, and well-ventilated areas for rest.
- All bedding is firm, flat, and age-appropriate and is cleaned after each use.
- Children have their own bedding which is regularly washed and not used by others.
- Outdoor naps are permitted only in appropriate weather and within designated, supervised spaces that meet safety standards.
- Children may choose comfort objects (e.g., a small cuddly toy) if age-appropriate and agreed with parents.

5. Individual Needs and Natural Rhythms

- Children are not woken up unless absolutely necessary so as not to interrupt their natural sleep cycle. (e.g., safeguarding concern).
- We recognise that sleep patterns in children aged 2–5 can vary widely. Some may need daily naps, others none.

6. Outdoor Learning and Increased Sleep Needs

Outdoor learning is at the heart of our ethos. While it offers enormous developmental benefits, it is also physically and mentally stimulating.

- Physical exertion, exposure to fresh air, and natural sensory input can increase fatigue in young children.

- Some children who no longer nap at home may need occasional rest while attending our setting, especially after long periods of physical play or time spent in varying weather conditions.
- We respond to children's cues and offer rest opportunities even when naps are not part of their regular home routine.

7. Staff Supervision and Recording

- Sleep checks are conducted every 10 minutes and recorded (including breathing, colour, and positioning).
- The sleep start and end times are recorded so that we can inform parents.
- Children are always within sight or sound of a qualified adult during rest.
- Any changes in sleep behaviour or health concerns are reported to parents promptly.

8. Partnership with Parents

- We work closely with parents/carers to understand and support individual sleep routines.
- Parental preferences are respected where safe and developmentally appropriate.
- All routines are reviewed regularly in partnership with families.

9. Staff Training and Responsibilities

- All team members receive training on:
 - Safe sleep practices per NHS and Lullaby Trust guidelines.
 - Understanding sleep cycles in young children.
 - The impact of sleep on learning, behaviour, and wellbeing.
- Designated staff are responsible for overseeing sleep logs and ensuring consistent implementation of this policy.

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Approved by: Eliza Barlow, Manager

References:

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- Jenni, O.G., & LeBourgeois, M.K. (2006). Understanding Sleep-Wake Behavior and Sleep Disorders in Children: The Value of a Developmental Framework. *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care*, 36(7), 230–272.
- Touchette, E., et al. (2007). Associations Between Sleep Duration Patterns and Behavioral/Cognitive Functioning at School Entry. *Sleep*, 30(9), 1213–1219.
- Mindell, J.A., & Owens, J.A. (2015). *A Clinical Guide to Pediatric Sleep: Diagnosis and Management of Sleep Problems*. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- The Lullaby Trust. (n.d.). <https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk>