



FOREST SCHOOL HANDBOOK

For parents, educators and volunteers



Forest & Nature School
WILDFLOWER

**AND AT THE END
OF THE DAY,
THEIR FEET
SHOULD BE DIRTY,
THEIR HAIR
MESSY,
AND THEIR EYES
*sparkling***



LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Wildflower Nature School acknowledges that we learn and play on the unceded and traditional territory of the Mohawk and Haudenosaunee Peoples. We humbly acknowledge indigenous peoples who came before us and who are currently living on these lands. While the concept of Forest and Nature Schools is new to Western culture, we recognize that indigenous peoples have been living this way and offering sophisticated outdoor education to their children for thousands of years. As settler descendants, we strive to strengthen our connection to the land and indigenous community as a way to promote social justice, decolonization and greater indigenous visibility.

We are guests of this land and strive to honour the original peoples by working together in the spirit of reconciliation.

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WILDFLOWER FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL

Open 8:30am to 3:30pm

Tel: (613)861-0054

Email: wildflower.cornwall@gmail.com

17838 McPhail Road

St. Andrews West, ON

K0C 2A0

WHAT IS FOREST SCHOOL?

Forest and Nature School (FNS) is an early childhood educational approach that takes place in nature. The FNS approach started popping up in Denmark and Sweden in the 1950's and soon made its way to Canada in the early 2000's with the establishment of the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada (CNAC). As defined by CNAC, *"Forest/Nature School is an educational ethos and practice that centres the Land and the child-at-play. Children and educators build a relationship with the Land through regular and repeated access to the same outdoor space over an extended period of time. Educators support learning through a pedagogical framework that is rooted in place and play, directed, and inspired by the child (emergent curriculum), and driven by a process of inquiry."*

As listed by the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, Forest/Nature School:

1. Takes place in any outdoor space, including urban greenspace, playgrounds, forests, creeks, prairies, mountains, shoreline, and tundra.
2. Is a sustained process of regular and repeated sessions in the same outdoor space, supporting children to develop a reciprocal relationship with the Land, and an understanding of themselves as a part of the natural world.
3. Views children and youth as innately competent, curious, and capable learners.
4. Is led by educators who share power with learners through play-based, emergent, and inquiry-driven teaching and learning methods.
5. Values children's play - self-directed, freely chosen, intrinsically motivated - in and of itself. FNS programs provide adequate time and space for children and youth to dive deeply into their play.
6. Views risky play as an integral part of children's learning and healthy development, and is facilitated by knowledgeable, qualified educators who support children and youth to co-manage risk.
7. Relies on loose, natural materials to support open-ended, creative play and learning.
8. Values the process as much as the outcome.
9. Prioritizes building reciprocal relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, who have been learning from this Land since time immemorial.
10. Practices, policies, and programming reflect and prioritize the building of engaged, healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities through consideration of access and equity in our decisions and actions.

At Wildflower Forest & Nature School, we value children as competent learners who help forge their own program. The children spend the majority of their day outdoors where they are given unhurried time to engage in risky play, collaborative creation and independent reflection. There is no set day plan as everyday and every child brings something new and unexpected.

As a complement to children's home or school-based academic learning, Wildflower Forest & Nature School will give children the opportunity to learn and work on skills that can not be taught inside a classroom. While our program is not a replacement for regular academic learning, it is an important alternative form of education that enriches a child's whole development.

FOREST SCHOOL BENEFITS

- ◆ Improved confidence, social skills, independence, communication and concentration
- ◆ Improved physical development including balance, coordination and stamina
- ◆ Encourages problem solving and leadership
- ◆ Prevents anxiety and depression
- ◆ Reduces childhood obesity
- ◆ Supports creativity
- ◆ Promotes resiliency
- ◆ Levels the playing field for children who don't excel in a standard classroom setting

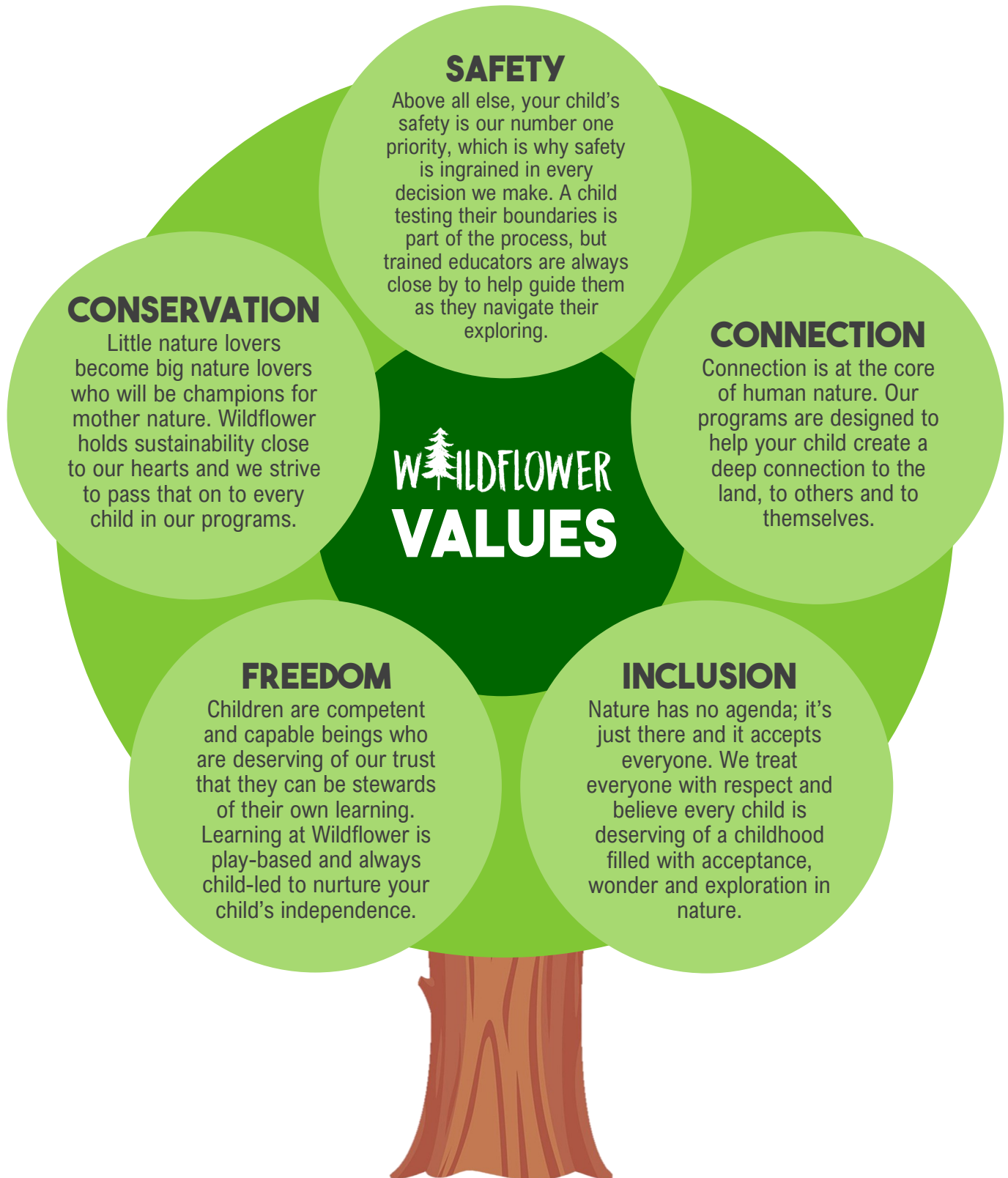
The list could go on forever! Forest and Nature Schools are so beneficial because children are happy and engaged in learning that is directed by them in a stress free and therapeutic environment. This makes for stage appropriate learning that they will retain (we focus on developmental stage versus age, as age doesn't always correlate at what level a child should be learning).

OUR MISSION

Wildflower Forest & Nature School's mission is to provide a safe and stimulating environment where children can foster a deep connection with themselves, others and most importantly, nature.

OUR VISION

Our vision is to build an inclusive community for the families of S.D.&G. to reconnect with nature. We want to give as many children as possible regular access to quality outdoor play so we can help create happy and healthy nature lovers. Wildflower believes that children who love nature, become adults who love nature, which will in turn contribute to the sustainability of our world.



MEET OUR EDUCATORS & VOLUNTEERS



Melanie Gravel— Owner & Educator

Melanie is a passionate outdoor enthusiast that has always had a great love for children. Since she was a young girl, she always gravitated toward children and felt a natural instinct to nurture. That affection has grown into a passion for teaching. Growing up on the St. Lawrence river, going on biking trips, camping and hiking, Melanie spent her childhood outdoors and understands the value and benefit of time spent in nature.

Certified as an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) and registered with the College of ECE's, Melanie has worked in a variety of settings including schools, public daycares, a children's charity and most recently running a home daycare. She is currently completing her Forest and Nature Practitioner certification with the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada. Through researching alternative education, Melanie stumbled upon Forest and Nature School and immediately felt the importance of opening a program in her community. She believes every child has a right to create memories in the wild and develop a deep connection with the natural world.

Julie Casey—Lead Volunteer

Julie is a champion of all things natural. A loving mother to three daughters, Julie brings a maternal presence to our programming as one of our most valued volunteers. Her passions include art, tending to her garden, living holistically and most importantly, spending time with her grand children. She is a successful business owner of over 30 years and has recently completed her training in Holistic Lifestyle Coaching with the Check Institute. Julie plays an integral part in our programming as our biggest donor and owner of the beautiful land we learn on. Without her support, this program would not be running.

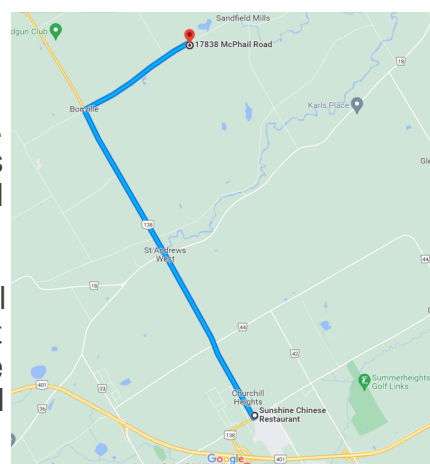


Julie helps with the day to day logistics of running our program and with the up keep of the land. You may sometimes see her accompanying our groups on adventures or facilitating art programs for the children.

LOCATION AND DIRECTIONS

Wildflower Forest & Nature School is located at 17838 McPhail Road in St. Andrews West, Ontario. Just 15 minutes north of Cornwall. The school takes place on 30 acres of beautiful forested land including a beaver dam, groomed trails, a pond, natural playscapes and a cozy yurt as home base.

DIRECTIONS FROM CORNWALL—Take the 138 from Cornwall Centre Road all the way up to Bonville. At the intersection with the flashing light, turn right onto McPhail Road. Continue on McPhail road for 3km and the school will be on your right. You will see the wooden “Wildflower” sign and the gravel parking lot right at the entrance.



A photograph of children playing in a muddy area. The children are wearing colorful raincoats and boots. One child in a pink raincoat is pointing at a hole in the mud. The ground is dark and cracked, with scattered dry leaves. A yellow banner is overlaid on the image with the text 'PROGRAM DETAILS'.

PROGRAM DETAILS

A DAY IN FOREST SCHOOL

Our days at forest school are anything but typical. Everyday brings new learning and adventure based on the children present, the places discovered, the weather, questions asked and various loose parts and materials found around the property. While our activities are ever changing, we keep a basic daily structure that includes a morning welcome, snack breaks, lunch/bathroom break and our end of day reflection circle.

Some examples of activities we can expect at Forest School include things like tree climbing, fort/bridge building, animal role playing, pretend play, cooking in the mud kitchen, plant identification, bug hunting. Some days might include leadership building by organizing a trail walk while other days are more about artistic development with our wild outdoor art days—each day brings endless possibilities.

ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

At Wildflower Forest & Nature School, we believe whole heartedly that children are competent and capable of leading their own learning. With this understanding, the role that our educators play at Forest School will look different than the role of a teacher in a conventional setting. Educators and volunteers become co-learners and co-conspirators to the children's play. Rather than having activities pre-planned for the day, the focus becomes observation and reflection. Educators contribute to the play with open ended invitations and provocations like loose parts, a new play area or tools. They ask situation appropriate questions to help deepen the children's learning and understanding of the environment around them.

The role of the educator is to also ensure the children's safety at all times during all types of activities. Educators monitor that children are engaging in stage appropriate activities that will contribute to their learning and not place them in a situation they are not capable of handling.

LEARNING APPROACHES

At Forest School, learning looks very different. We understand that children are competent and capable of constructing their own learning. They are naturally curious beings that are excited to learn about everything around them. Children explore math, science, social studies, art, physical education and other typical academic subjects while at Forest School through hands-on experiences. On top of that, they are working on important life skills that aren't typically taught in a classroom setting.

In order to nourish that excitement for learning, Wildflower Forest and Nature School implements the following learning strategies;

Experiential Learning

As defined by the Association of Experiential Education, "Experiential learning is a hands-on form of learning that begins with a concrete experience. After solving a problem, learners reflect on the process and are able to apply lessons more broadly to their lives." Learn by doing.

Play-Base Learning

Recognizes the holistic nature of play and centers around the development of the whole child. It treats a child's emotional, physical and social selves as interwoven and encourages depth of experience. It encompasses all hands-on learning experiences that emerge naturally through play.

Inquiry-Base, Child-Led Emergent Learning

A dynamic and emergent process that builds on students' natural curiosity about the world in which they live. Curriculum is uncovered through children's interests and discoveries and is not predetermined. Educators provide learning provocations to peak interest and inspire creativity, and exciting learning experiences are followed up with factual resources, literature, art activities, scientific experiments, and evaluations by Forest School Educators

PREPARING FOR FOREST SCHOOL

Forest school happens in all seasons, in all weather. Learning doesn't just happen in dry/sunny summer weather. Often times, “uncomfortable” weather makes for the best learning and the most engaging activities. To ensure our participants enjoy their experiences at Forest School and are comfortable throughout the day, it's imperative that they come dressed appropriately for the forecasted weather that day.

Not matter the season...

Children should have all of the following essentials when they are attending Forest School, not matter the season or weather.

- ◆ Small well fitting backpack
- ◆ Snacks and lunch (no access to fridge or microwave)
- ◆ 1-2 **FULL** water bottles
- ◆ Seasonally appropriate clothing (see detailed list on next page)
- ◆ An extra change of clothes (underwear, socks, base layers)
- ◆ Proper footwear made for running (always close-toed)
- ◆ Hat (season appropriate)

The material of your child's clothing is very important. **Cotton is not a suitable material for outdoor adventures in most temperatures.** Cotton dries slowly and can cause your child to be chilled when wet. Choose synthetic, wool or silk clothing which breaths well, dries quickly and insulates against the elements.

Expensive brand name clothing is not necessary to keep your little one ready for any climate. Thrift stores, market place and getting clothes second hand are all great ways to find quality clothing for a cheaper price. If getting appropriate gear is an issue, please don't hesitate to speak with one of our educators and we will be happy to help source some or lend some from our lending library.

There are ticks at Wildflower Nature School. Our volunteers and educators will perform regular surface tick checks throughout the day however it is important you do a full body tick check as soon as they arrive home. The best and easiest way to do this is during bath time or when they are changing

PREVENT TICK BITES

Use caution in areas where ticks are more likely to be found:



Wear light-coloured pants and a long-sleeved shirt so ticks are easy to see.



Wear closed footwear and tuck pants into socks.



Use a Health Canada approved insect repellent with DEET or Icaridin.



Perform daily full-body tick checks on yourself, children and pets.



**There's
no such
thing as
bad weather,
only bad
clothes.**

SEASONAL LAYERING SYSTEMS FOR FOREST SCHOOL

Cool Rainy Day Clothing (Fall/Winter/Spring):

- ◆ *Base Layer:* Synthetic or wool long john shirt and pants; wool socks
- ◆ *Mid Layer:* Fleece or wool sweater and pants.
- ◆ *Outer Layer:* Durable, WATERPROOF raincoat and rain-pants; warm toque; waterproof, insulated mittens; waterproof boots (Bogs, Kamik or similar).
- ◆ *Extra Layers:* 1-2 pairs of wool socks, 1-2 pairs of waterproof insulated mittens; warm toque; mid layer as indicated above; underwear.
- ◆ *Optional:* Extra boots



Cool Dry Day Clothing (Fall/Spring)

- ◆ *Base Layer:* Synthetic or wool long john shirt and pants; wool socks.
- ◆ *Mid Layer:* Lightweight fleece or wool pants and sweater.
- ◆ *Outer Layer:* Warm jacket; durable rain-pants, waterproof boots, waterproof mittens; warm toque.
- ◆ *Extra Layers:* 1-2 pairs of wool socks, 1 pair of waterproof insulated mittens; mid layer as indicated above; underwear.



Cold Winter Day Clothing:

- ◆ *Base layer:* Wool or synthetic long john shirt & pants; wool socks.
- ◆ *Mid layer:* Wool or fleece sweater and pants; fleece or wool neck warmer/balaclava.
- ◆ *Outer Layer:* Warm, waterproof, windproof and breathable snow suit; warm toque; waterproof insulated mittens; warm waterproof boots.
- ◆ *Extra layers:* 1-2 pairs of wool socks; warm toque; mid layer, 1-2 pairs of insulated mittens.
- ◆ *Optional:* Extra boots, hand-warmers, extra snowsuit



Warm Rainy Day Clothing (Fall/Spring):

- ◆ *Base Layer:* Lightweight, synthetic material t-shirt and long sleeve; lightweight, synthetic material pants (quick-dry material is ideal); wool socks.
- ◆ *Outer Layer:* Durable, WATERPROOF raincoat and rain-pants; waterproof boots.
- ◆ *Extra Layers:* Fleece Sweater; wool socks, toque.
- ◆ *Optional:* Extra boots



Warm Dry Day Clothing (Fall/Spring):

- ◆ *Base Layer:* Lightweight, long pants that can easily be rolled up; t-shirt; lightweight synthetic socks.
- ◆ *Outer Layer:* Fleece sweater or jacket; closed toe running shoes or hiking boots; sun hat
- ◆ *Extra Layers:* Extra socks; base layer.
- ◆ *Optional:* Bug jacket/head net (Spring)



**Please do NOT bring:

- ◆ Toys from home
- ◆ Electronics (iPads, iPods, cellphones, etc.)
- ◆ Pocket knives or tools
- ◆ Anything valuable or special that may be lost or broken.

Wildflower is not responsible for any lost, stolen or broken items.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES



PRIVACY POLICY

Your privacy and your child's privacy are important to us and we have taken steps to protect it. The following data is collected from each student at registration; name, date of birth, full address, health card, parent/guardian contact and address, emergency contacts, and health information including chronic conditions, allergies, medications, and activity restrictions. Any personal data shared with us, including photographs, is processed strictly in accordance with the privacy legislation and is used for the purposes of which you have consented in the registration form.

Please note that where consent is given to share images on the internet, they can be viewed by the general public. Your photo consent can be changed or withdrawn at any time through written communication to the Head Educator. We do not share details with third parties without consent, except where we are legally compelled or obliged to do so.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Wildflower Forest & Nature School has both a Facebook and Instagram account where photos and stories are posted. Our Facebook page is Wildflower Forest & Nature School and on Instagram we can be found at wildflower.FNS. Our public platforms are used as window's into our daily adventures. We share photos of children on nature walks, unique creations and sculptures, special finds of the day and quiet moments in the forest. Our photo consent policy is in effect on all social media platforms.

Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns about photo consent or protecting the privacy of the information you provide.

REGISTRATION AND PAYMENT PROCEDURE

To secure a space for your child into one of our programs you must read through the parent hand book, complete our request/waitlist form on our website, complete our registration form, sign our liability waiver, and submit the full or deposit payment.

Payment for summer camp and special events/programs are due in full within 48 hours upon acceptance into the program. Payment for regular programs can be made in one payment or monthly installments. If you are paying in full, the amount is due within 48 hours of acceptance. If you are paying in installments, a \$100 non refundable deposit is required within 48 hours of acceptance and then installment payments are due the first of each month. *If payments are not received in time, your child will be moved to the waiting list.*

Payment can be made by:

- ◆ Electronic Funds Transfer (e-transfer) to wildflower.cornwall@gmail.com ATTN: Registration Payment and [child's name]
- ◆ Cheque made out to Wildflower Forest & Nature School (arranged drop-off to onsite staff)
- ◆ Cash (arranged drop-off to onsite staff)

*Mailing Address: Wildflower Forest & Nature School
721 Champlain Drive
Cornwall, ON K6H 6P4*

PROGRAM TYPES AND FEES



WILDLINGS GROUP (age 4-8 years old)

This group is for our younger forest lovers with a ratio of 1 educator per 6 children. Your child will learn and grow in nature as they explore the beautiful forest through all of their senses. Most of their play happens at the main gathering area (the yurt), however we do go on short distance adventures in the forest and at the pond. You can expect your child to immerse in pretend play, mud (or snow) kitchen creations, story telling and other curious activities that are led by your child's interest.

Fall Full Day Thursday Program (9 weeks) - Tuition: \$450 +HST

October to December 8:30am-3:30pm

Spring Full Day Friday Program (17 weeks) - Tuition: \$850 +HST

March to June 8:30am-3:30pm

EXPLORERS GROUP (age 9-13 years old)



This group is for our older more independent forest lovers with a ratio of 1 educator per 8 children. They will deepen their connection to nature through inquiry based learning and exploring. Guided by the children's interest and curiosity, educators will assist them in learning about the land, the animals, and about themselves. They will enjoy hikes through the trails, risky play, building and any other activity that might peak their interest along the way.

Fall Full Day Friday Program (9 weeks) - Tuition: \$450 +HST

September to December 8:30am-3:30pm

Spring Full Day Thursday Program (17 weeks) - Tuition: \$850 +HST

March to June 8:30am-3:30pm

SUMMER CAMP (July and August)

Join us in the summer for unique and exciting themed week camps! Running Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 3:30pm, our summer programming will offer the same child-led, play based learning experiences as our regular programming but with a special twist. To see the summer camp schedule follow our social media pages or speak with an educator.

What to look forward too!!

TINKER WEEK

A week focused on tool use and building. Children will get creative with their surroundings and a combination of unique materials while also learning about the safe use and handling of tools.

FOREST ART WEEK

A week focused on art activities in the forest but on an epic scale! Children will work together to create extravagant works of art in beautiful settings.

SENSORY WEEK

A week dedicated to sensory exploration. Children will immerse themselves in mud puddles, foam parties, water play and many more activities that will engage all of their senses.

WONDER WEEK

A week focused on dramatic play and diving into their imaginations. Children will play out stories from books. or create their own, and bring them to life in the forest.

SURVIVOR WEEK

Only the strongest will prevail during this week where children become castaways stranded on an island. The children must use their survival instincts to build shelter, build fires, identify plants and use a compass for navigation.

REFUND POLICY

- ◆ Wildflower requires a \$100 non refundable deposit to be made within 48 of receiving acceptance. This deposit contributes to the full cost of enrollment.
- ◆ Generally, refunds are not given once the session begins unless there are extreme circumstances that prevent a child from participating in the program. Wildflower will determine and assess these circumstances on a case-by-case basis.
- ◆ If a child is withdrawn from programs due to illness or injury (and no medical note is provided), expulsion, or any other reason, a refund will not be issued for any portion of the program fees.
- ◆ Refunds will not be given in the event that a day's program is cancelled due to inclement weather. (see inclement weather/closure policy)
- ◆ Programs may be cancelled if there is insufficient registration. In this event, a full refund will be issued.

ILLNESS POLICY

In order to ensure the safety of our participants, educators and volunteers, we ask that participants, educators, and volunteers stay home if they are experiencing any of the following symptoms within the last 24 hours;

- ◆ Fever above 101°F or 38.3°C
- ◆ Vomiting
- ◆ Diarrhea

Should the above-mentioned symptoms arise while at Forest School, the affected participants parents/caregivers will be contacted to take the child home. Participants affected by communicable diseases such as measles, chicken pox, mumps, flu, strep throat, viral pneumonia, conjunctivitis (pink-eye), etc., are asked to stay home from Forest School until their health care provider has communicated that it is safe for them to attend.

FOOD/ALLERGY POLICY

NUT-FREE ZONE

Due to the prevalence of life-threatening nut allergies, we ask that participants refrain from bringing nuts to Wildflower Forest & Nature School. Soy and sunflower seed substitutes for nut butters are welcome.

SNACK-SHARING

In addition, we ask that participants do not share or trade snacks, as this ensures the health, safety, and happiness of the community.

GARBAGE-LESS LUNCHES

We encourage participants to try to bring a garbage-less lunch. At the same time, we ask that parents/caregivers consider the size/weight/safety of the containers in which their child's snacks are packed. At Wildflower we seek to empower even our youngest participants to carry their own snacks and water bottles on our adventures, which is totally possible with smaller containers.

TOILETING POLICY

All students must be able to use the facilities independently. Washroom facilities are available on-site with a proper hand washing station. When students need to use the washroom away from our facilities, Wildflower follows the "leave no trace" principles. In most cases they are encouraged to do a "nature pee" in a private area away from other students and play areas.

POISON IVY POLICY

It's possible that poison ivy is present in the woodlands at Wildflower Forest and Nature School. To limit exposure, we require that all participants wear long pants, long socks, and closed toed shoes while taking part in our programs in all seasons. Washing affected skin within 15-60 minutes of exposure is likely to remove the oil that can lead to a reaction, so staff carry potable water and soap at all times. In the event of a participant coming in contact with poison ivy, we are able to wash the affected area immediately

TICK POLICY

Ticks are present from spring until fall (as long as the temperature is above freezing, they may be active) at sites frequented by Wildflower Forest and Nature School. To limit exposure, we require that all participants wear:

- ◆ Long pants
- ◆ Socks
- ◆ Closed-toed shoes

We strongly recommend that children wear:

- ◆ Hats
- ◆ Long-sleeved shirts

We suggest that participants tuck their pant legs into their socks and shirts into their pants to also limit possible tick exposure. We recommend using insect repellent to deter ticks, either containing DEET or other natural essential oil alternatives, depending on what feels appropriate for your family. Staff carry these to be able to re-apply them throughout the day.

If a tick is noticed on a participant, it is brushed off. If a tick is attached, we will remove the tick using a tick key or tweezers and educators will inform parents/guardians. After a day at Forest School, we recommend you do an all-body check upon arriving at home.

More information about tick safety can be found on the Eastern Ontario Health Unit website at <https://eohu.ca/en/lyme/what-is-lyme-disease>

EXTREME WEATHER/CLOSURE POLICY

Wildflower Forest and Nature School educators consult the forecast regularly, and weather-related safety is considered in all decision-making (i.e. how far to venture away from the shelters, how long to be outside).

In the case of predicted thunder and lightning or high-winds - Wildflower educators/staff will ensure participants are close to shelter for quick access should thunder and lightning or high-winds occur. During thunder and lightning and high winds, participants will stay under shelter (in the yurt).

In the case of extreme heat (30C+), Wildflower educators will limit participants' length of exposure based on age and outerwear, and will constantly assess participants' comfort and safety, watching for signs of heat exhaustion, as well as offering ways to cool off using water and time in the shade. In extreme cold (-20 and colder) programs will continue to run. Our buildings are warmed up by woodstove in advance of children's arrival. Educators will play close to warm shelter with frequent warm up breaks. They support children in keeping skin covered and staying warm and comfortable.

In the event that the weather/road conditions make travel to/from Wildflower Forest and Nature School unsafe and we need to cancel programs for that day, we will contact families by telephone or Facebook to inform them of our closure for the day.



ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURE

Wildflower Forest and Nature School has written emergency procedures with which all educators and volunteers are familiar. A copy of the procedures, including emergency phone numbers, is carried by an educator/volunteer at all times in the emergency/first aid backpack.

FIRST AID CERTIFICATION

All Wildflower staff have current valid First Aid training with CPR. Proof of certification is available upon request.

In a severe accident or emergency, Wildflower Forest & Nature School staff will follow this procedure:

- I. Establish the nature and extent of the emergency. Lead educator to take the lead responding and administering First Aid.
- II. In consultation with other educators, make sure the area and all other members of the group are accounted for, safe, adequately supervised by co-educators or volunteers. This means that everyone fully understands what they must do to remain safe i.e. stop any tool or fire work.
- III. Assess the casualty and ask another adult to call 911, emergency services, while lead educator administers appropriate First Aid. The person phoning will need to respond to the following questions:
 - ◆ Nature of emergency
 - ◆ Injured party details: age, gender, medical history (see Emergency Medical Form in Emergency/First Aid backpack)
 - ◆ Location: 17838 McPhail Road, St. Andrews West, ON
 - ◆ First Aid administered
- IV. Send another adult to meet the ambulance at the main entrance and direct them to the Wildflower Forest and Nature School site in use.
- V. Inform the child's emergency contact of the injury as soon as possible.
- VI. Ensure that an appropriate adult attends the receiving hospital, taking with them any medical information available for the injured person.
- VII. Ensure that remainder of the party:
 - ◆ Is adequately supervised throughout
 - ◆ Is returned as early as possible to home base
 - ◆ Receives appropriate support and reassurance
- VIII. Wildflower staff will continue to liaise with the emergency services until the incident is over.
- IX. As soon as reasonably possible after the event, the accident will be reported using an Incident/Accident Report Form.

If the casualty is a Wildflower educator, other Wildflower staff or present volunteer will phone emergency services immediately (911) and follow the above protocol.

STAFF RATIOS POLICY

The ratios between Wildflower educators/volunteers and students vary depending on the age of the group of students and the adults accompanying them. The following ratios will be maintained at all times during regular programming and summer camp;



MISSING PERSON PROCEDURE

Wildflower Forest and Nature Schools' all-encompassing aim is to keep our children safe as an utmost priority at all times. We work within ratios set out by Forest School Canada and keep a register of all the children present during any one session, along with the times they arrive and leave the Forest School site. Every attempt is made, through regular headcounts once children are signed in, and by the use of high-visibility vests to ensure the security of children is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a child going missing, our missing child procedure is followed.

Child going missing on the Forest School site;

- I. As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the lead educator alerts our setting manager.
- II. All children are called back to the yurt home base using our 3 whistle call and a headcount is done immediately. Children present are then entertained by two members of staff.
- III. The register is checked to make sure no other child has also gone astray.
- IV. A full and thorough search of the Forest School site is completed by the other members of staff.
- V. Under no circumstances are other children left unsupervised for staff to search for the missing child.
- VI. If the child is not found within 5 minutes, our manager calls the police immediately and reports the child as missing.
- VII. The parent(s)/caregiver(s) are then called and informed.
- VIII. A recent photo and a note of what the child is wearing is given to the police along with information about any medical condition the child has that requires attention and when the child was last seen.

As soon as reasonably possible after the event, the incident will be reported using an Incident/Accident Report Form.

RISK PLAY POLICY

Risky play can be defined as: “thrilling and exciting forms of physical play that involve uncertainty and a risk of physical injury.” (Sandseter, 2010). Different types of risky play can include tree climbing, playing with tools, rough and tumble play, and many other forms of play that challenge the boundaries of safety. Risky play is a term that has been gaining popularity within the education sector and with parents as more and more studies are published showing the benefits it has on children’s social, emotional and physical development.

Documented benefits of risky play;

- ◆ **Risk assessment skills** are developed as they learn to judge risk along with the consequences. As they engage in different types of risky play they will learn what is safe to try and what might not be. Researchers are discovering that children who engaged in regular risky play are less likely to injure themselves as they are more adept at observing their surroundings and making good decisions.
- ◆ **Emotional regulation** is developed when children are faced with risk. Risky play increases the frequency that children will have to face uncomfortable emotions like anger and fear. The more children have to face these emotions, the better they become at managing them without lashing out.
- ◆ **Problem solving skills** are challenged as they are placed in situations that require the child to quickly assess the situation and make decisions while under pressure. Without parents or educators close by, children must figure out issues that arise in their play without help.
- ◆ **Physical development** is improved as children take part in big play. If children aren’t allowed to engage in risky activities like balancing, climbing, or jumping, they will never understand their physical capabilities. The more they understand their capabilities, the less likely they are to injure themselves or engage in dangerous things that they are not prepared to handle.
- ◆ **Resilience.** Risky means, more often than not, they will fail. Learning how to maturely deal with failure is an important part of growing up that will benefit them in every aspect of their lives. Risky play teaches them that failing is part of the process and if you keep trying, you will succeed.
- ◆ **Confidence** is probably the biggest benefit that comes from risky play. Taking on new risks and realizing what he/she can handle helps with the child’s self-esteem. This type of play teaches children their boundaries and limits which helps them understand what they are capable of handling in uncertain situations.

TYPES OF RISKY PLAY

#1 PLAYING AT GREAT HEIGHTS

Climbing trees, jumping off high places, balancing on something high, and anything that presents the “threat” of falling.



#2 PLAYING AT HIGH SPEEDS

Running down steep hills, going fast on a bike, sledding down a hill. The risk of falling or running into something.



#3 USING DANGEROUS TOOLS

Using knives to help with dinner, hammering nails, using a saw. Many tools can be used if the children are taught how to use them safely.



#5 PLAY NEAR DANGEROUS ELEMENTS

Playing near bodies of water, near fire, on a farm near animals. Anywhere near potentially dangerous elements.



#4 ROUGH AND TUMBLE PLAY

Wrestling, sword fighting, pushing, and tackling. Play that helps teach children about consent and communication.



#6 PLAY WITH A CHANCE OF BEING LOST

Play where children can venture off on their own into unknown territory away from adults.



RISK MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

All parents/caregivers of children attending Wildflower Forest and Nature School programs must read, sign and return the appropriate Informed Consent/Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risks Form before the program start date.

At Wildflower FNS, we believe that there is an inherent value to risk, and learning how to assess and navigate it is an important part of healthy child development and a fundamental practice within Wildflower FNS (see Risky Play). For this reason Wildflower educators co-assess and co-manage risk with students on a daily basis, so that students learn to acknowledge, manage and overcome risks, in order to be exposed to the benefits of risk, rather than the hazards.

The following risk assessments are conducted regularly:

- ◆ **Seasonal risk assessments** – risk/benefit analysis completed as the seasons change and new environmental/weather risks present themselves.
- ◆ **Activity or experience risk assessments** – risk/benefit analysis based on the activity or experience planned or presented, can be done in advance or on the spot.
- ◆ **Dynamic risk assessments** – risk/benefit analysis of site(s), group(s), weather, and activities/experiences on the spot.

FIRE USE POLICY

Students will have many opportunities to build and create fires. This includes lighting them with matches or other means (magnesium and steel, bow drill, etc.) Strict guidelines are in place around fires and students must earn this privilege through skill development and trust.

The use of a “safety circle” helps children see the boundaries around a fire. The safety circle is a rope placed in a circle around a fire. If a child is working on building a fire, the safety circle is used to set a boundary where only the child working on the fire is allowed to enter. If we have a fire lit for the group, the safety circle is placed around the fire to create a boundary where children are not allowed to enter in order to keep a safe distance from the fire.

TREE CLIMBING POLICY

As an important part of risky play, we support children’s want to climb. Our policy at Wildflower is that children need to be able to climb trees and descend comfortably on their own if they want to climb them (i.e. Teachers will not lift them up). Maximum height off the ground is roughly equal to their personal height.

TOOL USE POLICY

Prior to using tools, educators will teach procedures for proper tool use. These skills will only be taught by experienced and appropriate staff. The program will be scaffolded and directed depending on the age and experience of the child. The availability of tools for use will depend on the fine and gross motor skills of that individual child. Educators will consider age, experience, and current capabilities and scaffold the teaching of tool use on a case-by-case basis.

The use of tools gives children a great sense of accomplishment, authentic experiences and independence, as well as develops confidence and self-esteem. Tool use also enhances gross & fine motor development and hand-eye coordination. Children learn to manage age appropriate risks while also learning how to safely use and take care of tools. Tools will be used with the policy of one tool, one child, one educator. Wildflower Forest & Nature School may use tools that include but are not limited to: mallets, saws, carving knives, fire-starting tools, brace and bit drills.

ENTRY AND RELEASE POLICY

As part of the registration process, parents and/or guardians must give Wildflower Forest and Nature School written authorization for the people who will have access to their child while at Forest School (i.e. relative picking up, emergency contacts in instances where parents/guardians can not be reached). Parents must notify Wildflower staff **BEFORE** any changes are made to the pick up schedule.

The following procedure will be followed if an unauthorized adult arrives to pick up your child;

- ◆ Parents/guardians will be contact to give verbal authorization.
- ◆ If parents/guardians are unreachable, the child will remain with Wildflower staff until a parent is reached.
- ◆ Staff will remain with child until very authorization is given or an authorized adult arrives.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Wildflower Forest and Nature School takes children’s safety very seriously. According to the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Society, everyone in Ontario, including members of the public and professionals who work closely with children, is required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect. If our staff have any grounds to suspect that a child may need protection it must be immediately reported to the Children’s Aid Society.

BEHAVIOUR GUIDANCE POLICY

At Wildflower, we strive to provide children with a positive and fulfilling experience while at Forest School. We want them to feel safe and welcome in our space. We believe children should have an active role in behaviour guidance by helping to create clear boundaries and guidelines they believe will work best for their group. Staff work closely with the children to support positive behaviours that foster the healthy development of self-esteem, self-awareness, cooperation, communication, risk management and self regulation.

When dealing with challenging behaviours, educators will incorporate the following strategies;

- ◆ Focusing on the behaviour, not the child. Try to find out what the root cause may be.
- ◆ Considering the child’s developmental level and if their needs are being met.
- ◆ Encouraging and modeling constructive communication so children can be heard.
- ◆ Working together with the children to come up with solutions.
- ◆ Implementing behaviour management strategies in a positive and consistent manner.
- ◆ Be designed to help children learn appropriate behaviours and social techniques.

Challenging behaviours are inevitable and an important part in children’s social and emotional development. However, to help mitigate some challenging behaviours and set a foundation for positive interactions—at the beginning of every session—children will work together to create “group rules”. Group rules are agreements that are put in place by the children to help create a safe and caring space where they can feel comfortable with each other. Some examples of group rules may include no laughing at people, help each other, no excluding anyone, be respectful.

PROHIBITED PRACTICES

We have a zero tolerance policy for any type of abuse or the use of corporal punishment at Wildflower Forest and Nature School. A child must not be humiliated (physically or emotionally, through taunting, teasing or sarcastic humor) at any time in our program.

Although we try to allow space for big emotions to be worked out, there may be occasions where parents must get involved if we feel the behaviour of a child has become unsafe. **Unsafe behaviour** is defined as any behaviour that puts a participant or staff member at risk. This includes not responding when called, running, hiding, taking risk without consulting staff, and not following safety guidelines so that behaviour becomes potentially dangerous to the participant or others.

In the case of inappropriate/unsafe behaviour the following steps will be taken:

1. Wildflower educators will remove the child from proximity of the group and the two will work together to define the unsafe behaviour and create a plan to modify it.
2. Wildflower educators will confer with other educators to be consistent with expectations and to agree on the best approach for the student.
3. Parents/guardians will be informed (by phone or at the end of the day in person) of the behaviour and consulted to understand the root cause.
4. Wildflower educators and parents/guardians will, together, develop strategies to adjust and eliminate the unsafe behaviour. These strategies will be implemented with the child at home/school and at Wildflower Forest and Nature School to offer a consistent approach. Wildflower educators and parents/guardians/teachers will stay in contact to keep each other informed of the child's progress with regard to the behaviour in question.
5. Wildflower educators will follow up with the child to be consistent with expectations and approach as well as to offer feedback and positive reinforcement.

In the extreme case that a child's behaviour is consistently inappropriate or unsafe for the child or others, and after the above process has been implemented, the child may be asked to leave the program for a short term or permanently. If your child is severely misbehaving or is verbally or physically abusing another participant or instructor, Wildflower Forest & Nature School reserves the right to suspend or expel a child from the program should their behaviour be deemed unsafe for themselves or others. In this event, a phone call home to parents/guardians will be made, the child will be asked to leave Wildflower immediately and no refund will be issued. This is only used in extreme circumstances when other children and instructors' safety is in danger.

COMMUNICATION & SUSTAINABILITY



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY POLICY

The health and sustainability of our environment is very important to us at Wildflower Forest and Nature School. Our whole educational ethos is based on loving, learning, and caring for mother nature. We strongly believe that children who spend most of their time in nature will grow up to become adults who love our planet and want to ensure it's health and prosperity.

We understand that having our classroom in the same natural space over a long period of time can have adverse effects on the environment. We use composting toilets to maximize decomposition of human waste, we collect rain water for hand washing and use solar panels for any electricity needs while at our site. While we do our best to mitigate environmental disturbances, overuse of an area will inevitably have effects on that land. In an effort to minimize our ecological impact, we rotate our sites of play, stay on designated trails as much as possible and keep high impact activities at our home base. We conduct regular Ecological Impact Assessments of our sites that we visit in order to be proactive with the mitigation of our impact.

GENERAL COMMUNICATION

We are happy to talk briefly during pick up or drop off for any quick questions or concerns for the day. However, should any non urgent questions arise or longer conversations become necessary, please email wildflower.cornwall@gmail.com or contact Melanie directly at (613)861-0054.

Most communications will be done by email for important information and by social media for day-to-day communications.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

In the event of an emergency that involves your child, the parent/guardian listed as the emergency contact provided will be contacted at the earliest reasonable time. Please ensure we have current and up to date contact information on file at all times.

GRIEVANCE POLICY

We encourage all participants, parents/guardians, volunteers and visitors to share feedback on their experience. What they enjoyed, as well as any concerns that may have arisen during their visit. At Wildflower, we believe it is important to always be receiving regular feedback so we may provide the safest, most welcoming and best learning experience for our community.

Should any concerns arise in your dealings with Wildflower Forest and Nature School, please communicate them to Wildflower staff in person, by phone or by email at wildflower.cornwall@gmail.com.

**This Forest School Handbook is adapted from the ones available on www.childnature.ca (Forest School Canada), www.fsforestschool.com (Free Spirit Forest School) and www.kingstonforestandnatureschool.ca (Kingston Forest and Nature School).*

This is a living document that is being revised and updated regularly.

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