

Risk Assessment: Sheath Knife

Venue	Rewilding Adventure Site, Dunsdale	Completed by:	Morgan Lax	Date:	14th April 2025	Review Date:	14th April 2027
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Description of site / activity / tools:

The Forest School and Bushcraft approaches and Rewilding view the use of sheath knives as a tool to be used in order to meaningfully achieve or produce something. They are not simply given out in order to occupy time or to satisfy a desire to use a knife. The choice to allow individual participants to use a knife, and the manner in which that knife is used reflects an appreciation of the participant's ability and developmental level. It should be borne in mind that the use of tools reflects the FSA's principle of the opportunity to take supported risks, as well as the risk being balanced against the benefit the participant will glean from such use.

The use of a knife as a tool will be for such tasks as whittling a stick in order for it to be used to roast marshmallows, production of campsite items from natural materials and cooking. The use of sheath knives receives specific attention in Forest School practitioner training and assessment, and there are established 'tool talks' which are applied each time knives are to be used. The dynamic risk assessment of an individual participant's ability to use a knife and the manner in which that knife is to be used rests with the Forest School practitioner and their professional and pedagogic judgement.

	Hazard	Harm	People at Risk	Existing Control Measure	Likelihood (1-3)	Severity (1-)	Rating LxS (1-9)	New Control Measure Who? When?	Comments
1.	Knives stored unsheathed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cutting self when collecting a knife •Knives cutting through bag and cutting person carrying it 	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All sheath knives carried in metal container • Use of 'tool talk' • Ensure all knives are stored with sheath securely on • Ensure participants are wearing gloves when collecting knives ('gloves on first policy') • Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate • First aid kit carried at all times 	2	2	4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Tool talks' are a strategy which are promulgated within the FS approach. They are intended to have a positive focus of what participants should do rather than what they should not do. All Level 3 FS Practitioners have been assessed on their competence at delivering tool talks.
2.	Carrying a knife unsheathed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cutting/ stabbing self (inadvertently) •Cutting/ stabbing another (inadvertently) •Falling onto knife 	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of 'tool talk' • Demonstrate the safe way to carry a knife • Intervention made if a person is walking with an unsheathed knife • 'Static use policy'- knives are only used whilst we are stood/sat still • Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate • First aid kit carried at all times 	2	2	4		
3.	In-correct carrying of the knife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cutting/ stabbing self (inadvertently) •Cutting/ 	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of 'tool talk' • Demonstrate the safe way to carry a knife • Intervention made if a person is carrying a knife incorrectly whilst walking 	1	1	1		

		stabbing another (inadvertently) •Falling onto knife		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate First aid kit carried at all times 					
4.	Removing the knife from the sheath	•Cutting hand/fingers	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of 'tool talk' Demonstrate the safe way to remove the knife from a sheath Advised that participants wear gloves on their 'helper hand' Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate First aid kit carried at all times 	2	2	4		The 'helper hand' is the hand which the participant holds the piece they are working on. Usually their non-dominant hand.
5.	Carrying the knife on the belt	•Cutting self when sheathing/unsheathing	User	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verbal warning Use of 'tool talk' Avoid/discourage the wearing of sheaths on a belt Encourage sheaths to be worn where they can be seen (if they insist on wearing it on a belt) 	2	3	6	Consider including this on the tool talk	<p>Sheath knives are rarely carried on the belt and is discouraged for occasional users.</p> <p>This risk applies to cutting both the hands and the side of the body.</p> <p>This is compounded as there is no requirement to wear a glove on the knife hand</p> <p>This is to be monitored and if needed a decision made during activities to either wear a glove of the knife hand or remove the sheath from the belt.</p>
6.	Incorrect knife technique	•Cutting 'helper hand'/self •Cutting another	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of 'tool talk' Demonstrate the safe way to use the knife, using the portion of the blade next to the handle Advised that participants to wear gloves on their 'helper hand' Practitioners to monitor use of knives and intervene as necessary Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate First aid kit carried at all times 	2	2	4		
7.	Too much force used to shave wood	•Losing control of blade •Cutting self/others		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of 'tool talk' Demonstrate the safe way to use the knife, only taking small shavings from the wood Advised that participants wear gloves on their 'helper hand' Knives maintained and sharpened regularly so minimum force is needed Practitioners to monitor use of knives and 	2	2	4		

				intervene as necessary • Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate • First aid kit carried at all times					
8.	Batoning	• Injury	All	• Tool talk • Demonstration • Advised that the helper hand is gloved • Knife handle always used to outside of wood • Restrict diameter of wood to be batoned to approx' 3" • To be used in conjunction with small wedges to reduce the force needed on knife blade • Blade to be struck vertically onto spine • Portion of blade in contact with wood to be hit; not the expose tip • Once wedge released blade from the wood, the knife is to be recovered to the sheath	2	2	4		See also the risk assessment relating to billhook and mallet use
9.	Sharpening/stropping blades	• Cutting self • Cutting others	All	• Knives maintained by practitioners or adult participants • The wearing gloves whilst sharpening/stropping blades	1	2	2		
10.	Using knife whilst sitting	• Cutting knee • Cutting inside of thigh	All	• Use of 'tool talk' • Demonstrate the safe way to use the knife, emphasising the cutting on the 'outside of the body policy' or 'elbows on knees policy' • Practitioners to monitor use of knives and intervene as necessary • Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate • First aid kit carried at all times	2	2	4		
11.	Kneeling/sitting/stepping on unsheathed knife	• Cutting knee • Cutting bottom • Knife puncturing footwear	All	• Use of 'tool talk' - re-sheathing knife when not being used/ returning to storage when finished • Tool only used one arm and a tool away from any other person • Possible use of 'safe zones' denoted by stick boxes on ground • Practitioners to monitor use of knives and intervene as necessary • Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate • First aid kit carried at all times	2	2	4		
12.	Knife used in proximity of others	• Accidentally hurting someone who walks into knife	All	• Use of 'tool talk' • Tool only used one arm and a tool away from any other person • Possible use of 'safe zones' denoted by stick boxes on ground • Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate • First aid kit carried at all times	2	2	4		

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners to monitor use of knives and intervene as necessary Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate First aid kit carried at all times 					
13.	User of the knife entering a state of 'flow'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Becoming oblivious to other around them and hurting self/others 	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners to monitor use of knives and intervene as necessary Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate First aid kit carried at all times 	1	2	2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a balance between intervening and allowing the participant to continue. An intervention should be made if there is the possibility of safety being compromised
14.	Inappropriate use of knife developing (horse-play)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hurting self or others 	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish relationship with group/individuals before introducing the use of knives Limit the numbers using knives at any one time in accordance with the developmental and maturity level of the participants Practitioner to observe and monitor use Intervention made if unsafe behaviour or practice is seen Revisiting the 'tool talk' to re-establish correct behaviour and use of knives Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate First aid kit carried at all times 	1	2	2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-keeping with the development of responsibility and awareness for those using knives, rather than telling participants what to do the practitioner should consider questioning them as to the possible outcomes of such use and what correct use looks like and consists of.
15.	Knife used as a weapon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hurting another 	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish relationship with group/individuals before introducing the use of knives Emphasise that knives are tools which are used for a specific reason Consider if the use of knives is appropriate- are there any indicators that this may occur? Practitioners hold a valid first aid certificate First aid kit carried at all times 	1	3	3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should such behaviour occur there maybe the need for the participant to be removed from the programme Such behaviour sits outside of this risk assessment and is a deliberate act on the part of another.
16.	Knives taken/ stolen/ lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used inappropriately and not under supervision Potential criminal offence 	All / General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of knives present established at the start of the session Participants made aware of the number of knives Individual participants given responsibility for a knife/ ensuring all knives are returned Counting of knives at the end of the session 	1	3	3		
17.	Storage of knives when camping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Injury 	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knives to be collected in and counted at the end of the session/day If the knives are owned by the participants then they are to be instructed to place the knives in a safe place when resting/sleeping (inside a rucksack- not on their body) 	1	3	3		

18.	Participants using own knives	• Loss of authority over knife use	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set ground rules of knife use• Tool talks apply to all taking part in activity• Knives inspected by instructor to ensure they are sharp enough to be effective and that the blade locks in place.	1	2	2	Consider if this should be a condition of participation for open courses Contact insurance company if hosting workshop where participants are to use their own knives	
Comments/Concerns: This risk assessment will be reviewed in the event of any incident or near miss in order to be fully informed for the future. It is not an exhaustive list, and is written with experience of FS and bushcraft activities in mind and the incidents (or lack of) that have been encountered in the preceding 11 years.					Recommendations: For bi-annual review- due March 2027				