



THE WILDLING TRIBE

The Wildling Way - Our Pedagogical Approach

We are often asked why we allow young children to freely use "dangerous" tools, explore the woodland without supervision and at times out of adults' direct line of sight, come up close to our fire pit and take what appear to be unmanaged risks

At the Wildling Tribe, we do things a little differently to most traditional forest schools or outdoor providers. This is why:

Since time began and in tribes throughout the world, real and, at times, life threatening risk has been and is a part of every day life.

As soon tribal children can move independently, they are taught these real life risks through experience and modelling, through stories and witnessing the consequences of not appreciating the dangers and risks, rather than having these risks removed or managed so that they are no longer real risks or dangers at all. In most cases, living in close connection with the land and all that shares it is full of risks and potential dangers that cannot be removed as they form the very fabric of these people's culture, environment, diet and way of life.

We almost always find that these children - the ones exposed to real risk - are more confident, have higher self-esteem, and in general have a better quality of life than those who grow and develop in an environment where risks and dangers are managed before children get a chance to even be aware of them.

The Western world has become more and more risk averse over the years, and in the majority of cases, risks are so over-managed that they no longer resemble real life.

It is assumed that children need supervision when faced with risk or danger and that they cannot independently manage that risk or develop the emotional and mental skillset to keep themselves safe whilst not affecting the quality of their life experiences.

It is assumed if children are given the opportunity to self-manage the risky and potentially dangerous situations they come across, that they will be unable to evaluate these situations and make wise decisions without adult intervention and guidance.

In our experience, this is false.

Children, when presented with a risk or potential danger are often as adept at managing that risk as adults, and sometimes more so! All too often, we do not give children the chance to show they possess or develop this skill set because as adults we feel we are somehow more equipped to make wise decisions and choices than children are and jump in to manage that risk for them by removing it or making it negligible.

We feel this is robbing our children of the life lessons and opportunities to grow and develop their own inherent inner knowing, which in turn prevents them from fully experiencing life and all its wonderful adventures.

Over-managing risk or removing it altogether does not give our Wildlings the extent of appreciation of risk and danger that these things deserve. Without a hands-on and practical innerstanding of the need to appreciate and respect the dangers and risks they face, children are often unable to use their natural, inbuilt self-preservation instinct to manage risk when presented with it in life. They have not mastered the necessary critical analysis and decision-making skills nor have they been able to hone their inner voice or inherent instinct, because the risks have been managed for them in their experience thus far.

In The Wildling Tribe, we place emphasis on showing children through doing. We have very few rules - in fact we have no specific "rules", although we do have general guidelines, and always teach children "The Wildling Way" (please see our website for more information).

We spend time talking about what risks may be involved before we start on any task, mission or activity and demonstrate what we think are the best or safest ways to do things.

During Wildling Lore, we tell stories and share memories of times when we have not managed risk in the best way ourselves, and what happened as a result. We tell tribal stories and myths aimed at helping our Wildlings.

Most importantly, we encourage children to think for themselves and discover the intuition and instinct to keep themselves safe and well.

We show children that they CAN do anything they want to do, as long as they use common sense and Wildling Wisdom to do it. In doing so, we find our Wildlings tend to self-manage and co-manage risks they are presented with without the need for extensive supervision.

We focus on empowerment and self-awareness and are often astounded at just how well children can manage themselves and their adventures! Some of our favourite times in The Tribe are when we overhear a group of children discussing the risks and benefits of a plan they have, often showing a level of risk management that is more finely tuned than most adults.

We strongly feel this self-directed, autonomous approach is a vital part of supporting children to stand in their power and become self-aware, courageous, grounded and balanced young people and adults.

This is not to say our sessions are dangerous - not at all!

Years of experience of supporting children from all backgrounds, in all environments, of all abilities all over the world have shown us a number of what we feel are important pillars of The Wildling Tribe:

- 1. BACK OFF! - Children do not need constant supervision and are often more able to make wise decisions and choices if not heavily supervised**
- 2. Children generally do not want to hurt or injure themselves**
- 3. Adult intervention can sometimes make matters worse**
- 4. The old saying, "having eyes in the back of your head" is a non-negotiable when employing this approach**
- 5. Supporting and encouraging autonomy and the freedom to choose and make mistakes is not only paramount to children's sense of self and wellbeing, but yields consistently amazing results!**

We risk assess thoroughly before each session or event and then employ a dynamic risk assessment approach in all we do. We also model this to children attending The Wildling Tribe by explaining our decisions and how we have come to them and asking the children themselves to assess the safety of the ideas and plans they have with our guidance and support.

We actively encourage older and more confident Wildlings to model and support our younger children as mentors and "Tribe Guides". We have found this to have multiple benefits for all involved - the Tribe Guides gain confidence, compassion, patience and responsibility and take pride in sharing their wisdom with younger or less confident children, and both parties build friendships and trust as well as a sense of belonging and community - the Wildling Tribe Vibe! We find that showing trust and belief that Wildlings will manage themselves and risks in a positive way becomes mirrored in the way our Wildlings trust us, and trust themselves to use their own judgements. This ethos of trust and belief runs through all we do, from food and drink preparation to tool and fire use, to exploring and climbing.

We also have a policy whereby parents or guardians can either attend to support their child or drop their child off to us (by prior arrangement only. 7 years old and above for drop off).

We believe that it takes a village to raise a Wildling - or in this case a Tribe of people who know a more beautiful world is possible for our children - and so encourage adults attending to get actively involved in what we are doing; be it tending the fire, chopping wood and using tools or exploring The Tribe Woods. We recognise that many of our Wildlings' parents and guardians have some amazing skills and talents and always welcome impromptu workshops and demonstrations by adults and children alike.

We keep our sessions small and responsive to the children we have attending. We are able to do this by getting to know each child on a personal level and building a trust bond with them. By taking the time to learn about each individual, we get to know each child's capabilities, strengths and struggles. We offer parents an optional Child Profile to fill out when their child first joins The Wildling Tribe, which gives us a valuable insight into how we can best support children in a way that most benefits them and their needs, and one that is congruent with the family's parenting style, values and beliefs.

Our Wildlings are actually supervised, it just doesn't look like it!

That is also by design. We plan our sessions so that children feel a sense of freedom and autonomy, but always maintain a watchful eye on those using tools, tending the fire or carrying out other tasks that may put them at risk. We arrange our spaces so that we can observe what the children are doing, and share a tribal way of communication common in the indigenous tribes of South East Asia - The Wildling Wail! This is a "calling and replying" practice used by members of the Mentawai Tribe so that they do not lose each other in the thick tropical jungle, and our Wildlings find it great fun!

These and other methods we use all help your child to feel that they have control and autonomy over what they are doing and, more importantly, what they are learning to enable them to find their unique passions and interests and develop them into skills and wisdom.

We take the time to ensure children are confident and comfortable with what they are doing - and the only way to show them how to be confident and comfortable is to allow them to do it!

Read more about the reasons The Wildling Tribe was created and what we are attempting to achieve on the "Our Story" section of our website.