



WILD ROOTS

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 provides our community with high quality outdoor experiences through; Forest School, Forest Bathing, Yoga in Nature, Beach School and Professional Development Programs to connect people to nature, the land and themselves.

At Wild Roots, we believe that all participants should have equal opportunity no matter your ethnic background, 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.

The Forest School philosophy is used as the mentoring model, allowing for a complete nature immersion program for children ages 4-10 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 (Atchley, 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.

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 the 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 acknowledges the location of our outdoor classroom is on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People.

Classes are held at Macskimming Outdoor Education Centre, which is located in the east end of Ottawa. The address is **3640 Highway #174**. 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 Wednesdays from 1PM to 4PM for children ages 4-10 years.

Forest School Practitioner to Student Ratio:

Our staff student ratio is 1:5.

Program Fees:

The cost to attend will be \$36/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. Ask us about our payment plans! Fees can be sent to wildrootsnatureandforestschool@gmail.com

Registration:

Registration forms must be completed in full before the program begins. Email us for a link to the registration form.

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 unsafe, we will contact families individually by phone and email to inform them of our closure.

Withdrawal Policy:

If a child is unable to participate in the program, refunds may be given after an assessment by Wild Roots Nature and Forest School.

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 if 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 separate backpack that they can carry themselves on a hike.
- 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. We recommend wearing a base layer to wick away moisture, a fleece layer for warmth and a shell or outer layer to protect from the wind. Pack extra socks, fleece mittens and a hat. Please bring rain boots and rain gear for the soggy days.

Winter:

During the winter, we request that students 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, balaclava and wool socks.

Spring:

In the spring, rain boots and rain gear with a full change of clothes. We like to jump in puddles, so extra socks are a must!

Summer:

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



Bathroom Policy:

Children must be independent using the bathroom.

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 that you refrain from sending your child to school with any type of nut product (almond butter, peanut butter, any type

of nut beverage etc). 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:

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; by 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.

If Wild Roots Nature and Forest School needs to cancel programs, parents/guardians will be notified by phone and/or email.



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 then 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. Hazards 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 always kept and 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 will be carried by all practitioners when exploring the woods.

At Forest school, employees are certified in Wilderness First Aid and/or 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 recognize 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.

Covid-19 Policies and Procedures/Sick Children:

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School is following the **Ottawa Public Health COVID-19 Guidance for Childcare Centres**. When these guidelines are updated, we will implement any required changes as needed.

Health and Safety Measures

Only Wild Roots Nature and Forest School staff and students will be allowed to enter our program setting. Wild Roots Nature and Forest School will maintain daily records of anyone entering the program site. Parents/Guardians will be met in the parking lot.

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School has an infrared thermometer and all students and staff entering our program setting will be required to have their temperature taken. If their temperature is 37.8 degrees C or greater, they will not be allowed to come to class. Parents and staff will also have to submit an online self-screening survey before each class. There is a series of questions parents and staff will need to answer “no” to, to be able to attend the program.

Students are encouraged to wear a mask. They are required to bring a mask to our outdoor classroom. Masks are mandatory if they are entering an enclosed space (such as an outhouse or indoor bathroom) OR if they need to be within 2 metres of another student or staff member. Staff members, students and parents must wear a mask during the active screening, drop-off, and pick-up.

Wild Roots Nature and Forest School will continue to keep a 5:1 ratio of students to staff. We will have a maximum of 10 participants. The class will be split into smaller groups during the program to reduce contact with others.

Sharing personal items such as clothing, snacks, water, sunscreen, bug spray, tools, craft supplies, etc., between participants and staff is prohibited.

Frequent and proper handwashing will be performed by all participants and staff, especially before eating and after using the washroom. Hand sanitizer will also be available for all participants.

Any surfaces used or frequently touched by children will be sanitized every hour and as needed with an approved disinfectant with a DIN.

Parents must label their child’s personal belongings (backpack, water bottle and lunch kit).

Management of Participants with Covid-19 Symptoms

Any students or staff members who are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 will be sent home and referred for testing.

Symptomatic participants will be separated from the class immediately and will stay in a supervised area until they can go home. Proper PPE (a mask and eye protection) will be worn by the staff member supervising the child. Those who test negative for COVID-19 will be excluded from the program until 24 hours after symptom resolution (without symptom control medication such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, etc.)

Those who test positive for COVID-19 must be excluded from the program for 14 days after the onset of the symptoms and clearance has been received from the local public health unit. Environmental cleaning and disinfection of the space/items used by the program will be conducted once the participant has been picked up. Items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected (e.g., paper, books) will be removed from the class and stored in a sealed container for a minimum of 7 days. Wild Roots Nature and Forest School will contact Ottawa Public Health and follow their advice for the next steps to be taken for the health and safety of the entire program and communications will be made to all parents/guardians.

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 Ottawa 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.

Alyssa Delle Palme is a certified Forest Therapy Guide through the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs and a certified Forest School Practitioner through the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada. Alyssa 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, Ottawa Family Living Magazine and Fifty-Five Plus Magazine. Her article "Lessons from Ottawa Forest and Nature School" was published in the Winter 2015 issue of Ottawa Family Living Magazine, "The Trekking Tribe" was published in the Summer 2017 issue and "Hiking with Kids" was published in the Summer 2018 issue.

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 at a young age from spending summers swimming, hiking and exploring at her family's cottage.

Caleigh is a graduate of Biology (MSc) and Environmental Science (BSc) from Carleton University and has published two peer reviewed papers on conservation science and management. She has diverse research interests in conservation science, natural resource management, science transfer, human dimensions, health, and connection to nature. Her desire to

create meaningful opportunities for Canadians to connect with nature led her to pursue her certification as a Forest School Practitioner through the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada (Forest School Canada). She is currently a Marine Conservation Advisor with Parks Canada.

Caleigh is a certified yoga instructor and together with Alyssa Delle Palme, she has led several Forest Bathing and Eco-Yoga workshops at Macskimming Outdoor Education Centre and at The Healing Circle Farm in Plantagenet, Ontario.

Lukeisha Andrews:

Lukeisha grew up in the small village of Diamonds on the beautiful island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Located on the Windward side of the Island, Diamonds neighbours lush forests, an active volcano and waterfalls. As a child, Lukeisha spent most of her time playing outdoors in streams and nearby banana and coconut fields.

Lukeisha holds a bachelor's degree in Library and Information Studies from the University of the West Indies Mona Jamaica. She is a certified Forest School Practitioner through the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada (CNAC). She currently works as a Facilitator for the CNAC Forest School Practitioner's Course.

Lukeisha is passionate about sharing her love for nature and creating space to empower diverse voices. She loves getting outside and exploring the forest with students of all ages. As Thomas Berry said, "Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives."



References:

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