



Wild Roots Nature & Forest School Parent and Safety Handbook

Welcome to Wild Roots Nature and Forest School!

We are looking forward to sharing adventures in the forest with your child. This handbook is designed for our half-day and full-day recreation programs and introduces you to our policies. Please contact us if you have any further questions or concerns at wildrootsnatureandforestschool@gmail.com.

Wild Roots Core Values, Vision and Mission Statement:

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School's mission is to introduce nature to young children who have little to no experience in an outdoor setting and to further develop skills of children already comfortable with learning and playing in a natural environment.



The Forest School philosophy will be used as the mentoring model, allowing for a complete nature immersion program for children ages 4-8 years. The Forest School philosophy is an educational approach that started in Denmark and Sweden in the 1950s, gained traction throughout Europe, Australia, New Zealand, USA and now Canada. To follow the Forest School principles, learners must be exposed to regular and repeated access to the *same* natural space. As well as *emergent, experiential, inquiry-based, play-based and place-based learning* (MacEachren, 2013).

Forest School has been heavily researched over the past decade and the potential benefits of participating in the Wild Roots Nature and Forest School include:

- Improved confidence, social skills, communication, motivation and concentration. (O'Brien & Murray, 2007)
- Improved physical stamina, fine and gross motor skills (O'Brien & Murray, 2007)
- Positive identity formation for individuals and communities (Russell et al., 2013)
- Environmentally sustainable behaviours and ecological literacy.
- Increased knowledge of environment, increased frequency of visiting nature within families (O'Brien & Murray, 2007)
- Healthy and safe risk taking.
- Improved creativity and resilience.
- Improved academic achievement and self-regulation.
- Reduced stress and increased patience, self-discipline, capacity for attention and recovery from mental fatigue (Russell et al., 2013, p.482)
- Improved higher level cognitive skills (Atchlet, Strayer & Atchley, 2012)

Another key feature of this type of nature program is that children develop and build an on-going relationship with the land, and thus developing pride, ownership and environmentally sustainable behaviours. Students of Wild Roots Nature and Forest School will naturally become well-informed caring stewards of MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre presently and for future generations to come.

The image is a screenshot of the ParticipACTION website. At the top left is the ParticipACTION logo with the tagline "Let's get moving." To the right of the logo are links for "Register now to customize this site and more", "Login", and a search bar. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for "Report Card", "Get STARTED", "Make Room For Play", "Programs & Resources", "Blog", and "About". The main content area features a large red banner with the text "The Biggest Risk is KEEPING KIDS INDOORS" in white and black. To the left of the banner is a circular graphic with a pine branch. Below the banner is a photograph of a report card on a wooden surface. In the bottom left corner, it says "2015 The ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth". In the bottom right corner, there is a button that says "READ THE REPORT CARD" with a right-pointing arrow.

This type of program is especially important in today's society as research shows huge reductions of youth participation in outdoor activities. This reduction of outdoor activity closely relates to increased childhood obesity rates and mental health issues (like ADHD). According to the 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth in Canada, children in kindergarten to grade six spend almost eight hours each day in front of a screen. The report card as well as a growing base of scientific research states access to active play in nature and outdoors, is essential for healthy childhood development. Wild Roots Nature and Forest School will aid in the overall health and well-being of participants.



Location:

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School is held at MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre, which is located in the east end of Ottawa off Highway 174. The address is **3685 Wilhaven Drive**. Our outdoor classroom has over 425 acres to explore! Our site is diverse and includes; wetland, agricultural fields, red maple swamps and mixed mature forests.

Hours of Operation:

Half-day sessions will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 AM to Noon for children ages 4-8 years.

Forest School Practitioner to Student Ratio:

Our staff student ratio is 1:5.

Program Fees:

The cost to attend will be \$30/per half-day program. Fees will be accepted in the form of email money transfer for the full amount each semester. Payment must be made in full two weeks before the program begins. Fees can be sent to wildrootsnatureandforestschool@gmail.com

Registration:

Registration forms must be completed in full and emailed to wildrootsnatureandforestschool@gmail.com before the program begins.

Late Pickup Fee:

Parents picking children up after scheduled pick-up times are considered late and maybe subject to late fees.

School Closures:

In the event that programs need to be cancelled due to weather and road conditions that make getting to Wild Roots Nature and Forest School unsafe, we will contact families individually by phone and email to inform them of our closure.

Withdrawal Policy:

Refunds may be given after assessment by Wild Roots Nature and Forest School in the event that a child may be unable to participate in the program.

Refunds will not be given in the event that a day's program must be cancelled due to extreme weather conditions.

A full refund will be given in the event that a program is cancelled due to insufficient registration. Any person who leaves during the middle of a program due to illness, injury, expulsion, or any other reason will not be refunded any portion of the program fees.

What Your Child Needs to Forest School:

What your child needs to bring each day changes as the seasons change, the year round necessities include:

- a full change of clothes (in a separate cloth bag labelled with their name)
- a backpack that they are able to carry themselves
- a water bottle and a nut-free lunch with extra snacks

Labelling everything will help us keep your child's belongings together.

Fall:

Fall weather can be unpredictable, but layers will help with the changing weather and as always, extra socks along with rain boots and rain gear for the soggy days.

Winter:

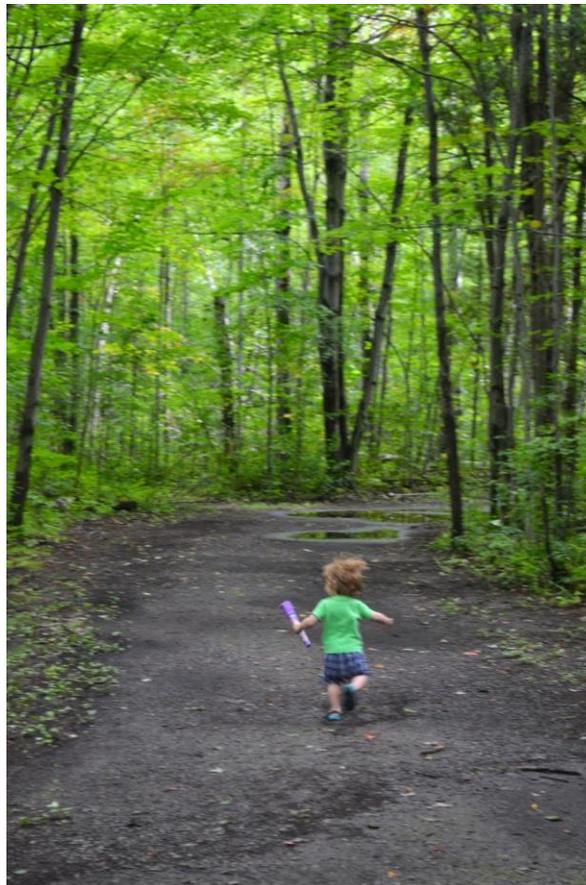
During the winter, we request that they come prepared to be outside with layers of warm clothing, a snowsuit, a balaclava, a neck warmer, a hat, insulated mittens (2 layers – wool or fleece mitts with a waterproof shell) and wool socks. Students also need a change of clothes and an extra pair of mittens and wool socks.

Spring:

In the spring, rain boots and rain gear with a full change of clothes.

Summer:

In the summer, we request that they wear long pants and close toed shoes, a sunhat is a must and sunscreen/bug spray if your family uses these items. Rain boots and raingear are good things to throw into their extra clothes bag.



Bathroom Policy:

Children must be toilet trained and independent using the bathroom. No Pull-Ups.

Food Policies:

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School is a **nut-free zone**. Due to the high risk and life-threatening allergic reactions that many children have to nuts, we ask you to refrain from sending your child to school with any type of nut product (almond butter, peanut butter, any type of nut beverage). Alternative choices include soy and sunflower products. We ask that you pack your child a **garbage-less** lunch/snack.

Snack Sharing:

For the health and safety of the students, snack sharing or trading is not permitted.

Allergies:

In order to ensure the safety of your child, we must be informed of any known allergies and any medications (ex: Epipen) that your child may have.

Handwashing:

Handwashing is the best thing we can do to keep ourselves healthy. To help prevent the spread of bacteria and viruses, your child will be asked and must wash their hands with soap after going to the bathroom, before eating and after playing in stagnant water.



Behaviour Policy:

At Forest School, we believe children excel when they know how they are expected to behave and when they are free to develop their play and learning without fear of being hurt or unfairly restricted by anyone else.

We are committed to establishing a learning environment in which children develop self-discipline and self-esteem as they take increasing responsibility for themselves and their actions, and as they consider the well-being of others.

We actively promote positive behaviour, where children treat each other with care and respect.

Forest School encourages positive behaviour by focusing on activities that require sharing, negotiation and co-operation. We encourage responsibility in caring for others and for the environment.

Forest School requires all staff, volunteers and students to provide a positive model of behaviour by treating children, parents and one another with friendliness, care, good manners and courtesy.

We require all staff, and participants to use positive strategies for handling any conflict by helping children find solutions in ways which are appropriate for their ages and stages of development for example distraction, praise and reward.

At Forest School we praise and reward good behaviour such as kindness and willingness to share.

When children behave in unacceptable ways, we help them to see how to cope more appropriately, bearing in mind their ages and stages of development. For example by distraction or discussion.

We do not use techniques intended to single out and humiliate individual children. We do not shout or raise our voices in a threatening way to respond to children's behaviour. It will always be made clear to the child or children in question that it is the behaviour and not the child that is unwelcome.

Recurring problems are undertaken in partnership with the child's parents.

Child Protection Policy

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School will not share any personal data that you give to us with third parties without your consent, unless we are legally compelled or obligated to do so.

When you register your child for a program at Wild Roots Nature and Forest School, you are providing us with sensitive information. Registration forms with information about allergies/medical conditions and emergency contacts will be printed and placed in a binder for authorized employees only. The binder will be kept with the First Aid pack, so that important information can be quickly accessible in case of an emergency.

Custody/Access to Children Policy

Parents/Guardians must give Wild Roots Nature and Forest School written authorization for the people who may pick their children up from the program. Parents/Guardians must notify us if there is a change in the regular pick-up routine. When in doubt, we will always act in the best interests of the child.

Children must be signed in and out each day by a person who is on the authorization list.

Communication Strategy

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School will communicate with parents/guardians via email or telephone. If you are going to be late/absent please email us at wildrootsnatureandforestschool@gmail.com

In the event of an emergency involving your child, parents/emergency contacts will be called.

In the event that Wild Roots Nature and Forest School needs to cancel programs, parents/guardians will be notified by phone.



Planning and Observation Policy

Unlike curriculum-based educational settings where a lesson plan is developed prior to a semester, at Forest School we nurture emergent-learning based on a core value of learning through play that is intrinsically motivated and personally directed and freely chosen (Conway, 2008). To accomplish this, our Forest School Practitioners will make a broad plan to inspire play and step back to observe, providing loose ends as needed.

Our documentation will consist of photos, videos and writing notes to assess individual learning.

Conway, M. (2008). The playwork principles. In F. Brown & C. Taylor (Eds.), *Foundations of Playwork* (pp. 19–122). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Health and Safety Policy:

We aim for all our participants and staff to engage in a high level of respect for the natural world and encourage all to be involved in decisions about their environment and safety.

We aim to make children, parents and staff aware of health and safety issues and to minimize the hazards and risks to enable the children to thrive.

Site risk assessments are done daily and seasonally.

Site and equipment are regularly checked for damage or hazards and are dealt with accordingly and immediately.

A register of all participants (with emergency details) will be taken into the woods.

A first aid backpack is kept at all times and is equipped with different size bandages, antiseptic wipes and Polysporin, eyewash and a hypothermia blanket along with a whistle to alert other practitioners in the case of an emergency.

Our first aid kit is regularly checked by a designated member of staff and restocked as necessary.

A mobile telephone and walkie-talkie (two-way radio transceiver) will be carried by all practitioners when exploring the woods.

At Forest school, employees are certified in Standard First Aid and CPR C.

Basic hygiene will be taught to children, hand washing, covering mouths when sneezing/coughing, using paper towels, disposing of tissues etc.

Children learn about health, safety and personal hygiene through the activities we provide and the routines we follow.

All equipment is regularly checked for cleanliness and safety and any dangerous items are repaired or discarded.

Children are taught to handle and store tools safely.

All materials including paint and glue are non-toxic.



Risk Management

We recognise that taking risks is an important part of learning and developing and we want to provide a safe and supportive environment in which participants can learn about risks, challenges and personal safety in nature based learning.

We will use a risk/benefit analysis in our assessment of our sites and activities on an ongoing daily basis to minimize risks.

Some of the risks intrinsic to nature based learning include:

- Extreme weather
- Wild animals
- Poisonous plants e.g. poison ivy, mushrooms, berries etc.

- Injuries from physical activities such as running, climbing trees etc.

Sick Children:

In the cases of:

- Temperature of over 100° F or 38° C
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

We ask that you keep the child at home and only return to Forest School when the symptoms have diminished.

In the case where the child gets sick at Forest School we will ask for the parent or guardian to pick up the child from Forest School. The child should not return to Forest School until the last symptom of the illness diminishes.

If a child has a communicable disease, such as ; measles, chicken pox, mumps, hand foot and mouth, flu, etc., the child should stay away from Forest School and may return when his/her health care provider has communicated it is safe to do so.

If your child is being treated for lice, please let us know via email so that we can pass on any relevant information to other families in the program.

Inclusion and Accessibility Policy

At Forest School, we believe that all children should have equal opportunity irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, disability, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or background.

To provide this equal society for all participants, our site is physically accessible, welcoming and safe to all.



Environmental Sustainability

A key feature of our program is that sessions are held in the same forest over a period of time, allowing children to develop and build an on-going relationship with the land. Through this deep connection, we believe children will become stewards of the woodlands. We don't want to over-use any area at MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre. We will minimize our environmental footprint by rotating our sites and by staying on marked trails as much as possible.

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School staff have a plan in place to conduct ongoing ecological impact assessments where we will monitor and manage factors including; erosion, pollution, compaction and corruption of species.



Wild Roots Nature and Forest School Team

Alyssa Delle Palme

Alyssa was born and raised in Orleans and spent her summers at her family's cottage, deeply immersed in nature. Alyssa and her siblings spent their vacations swimming in the lake, catching frogs, taking nature walks and paddling around in their ancient green canoe. Alyssa's outdoor mentoring experiences are diverse. She is a certified lifeguard and has over five years of experience working with children of all ages and abilities in a camp setting; Camp-Y-on-the-Ottawa and Camp Misquah. Alyssa also worked as a Nature and Drama Camp Director for the Ray Friel Centre in Orleans. In 2014, Alyssa

and her sister developed a six-week Fall Nature Program at Petrie Island for children ages 2-5. Each week brought new adventures in nature, art and music.

Alyssa has graduated with honours from both the Canadian College of Performing Arts in Victoria, B.C and from the Broadcast Journalism program at Loyalist College in Belleville, Ontario. Her news, sports and entertainment stories have been heard over the airwaves in Ottawa (CIDG), Moncton, New Brunswick (CFQM) and Smithers, British Columbia (CFBV). She has been published in the Ottawa Citizen and Ottawa Family Living Magazine.

Alyssa took the Forest School Practitioner's Course in Sussex, New Brunswick in August 2016. She is passionate about the outdoors and wants to help children recognize the beauty of Mother Nature. She believes children learn by example and if you take the time to teach them to appreciate their surroundings, you will be giving them a gift they will have forever.

Caleigh Delle Palme:

Caleigh's love for nature and the outdoors sprouted from a young age by spending summers swimming, hiking and exploring at the family cottage. Her interests in the natural world and conservation led her to pursue her BSc in Environmental Science at Carleton University. During the summer months of her undergraduate, Caleigh worked at the beautiful City of Ottawa park, Petrie Island on the Ottawa River. As the Nature Centre Manager and Children's Nature Program Coordinator for Friends of Petrie Island, she directed and ran the successful Junior Naturalist (ages 2-5) and Youth Naturalist (ages 6-12) and helped grow a community of families who were interested in outdoor learning. Her employment at Petrie Island further enhanced her love and enthusiasm for teaching, which led her to researching and finding out about the Forest School philosophy. She has completed her Level 1 and Level 3 Forest School practitioner's courses and has volunteered and worked at the Ottawa Forest and Nature School in Kanata, Ontario. Caleigh has returned to Carleton University to begin her MSc in Biology, while still making time to explore and play in the forest.

Lukeisha Andrews:

Lukeisha grew up in a small village of Diamonds on the beautiful island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Located on the Windward side of the Island, Diamonds is neighbouring lush forest, an active volcano and waterfalls. As a child, Lukeisha spent most of her time playing outdoors getting her knees bruised making memories in nearby banana and coconut fields and streams sometimes.

Lukeisha is passionate about nature and spending time outdoors. She enjoys working with children, seeing them play and explore in nature as they learn independently. Her best days are time spent with her son in nearby forests where they hike, play and explore. Lukeisha is passionate about sharing her love for nature and exploration with student of

all ages. As Tomas Berry noted teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives.

Lukeisha holds a Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Studies from the University of the West Indies Mona Jamaica. Lukeisha: the one to bring the library into the woods.

“It is not half so important to know as to feel when introducing a young child to the natural world.”– Rachel Carson



References:

Forest and Nature School in Canada: A Head, Heart, Hands Approach to Outdoor Learning. (2014, June).