



# Walden Nature Connections

## Parent Handbook

Joshua Clark

Values	3
Forest School Origins	3
Preparing for Forest School	5
Probationary Period	5
Preparing for the first day with Walden	6
A Typical Day	6
Participant Sign in and Sign out	6
Clothing and Equipment	6
What to Pack	8
Lost and Found	9
Health and Safety Policies	10
Terms and Conditions	10
Privacy Policy	10
Illness Policy	11
Emergency Procedure	13
Food/Allergy Policies	13
Toileting / Hand Washing	14
Accident Procedure	14
Missing person procedure	15
Weather Related Policies	15
Tool Use / Fires policy	16
Child Protection Policy	18
Risk Assessment and Site Management	20
Our staff and volunteers	21
Staff Responsibilities	22
Behaviour Management Policy	22
Communication Strategy	24
Questions and Concerns	25
Environmental Sustainability	26





## Values

Here at Walden, we are a classroom without walls. We aim to educate, empower and inspire. To bring out the best in our students, through hands-on learning in a safe and non-judgmental way. Everyone is treated as an individual. The experiences and exploration are given in a fun, positive, supportive way and adapted to each participant's needs, as everyone has different comfort zone boundaries.

Our educators utilise learning approaches drawing out ideas and theories that start with and come from the child. Whether child or adult, studies have shown that in a Forest School setting participants can benefit from improved confidence and self-esteem, whilst also giving freedom to explore, greater independence, and resilience.

We do this by being largely child-led, helping children to complete achievable tasks that they want to do. By doing this, a child confidently grows in ability and doing so at their own pace. It makes learning fun. Enabling the children to be their best self and helps them become what they want to

be. Developing important skills, such as their physical, spiritual, social, intellectual and emotional developmental needs.

We strive to provide the highest quality programmes possible by having staff committed to forming relationships and using reflection as a tool. Creating a positive, healthy, safe and supportive work environment where people love what they do is paramount to Walden. We firmly believe that being happy at work will make our programmes better for the children.

We are all stewards of this land where we work, play and learn. We believe in leaving no trace, to leave things better than we found them and to engage in sustainable and ethical practices. We give back, live consciously and support those around us in many ways.

## Forest School Origins

The Forest School idea originally came from Denmark where it was found that children who had previously been to Forest School had better social and communication skills and high self esteem. They worked well in groups and were more confident in their decision-making skills and the ability they had gained. With this solid foundation the children were able to come into school confident and build on their experiences helping to raise their academic achievements, to be happier and healthier.

You can find out more about the ethos from the Forest School Association here: [www.childnature.ca](http://www.childnature.ca)

## Ethos

Forest School ethos is experiential, exploratory, learner led, outdoor education that inspires confidence, self esteem, respect for nature and connection to self. Encourages collaboration rather than competition, generosity over selfishness, sustainable management rather than exploitation. Inspires a mindset of abundance rather than scarcity, self reliance rather than dependence, inter-connectedness rather than isolation, creativity rather than consumption.

Learners as part of nature, not separate from it, where they are provided with opportunities to explore their boundaries in a safe and supported environment, thus building resilience and strength of character.

Themes and topics that have interested students from previous days have been recorded and serve to direct the development of our facilitator's future lesson plans. Facilitators are able to delve deeper into students' learning by taking what students are interested in and combining it with what can be found around our sites.

The sessions involve practical hands-on activities which will build up children's skills, abilities and confidence. The children will get the freedom and responsibility to explore what interests them, encouraging them to pick what they learn. At Walden we deal with managed risk, this helps the children to become safe and confident in their own abilities as well as learning the boundaries they will need in life, in a safe and constructive way.

## Land Acknowledgment

Children are able to be interactive, hold out their hands and participate in this acknowledgement. The idea that this acknowledgement wasn't just to be read out loud and then moved on from, participation allows it to become real. Actions breathe life into mere words. We build with our hands, use our hands and speak with our hands as much as our tongues.

Being open to change as well as willing to learn, grow and work to a stronger future together is ingrained in Walden's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. It will be in our daily teachings, Land Acknowledgement and through our sit spots that our staff and children alike will be able to connect with our neighbouring Indigenous cultures. Our aim, in regards to Truth and Reconciliation, is to continually learn and work out what more we can do, teach and learn to improve relations.

It is of paramount importance that our company, and its programmes, are working in relation to the land. It is hypocritical to do otherwise. As such, impact assessments are carried out at the various areas that we occupy as well as continual monitoring of the impact we will have. It is desirable that our impact is low for the benefit of all that live around us, as well as for the children to be in a cared for environment.





## Preparing for Forest School

We require a \$30 non-refundable enrollment fee, per child, to secure your child's spot at Walden Nature Connections. This goes towards the full cost of the programme and is non refundable.

Full payment is due three weeks before the start date of your program.

Payments can only be made through E-Transfer to [waldennatureconnections@gmail.com](mailto:waldennatureconnections@gmail.com).

No refunds will be given for days missed due to illness, inclement weather, emergency closures during session, or statutory holidays. Days will either be added or refunded for cancellations due to staffing issues, at the discretion of Walden Nature Connections.

Programmes are refundable up to 3 weeks prior to the start week - less a \$30 administration fee / initial deposit sum.

*Cancellations after this 3 week programme are non refundable.* Our programmes run on very small, personal numbers thus it is likely that a cancellation could put a programme in jeopardy.

## Probationary Period

The first 4 weeks are considered a probationary period. Walden Nature Connections reserves the right to request that the child is withdrawn from the programmes if they are unable to adapt to the programme and our staff believe the programmes are unable to meet the needs of the child in question. In such a situation a 50% refund will be offered.

## Preparing for the first day with Walden

We are all eager to get to the forest, find new things and see new sights. But before we head out, we must make sure that all the important bits are in place. We recommend arriving a little early (10 minutes) at the start of the first session. This provides us with a chance to meet you, your children and do any remaining paperwork. We suggest around 5 minutes early on sessions for us to check clothing and gear as well as answer any last-minute questions that you may have for us. When everyone is ready, we encourage a quick goodbye to lessen the potential separation sadness before we head off to explore.

## A Typical Day

Our days hold a general rhythm, but please note that our schedule is flexible. The weather, the child's interests, animals present, events and activities all help shape our time outside.

Here's what a typical day might look like:

- Arrival / Sign In
- Welcome Circle
- Child Led exploration
- Snack, Storytelling, Rest.
  - Activity & Free Play
- Sit Spot / Closing Circle
- Collection/ Sign Out

## Participant Sign in and Sign out

Walden Nature Connections will not release children to anyone who is not specified as a *Primary Contact*, *Emergency Contact* or other contacts specified on the enrolment form. Everyone, including parents who are authorised to pick up a participant must be prepared to present photo ID. We require the child to be walked to our meeting spot and signed in/out on paper. Please drop off and pick up your children in good time. A parent dropping off their child whilst they stay in the car assuming that a facilitator has seen the child is not acceptable. All children are to be properly handed over to the responsibility of the facilitator that day.

## Clothing and Equipment

Appropriate clothing is paramount to a child's well-being during Forest School sessions. A child without appropriate clothing that is able to protect them from extremes of hot or cold, able to cover them and reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes, clothing that is comfortable and is able to keep them dry if necessary. Our programmes are completely outside, even for snacks.

Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of clothing for outdoor activities, we want children to get dirty and not feel constrained by keeping their clothes clean. It is the parent's responsibility to see that the children are properly dressed. Appropriate clothing is a requirement for participation in Walden programmes as a key component to a child's well-being, comfort and happiness.

Children and parents should be mindful of different seasons when dressing children, for example when the weather is wet, wellies (rubber / rain boots) and waterproofs are ideal, when the weather is hot sun hats and sunscreen are a must. Sunscreen is to be put on by the parents before arrival and with a bottle in the child's bag to be used by them throughout the day. As temperatures and exposure can vary from open areas to under the shade of trees.

Staff are required to scan children upon arrival and ensure they are wearing clothing suitable for the day's conditions. Children who are not prepared may be given the option to wear gear provided by staff or they will be sent home to better prepare. Parents and caregivers may not leave a poorly prepared child with staff while they go home to get extra gear. They must take their child with them.

### The 3 Basic Clothing Layers:

**The base layer** – the layer next to your skin. Avoid cotton – synthetic and Merino wool fabrics work best. These fabrics wick moisture away from your skin to your outer layers so it can evaporate. They also dry quickly.

**The middle layer** – keeps us warm! Fleece or microfleece shirts / trousers, and jacket.

**The outer layer** – the shell. The water and windproof layer that is breathable. Think Gore-Tex coated fabrics with vents (core / underarm) that help release heat. This includes snow pants too!

We do not recommend that you send your child in camouflage or deep greens and browns as it increases their chances of getting lost. There is no need to go with expensive gear, check out the local thrift shops, Kijiji and Facebook Marketplace for good quality things at a fraction of the cost.

Children must come with gear that is appropriate to the weather that day. Please check the weather forecast each morning and dress your child for the *low* of the day, as well as the high.



## Winter Clothing

- Long trousers
- Warm hat and gloves
- Wellies or trainers (no open toe shoes)
- Waterproof coat or another suitable coat
- Water bottle
- Layers

## Summer Clothing

- Light long-sleeved top
- Jumper or light jacket.
- Water bottle.
- Light long trousers
- Sun hat / cap
- Sunscreen
- Wellies or trainers (no open toe shoes)

## Further Clothing Notes

- Dress your child in layers during the days, it will allow for better control over body temperature. It's easier to have too many layers than not enough.
- It is often cooler/damper in wooded areas and during mornings.
- Stay away from cotton as much as possible. It retains moisture and can make us feel cold. This includes cotton socks.
- Use wool for base and middle layers if possible as it insulates even when wet. When woollen items are not available, use other synthetic fibres (fleece, polyester, silk etc)
- Mittens are also better than fingered gloves for little hands. Thin knitted cotton gloves should be avoided, as they can make hands colder than wearing nothing, especially when they get wet.
- Children are encouraged to wear a hat at all times
- A sturdy breathable waterproof jacket and waterproof rain pants will be required.
- Sturdy, comfortable shoes are a must.

Please note that most snow pants and nylon splash pants are not waterproof and are not appropriate on wet rainy days. When purchasing gear, look for waterproof and not water resistant.

- LABEL ALL GEAR, that is being worn and in the backpack.

Children who are not adequately dressed will not be able to attend that day's programmes as it poses an unacceptable risk to the child's well being and happiness.

## What to Pack

We ask that parents ensure their child has all of the following items packed in a sturdy backpack that fits your child. It is good practice to pack the backpack with your child's help so that they will be aware of what is in it and where to find specific items.

Please place any medication in an easy to grab location (for example the top pocket on the bag), and make us aware of the location at daily sign-in.

Please refrain from packing extra items. Your child will be carrying their own pack while walking from site to site and extra items will add extra weight. All tools and equipment that are needed will be provided by Forest School. Please **do not** send any tools or knives from home unless we have asked.

- Small, full water bottle: that they are able to open.
- Healthier snacks: preferably litter-less, in a container that sets your child up for success. You will be informed if there are any allergies in your group you must be aware of, i.e. nut allergies.
- Extra socks: wool or synthetic fibres,
- Spare clothing: in a plastic bag.
- Plastic bag: for dirty, or soiled, clothing.
- 3 Bread bags: clean, re-used bread bags for your child's backpack. These go over the feet if boots get wet, so that children can slip their feet into their boots again. Please place a few bags into your child's backpack.
- Pair of hand warmers: ideally reusable - season depending.
- Tissues: in a small ziplock bag, easily accessible.
- A whistle: attached to the child's jacket.
- Life saving medication (eg, epipen), if needed.
- All extra clothing listed in the segments above.

## Lost and Found

Walden Nature Connections is not responsible for any damaged, lost or stolen items while on site. We encourage parents to label everything coming with your child to help ensure it ends up back in their pack. Any items left on site that are found will be placed in a Lost and Found. We do use public land which is in regular use, so not all items may be returned to the family if they are picked up by a member of the public.



## Health and Safety Policies

### Terms and Conditions

At least three weeks before the start date of the program, in order to participate we need:

- All Registration Forms to be completed
- Informed Consent /Liability Waiver signed
- Payment in full

### Privacy Policy

Information discussed in regards to staff, children, or families is to stay confidential. Information about children is not to be shared without parental consent (unless governed by law). Any discussion regarding concerns of family or child behaviour is to be done in confidence with the intent to find a solution.

### Photography Policy

At Walden, we take photos of the children in our programmes so that we can make learning visible to parents, other children and engage the public in the goodness of what we do.



We request that all parents in our programmes sign a photo release. This is a part of our larger waiver that is sent out to you via email. We will never name a child in a photo and will not post specific location information beyond what is publicly available through the location of a programme or event.

Facilitators do their best to take non-identifying photos of the children in our programmes. If we would like to use a photo in a public domain that is only of your child and clearly shows their face we will make attempts to contact you before using it.

The photos we take are used to reflect on our teaching methods, aid the teaching of new facilitators. As well as to use on our website, social media platforms such as Facebook / Instagram. For the creation of promotional materials such as posters, brochures and business development.

If you object to the usage of your child's image in any photo you see please let us know and we will remove it.

## Refund Policy

Refunds are not given unless there are extreme circumstances that prevent a child from participating in our educational programmes. Walden Nature Connections reserves the right to determine and assess these circumstances on a case by case basis.

- *Programmes are refundable up to 3 weeks prior to the programme start week - less a \$30 administration fee / initial deposit sum.*
- *Refunds will not be given 3 weeks prior to program start date, or during program unless the spot can be filled. This is done by enrollment of a child and full payment of the programme.*
- *A full refund will be given if a program must be cancelled due to insufficient registration.*
- *No refunds will be given for days missed due to illness, inclement weather, emergency closures during session, or statutory holidays.*

Our programmes run on very small, personal numbers thus it is likely that a cancellation could put a programme in jeopardy.

## Illness Policy

If your child does not come to the program for any reason, there is no refund or reduction in fees. Children may however make up any class missed if space permits within one week of the absence.

If the style of the programme permits. However, as we run small ratios of adults to children the possibility of available space is potentially low.

Should Walden Outdoor Connections be closed due to staff illness, programme fees for that lost day/days will be refunded within 2 weeks.

We ask that participants (including students, educators, and accompanying volunteers) stay home from Walden Nature Connections for at least 24 hours after their last symptoms have subsided, for the following cases:

- Temperature (At or above 38°C/100.4°F)
- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Pink Eye
- Any contagious illnesses
- COVID

Should the above-mentioned situations arise while at Forest School, the parent/guardian will be contacted and asked to pick up their child immediately.

In the case of communicable diseases such as measles, pink eye, chickenpox, mumps, flu, strep throat, viral pneumonia, etc. A sick child may return to Walden Nature Connections after their health care provider has communicated that it is safe for them to do so. Any outbreak of communicable disease or lice treatment will be communicated to parents / guardians via preferred method of contact.

## Administration of Medicine Procedure

Staff will administer medicine according to the labelled directions only when all of the following criteria are met:

- 1 *Written consent from the child's parent has been obtained.*
- 2 *The medication is in the original labelled container.*

We will not administer medications that have the instructions to give "as needed" without a doctor's specific written instruction for a specific time to give the medication.

Anytime medication is administered to a child the following information will be recorded:

- 1 *The name of the medication,*
- 2 *The time of the administration.*
- 3 *The amount administered.*
- 4 *The initials of the persons who administered the medication.*

**Parents must fill in and sign a medical form for their children upon enrollment.** For the greatest clarity over medications, we strongly suggest that medication application timing can be altered to when a parent / guardian can do it themselves, not as the responsibility of Walden staff.

\*\*for ongoing medical conditions ( EpiPen, inhalers etc.). A separate permission form must be filled and signed for any medication to be administered - each time/day medication is to be administered. All medical needs **must** be relayed to Walden as soon as possible. Through our forms and email communication.



## Emergency Procedure

The Forest School Leader (Josh Clark) is a qualified first aider and carries a recommended first aid kit. Activities are risk assessed and staff continuously monitor the safety of the group as activities progress. An emergency plan has been drawn up, which will be followed in the unlikely event of an accident.

### Poison Ivy

Poison ivy is present in some grasslands at certain sites staff are required to learn to identify it and learn where it grows. Skin that has come into contact with poison ivy is to be washed with warm soapy water within 5 minutes of exposure to limit any rash or reaction.

### Ticks

Children must be checked before they leave the park for ticks. We will conduct a visual scan of each child when they put their backpack on before they get picked up by their parents.



If a tick is seen on a participant it is brushed off. If a tick is attached we will leave it and contact parents. Parents / guardians will be informed at pick-up, and given the opportunity to take the tick to a health unit for testing.

## Food/Allergy Policies

The 'No picking, no licking' motto will always apply. Preventing children eating anything found in woods, such as berries and seeds. All participants doing activities that involve food will be encouraged to wash their hands with water and soap (or at least sanitised) which will be provided, before eating food.

Due to allergies, food is never given to the children without first checking with parents. Food is never shared between the children.

Please ensure you have contacted Josh prior if there are any food allergies.

At Walden, students are required to bring their own lunch, snacks and ample water for each day of their programmes. By bringing their own lunch ensures students can attain proper nutrition, while following personal dietary preferences and restrictions. We encourage families to consider packing a litter-less / zero-waste lunch that is easy to carry in a backpack.

During winter months, consider thermoses for hot snacks and beverages. Students may not share food with other students. On special circumstances, snacks may be provided by Walden or parents. In these cases, all allergies and intolerances will be considered. Given that Walden undertakes programmes in public environments, we are unable to guarantee a nut-free environment, but do our best to mitigate this. Students with severe nut-allergies should have an EpiPen on them, and an additional EpiPen with staff at all times.

## Toileting / Hand Washing

There are no close washroom facilities around our sites. If we are in close proximity to public washrooms they are checked prior to children entering by a responsible adult. In most cases, children are encouraged to do a 'nature pee' in private areas, away from other students, play areas, and a water source. Children will dig a cat-hole in a more remote location. All must be comfortable toileting outdoors with appropriate assistance from facilitators. Children should be able to inform the facilitators if toileting help is required, but all children must be toilet trained. If accidents happen, children will be changed using the back-up clothing provided in their backpacks and soiled clothing will be sent home in a plastic bag.

Staff are prepared with hand washing kits and material needed to do this successfully. All students must be able to use the washroom independently and are required to always bring an extra change of clothes.

We wash our hands after toileting and before eating food. Hands are sprayed with lots of warm soapy water or sanitiser.

## Accident Procedure

For minor medical accidents (scrapes, cuts, bumps) staff provide appropriate first aid and fill in an accident form. When parents arrive, staff will speak with them explaining what happened. Parents will be required to sign the accident form.

## Ambulance procedure

First aider to use the phone to call 911 and stay with the injured person. First aider first on the scene to always stay with casualty and observe any changes. Give as much information about the patient and their location as possible to emergency services:

- Who has been injured
- What their injuries are
- If they have any medical conditions
- Where on the site the patient is?
- The directions to the site and the patient.
- Any changes in condition.

The child will be transported to a hospital accompanied by Josh, or staff designated in charge. Emergency support team will be called if staff is solo, to supervise other children until parents/guardians and/or Josh arrives. We will notify parents as soon as possible, if they cannot be reached, call emergency contacts. The accident/incident report form must be filled in and discussed with the parent / guardian at the hospital.

## Missing person procedure

- *The Forest School leader is to blow the whistle / wolf howl to assemble all the children.*
- *Programme leader conducts a headcount.*
- *Children to be asked if they have seen the missing child.*
- *Toilet areas to be checked and surroundings with the group.*
- *Call in support from other staff members. Use members of the public to aid, if available.*
- *All available adults to search the site, including any hiding places, blind spots etc.*
- *Call the police and parent / guardian.*
- *If the child is found in the meantime the police, all staff, and the child's parents / carers are to be notified immediately.*

The incident will be recorded immediately in line with Walden's policy for recording critical incidents.

## Weather Related Policies

On inclement weather days, class will either be reduced by an hour or cancelled entirely depending on the severity. Such days may occur from extreme heat, extreme cold or very low quality air.

Inclement weather notices will be texted the morning of to the parent or caregiver who filled out the registration form. A credit will be applied to your account for any programmes that were cancelled due to inclement weather. There are no refunds for programmes cancelled due to inclement weather as defined above and below.

### Extreme Weather

Walden staff will consult the forecast throughout the day and any weather related safety concerns will be considered in all decisions for programming purposes. During thunder and lightning, participants will remain under a permanent shelter until a storm has passed.

In the case of extreme cold ( $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  or below) or extreme heat ( $30^{\circ}\text{C}$  or above), the time spent outside will be limited, based on age and gear. Walden staff will visually monitor students for frostbite, hypothermia, heat exhaustion etc. and verbally monitor students by facilitating body scans, which the students will become comfortable executing on their own (ie. self-check). In the event of high winds or wind gusts, we will stay clear of forested areas and other overhead hazards.

### Extreme Heat Days

When the weather is  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$  or hotter we:

Remain in our most sheltered/shaded sites.

Encourage children to drink plenty of water and take lots of water breaks.

Have water fights and get wet!

When the temperature is over  $40^{\circ}\text{C}$  classes are cancelled.

### Extreme Cold Days

When the weather is  $-13^{\circ}\text{C}$  through  $-18^{\circ}\text{C}$  including windchill we:

1. Bring along our pop-up tent and tent heater to give us all somewhere to warm up.

2. Start class an hour later and shorten by an hour too.

When it is over  $-18^{\circ}\text{C}$  with windchill class is cancelled.

### Air Quality

When the AQHI is a 7 or higher:

Full day sessions will be reduced to half day.

Running games and hikes with extreme exertion will be halted.

Children will be encouraged to wear water soaked bandanas or a dampened facemask.

When the AQHI is 10+ classes are cancelled.



## Tool Use / Fires policy

Using a range of tools will be necessary in many site based activities and is an important part of our work as it enables participants to develop new practical skills that help develop self-confidence. Tools are only brought out once the staff have gotten to know the participants in the programmes. Individuals are assessed based on their maturity-level, interest level in the tool, how they navigate levels of risk, concentration level, ability to follow the clear guidelines given and shown around tools before being allowed to use any tools.

### Tools

- All tools are checked before usage
- Correct and safe use of tools will be demonstrated to all staff and participants
- Tools should be counted when handed out and counted back in again when finished
- All groups are to be supervised closely by competent facilitators until deemed competent to work with limited supervision
- Tools should be kept in a designated safe area when not in use
- All knives / saws will be closed/ sheathed immediately after use
- Walking around with open/ unsheathed tools will not be permitted
- Safe working distances and suitable ratios will be maintained at all times

### Fires

- Correct use of equipment and fire safety will be demonstrated before use
- Participants will only light fires under direct supervision
- A burns kit and water will be kept within close range of fires
- All fires will be fully extinguished at the end of a session

### Tree Climbing

As part of Risky Play, children love to climb. Our policy at Walden is that children need to be able to climb trees and descend comfortably on their own if they want to climb them - facilitators won't lift them up. Maximum height off the ground is roughly equal to their personal height.



## Child Protection Policy

All Walden staff are fully committed to taking a proactive position regarding the prevention of child abuse. In accordance with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act our staff are trained to immediately report to the appropriate authorities if they suspects that child abuse has occurred or if a child is at risk of abuse.

## Child Entry and Release Policy

Parents must give Walden Nature Connections written authorization for the people who may have access to their children (i.e. a relative who picks up the child, emergency contacts in cases where parents cannot be reached). Parents must notify Walden before changing the usual pick-up routine. We always act in the best interests of the child if there is any confusion or uncertainty.

### Unauthorised Pick-up Procedure:

If someone, other than a parent / guardian or authorised alternate pick-up person, arrives to pick up a child and we haven't been notified in advance by these authorised persons we will:

- Call the parent/guardian
- If the parent/guardian cannot be located, the child is not allowed to leave Walden until a parent/guardian has been contacted.
- Staff will remain with the child until an authorised pick-up person arrives.

### Release of Children to a Person Who Appears Intoxicated/Impaired:

Staff will not release a child to a person who appears intoxicated or impaired. In such cases, staff will assist in making other pick-up arrangements (i.e. a spouse or other authorised person). Staff members are legally responsible to protect the children in their care from any perceived risk.

## Custody and Access to Children

According to the law, both parents of a child have equal access to a child and to the information about the child's development, health and welfare. The only time a staff member can deny access of a parent to a child is when there is a written separation agreement or a legal court order. Walden requires a copy of this document.

## Grievance Policy

If you have a complaint or grievance that cannot be resolved within the time allotted after a programme ends, or with an educator directly, please submit your complaint in writing to Walden Nature Connections Lead Facilitator Joshua Clark at [WaldenNatureConnections1@gmail.com](mailto:WaldenNatureConnections1@gmail.com).

Concerns or complaints do not necessarily signal something bigger. They offer an opportunity for growth, change and improvement. We strive to engage all parties involved and seek an inclusive resolution. Concerns will be treated confidentially, subject to applicable legal requirements.





## Risk Assessment and Site Management

Risk is an inherent part of Forest School, and learning how to manage risk is an extremely important life skill and is part of what makes our programmes unique. Each of our educators continually assesses and manages the risks on-site, while balancing inclusion of the participants to help children learn and understand risk management themselves. A hazard is something that can cause harm. Risk is the chance that something has the potential to cause harm.

Once a hazard or risk is identified it is given a rating from 0-5. Acceptable risk levels for Walden programmes are in the 0-3 range with the understanding that activities in the 3 range must be closely managed / facilitated by staff.

Some of the risks that participants may face while at Walden include:

### Weather Related Injuries:

- Chill or hypothermia from improper gear
- Falling or stirred debris from wind
- Thunderstorms

### Injuries from Physical Activity:

- Slips/falls on uneven or slippery ground
- Unsafe handling of sticks



- Rough play with other children
- Interactions with other animals

- Bug bites
- Insect stings
- Tick attachment
- Scratches or bites from domestic dogs or wildlife

Plant interactions:

- Scratches from thorns
- Ingestion of improperly identified plant material
- Scratch to the eyes from a branch swinging back.



## Our staff and volunteers

All staff, and volunteers, have undergone an appropriate selection process to assess their skills and suitability for working with children and have been subject to police checks. All sessions are staffed by a qualified first aider and have access to a recommended first aid kit and have passed a criminal Record Check, with a Vulnerable Sector Screening.

The role of our educators is to (invite, emotionally nudge and pull) students beyond their comfort zones and misconceptions into deeper thinking and understanding. Much time is spent reflecting on the day's events for future session planning, an act of imagining the possible provocations, questions, situations they might set up to build on prior experiences.



## Josh Clark

*Founder and Lead Facilitator.*

Originally from the coastal city of Brighton, England, Josh spent a lot of his time in the hills, walking, biking and breathing in the ocean air.

Graduating with a Bachelors in Environmental Earth Science at the University of Aberystwyth in Wales, UK. He was working at an outdoor education charity where he discovered his love for nature-based education. Seeing children transform in character because of the freedom of outdoor play and the opportunity to physically connect to their natural environment sparked the fire

for Josh. Since then Josh has taught and designed programmes in Iceland, England, Wales, Calgary and Kimberley, BC.

Josh became a certified Forest and Nature School Practitioner through the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada in 2022. He has gained experience with a range of ages, as well as neurodiverse children.

Josh loves a challenge and seeks out the adventure wherever he goes!

## Staff Responsibilities

Facilitators will be models of appropriate behaviour and problem solving techniques by supporting respectful interactions with adults and children. We will give children the encouragement they need to develop self control and grow through the facilitation of a safe environment to express feelings and big emotions. To encourage children to work through any problems with their peers verbally before facilitators intervene. Including directing them to a quiet spot or redirection to another activity. We set rules and expectations that are age and ability appropriate. Facilitators provide a positive approach to discipline through learning. This process involves guiding children to resolve their differences in a positive manner, allowing the development of self-control.

## Participant: Staff Ratios

Our maximum teacher to participant ratio is 1:6. This allows all children to be heard and stay safe.

## Volunteer / Accompanying Adult Responsibilities

We are always looking for volunteers with the same ethos as us to help out with our programmes. This could take the form of an ongoing weekly volunteer placement, the sharing of a passion or skill with our groups, or any other ideas and suggestions. All of our volunteers will be 14 or older, will have been arranged by Walden staff, must have a clear Police Check and have read and reviewed our Handbook to become familiarised with expectations. If you're interested, feel free to reach out to Josh at [WaldenNatureConnections@gmail.com](mailto:WaldenNatureConnections@gmail.com).

## Behaviour Management Policy

At Walden we are proactive in creating positive spaces that are developmentally appropriate for the children. Walden explicitly prohibits corporal punishment, violence, harassment or any kind of foul language. As well as any disrespect from staff, caregivers or children to other members of our Forest School community.

We understand and acknowledge that children have heightened emotions and big feelings, we will do our best to work through and mitigate situations in a safe and positive way.

In general, our behaviour management will:

- Focus on the behaviour rather than the child
- Consider the child's developmental level and needs
- Make expectations clear and provide scaffolding to help students participate positively
- Be implemented in a positive and consistent manner
- Be designed to help the child to learn appropriate behaviour and techniques that can help children to develop self-control, self-confidence, decision making skills, the ability to communicate effectively and sensitively in their interactions with others
- Involve consulting with parents / guardians to include their input and how best to approach their child if a problem is recurring. Along with keeping them informed of issues / concerns as / if they arise

Please note that Walden Nature Connections does reserve the right to remove or suspend a child from the programme should their behaviour continue and be deemed unsafe for themselves or others during the programme. In this event, parents will be contacted and instructed to pick up their child. The lead educator will be available to discuss this decision with those involved.



## Communication Strategy

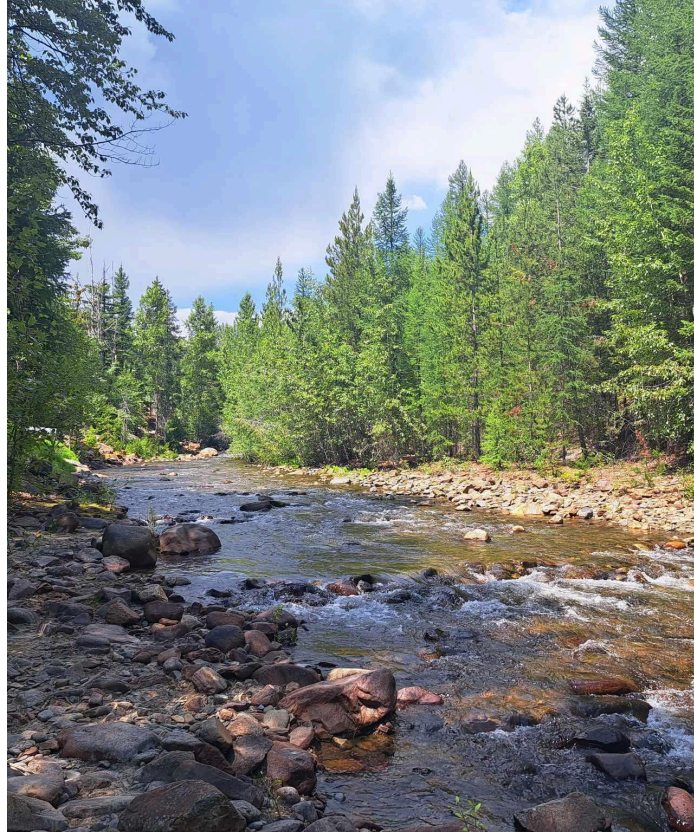
Walden Nature Connections staff will use email and phone as the primary modes of communication with parents. Please also check our website for regular updates and information. For attendance purposes, a phone call or text message is required. Please *do not* Facebook message us, email or use other forms of social media – we will not receive it.

Please always inform instructors promptly if your child will be absent or late. We will not wait for missing individuals if they are beyond the programme's start time, as it is likely that we have moved on from our initial site. At the start of each morning all parents are required to sign their child in and leave relevant emergency contact information for that given day.

## Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency, parents / guardians will be contacted by telephone once emergency personnel (if necessary) have been contacted. In the event that weather or road conditions make travel dangerous for staff / participants and we need to cancel programmes or close early for the day, parents or guardians will be contacted by telephone.





## Questions and Concerns

Should you have any questions or concerns about your child's well-being or success, we encourage you to discuss it with staff directly. We are open to feedback at all times and always have your child's best interest at heart. If you feel that you require an extended or more focused conversation, we will happily arrange a meeting between us.

We will provide feedback from the day to parents as necessary or notable. Please be considerate that time restraints do not allow us to give feedback for every child, each and every day. If there is something notable or remarkable from the day we will share it, but otherwise please assume your child had a successful and enjoyable time. If you have an interest or need for specific feedback, please let instructors know at the start of the day.

## Organisational information

Joshua Clark: 778-586-5329

WaldenNatureConnections.com

WaldenNatureConnectionsI@gmail.com

[www.facebook.com/WaldenNatureConnections](https://www.facebook.com/WaldenNatureConnections)

[www.instagram.com/WaldenNatureConnections](https://www.instagram.com/WaldenNatureConnections)

## Family Resources

Canada's Food Guide:

<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

## Community Education Services:

The Community Education Service (CES) provides parents/ caregivers and other community members with opportunities to access free, public education sessions on child and youth emotional wellness and health topics.

[www.community.hmhc.ca/](http://www.community.hmhc.ca/)

## Environmental Sustainability

We work and play on the traditional territories and unceded territories of the Ktunaxa people which is also home to the Kinbasket people. We are grateful to be on these lands and treat them with respect.

A large-scale Environmental Impact Assessment guides our actions and policies, and individual site assessments are done tri-annually. New assessments are completed upon every site return, involving the children as well. Understanding how our presence changed these spaces? What plants have grown back, returned or are damaged?

As a major part of our forest school identity, our students are very aware of and in tune with the seasonal changes within this space, and observe nature's changes with respect and wonder.

Reducing our human impact is also a daily part of our core routines. Kids are asked to bring litter-less snack packs and are reminded to always pack out what they pack in. In general, facilitators do their best to follow Leave No Trace principles wherever possible.