



# Applegrove Nature School

"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 and reconciliation, 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?**

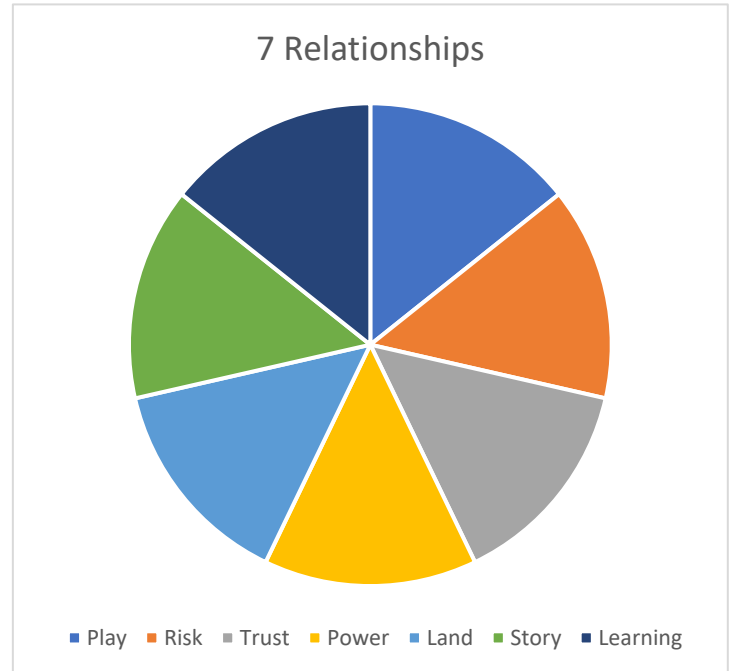
Nature School is an educational ethos and practice that puts the land and the child-at-play at the centre of every activity. Children build a relationship with the land by using the same outdoor space over extended periods of time and throughout all 4 seasons. Children are given space and time to explore 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](http://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 806 Applegrove Road. 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. You can either take the next driveway on the right and park by the bridge or continue past the driveway and park at the gate. Since parking is limited and turnaround space is tight, we encourage parents to carpool to our site.

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

### **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 are developing classes to run on Pro-D days for school aged children, parented classes on weekday mornings for pre-school children as well as full-week half-day March Break and summer camps. 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, with 2 staff present at all times. We meet at the gate to our property and from there walk a short distance to our play space. We start by forming a welcome circle, 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 trees, 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. Towards the end of the day, educators will call all children back to the welcome circle to 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 out, 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!

<p><b>Winter</b>  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!</p>	<p><b>Summer:</b>  rain gear (waterproof boots, pants, jacket)  running shoes  sun hat  lightweight clothing  water shoes (sandals, crocks)  sunscreen</p>
<p><b>Spring and Fall</b>  See Summer list; and  warmer sweater or jacket  gloves  base Layers  extra boots</p>	<p><b>All seasons:</b>  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)</p>

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

## *4 Policies and Procedures*

### **Terms and Conditions**

In order for children to participate in our Nature School we need the following in place 1 week prior to the start of class:

1. Minimum 50% of fees paid
2. Registration form completed and signed
3. Waivers and media release signed

By the beginning of the first class 100% of the registration fee must be paid.

### **Refunds Policy**

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

1. Refunds will not be given if a day's program is canceled due to inclement weather.
2. A child who is absent or leaves for a portion of the day due to illness, injury, expulsion or any other reason will not be refunded any portion of that day's program fees. If the child is unable to return for the remainder of the program, a refund may be granted for the remaining days.
3. If a refund is issued, it may be subject to a \$30 administrative fee. In some cases, refunds can be used toward a future program.
4. Two weeks' notice is required if you decide to leave the program and you will be refunded the remaining balance, minus \$30 for administrative fees.
5. Refunds will be given if a class has to be cancelled due to instructor illness, or a makeup day will be offered.

Applegrove Nature School reserves the right to terminate a contract (with a refund for days not attended) if it is deemed that the program is not a good fit for the child.

### **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 used for the purposes agreed upon. Information pertaining to your child will not be discussed with third parties, except when we are legally obligated to do so, and will remain in confidence between the parents 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.

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 on our website or social media in which case they are visible to the public, and we may share photos between participants of a class.

### **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 encouraged 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 healthy, easy-to-eat, waste-free snack for the day as well as ample water.

### **Administration of Medicine Procedure**

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. Anytime 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.

### **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. 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.

### **Emergency Procedures and First Aid Policies**

For minor medical accidents, like scraps, cuts, and bumps, staff will provide appropriate first aid and will inform the parents upon pick up to explain what happened.

Staff are trained in first aid and carry a first aid kit and cell phones. For serious accidents or medical emergencies, one staff will provide first aid and call 911, while the other staff ensures the safety of the group. Injured children will not be left unattended and will be monitored until the ambulance arrives.

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

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

When safe to do so, the injured child's parents/guardians will be contacted. The child will be accompanied to the hospital by a staff member or appropriate adult. An accident report form will be completed as soon as possible.

### **Missing Person Procedure**

Adults continuously scan the area for children and do 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 of members of the public in the vicinity
4. Check toilets and surrounding areas
5. Call 911 and a parent/guardian

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

## **Staff 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.
1. creating a positive, welcoming space and community where everyone feels safe, and a program which supports our core values, mission and vision.
3. modeling good behavior and respect for others and the natural world.
4. supporting students to work through problems themselves and with peers before intervening.
5. helping students name and regulate emotions.
6. setting rules and expectations that are age and ability appropriate.
7. observing and recording play.

We have two educators on site at all times and we accept a maximum of 20 children per group to maintain a 10:1 ratio. All staff are qualified educators with a valid teaching license, first aid, police clearance and vulnerable sector check.

## **Child Protection Policy**

Applegrove Nature School requires a written or verbal authorization from parents/guardians for who may pick up their child or 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 the adult until verbal consent has been given via telephone. Staff will remain with the child until a person authorized to pick up arrives or parents/guardians have given verbal authorization for a change in pick-up routine. Additional charges will apply if a staff has to remain with the child for longer than 30 minutes past the end of class.

Applegrove Nature School recognizes all parents' rights to access their child regardless of marital status. Please know that access/information will only be denied when there is a written separation agreement or a legal court order provided to our Nature School directing us to do so. Drop-off is at 10:30am and pick-up is at 2pm unless otherwise arranged.

## **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 or very hot days, the time spent outside without shelter will be limited, based on age and gear. Our staff will visually monitor students for frostbite, hypothermia, heat exhaustion etc. and check in frequently with children to ensure their well-being. We may have fires to help warm up and extra water available to cool down.

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+.

### **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 staff's discretion which tools will be used and by which children; this depends on the children's maturity-level, interest level in the tool, how they navigate levels of risk, concentration level, and the ability to follow the clear guidelines given and shown around tool.

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

### **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 or any kind of foul language, as well as any disrespect from and 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.

In general, our behaviour management will:

- focus on the behaviour rather than the child
- consider the child's developmental level and needs
- make expectations clear and provide scaffolding to help students participate positively
- be implemented in a positive and consistent manner

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

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

### **General & Emergency Communication Policy**

Applegrove Nature School staff are 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 questions arise that cannot be fully answered during this time, please email [ApplegroveNatureSchool@hotmail.com](mailto: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 contracted a communicable disease or is being treated for lice.

Parents will receive an email after each class with photos and information about the day's events, including highlights and learning that took place. Applegrove Nature School also uses email to communicate upcoming changes to the program, for example in case of extreme weather or staff illness, as well as to inform parents about food preparation and sharing. Please ensure we have your most current email address on file.

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

### **Questions and Concerns**

Should you have any questions or concerns about your child's well-being or success, we encourage you to discuss it with staff directly. We are open to feedback at all times and always have your child's best interest at heart. If you feel that you require an extended or more focused conversation, we will happily arrange a meeting. We will provide feedback from the day to parents as necessary or notable. Please be considerate that time restraints do not allow us to give feedback for every child, each and every day. If there is something notable or

remarkable from the day we will share it, but otherwise please assume your child had a successful and enjoyable time. If you have an interest or need for specific feedback, please let our staff know at the start of the day.

If you have a serious concern, please arrange a meeting with us. Concerns are best addressed through direct conversation between the parties involved in a timely manner. Concerns or complaints do not necessarily signal something bigger. They offer an opportunity for growth, change and improvement. We strive to engage all parties involved and seek an inclusive resolution. Concerns will be treated confidentially, subject to applicable legal requirements.

### **Environmental Stewardship**

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. The Boy Scouts of America have the motto: *Leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but pictures, kill nothing but time*, and we aim to follow this sentiment 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 respecting nature.
3. **respecting wildlife:** we avoid areas where animals might have their nests and burrows
4. **rotating through the forest** to avoid over-compacting the soil and giving plants a chance to recover

### **What about the risks?**

It goes without saying that nature can sometimes be a tough teacher and that 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 absolutely 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 keep children safe. You can find our risk assessment forms at the end of this handbook.

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. We assign 1 staff to the child climbing, who moves closer to the child and observes them carefully. We will communicate with the child to ensure they climb safely (close to the trunk, on branches thicker than their wrist, not above another child), feel comfortable and that they have a plan to come back down safely. If at any point the instructor 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, potato peelers. Before a child or children are given tools to use, we gauge the readiness of the group and each individual child as well as the level of comfort of all staff. 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. Suitable staff to children with tools will be maintained to allow for adequate supervision and support. 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. One qualified staff will be assigned to the fire at all times and children will not be left unsupervised. A safe zone around the fire will be maintained and fire blanket, water and first aid kits will be kept nearby.

With all risky activities, tools, sticks, fire, climbing, children must earn and maintain the trust of the educator and demonstrate responsibility.

For a complete list of hazards and risks as well as risk mitigation, please refer to the risk assessment forms at the end of this handbook.

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

*Angela Hanscom*

## *5 Forms*

On the following page you will find:

1. Registration Form & Participant Waiver
2. Accident Report Form
3. Risk Assessment
4. Ecological Impact Assessment

"Tell me and I'll forget. Teach me and I'll remember.  
Involve me and I'll learn."  
Benjamin Franklin



## *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