



"To raise a nature-bonded child
is to raise a rebel, a dreamer, an innovator...
someone who will walk their own verdant, winding path."
Nicolette Sowder.

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“If we want our children to move mountains,
 we first have to let them get out of their chairs.”
 Nicolette Sowder

1 Welcome to Applegrove Nature School

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the beautiful land we live, work and play on is part of the traditional homeland of the Sinixt, as well as the Okanagan people to the west and the Ktunaxa people to the east. In the spirit of respect, we commit to honouring the trees, mountains, streams, lakes and animals that make this land stunningly beautiful and wild. Given our children's Metis and Cree heritage, we strive to live by the principle of *wahkohtowin* (kinship) when interacting with people and the natural world to foster a community based on kindness, respect and reciprocity.

What is Nature School?

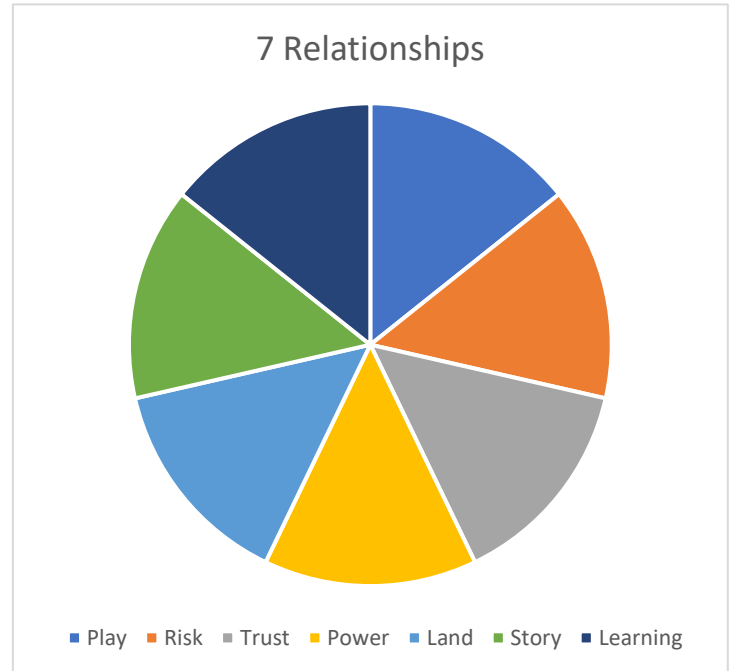
Nature School is an educational ethos and practice that puts the land and the child-at-play at the centre of every activity. Children build a relationship with the land by using the same outdoor space over extended periods of time and throughout all 4 seasons. Children are given space and time to explore and be inspired by their surroundings, and educators support the children through an emergent curriculum, which is driven by a process of inquiry. Nature School views risky play as an integral part of children's learning and healthy development. (Adapted from the Child & Nature Alliance of Canada and Forest School Canada). Nature School promotes the holistic development of all children and supports them in building active, healthy, and vibrant communities. Nature school views all children as capable and competent learners.

Core Values

According to the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada nature schools need to maintain 7 relationships in order for them to be ethical, authentic and meaningful.

These 7 relationships are: Play, Risk, Trust, Power, Land, Story & Learning (To read more about these 7 relationships, please see references). At Applegrove Nature School, our core values align with these 7 principles:

- Trust & Respect
- Emergent Learning
- Whole-Child Development
- Place-based Learning



Mission

Our mission is to provide space and time for children to learn with and from nature using emergent curriculum, and to support them as they seek new learning opportunities and challenges.

Vision

Our vision is that all children develop a sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world, and that they become self-confident, resilient, and caring problem-solvers.

"If we provide enough space and possibilities for moving freely,
then the children will move as well as animals:
skillfully, simply, securely, naturally."

Dr. Emmi Pikler

2 Learning and Development

What are the benefits of Nature School?

Countless articles and books have been written about the benefits of outdoor play on children themselves and their communities. Angela Hanscom, the founder and CEO of TimberNook (www.timbernook.com) lists the following therapeutic benefits:

1. **Better gross motor skills:** by using their whole bodies and working hard, children's coordination and vestibular systems are challenged
2. **Greater attention spans:** through increased movement and activity
3. **Improved visual skills:** moving around a lot stimulates the vestibular sense and supports the eye muscles; children's eyes also have to repeatedly switch between closer and further objects
4. **Improved auditory processing:** children are challenged to distinguish between a variety of near and far sounds
5. **Better fine motor skills:** large body movements strengthen the grasping patterns and fine motor muscles in children's hands and the upper body
6. **Enhanced social skills:** unrestricted play leads to creative social adventures which require cooperation and problem solving
7. **Improved creativity:** children are given lots of time and space, as well as loose parts with multiple affordances that require them to use their imagination
8. **Increased emotional stability:** physical activity and fresh air helps kids better regulate their emotions and lowers cortisol levels, which makes kids calmer and improves their mood
9. **Enhanced conflict resolution skills:** children are given opportunities to play together in groups; in order for them to be able to play and build together, they need to solve challenges as a group

In addition to these benefits, nature school also increases physical health and wellbeing, increases self-discipline and self-awareness and enhances children's understanding of biodiversity and the environment.

How do children learn in Nature School?

In 1978 Lev Vygotsky's formulated a theory of learning called Zones of Proximal Development. The zone which benefits the learners the most is the one where they are close to mastery but require some guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner or adult. We sometimes say that we are in “flow” if we are in that zone. It’s a place where we are so focused on our “work” that it feels as though time stands still and all outside distractions can be tuned out. At Nature School we aim to operate in this stretch zone, also called the growth zone, which is a place where children are taking some risks and experience some challenges without feeling afraid or overwhelmed. We aim to provide children the time, space, opportunities and tools to step outside their comfort zone, while at the same time providing guidance to prevent them from entering the panic zone. This allows for them to develop maximum cognitive, emotional and physical growth.

The following image was created by Ute Limacher-Riebold:



Forest and nature schools in Canada follow a particular set of learning approaches to maximize the benefits for children. The following is a summary with excerpts from the Forest and Nature School in Canada Guide by the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada (<https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/FSC-Guide-1.pdf>).

1. Inquiry-based, emergent and experiential learning:

Nature school recognize that children have an innate desire to explore and experience their surroundings and educators foster this curiosity by valuing the children’s questions to drive the learning

What Does This Look Like in Practice?

1. Creating a culture of *observing and listening*, both of students and of the natural world, supporting students to do the same of one another and of their environment. An educator cannot “draw out” what they cannot hear, see or understand in a child.
2. Being willing to acknowledge and keep in check assumptions, prejudices, and preconceived notions, in order to move beyond what one “thinks” they know towards deeper learning instead.
3. Establishing low-ratio groups that support relationship-building.
4. Creating and modeling community standards that include respect, care, non-judgement, safety and inclusion.
5. Allowing children to make mistakes.
6. Allowing children to learn by doing.
7. Learning alongside children.
8. Introducing a resource, idea, or inquiry only after a child prompts in an explicit or implicit manner.
9. Giving children more time to explore, experience, solve problems, resolve conflicts, and provide answers to questions.

2. Play-based learning:

Jean Piaget said “play is the work of children”. In play-based learning the whole child develops.

Play-based learning includes:

- **symbolic play**, where objects represent something, such as a stick, which can become a wand, a sword, a horse, a pen etc.
- **exploratory play**, where children are free to be curious and inquisitive of their environment
- **socio-dramatic play**, where children can work through real-world scenarios in their play
- **dramatic play**, where children act out stories they heard about or saw in other people’s lives or in stories
- **social play**, where children who play in groups have to work out “rules” for the game, negotiate roles and solve problems to keep the play fair and to keep it going

- **communication play**, where children use words or gestures, for examples mimes, jokes, singing, poetry etc. to interact with one another
- **creative play**, where children spontaneously create 2D and 3D designs using loose materials
- **deep play**, where children conquer their own fears by taking risks and working through physical challenges
- **fantasy play**, where children invent stories that are completely unreal, such as superhero stories or magic
- **imaginative play**, where conventional rules of their lives become suspended and anything is possible; often scenarios in this “pretend” play morph as time passes
- **locomotor play**, where children seek active challenges, such as rolling down the hill, balancing across logs or hanging upside down
- **mastery play**, where children take and control over their physical environment, such as when they are digging holes or damming a creek, and gain new skills
- **recapitulative play**, where children build shelters and real or pretend fires
- **rough-and-tumble play**, where children test their physical limits through play fighting and chasing

3. Place-based learning:

By returning to the same space each time, children learn to build strong connections to the land and to get to know it intimately. As they experience all seasons in that space, children become familiar with the process of natural change, they develop ownership of that space and ultimately a sense of stewardship for the larger community surrounding their space. It allows them to feel rooted and at home.

4. Storytelling:

Each day at Nature School centres around a theme or story. Sometimes they are told in form of a book, sometimes a song, a quick dramatization or an oral story. Stories can be real or imaginary, familiar or new, but they each form the jumping off point for the day’s explorations and play, and stimulate the children’s imagination. Stories also help children practice their listening skills, learn about sequencing, rhythm and vocabulary as well as story plots, and they help children’s overall language development and memory skills. Story telling also gives children the opportunity to put themselves into the position of others and develop empathy and compassion. Children are able to experience adventures and try out roles not possible to them in real life.

5. Loose parts:

Loose parts form the central part of play at Nature School. Loose parts are any materials that do not have just one specific purpose and that can be moved

around the play space by the children to suit their needs. This gives them control and autonomy over their own space and how they wish to spend their time. Loose parts can be large and bulky, such as tires or boards, or they can be small like kitchen appliances, pinecones or rocks. They may consist of natural materials or manmade ones. They can be soft or rough, light or heavy and thus address various sensory needs. Children also value carrying devices, such as baskets, craft items, pulleys, ropes, hammocks, tools, pen and paper etc.

Rules at Applegrove Nature School and the Role of the Educators

At Nature School children always have a **choice** of how to spend their time, where to play, with who to interact and how to play as long as it is deemed safe by the educators. Some children jump right in and other take their time observing or playing next to others. All of these are ok.

Facilitators will not lead the play or give specific play ideas. We are there to observe and support, but we are not their play mates. Educators will facilitate arguments or guide children in their problem solving, but will always focus on giving the children the skills and tools to look after themselves.

We follow the “**it’s ok not to share**” mentality, meaning a child can play with things until they are completely finished with them. On occasion we may encourage other children waiting for the item to let the child know that they also would like a turn.

Just as children can choose what to play, they can also choose their playmates. Sometimes this means that a group of children will not let others join them. We encourage them to express this in a kind way, but we do not force inclusion.

Sticks are very popular at Nature School and they are ok to be played with. Children are not allowed to use sticks to hurt others or to point them at someone else face. If sticks are very large, we may ask them to be pointed at the ground or to break it in two to make it smaller. Occasionally children will engage in sword fights with sticks. In this case, educators will step closer and pay close attention to the children’s facial expressions and body language to ensure everyone has given consent to the play and everyone is having fun. Educators will step in immediately if a child is at risk of getting injured.

Other risky play at Nature School may include **climbing** trees. Again, an educator will step closer and observe the child closely. We teach children to pay attention to their own bodies and how they feel. We check in with them to see that they stay within their comfort zone and have a plan to climb back down. As we get to know the children better and build trust with them, we may allow them to climb higher, as long as they stay close

to the trunk of the tree, step only on branches that are at least the diameter of their wrist and do not climb above other children.

Although **conflicts** are uncommon at Nature School, they do exist. We want children to solve their own conflicts as much as possible, and we will work with them to build the necessary skills. Unless there is imminent physical danger, we follow the “17 seconds rule”, meaning we step closer and observe for 17 seconds before intervening. In most cases, this is enough time for children to find their own solutions to the conflict and play resumes.

Educators set up the space to spark engagement, creativity, collaboration. We spend most of the time observing children at play and may take notes and photographs to capture particular moments. Oftentimes educators will learn alongside children as they explore their natural environment, and we will help them make connections to nature. Our role is mainly to give children then time and space to play freely and to keep them safe while they are playing.

“Children deserve to grow and learn in a place & alongside
a force that is as wild and alive as they are.”
Nicolette Sowder

3 About Applegrove Nature School

Location

Applegrove Nature School takes place at various locations. Our main forest is located at 806 Applegrove Road in Fauquier, BC. Our private land in the beautiful Kootenays has a large natural space with trees, shrubs, hills and rocks near the shores of Lower Arrow Lake at the foot of the Valkyr Range of the Selkirk Mountains. Children will spend 100% of the time outside. There is shelter in case of inclement weather and a portable toilet.

To find us drive south from Fauquier on Applegrove Road until you see the orange kilometer marker "12" on your right hand side. Shortly afterwards you'll see a gate with a wooden shed on either side. There is lots of road parking to the left of the gate.

We also provide programming at near the Burton Campground. At the main intersection in Burton turn west toward the lake on Lakeview Park Road. You can park at the Burton Bee Community Garden and walk around the fence into the forest just to the south of it.

Parents will need to drop off and pick up their children at the same location each day.

We are also able to come to you to provide programming. In the past, we've worked at Edgewood Elementary School, Burton Elementary School, Nakusp Campground, Nakusp Elementary School, Nakusp Kuskanax Creek and Public Beach and Cherryville Gold Panners Campground. If you have an outdoor space that you think would be suitable to host an outdoor program for children or adults, please feel free to reach out.

Staff

Our passionate team of educators are certified teachers in British Columbia and Alberta with over 20 years of teaching experience between them. One has Wilderness and Standard First Aid. The other is a Forest and Nature School Practitioner certified through the Child and Nature Alliance Canada.

Pricing & Hours

Days and hours may vary throughout the year depending on demand. If there are days and times you would like to have a class, please reach out to us and we will do our best to accommodate you. (Please note that we need at least 6 children to run a class). We currently have classes on Pro-D days for school aged children, parented classes on Monday mornings for pre-school children as well as 4-day Spring Break, Summer Break

and Winter Break camps. In addition, we are able to offer custom programming for school or community groups. Please refer to the registration package for details on pricing and hours.

What to expect?

Each class has an educator to child ratio of 1:10. We start by forming a welcome circle (sometimes in the tipi, under a tent, under the forest canopy or under the open sky) where we will set the tone and discover the theme for the day. This may be in form of songs, stories or books. Children then enter the play space, which is set up in the forest, where they encounter a variety of loose parts related to the theme, which children can use in any way they wish. They may play alone or in groups. Some children may choose to observe before entering play at their own time. Children may return to the welcome circle at any time during their play to have a snack or take a break. Children are encouraged to use the bathroom independently at the portable toilet. In addition to free play, we include nature art and bushcraft skills, nature walks, cooperative games, and communal cooking into the day. We end the day with a reflection circle to express gratitude, reflect on the day's play, discuss their projects, talk about any issues that may have come up and sing a good-bye song.

Educators are constantly observing children to ensure their safety, but follow the "step back, but tune in" approach. This means that children are encouraged to be fully immersed in play without an adult directing them. Adults will step in to prevent physical or emotional harm and will coach children to assess their own risks and comfort zones, express their own needs and solve problems with their peers.

Depending on group dynamics, weather and level of interest, there may be a communal fire or instruction of skills, such as fire building, outdoor cooking, knife skills, shelter building etc.

Photos will be taken throughout each class and parents will receive an email after each class with a summary, photos and information about outdoor play.

Clothing and Equipment Checklist

Children will be outside 100% of the time in all seasons and must come fully prepared to be safe and comfortable. If children do not come well dressed for class, it impedes their ability to play happily and safely, it is therefore of utmost importance to send children well prepared with food and clothing. Fresh air and physical play make them hungry and thirsty, and children will get wet and dirty.

Children are expected to change their own clothing but will be supported by educators.

Adults will help children monitor their own comfort and will encourage children to take off layers or put on extra clothing as the weather changes.

The 3 Basic 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. When it's really cold, it's common to wear 2 base layers: a lightweight or middle weight layer, then a thicker heavyweight layer.

The **middle layer** – keeps you warm! Fleece or microfleece shirts/pants, and jacket (a goose down jacket or similar).

The **outer layer** – the —shell. This is your water- and windproof layer and is breathable. Think Gore-Tex, or other polyurethane-coated fabrics with vents (core/underarm) that help release heat. Remember **snow pants** as well!

Winter winter hat 2 fleece balaclava and/or neck warmers 2 pairs of warm, waterproof mitts warm, waterproof snowsuit warm, waterproof boots 3 base layers: thermal shirt and pants, middle layer, wool/fleece sweater 2 pairs warm wool socks hand/foot warmers extra clothing!	Summer: rain gear (waterproof boots, pants, jacket) running shoes sun hat lightweight clothing water shoes (sandals, crocks) sunscreen
Spring and Fall See Summer list; and warmer sweater or jacket gloves base Layers extra boots	All seasons: small backpack healthy, easy to eat lunch and snacks water bottle (with warm drink during the cold season) change of clothes (especially socks!) plastic bag: for dirty, or soiled, clothing. 3 bread bags (these go over the feet if boots get wet, so that children can slip their feet into their boots again) tissues small dry hand towel (so they can dry their wet/muddy hands) life saving medication (eg. EpiPen)

Further Clothing Notes:

- Dress your child in layers during the days, it will allow for better control over body temperature. 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.
- Please note that most snow pants and nylon splash pants are not waterproof and are not appropriate on wet rainy days; 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.
- Please do not send toys, tools or electronic devices to Nature School

"Tell me and I'll forget. Teach me and I'll remember.

Involve me and I'll learn."

Benjamin Franklin

4 Policies and Procedures

Registration & Program Policies

Terms and Conditions

In order for children to participate in our Nature School, we need the following in place prior to the start of the program:

1. 100% of program fees paid
2. Registration form and required waivers completed and signed

If your family requires financial assistance, please contact us via email as soon as possible. We will do our best to support you using available funds from our Bursary Fund.

Once a program is full, we keep a waitlist in case of last-minute cancellations.

Refunds Policy

Refunds will be determined on a case-by-case basis and are not generally given unless there are circumstances that prevent a child from participating in Nature School.

1. To receive a full refund of program fees, we require written notification at least 48 hours in advance of the first class.
2. No refund will be given if a child withdraws part way through the program.
3. A child who is absent or leaves for a portion of the day or program due to illness, injury, expulsion or any other reason will not be refunded any portion of that program's fees.
4. In some extreme circumstances, when a child cannot continue with a program that has already started, the remaining fees may, at the discretion of Applegrove Nature School, be used toward future programming.
5. If a class has to be cancelled due to instructor illness or extreme inclement weather (see weather policy), a makeup day will be offered or a refund will be given.

Applegrove Nature School reserves the right to end a child's participation in the program if it is determined that the program is not a good fit for the child. In this situation, a refund for any remaining unused program days will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Privacy Policy

Privacy is a very important aspect of Applegrove Nature School, and steps will be taken to ensure your child's privacy. Any personal information you provide to us will only be accessed by educators to help them provide appropriate support and ensure your child's safety during the program. Information pertaining to your child will not be discussed

with third parties, except when we are legally obligated to do so, and will be kept confidential between the family and Applegrove Nature School.

We will keep a paper copy of your child's name, age, emergency contact information and medical information on site for quick access. We also store parents' and emergency contacts' phone numbers in our cell phone in case of emergencies.

The registration form is hosted by Jotform and stored on a server outside of Canada. We download the registration forms onto an external hard drive and delete them from the Jotform server.

Upon registration, you will be asked to sign a media release consent form. Photos will only be shared once consent has been given. We may share photos:

1. Privately between participating families via Google Drive
2. On our website, posters or social media, in which case they are visible to the public

You have the option to opt out of photos entirely, and you can change your consent at any time throughout the program.

Safe Pick-Up/Release Policy

Drop-off is at 10am and pick-up is at 3pm unless otherwise arranged in advance.

Parents/Guardians are required to provide written authorization for who may pick up their child and who may be contacted in case of an emergency. Parents/Guardians must notify us before changing the usual pick-up routine.

Should an unauthorized person come to pick up a student, the child will not be released into the care of that person until verbal consent has been given by a parent/guardian via telephone.

The educator will verify the identity of the person picking up when necessary.

The educator will remain with the child until an authorized person arrives or the parent/guardian has given verbal authorization for a change in the pick-up routine. Additional charges may apply if the educator has to remain with the child for longer than 30 minutes past the end of class.

Health and Well-Being

Illness Policy

If your child is sick, please keep them home until their symptoms disappear. If your child will be absent from a class, please notify us via email, text message or phone call. If a child becomes ill while at Applegrove Nature School we will contact the parents or emergency contacts and the child will need to be picked up.

No refunds will be given if a child cannot attend a class or portion thereof. If Applegrove Nature School has to cancel a class due to staff illness, program fees for the lost class will be refunded or an alternative class date will be offered.

Food/Allergy Policy

All children and staff will be expected to wash their hands with soap and water before doing any activity that involves food. If no soap and water is available, hand sanitizer will be used. If we do a communal cooking activity, parents will be notified ahead of time with the ingredients, and parents may opt out of the communal meal and send a separate snack instead.

Each student is required to bring their own easy-to-eat, waste-free, healthy snack for the day as well as ample water.

Parents are asked about known food allergies in advance of a program. We are not a nut-free program, but will take reasonable measures to help keep children with severe allergies safe. In case of severe allergies, parents are asked to send an EpiPen or other emergency medication and inform staff in advance. Parents should also provide any information that will help staff understand how to respond in the event of an allergic reaction.

Children may share food with one another if they wish, unless a parent has asked them not to or there is a food allergy that makes sharing unsafe.

Toileting and Handwashing Policy

Sometimes we have access to washrooms with running water, soap and toilet paper. Children must be able to use these facilities independently. If there is no access to washroom facilities, staff will set up a portable toilet tent with toilet paper and hand sanitizer.

While children should be able to use the facilities independently, educators may assist students with bulky clothing and accidents. Children are expected to wash their hands after using the toilet.

Parents should always send a plastic bag and a complete change of clothes.

If children have to pee, they may also find a private spot and do a nature pee. During parented programs, caregivers are responsible for supporting their children with toileting.

Administration of Medicine Policy

Staff will not administer any medicine to children unless prior written consent has been given by the parent or guardian and the medication is in the original labelled container. Any time medication is administered to a child, we will record the time and amount given. Parents must complete the medical portion of the registration form for their child upon enrollment.

In the case of an emergency, staff will administer emergency medication when prior written consent has been given by the parent or guardian. Emergency medication must be provided by the parent and be immediately accessible to staff.

If a child brings routine medicine to the program, we ask that parents inform us in advance so that we can support the child in self-administering.

Any routine medication children bring will be kept in their own bags unless other arrangements have been made with staff.

Behaviour Management Policy

At Applegrove Nature School we are proactive in creating positive spaces that are developmentally appropriate for the children. We explicitly prohibit corporal punishment, violence, harassment, abusive behaviour or language, as well as disrespectful behaviour toward staff, caregivers or children.

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. When a situation presents an immediate safety concern, the educator will intervene right away.

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 support and guidance to help students participate positively
- be implemented in a positive and consistent manner
- be designed to teach appropriate behaviour and techniques that can help children develop self-control, self-confidence, decision-making skills, and the ability to communicate effectively and sensitively in their interactions with others
- involve consulting with parents/guardians to include their input on how best to approach their child if a problem is recurring, along with keeping them informed of issues/concerns as they arise

Please note that Applegrove Nature School reserves the right to remove or suspend a child from the program if their behaviour continues to be unsafe for themselves or other participants. In this event, parents will be contacted and instructed to pick up their child.

If it is determined that the program is not a good fit for a child, Applegrove Nature School may end the child's participation in the program. The educator will be available to discuss this decision with those involved.

Safety & Risk Management

Risk Management Policy

Nature can sometimes be a tough teacher, and being in nature can create challenges and risks. Ellen Sandseter lists 6 types of risky play, which are summarized here:

Table 1. Categories and subcategories of risky play (revised from Sandseter, 2007a, 2007b)

Categories	Risk	Sub-categories
Great heights	Danger of injury from falling	Climbing Jumping from still or flexible surfaces Balancing on high objects Hanging/swinging at great heights
High speed	Uncontrolled speed and pace that can lead to collision with something (or someone)	Swinging at high speed Sliding and sledging at high speed Running uncontrollably at high speed Bicycling at high speed Skating and skiing at high speed
Dangerous tools	Can lead to injuries and wounds	Cutting tools: Knives, saws, axes Strangling tools: Ropes, etc.
Dangerous elements	Where children can fall into or from something	Cliffs Deep water or icy water Fire pits
Rough-and-tumble	Where the children can harm each other	Wrestling Fencing with sticks, etc. Play fighting
Disappear/get lost	Where the children can disappear from the supervision of adults, get lost alone	Go exploring alone Playing alone in unfamiliar environments

Despite the risks, nature play is crucial for the healthy development of children. At Applegrove Nature School we embrace healthy risk as a teacher and support children in navigating risks appropriate to their age and abilities.

We conduct regular risk/benefit assessments of the site and activities and do a daily dynamic risk assessment to identify and manage risks.

The presence of risk does not necessarily mean that an activity is unsafe or should not take place. We consider the potential benefits alongside the risks and look for ways to reduce unnecessary risk while allowing children to experience appropriate challenge and develop their ability to assess and manage risk themselves.

Some specific risks that come up frequently at Nature School are:

1. Tree climbing:

Our policy at Applegrove Nature School is that children should be allowed to climb trees. The educator will move closer to the child and observe them carefully. We will communicate with the child to ensure they climb safely, feel comfortable and have a plan to come back down safely. We encourage children to stay close to the trunk and climb on branches that are thicker than their wrist. Children should not climb above another child. If at any point the educator feels that the risk is getting too great, we will ask the child to climb lower. We will never help a child up a tree; if they cannot get up on their own, they are not ready yet to climb.

2. Tool use:

At Applegrove Nature School we commonly use metal shovels, rakes, hammers, saws, axes, knives and potato peelers. Before a child or children are given tools to use, we assess the readiness of the group and each individual child, as well as the educator's comfort with the activity. Before receiving a tool, children are taught the difference between a toy and a tool, how to use the tool safely, how to store it correctly and how to maintain a safe working distance.

The educator will determine how many children can safely use tools at one time based on the activity, the tools being used and the children's readiness. All knives, saws and axes will be kept sharp and stored in a designated safe area when not in use. Tools like saws, axes and knives will never be used without adult permission and supervision. First aid kits will be kept nearby.

3. Fire:

Nature School students often get to build, light and use fires during their programs. Depending on age and readiness, we may teach students to light fires using matches, lighters and steel/flint, etc. The educator will remain responsible for the fire at all times and children will not be left unsupervised. A safe zone around the fire will be maintained, and a fire blanket, water and first aid kits will be kept nearby.

With all risky activities, including tools, sticks, fire and climbing, children must earn and maintain the trust of the educator and demonstrate responsibility. This includes following safety guidelines, respecting others and the environment, and responding appropriately to the educator's direction.

Procedures for Tool Use

At Applegrove Nature School we may at times give children the opportunity to use tools. Tool use is an important practical skill to learn as it develops self-confidence, focus, patience, persistence, fine motor skills and awareness of safety.

It will be at the educator's discretion which tools will be used and which children will be offered the opportunity to use them. This depends on each child's maturity, interest in the tool, ability to navigate levels of risk, concentration and ability to follow the clear safety guidelines demonstrated by the educator. Not every child will be ready to use every tool.

Tools we may use include knives, saws, hammers, mallets, potato peelers, drills and matches. Please refer to our Risk Management Policy for more information about safe tool use.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid Policies

The site will be checked by the educator before children arrive for potential hazards and risks, including wildlife, leaning or unstable trees, garbage, broken glass or other hazards. If a hazard can be safely removed or addressed, the educator will do so. If a hazard cannot be safely addressed, the group will play in another area.

The educator is trained in first aid and carries a first aid kit and cell phone. For minor medical accidents, such as scrapes, cuts and bumps, the educator will provide appropriate first aid and inform parents upon pick-up about what happened.

For serious accidents or medical emergencies, the educator will provide first aid and call 911 when necessary. The educator will remain with the injured child and ensure the safety of the other children as much as possible. Parents/guardians will be contacted as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

When calling for an ambulance, the following information will be provided:

1. Details of the injured person
2. Nature of the injury
3. Existing medical conditions
4. Location
5. Directions to the site and the patient
6. Any changes in the child's condition

If a child needs to go to hospital, the educator will accompany the child or arrange for another appropriate adult to accompany them. An accident report form will be completed as soon as possible.

Outdoor Emergencies

Because much of our programming takes place outdoors, staff are prepared to respond to a variety of outdoor emergencies. The educator will assess the situation, move the children to a safe location when necessary, and contact emergency services and parents/guardians as appropriate.

Wildlife:

Wildlife is a normal part of being outdoors, and we teach children to respect animals and give

them space. If potentially dangerous wildlife is encountered, the educator will keep the children together, create distance from the animal and move to a safe location. Children will be instructed to follow the educator's directions and never approach, feed, chase or attempt to touch wildlife.

If a wildlife encounter creates an immediate danger, the educator will contact 911 or the appropriate wildlife authorities as necessary. If a child is bitten or stung by an animal or insect, the educator will provide appropriate first aid and seek medical assistance when necessary.

Severe weather, wildfire and smoke:

The educator will monitor weather, wildfire conditions and air quality throughout the program. If conditions become unsafe, the group will move to an appropriate safe location or the program will be cancelled or ended early. Parents/guardians will be contacted as appropriate. Please also see our Inclement and Extreme Weather Policy.

Inclement & Extreme Weather/Closure Policy

As an outdoor school our goal is to run in all but extreme types of weather. We ask that children come prepared for all weather conditions and that parents check the weather forecast the night before to ensure the child has all necessary clothing to have a safe and successful day.

Nature School staff will consult the forecast the day before the program, the morning of the program and throughout the day. In the event of high winds or wind gusts, we will stay clear of forested areas and other overhead hazards. In the event of potential thunder and lightning, students will stay close to shelter. During thunder and lightning and/or hail, participants will remain under shelter until the storm has passed.

On very cold days, children will need to come prepared with multiple warm layers and appropriate winter clothing. Families are encouraged to send warm drinks, and children will be encouraged to stay active and keep moving throughout the day. We may have a fire to help everyone stay warm. The educator will closely monitor children for signs of frostbite, hypothermia or discomfort and will check in frequently with children to ensure their well-being.

On very hot days, children will be encouraged to stay hydrated, take breaks from strenuous activity and seek shade when needed. The educator will monitor children for signs of heat exhaustion and check in frequently with children to ensure their well-being. Extra water will be available to help keep children cool.

If the temperature drops to -20C or below, or rises to 35C or above, all programs will be cancelled. Parents will be notified the night before or the morning off the program. A make-up date for the cancelled class will be offered or a refund given. Classes will also be cancelled when the AQHI is 10+.

Missing Person Procedure

Children are asked to stay within site of the educator at all times. The educator continuously scans the area for children and does regular head counts to ensure all children are safe and accounted for. If we are unable to locate a child, we will:

1. Do a bird call to assemble all children and conduct another head count
2. Ask children if they have seen the missing child
3. Enlist help from members of the public in the vicinity
4. Check toilets and surrounding areas
5. Call 911 and the child's parent/guardian

If the child is located, police and parents will be notified immediately.

Educator Ratios and Responsibilities

The responsibilities of our staff and volunteers include, but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of students.
2. Assessing and managing risk.
3. Creating a positive, welcoming space and community where everyone feels safe, and a program which supports our core values, mission and vision.
4. Modeling good behavior and respect for others and the natural world.
5. Supporting students to work through problems themselves and with peers before intervening, when it is safe to do so.
6. Helping students name and regulate emotions.
7. Setting clear rules and expectations that are age and ability appropriate.
8. Observing and documenting play and learning.

We maintain a maximum ratio of 10 students to 1 educator. Some activities may require additional adult support or a smaller group size.

Our educators are qualified educators with a valid teaching license, current first aid certification, police clearance and vulnerable sector check.

Environmental Stewardship

Environmental Stewardship Policy

Much of our focus here at Applegrove Nature School is on environmental education, and we strive to create not only a respect for nature, but a love and sense of belonging in nature. Accordingly, a lot of what we do takes place in wild, natural spaces and we certainly do have an impact on our surroundings, although there are things we can do to mitigate this impact. We aim to follow the principle of *Leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but pictures, kill nothing but time* through:

1. **disposing of waste properly:** we encourage students and staff to bring a no-waste lunch/snack and to take home all garbage.

2. **leaving what we find:** children are naturally curious about their surroundings and often learn by picking things up. This may include flowers, insects, feathers, rocks, etc. We want to nurture this curiosity and need for exploration while at the same time teaching children to respect nature. When possible, we encourage children to observe, investigate and then leave things where they found them.
3. **using what has already fallen:** when children want to use natural materials for building, creating or exploring, we encourage them to use dead plant matter such as sticks, branches and fallen leaves rather than cutting or breaking living plants. Sometimes children enjoy using sticks for hitting or other forms of physical play. We encourage this exploration while teaching children to avoid damaging or killing living things. If we do need to cut a living branch or tree for a specific purpose, we intend to make full use of the material rather than wasting it.
4. **respecting wildlife:** we avoid areas where wildlife has nests, burrows or other places where animals may be raising young. We teach children to give wildlife space and to observe animals without disturbing them.
5. **rotating through the forest:** we rotate our play areas to avoid over-compacting the soil and damaging plants, and to give areas a chance to recover.

Communication & Concerns

General & Emergency Communication Policy

Applegrove Nature School is very open to feedback, questions and concerns from students and families. Regular, timely and open communication is important to us. We are happy to connect briefly during drop-off or pick-up to address any questions or concerns. Should something require more time or discussion, we are happy to arrange a separate conversation. Please email ApplegroveNatureSchool@hotmail.com or contact us directly at 250-265-1090.

Please notify us via email, text or phone call if your child will be late or absent, or if your child has a communicable illness or is being treated for lice.

Email is our primary method of communication with families. We use email to communicate what to expect for drop-off, information about the upcoming program, how the day went, photos and highlights from the day, upcoming changes to the program, and information about food preparation and sharing.

Please ensure we have your most current email address on file. We ask that you add ApplegroveNatureSchool@hotmail.com as a safe sender so our emails do not get lost in your junk folder, and check your email before each program in case there are important updates or changes.

In the event of an emergency, parents/guardians will be contacted by telephone as soon as it is safe and practical to do so, after emergency services have been contacted when necessary.

If weather, wildfire, road conditions or other circumstances make travel dangerous for staff or participants and we need to cancel a program or close early for the day, parents/guardians will be contacted by telephone as soon as the decision is made.

Questions, Concerns & Conflict Resolution

Applegrove Nature School values open, respectful and timely communication. We want everyone — children, caregivers and educators — to feel safe, welcome and respected while participating in our programs.

If you have a question, concern or problem relating to something that happens during a program, **please bring it directly to an Applegrove Nature School educator as soon as possible, preferably during the program when the situation is occurring.** We would much rather have an opportunity to understand and address a concern early than have it grow or become a source of frustration.

Our role is not only to support the children. We are also available to help caregivers navigate concerns that arise between children or adults during the program. If there is a disagreement or concern involving another child, caregiver or family, please come to us rather than trying to resolve the situation directly with the other person.

We will listen to everyone involved, help clarify what has happened, and work with those involved to find a respectful and practical way forward. When appropriate, we may act as a mediator or help facilitate a conversation between people involved in a disagreement.

We ask that concerns not be discussed or circulated within the wider community before giving us an opportunity to address them. Talking about a concern with others without involving the people who can actually help resolve it can allow misunderstandings and frustrations to grow. Bringing concerns directly to us gives us the opportunity to respond, make changes where appropriate and help everyone move forward.

Concerns do not necessarily signal something bigger. They offer an opportunity for growth, change and improvement. We strive to address concerns proactively, respectfully and as soon as possible, with the goal of maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for everyone. If a concern cannot be resolved during the program, we are happy to arrange a more focused conversation at another time. Concerns will be treated confidentially, subject to applicable legal requirements and the need to address the situation appropriately.

Parent/Caregiver Participation Policy & “Step Back, Tune In” (for parented programs only)

Parented programs are designed to give children opportunities to explore, play, take manageable risks, solve problems, and develop confidence and independence while their caregivers are nearby and available to support them when needed.

We ask caregivers to practice a **“step back, tune in”** approach. This means staying connected and attentive to your child while giving them space to participate in the play and work through experiences independently.

Caregivers are responsible for their own child’s basic needs, including snacks, water, toileting, clothing and any other personal care they require. Caregivers should remain close enough to support their child when needed, but we ask that they find a spot at the edge of the play area — for example, a low tree spot where they can sit or crouch — rather than staying in the middle of the play space or hovering over their child.

We ask caregivers to allow children to lead their own play. Please avoid directing children's play, solving problems for them before they have had an opportunity to try, or stepping in immediately when children disagree or have a conflict.

Conflict and disagreement are a normal part of being with other people. Learning how to communicate, negotiate, express feelings, set boundaries, listen to others and work through disagreements are important social skills. Supporting children through these experiences is an important part of our role at Applegrove Nature School.

If children need support with a conflict, educators will step in as appropriate and help them work through the situation. We will consider the children's ages, abilities, the circumstances and the level of risk involved when deciding how much support is needed.

Caregivers should not discipline, correct or intervene with another person's child. Similarly, caregivers are asked not to give parenting advice or instructions to other caregivers unless solicited. If you have a concern about something that is happening during the program, please bring it directly to the educator rather than addressing another child, caregiver or family yourself.

There will be times when an educator may offer a caregiver a suggestion, provide guidance about a child's behaviour or share resources about child development, conflict resolution or other relevant topics. Our intention is to support both children and caregivers and to help create a welcoming environment for everyone.

The goal of this approach is not for caregivers to be uninvolved. It is to give children the space to experience the benefits of being part of a group while knowing that their caregiver is nearby, paying attention and available when genuinely needed.

"In nature, children learn to take risks, overcome fears,
make new friends, regulate emotions, and create imaginary worlds."
Angela Hanscom

6 Worthwhile Reading & References

Brown, Lise and Adrian Alphonso, [The 7 Relationships of an Ethical Forest School](#)
[Forest and Nature School Guide in Canada](#)

[Richard Louv](#): Last Child in the Woods, The Nature Principle

[Angela Hanscom](#): Balanced and Barefoot

[Peter Gray](#): Free to Learn

[Heather Shoemaker](#): It's OK Not to Share, It's OK to Go Up the Slide

[Lenore Skenazy](#): Free Range Kids

[Ellen Sandseter](#): Risky Play

[Daniel J. Siegel](#): The Whole-Brain Child, No-Drama Discipline

[Gordon Neufeld](#): Hold on to Your Kids

[Jane Nelsen](#): Positive Discipline

[Janet Lansbury](#): Unruffled

[John Holt](#): Learning all the Time

"It's important that adults allow children both the time and the space
to play outdoors on a daily basis."

It's important that we give them the trust they deserve
and the freedom they need
to try out new theories and play schemes."
Angela Hanscom