



**This lesson plan was produced by the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning in 2016 as part of the Nature Discover Project.**

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**Activity Name:** Fort Building

**Ages:** 6-12

**Activity Level:** medium

**Length of time:** 60 minutes plus for initial, then time could be added to this throughout a week

**Number of Participants:** 10 per fort

**Concept:** Fort building is a wonderful way to create community and a safe and welcoming space for participants. This activity works best when participants are going to be spending multiple days in or visiting an area. The fort becomes their home base, where they eat lunch or a snack, do activities or get some quiet time.

**Materials Required:** A large forested area or beach with lots of driftwood (depending on the number of participants and therefore forts that will be created). Some leaders prefer to have the participants only use natural materials others might allow the use of rope and tarps.

**Introduction:** In our programs, participants are divided into (generally) 3 groups of 10. Each group of 10 is a clan and each clan builds a fort.

**Methods:** Basically, just let the group develop a plan and action it. The challenge is to build a structure that the whole group can sit inside comfortably. Leaders often help keeping the enthusiasm going, making sure all members of the group are involved or finding a way to be involved. The fort continues to be worked on throughout the week or length of time in one area. We often culminate this activity at the end of the week with a fort tour so everyone can see what each clan created.



**Tips for Teachers:**

- Ensure that no living material (branches, leaves, shrubs, moss clumps) are used in the construction. The challenge is to use fallen material (sound logs, branches, dead leaves, bark from downed logs and the like) for the construction.
- We have found that having regular fort time really helps participants to get some needed down time which helps to improve their behaviour throughout the week.

- The participants really take pride and ownership in the forts they have created and this is something to take note of when scheduling activities.
- It is important for teachers or leaders to check the fort before letting the participants occupy the space. This is a safety concern which can be reduced if structures are limited to just walls with no load bearing roof structures.

**Background facts and information:**

- This activity has many levels of beneficial outcomes such as cooperation, shared decision making, design, engineering, experimentation and the physical activity. We also found that it binds the group together socially and connects them with the place. All of these are significant foundational outcomes that can be drawn on for other activities carried out while there.
- If the forts are constructed in an area where you must take them down, use this as an exercise in putting all the natural materials back into the forest so that there is no or little trace of you being there. This is a very challenging and fun activity for the participants at the end of the session.