



Parent/Guardian Handbook

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Welcome to Algoma Forest & Nature School!

We are very excited and look forward to spending our days outdoors with your child(ren). This handbook is designed for our half-day and full-day programs to acquaint parents/guardians with our policies and operating procedures. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at algomaforestandnatureschool@gmail.com.



What is Forest School?

“Forest School (FS) is an educational approach and program of delivery, that has existed since the late 1950s, with thousands of programs expanding the world over, starting in Denmark and Sweden, moving through Scandinavia, into Europe, China, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and now Canada. Although Forest School is called by many different names (e.g. Nature Kindergarten, Outdoor School, Waldkindergarten, Rain or Shine School, Bush School), in Canada two prominent names are taking hold: Forest School and Nature School (FNS).

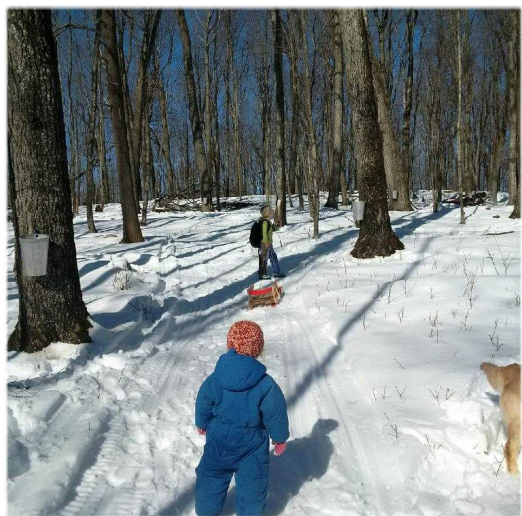
Two main features separate Forest and Nature Schools from other outdoor and environmental education programs. FNS can happen on a part time or full time basis, and it can also take place in a variety of contexts, environments, with varying age groups, and in different climates.

Despite variations, all FNS programs adhere to the following: *regular and repeated access to the same natural space, as well as emergent, experiential, inquiry-based, play-based learning* (MacEachren, 2013). The defining feature of this type of nature-based education program is that children are provided with opportunities to build an on-going relationship to the land, to (a) dedicated educator(s), to one another, and to themselves through this educational approach.

FNS touches on all subjects and disciplines; in any given moment and experience can cut across math, science, art, literature, physical education, social studies, etc. Skilled educators in FNS will often plan their lessons at the end of the session, (also known as “backwards lesson planning”), and will know what curriculum standards they need to meet on any given day. The learning outcomes are based on real-time explorations and experiences, rather than pre-determined concepts in books or on screens, done within the four walls of a classroom.” - *Forest and Nature School Canada, 2014.*

About Algoma Forest & Nature School

Nestled in the heart of the Great Lakes, our St. Joseph Island Site sits on a 95 acre parcel of private land on St. Joseph Island, in the Algoma region of Ontario. The physical address is 1168 D Line Road. Our site is diverse, offering opportunities for play and exploration in old agricultural fields, mixed wood forests, lowlands areas as well as a stand of maple in which maple sap is collected and made into maple syrup on site every Spring!



Our second is located just North of the city of Sault Ste. Marie in the area known as Hiawatha Highlands, part of the Sault Ste. Marie Region Conservation Authority.

Who We Are!

Our Outdoor Educators possess a variety of interesting experiences:



Becky Hodgson

Outdoor Educator/Director

Hi there! I'm Becky and I am the founder and director of Algoma Forest & Nature School! Growing up I had the good fortune of being raised in small Northern Ontario town with the ability to explore nearby nature freely. As a child, camping and canoe trips, snowmobile excursions, downhill skiing, climbing trees (and making forts), spending days at the lake and riding my bike were some of my most treasured memories.

As an adolescent, I pursued my love of the outdoors through a variety of natural resources summer jobs. From spending the summers paddling in a variety of

Provincial Parks as an Ontario Ranger, Interior Canoe Ranger, and Research Technician, to planting trees and fighting forest fires, outside is where I've spent the majority of my time! I took this love of the outdoors to post-secondary, where I acquired a Forest Technician diploma, an Environmental Studies degree (with a major in Forest Conservation) and an Education degree with a focus on outdoor and environmental education. Becoming a mother of three little forest pixies, has only cemented this concept in my mind; that the outdoors and education go hand in hand. I wouldn't want my children learning from anyone else, than Mother Nature. I look forward to meeting you and your wildlings outside!



Megan Parr
Outdoor Educator

Megan was born and raised on St. Joseph Island, surrounded by a menagerie of pets in an outdoor-loving family. Megan grew up with an inherent appreciation of the beauty of nature. She graduated from Lake Superior State University with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education.

Megan's educator style can be described as "guide on the side", watching for what interest each child as a starting point for learning or presenting new ideas and concepts. With the belief that we learn best by doing and teaching others, many of the activities Megan creates for her learning environments include hands-on and self-guided exploring and play-based learning opportunities. She believes that learning activities should help develop practical life skills and be as much fun as possible!



Angela Cove
Outdoor Educator

Angela was raised outside of Echo Bay on a hobby farm and spent many summers at Batchewana Bay, swimming in the waters of Lake Superior. She has traveled throughout Canada, the United States, parts of Europe and has returned home to raise her two boys in the splendour of the Algoma Region.

Angela developed an intense love of nature early on and has devoted herself to the study of the natural world and its conservation. Angela has earned a BSc in Biology from Laurentian University, MSc in Environmental Science from the University of Guelph.

Along the way Angela has become an effective educator. Through her studies she realized there is a growing disconnect between society and the natural world;

which enables her to find ways to share her love of nature and science with children.

She has spent time volunteering as an Eco Ranger for the Stanley Park Ecology Society Vancouver, BC, a Fine Arts Teacher in the North West Territories, a demonstrator of vermin-composting with Clean North in Sault Ste. Marie, and has developed various workshops for elementary school children on soil science and invasive species at summer camps and other events held at Algoma University. She believes that cultivating curiosity and love for nature in the youngest generation will help ground them throughout their lives and lead to the protection our environment in perpetuity.

Core Values And Vision

Algoma Forest & Nature School (AFNS) values that children are born with an innate desire to explore and experience everything that surrounds them, to ask questions of these experiences, and to learn by doing. As such, AFNS strives to provide regular and repeated access in the same natural space in order to promote inquiry-based, emergent and experimental learning opportunities in nature.

AFNS has a vision that all children have access to outdoor spaces in which to explore at will and engage in self-directed learning through play in the natural environment.

Mission Statement and Best Practices

AFNS's mission is to create a vibrant community of like-minded outdoor enthusiasts, to foster a rich learning environment through place-based and play-based learning in our outdoor setting. We strive to accomplish this by following the principles and best practices of the model set out by Forest School Canada.

Our Learning Environment

Our programs operate outdoor almost exclusively, in rain, wind, snow or sun! Our motto is "*there is no bad weather, just inappropriate clothing*". In our outdoor space, children can be found, climbing, building, running, exploring, resting, drawing, writing...the opportunities are endless! For times necessary to retreat indoors, at our St. Joseph Island site, there is a heated and newly renovated, cozy log cabin complete with games, wood toys, books, arts and crafts.

At the Hiawatha site, we have access to the Sugar Shack hall which has heat, electricity, running water and flush toilets.

Hours of Operation/Programs

St. Joseph Island Site

For the Winter 2020 term, the *Puddle Jumpers* program will be held on Mondays from January 13 - March 9 (excluding Family Day) from 9:30 am-12 pm for children ages 3-5 years.

The ***Forest Explorers*** program will be held on Mondays at our Island site for children ages 4-12 years (born in 2015 or earlier), from 9:30 am-3:30 pm.

PA Day Camps and March Break Sugar Moon Camp will be held from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm and follow the Algoma District School Board (ADSB) calendar.

Sault Ste. Marie Site (Location TBA)

For the Winter 2020 term, the *Puddle Jumpers* program will be offered on Wednesdays from start date TBA - March 9 from 9:30 am-12 pm for children ages 3-5 years.

The ***Forest Explorers*** program will be held on Thursdays from start date TBA - March 9, 9:30 am-3:30 pm for children ages 4-12 years (born in 2015 or earlier).

Ratios

At AFNS we maintain a ratio of 5:1 (five children to one educator) for our *Puddle Jumpers* programs, and a ratio of 8:1 (at the most, although often lower) for our ***Forest Explorers*** programs and PD Day/Camp sessions. There may be times when this ratio may include a parent/other volunteers. These volunteers will have a criminal record check (with vulnerable sector check) on file with our school.

Program Fees

St. Joseph Island Site

For the Winter 2020 term, the fee to attend the **Puddle Jumpers** program is \$200 (plus hst) for the eight week term, or \$28/day on a drop-in basis (subject to availability).

The fee to attend the **Forest Explorers** program is \$360 (plus hst) for the eight week term, or \$48/day on a drop-in basis (subject to availability).

The fee for the PA Day Camps is \$50 per day. The fee for the March Break Sugar Moon Camp is \$225 for the week (plus hst).

Sault Ste. Marie Site (location TBA)

For the Winter 2020 term, the fee to attend the **Puddle Jumpers** program at the Sault site is \$240 (plus hst) for the eight week term, or \$32/day on a drop-in basis (subject to availability).

The fee to attend the **Forest Explorers** program is \$400 for the eight week term, or \$52/day on a drop-in basis (subject to availability).

**To make forest school more affordable for families who value this unique experience, we offer a 10% sibling discount.*

**Payments are accepted by cash, email money transfer (preferred) or by credit card.*

**Payment in full is due at time of waiver signing. That said, we understand this is an investment in your child's education, so payments in two instalments (at registration & February 1) may be arranged on an individual basis. Please feel free to ask if this option will be more manageable for your family.*

OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Privacy Policy

Algoma Forest & Nature School takes the privacy of its families very seriously, and as such, we have take steps to protect it. Any personal information shared with us, including photos and videos will be processed strictly in accordance with privacy legislation and will be used only for the purposes that you have consented to. We do no share details with third parties without consent, except where legally obligated to do so. Please note that where consent is given to share photos and/or videos on the internet (Facebook, website), they may be viewed worldwide.



Child Protection Policy

Algoma Forest & Nature School is committed to taking proactive measures in the prevention of child abuse. In accordance with the *Child and Family Services Act*, it is the responsibility of every person in Ontario, including a person who performs professional or official duties with respect to children, to immediately report to a Children's Aid Society if s/he suspects that child abuse has occurred or if a child is at risk of abuse. The staff of Algoma Forest & Nature School take this responsibility very seriously. All staff and volunteers are trained in reporting procedures.

Illness Policy

In the following cases, we ask that AFNS participants (including students, volunteers and educators) stay home from Forest School for at least 24 hours after their last symptom has subsided including:

- a temperature over 101 degrees F (or 38.3 degrees C)
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

If any of the above symptoms should arise while at Forest School, parent(s) and/or guardians will be called and asked to come and pick up their child(ren).

Participants affected by communicable diseases such as measles, chicken pox, mumps, flu, strep throat, viral pneumonia, etc., are asked to stay home from Forest School until their health care provider (ie. naturopath, MD, nurse, etc.) has communicated that it is safe to return.

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.

Food Policies

Nut-Free Zone - due to the prevalence of life-threatening nut allergies, we ask that participants refrain from bringing nuts to Algoma Forest & Nature School. Soy and sunflower seed substitutes or 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 all in our forest school 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 food is packed. At AFNS, we seek to empower even our youngest participants to carry their own snacks and water bottles on our adventures, which is totally possible with small containers.

Toileting & Hygiene Policy

We require that all participants are toilet trained prior to the start of a program. If your child has an accident, we will happily assist them in changing into their spare clothing. However, we cannot accept children using diapers or



pull-ups. Please ensure that your child is independent with using the toilet prior to the start of the session.

At our St. Joseph Island site, our primary toilet facility is an outhouse. If you feel that your child may have some fears or anxieties about using such a facility, please speak with them and/or practice to alleviate such fears. Some occasions may arise where we will not be within walking distance of our outhouse (ie. on an adventure to the Sugar Bush). Children must be comfortable using the “washroom” outdoors (ie. bush pee), with minimal coaching from an educator.

All children are required to wash their hands after using the washroom and before eating a snack or lunch.

Risk Management Policy

“Avoiding hazards and risks is often deemed necessary as a means of avoiding injury, litigation, and insurance claims, as well as keeping children “safe”. These assumptions are fuelled by societal norms that now view overprotection as a fundamental part of the role adults should play as they care for children.” - *Forest and Nature School Canada, 2014*

At AFNS, we acknowledge that experience and management of risk is an inherent and integral part of FNS, and indeed healthy child development. AFNS educators and volunteers endeavour to co-assess and co-manage risks with participants. We believe this to be an essential skill for children to acquire and for adults to support. FNS educators conduct seasonal site risk assessments, as well as activity risk assessments and individual risk assessments on an ongoing basis, always considering the balance between risks and benefits when doing so.

Some of the risks inherent to Forest and Nature School play include, but are not limited to:

- injuries from physical activities such as running, climbing trees, etc
- injuries from failing to properly use tools
- slivers, scrapes and bruises
- injuries resulting from matches or fire
- contracting rashes associated with poison ivy
- the presence of wild animals and ticks
- inclement weather

Health and Safety Policy

At AFNS, we aim for all participants and staff to enjoy their time here and explore all the natural world has to offer. We aim for all to engage in a high level of respect for the natural world and encourage all to be involved in the decision making regarding the safety of our actions on the environment. We find that when children are a part of the decision making process with regards to safety, they are more apt to think with safety in mind.

We aim to make children, parents and staff aware of any health and safety issues and to minimize any potential hazards and risks in order to allow children to thrive. This is done through site risk assessments conducted both seasonally and as well as daily.

When exploring the forest away from our log cabin home base, educators will carry a list of all participants (with emergency details).

A first aid kit/backpack is kept full stocked at all times should it be required. This kit is regularly checked by a designated staff member and restocked as needed.

A mobile telephone will always be kept by a staff member when exploring the forest.

At least one AFNS staff member is required to possess current first aid certification.

All of our equipment and tools are regularly checked for safety and any damaged or defective equipment is replaced or taken out of use. Additionally, before any child can use tools, they must demonstrate they are competent in doing so in a safe manner.



Inclusion and Accessibility

At Algoma Forest & Nature School we are committed to making our programs accessible to a wide range of individuals regardless of race, religion, gender,

sexual orientation, language, physical ability, or socioeconomic status. We seek to dismantle the barriers to participation in Forest School by making our site physically accessible for everyone, and our community safe and welcoming. In the future, we hope to establish a partnership with community partners that will allow tuition to be subsidized for those in need. We also hope to establish a “gear bank” or “lending library” of outerwear (snow pants, hats, mitts, etc.) so that the supplies needed to safely enjoy Forest School are not themselves a barrier to participation. Our log cabin is wheelchair accessible.

Emergent Learning

Learning at Forest School (FS) can and often does look different than it does in a conventional school setting. At FS, we are committed to student-led or emergent, and inquiry and play-based learning. This means that we believe that all student who come to FS, including very young children, are capable of constructing important knowledge through pursuing their own interests, asking questions, and expressing themselves in multiple, complex, and interrelated ways.

Role of the Educator

Understanding participants as knowledge builders making meaning of the world through play and other self-selected activities means that the role of a FS educator is also quite different than the role a teacher may play in a conventional classroom. Instead of being an “expert” or the one who has all of the “right answers” (and thereby occupying a positions of power over and above learners), FS educators seek to be co-learners with participants. They aim to prompt questions, and extend and deepen participants’ thinking about and compassion for the world around them by themselves posing questions, or by using or introducing tools, loose parts, and supplies that change the learning environment and therefore elicit a change in the learner.

Planning & Observation

In order to truly follow the interests of participants and to nurture emergent learning, educators shift their emphasis from planning to observing and reflection. This is often known as backwards planning. Instead of predetermining the activities for the day, educators closely observe participants, only intervening (when appropriate) with open-ended invitations and “provocations” like those described below.

FS educators support their observations by taking photos, videos, and written notes which are using to extend learning, refocus it, or redirect it. For example, educators might show participants a photo (take during a previous session), where participants are engaged in an activity and prompt them to revisit that activity by asking, “what were you doing there? What were you thinking about? Were you able to accomplish what you were trying to do? What if we tried _____ today?”

Behaviour Management

At AFNS, we manage behaviour proactively by engaging in developmentally appropriate activities, and by nurturing a positive physical and social/emotional space. In general, our behaviour management will:

- consider the child’s developmental level and needs
- make expectations clear and provide scaffolding to help students participate positively
- focus on the behaviour rather than the child
- be implemented in a positive and consistent manner
- be designed to help the child to learn appropriate behaviour and techniques
- involve consulting with parents/guardians to include their input of successful approaches with a child, as well as to keep them informed of issues/concerns as they arise
- help children to develop self-control, self-confidence, decision making skills, the ability to communicate effectively and sensitively in their interactions with others

At AFNS, **inappropriate behaviour** is defined as using actions or words that make others feel uncomfortable or unsafe. **Unsafe behaviour** is defined as any behaviour that puts a child or staff member at risk. This includes not responding when called, running, hiding, taking risk without consulting staff, and not following guidelines so that behaviour becomes potential dangerous to the child or others.

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

1. Staff will remove the child from proximity of the group and the two will work together to define the inappropriate/unsafe behaviour and create a plan to modify it.
2. Staff 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 face-to-face at pick up) of the behaviour and consulted to discover the cause.

4. Staff and parents/guardians will, together develop strategies to adjust and eliminate the inappropriate behaviour. These strategies will be implemented with the child at home and at Forest School to offer a consistent approach. Staff and parent/guardians will stay in contact to keep each other informed of the child's progress with regard to the behaviour in question.
5. Staff will follow up with the child to be consistent with the expectations and approach as well as to offer feedback and positive reinforcement.
6. In the extreme base 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 period or permanently.

Clothing and Supply List

Depending on the season, participants (including educators) will need rain suits, boots, extra warm clothing, waterproof/warm snowsuits, extra hats and mitts, hiking shoes, sneakers, wool socks, thermal underwear etc.

For cold weather, please consider the following when dressing for Forest School:

Insulation

Natural fabrics such as wool or silk work well as an base layer, as does fleece. Polyester pyjamas are another good options. The key for this layer is to wick moisture away from the skin and insulate it with a breathable layer.

Middle Layer

This is another insulation layer that creates 'dead-air space' between skin and the elements. This air space helps in keeping warm. Wool sweaters (merino wool is exceptionally warm and soft) and fleece tend to work well.

Outer Shell

This layer should be waterproof and wind-proof, as well as breathable.

Winter:

- two winter hats (must cover ears and stay on head)
- balaclava or neck warmer (no scarves please, do to risk of strangulation)
- two pairs of warm, waterproof mitts
- one warm, waterproof snowsuit
- one set of warm, waterproof boots
- wool socks
- thermal base layers: thermal shirt and pants, middle layer, wool/fleece sweater (cotton is not recommended for cold weather conditions)

Spring:

- rain gear (waterproof boots, pants/jacket or suit), with extra insulation on cold days
- wool socks on colder days
- running shoes (please no open toe shoes)
- sun hats (for warmer months)
- warmer sweater or jacket for colder days
- bug jacket (optional)

Autumn:

- rain gear (waterproof boots, pants/jacket or suit)
- running shoes (please no open to shoes)
- sun hat (for warmer months)
- warm jacket (fleece or other breathable fabric)
- bug jacket (optional)

All Seasons:

- small backpacks
- lunch and snacks
- water bottle
- two extra changes of clothes (including underwear and socks)

Communication Strategy

AFNS staff will communicate with parents/guardians via email or text/phone. If you are going to be late/absent please call/text (705 943 7641) and/or email us at algomaforestandnatureschool@gmail.com.

In the event of an emergency involving your child, parents/emergency contacts will be called immediately. In the event that AFNS needs to cancel programs, parents/guardians will be notified by phone and/or text.

Environmental Sustainability

One of the many special features of FS is that sessions are held in the same wooded area over a period of time, allowing participants to become very comfortable in and knowledgeable of their surroundings. As we generally take good care of that which we feel connected to, we believe that it is only through this deep connection to place that children grow up to be stewards of the land. Although this is very positive in terms of learning, over-use can have adverse

environmental effects to an area over time. Therefore, we strive to meet a delicate balance where we promote children's connection to nature through exposure and meaningful experience, while at the same time fostering an ethic of care and sustainable use of the land we are connected to. We minimize our ecological impact by rotating our sites for play, staying on trails as much as possible, and keeping activities with the highest impact in our main courtyard area in front of our log cabin.

At AFNS, environmental sustainability and education is at the heart of our motivation for running these programs. As such, we conduct ongoing ecological impact assessments of our presence on site, taking into account such factors as compaction, erosion, pollution and the corruption/introduction of species. We have created a plan both for the monitoring, management and limitation of our potential negative impact and for the positive development and improvement of the ecology of our site.



Welcome to Forest School!