

# The Nature School Parent Information Manual



## About the School

### The Nature School

The Nature School is located at the Kortright Centre for Conservation. A 555 acre property with majestic hardwood forests, open wild meadows and access to swamps, marshes and the Humber River.

### Mission Statement

To provide a supportive student-led learning environment that empowers, motivates and develops the whole child.

### Values

#### *Take Risks*

Provide opportunities to build a student's innate motivation, confidence and skills to take supported risks within a nurturing environment where it is safe to fail.

#### *Education of the Whole Person*

Develop the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects in our students and promoting their holistic development by linking school experiences to students' life experiences.

#### *Student Led*

Support student development through the use of learning approaches that motivate students to develop theories, questions and ideas that drive the learning process forward.

#### *Environmental Stewardship*

Utilize the diverse habitats that exist on the 555 acre learning environment to foster a connection with and develop an appreciation for the Natural Environment.

## Ethos

### Teachers

At The Nature School, staff are hired for their experience and expertise. Our teachers hold one or more professional designation including; Ontario Certified Teachers (OCT), hold a Forest School Practitioner certificate and/or are a Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) with years of experience at a variety of outdoor education settings. All of our staff and volunteers have first aid training and have cleared a vulnerable sector screening (in-depth criminal reference screening) with their local police department.

### Learning Approaches and Curriculum

At the Nature School, we do not rigidly follow the Ontario Ministry of Education Curriculum but use it as a guideline to ensure students are ready prepared for entrance into the traditional school system. Teachers use a student-led, inquiry-based approach when developing lessons. Teachers facilitate student learning through providing a variety of tools, resources and experiences that guide students to find answers to their own questions; which builds confidence, self-reliance, and independent thinking skills.

Learning approaches used by our teacher's include;\*

- **Inquiry- based:** A dynamic and emergent process that builds on students' natural curiosity about the world in which they live.
- **Play-based:** Recognizes the holistic nature of play and centres around the development of the whole child. It treats a child's emotional, physical and social selves as interwoven and encourages depth of experience.
- **Experiential learning:** Learning that is based on students being directly involved in a learning experience rather than being taught pre-determined lesson plans. Students learn through and reflect on their learning experiences.
- **Place-based:** The act of connecting children to a particular place through direct experiential contact.

At The Nature School, students learn language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, visual arts, music and drama through these learning approaches.

\* definitions adapted from Forest and Nature School in Canada: A Head, Heart, Hands Approach to Outdoor Learning

## Student Evaluation Policy

Child-directed learning is the primary method of teaching and learning throughout the school. Our program emphasis is Nature School with integrated disciplines including those outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines.

Teachers have monthly check-in's with families in which parents will be provided with anecdotal updates on how their children are doing in school.

Teachers complete weekly assessment sheets that provide anecdotal evidence of students areas of strengths and areas of growth.

## The Children in the Forest

Every day, we practice dynamic risk assessment as we visit various natural sites on the property and determine suitability of the site for the goals of the lesson and safety of the children. The following guidelines (in italics) are written with phrases we use with the children as we guide them toward safe behavior in the forest.

### *Hiking*

*When we walk through the forest, we are in a sandwich.* Our facilitator will be in the front and a volunteer will be in the back. The children do not need to be in a line, but they do need to be inside the sandwich.

### *Boundaries*

If needed, boundaries will be established. Each adult will watch to ensure that the children stay within the boundaries. An adult will remain in close proximity to the children at all times. If we are working in smaller groups in different areas, there will be one adult per group.

### *Sticks*

Sticks for play will be the length of the child's arm or shorter except at the facilitator's discretion. *Sticks are for building, digging, and imaginative play. They are not for hitting. When we walk and run, we put the sticks down. It is important to be able to use your own hands for holding and for balance.*

### *Rocks*

When we are near the water, we may throw rocks. *When we throw rocks, we look around and check to make sure that no one is close to us, in our personal bubble* (the area a few meters around our body). *We may throw rocks that are as large as the palms of our hands.*

### *Climbing*

*We may climb as high as we are tall. We only climb as high as we can climb on our own.* We only climb when an adult can safely spot us (watch us and keep us safe). The adult will be present to spot a child, not to assist them to get higher. If the adult cannot be present or cannot safely spot the child, the child will not be able to climb.

### *Digging*

Ask the facilitator if you would like to dig a hole that is larger than your hand. *When we dig a hole, we will fill it back in when we are finished so that we disturb the forest as little as possible.*

### *Plants*

We ask an adult before eating a plant to make sure it is the right kind. We keep green leaves on the plants so that they can help the plant grow.

### *Fire*

On select days we will have a Forest School campfire. *When we are around the fire, we sit. We keep our bodies away from the fire as it is very hot. We also keep things out of the fire. When we walk to and from the fire, we walk on the outside of the campfire circle (a safe boundary set away from the fire).*

### *Water*

We will primarily access shallow, slow-moving water bodies such as ponds and side channels. Before we visit a body of water, the facilitator will give instructions to the children about the appropriate behavior around this water body. Children must be within an arm's length of an adult and may not stand in the water without permission from the facilitator.

(\*Excerpts adapted from *Fresh Air Learning Safety Handbook*, 2015)

## **Behaviour Guidelines**

Our goal is to ensure The Nature School is a positive experience for all of our students. Our staff are trained to deal with mild to moderate behaviour issues as they arise. If your child is severely misbehaving or is endangering themselves, another student or the staff, a phone call home will be made and a solution oriented discussion will be scheduled with the caregiver(s) to discuss how to best manage behaviour to maintain a safe learning environment. Following this phone meeting if there are ongoing behaviour issues that compromise safety, an in person meeting will be scheduled with the caregiver(s). If following this meeting improvements are not made, the child will be removed from school. This will only occur in extreme circumstances and no refund will be issued. Please inform staff ahead of time if your child has any special needs or considerations so that we can make your child's school experience a positive one.

### Behaviour Principles;

No Violence,

Respect all life,

Respect diversity,

Respect all people,

Respect the learning environment,

Use things with care,  
Enjoy learning,  
Help other's learn,  
Be prepared.

### **Conflict Resolution between Children\***

Each day, students will participate in teacher-led and student-led activities and also have time for free play. Sometimes children will have interactions between them that are challenging for both the children involved and for the adults around them. If conflict resolution is necessary, a teacher may intervene and assist the children in resolving their conflict. Discipline methods used by facilitators and volunteers will focus on gentle discipline.

Teachers will make every effort to do the following when challenging interactions occur:

- Be proactive. Take note of the social interactions between the children
- Be physically close to a child or children if concerned about a social or safety situation
- Remind the children to use gentle (kind, respectful) words when asking for what they need
- Remind the children that hands are for working and playing, not hitting
- Redirect the children to different activities or have them chat with an adult who will help them calm down
- When the children are calm, discuss the situation with the children involved. Encourage discussion of any differences so that the children can work on communicating their needs to each other and understanding the needs of another
- Acknowledge children's feelings and encourage them to express their feelings about a situation (i.e. "I felt sad when..."), help them to identify and name feelings if needed
- Encourage the children to consider alternative actions that they could take in the future

## **Policies and Procedures**

### **Drop off and Pick up**

Students may be dropped off at school no earlier than 8:45am. Students who are in the before care program may be dropped off no earlier than 8am. There will be a kiss and ride set up on the path to the Visitor Centre at the parking lot. In the event of severe weather drop off and pick up will occur inside the Visitor Centre. All students must be promptly picked up by a designated person at 3pm. Students who are in the aftercare program must be picked up by a designated person no later 5pm.



## Student Attendance Policy

Students must attend school punctually and regularly unless excused from attendance for illness, or for other reasons which may create a serious hardship; or absences that have been reported to and approved by the school.

Students must not leave school without parent/guardian permission.

Parents must inform school of student absences, early dismissals or late arrivals by email or phone before the start of the school day. Students must be signed out at the reception desk in the Kortright Visitor Centre.

## Illness Policy

A child will be unable to attend school, and need to be picked up if they are exhibiting any of the following symptoms listed below. Please ensure your child is symptom free for 24 hours before sending your child back to school.

- Fever AND a combination of other symptoms (e.g., nausea, vomiting)
- Fever AND a body rash
- Diarrhea – two or more liquid stools or a change in the normal pattern of bowel movement (e.g., runny, watery or bloody stools)
- Vomiting – two or more times in the last 24 hours
- Eye discharge – yellow or white
- Severe cough
- Yellowish skin or eyes, or jaundice
- Irritability, continuous crying or requires more attention than can be provided (Source: Region of Peel Public Health)

## Medication Policy

Students are not to administer their own medications, unless previously approved by the school. Parents are to bring all medications to the reception desk in the Kortright Centre where it will be stored and administered by office staff. Parents are to fill out a **Child Medical History and Prescription Medication Records Form** upon drop off of medication.

## Food Allergies

We are a nut aware centre but because we are open to the public we cannot guarantee that there will not be traces of nuts at our facility. We have children in various Kortright programs with life threatening food allergies, so please do not pack any lunch or snack items for your children that contain nuts or nut products. Please inform us if your child has a medical condition, a health concern, is taking medication or has an allergy and fill in the **Child Medical History Form** that staff can provide you with on the first day of Forest School.

### **Nutrition Policy**

Snacks and lunches - Filtered water is available at The Nature School. Parents are encouraged to provide health-promoting foods for their children's lunches. Lunches must be nut free.

Sharing of food is not permitted amongst students from different families because of potential allergies and dietary restrictions. Lunches should contain minimal waste. At The Nature School we practise the "boomerang" lunch concept. That is, lunch and snack wastes that are not compostable will be sent home for recycling/disposal.

If parents wish to bring in foods to share, the teachers must be consulted in advance and all intolerances taken into consideration. No child should feel left out. In an effort to maintain an inclusive environment and keep all children safe from food allergies, there may be times when the proposal to bring a particular food will be denied.

### **Safety\***

Teachers and volunteers are provided with and adhere to strict safety training, policies and procedures. These measures create an environment and culture that takes safety seriously and uses a proactive approach to Risk Management. Students and teachers actively play a role in personal and group safety.

Our safety principles include:

- Constantly assess risk as conditions change (dynamic risk assessment)
- Set up a safe space with boundaries and safety guidelines
- Observe the children's interactions with each other and with nature
- Spot the children during more challenging physical activity
- Gently guide the children to safer activities if required
- Head counts will be carried out every 10 minutes and before and after transitions to different sites
- Two way communication will be maintained by teachers and supervisory staff by way of two way radios and cell phones
- In depth monthly trail checks- looking for dangerous conditions
- Weather and environmental safety including- teaching students about hydration, application of sunscreen and insect repellent, changing of wet clothes
- Teachers conducting daily site inspection surveys
- Educating students on safe water ways practices; such as safety equipment needed, and guidelines for safe water way play

If we feel that the children's play is becoming dangerous, we will redirect the children and remind them that it is important to stay safe outdoors. If your child gets a bump, scratch, or a bruise, we will provide necessary first aid and let you know at the end of the session.



### **Environmental Hazards**

Environmental hazards including mosquitoes, ticks, and poisonous plants have the potential to be a threat to a child's safety. All of our staff are trained on how to identify and treat symptoms resulting from contact with poisonous plants, or insect bites. Please dress your child in long sleeved clothing and review all documents sent home with your child.

### **Emergency Contact**

In case of emergency, the emergency contact indicated on **The Nature School Registration Form** will be contacted by the school in order of contact priority stated by parents/guardians. Parents are to contact the school promptly in writing with any changes to contact information, including changes in custody (that effects student release), contact priority, address or phone number changes and change in emergency contacts.

### **Inclement Weather**

At The Nature School, we continue outdoor programming rain or shine. Nature and outdoor learning opportunities allow children to experience the environment under a variety of conditions. Drizzle or light rain will not hamper most programs. When severe weather such as thunderstorms, windstorms, very hot and very cold weather is in the vicinity outdoor programs will proceed to our indoor facilities. Please ensure your child is prepared for all weather conditions by packing appropriate clothing for them each day. Extra clothes may be stored may be brought in at the start of the year and stored in the indoor education space, clearly label all clothing with your child's name. In the event of extreme weather that permits school closures parents will be notified by 7am of the closure by email and/or website notification.

### **Immunization Policy**

The Nature School follows the regulations set out by the Immunization of School Pupils Act (1990). All students attending The Nature School will require proof of immunization against meningococcal disease, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, diphtheria, poliomyelitis, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chickenpox) (Note: varicella immunization is only a requirement for children born in 2010 or later.)

Exemption will be only be permitted to those students whose doctors deem it medically unsafe for the student to receive the above mentioned vaccines, or if it is against conscience or religious beliefs of the family. In these cases parents will need to submit a doctor's note or fill out a Statement of Conscience or Religious Beliefs form available through the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

[http://www.forms.ssb.gov.on.ca/mbs/ssb/forms/ssbforms.nsf/GetFileAttach/014-4897-64E~1/\\$File/4897-64E.pdf](http://www.forms.ssb.gov.on.ca/mbs/ssb/forms/ssbforms.nsf/GetFileAttach/014-4897-64E~1/$File/4897-64E.pdf)

## **Continued Enrollment Conditions**

Students and parents must abide by the policies of the school. At any time after consultation between the school and the parent, the school may decide to deregister the student under the following circumstances:

1. The student has particular social, emotional or behavioural requirements which the school does not have the resources to meet successfully. This particularly applies if those needs are expressed in behaviour that detracts from the quality of education for other students.
2. The student demonstrates an attitude that detracts from the quality of life from students at the school
3. The student and/or caregiver is unable or unwilling to abide by the school policies
4. The school has identified that the student has special needs that cannot be supported without additional funding support and the necessary funding is not available to The Nature School

### **Release of a Student**

Upon enrollment and any time thereafter, parents may give written consent if they wish their children to be able to leave the school with other adults. It is a parent responsibility to keep this information current. Children cannot be released to adults who are not named on the form unless the parent makes an emergency request for a certain time and day, and the person is adequately described for the caregiver to recognize. Government issued photo ID will be required.

If there are specific instructions for a child not to be released to one parent, or for a parent to be excluded from the school property, the custodial parent must inform the school in writing including the appropriate paperwork and to be taken if a situation arises. The custodial parent will be required to provide the school with a copy of any custody or court order documentation that exists.

A child will not be released to any adult who, in the opinion of the teacher/caregiver, may be incapable of providing safe care. Instead, an alternate adult from the child's file will be contacted to pick up the child. The police will be contacted if an adult who appears to be impaired insists on driving a motor vehicle. Children's Aid Society will be contacted if The Nature School believes the child may be in need of protection.

## **Additional Information**

### **What to bring**

Please send your child with a small backpack they can manage to carry on their own. The backpack should have the following items:

- Small hand towel for drying hands from our outdoor hand washing station
- Extra set of clothing in case of puddle or pee accidents, including underwear, bottoms, tops, socks, mittens- labelled with your child's name
- Water bottle
- Lunch
- Reusable mug for warm drinks

### What to wear

When your child is spending extending periods of time outdoors, comfort is very important. Good clothing makes the difference between a child who is engaged with the environment and a child who is uncomfortable and unhappy. Forest School staff will assess whether children are dressed appropriately when they are dropped off.

When it is **rainy**, please send your child in layers. We recommend:

- As an inner layer, fleece or natural fabrics such as wool or silk. The fabric should wick moisture away from the skin and provide a warm, breathable layer
- Middle layer of insulation made of wool or fleece
- Outer shell of waterproof and windproof clothing, including a rain jacket and rain pants. For the feet, we recommend neoprene such as Bogs or Kamiks. Alternatively, your child can wear waterproof boots that are one size too large with two pairs of socks.
- Make sure that your child has a warm, waterproof hat that covers their ears.

When it is **cold**, please add:

- Warm and waterproof gloves that slip on and off easily.
- Long underwear
- An extra pair of warm gloves and warm socks in your child's bag

When it is **warm**, please wear:

- A light cotton, silk or hemp long-sleeved shirt.
- Long, durable pants
- Long, light coloured socks that pants can be tucked into
- A sun hat
- Running or hiking shoes
- Sun protection
- Bug protection





