



# **WILD PATH FOREST SCHOOL**



**Parent Handbook 2022**

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## Vision

Wild Path Forest School is dedicated to fostering deep connection between children and the natural world.

Through play and exploration in forests, fields, and gardens children develop confidence, resilience and a sense of wonder. Experienced mentors support children in their exploration and extend their learning by providing resources and encouraging inquiry. The development of connection, caring, and ecological awareness empowers children to become stewards of the natural environment.

## Location

We are located on beautiful Cedar Down Farm, a 100-acre organic farm owned and operated by Leslie Moscovits and Jeff Boesch. The farm is a ten minute drive from Neustadt in West Grey, ON. We are on the traditional land of the Three Fire Confederacy of the Ojibway, Potawatomi and Odawa people.

Our learning takes place in the surrounding forests, fields, streams, and ponds. We meet daily in the forest, and make regular visits to our outdoor play area and children's garden. In addition, we have an indoor classroom that we use in inclement weather.



## Learning and Development

Forest School is an educational approach that is experiential, emergent, inquiry-based, place-based, and play-based. Forest school offers children regular opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experience in a natural environment.

**Experiential learning** allows students to explore hands-on, active and authentic learning experiences.

**Emergent curriculum** is based on the students' interests, observations and discoveries in nature, which serve as a starting point for inquiry.

**Inquiry-based learning** places students' questions and ideas at the centre of the learning process. Mentors support student learning by providing resources.

**Place-based education** means that we build an on-going relationship to place. As we visit the same locations in different weather and seasons we notice and observe changes in the flora and fauna, and we learn to be caretakers of our space. We incorporate traditional knowledge from the Anishinaabe people who have intimate knowledge of the land that we learn upon and from.

**Play-based learning** in nature allows children to imagine, develop their social skills, tell stories, move their bodies, and have fun!

### **Assessment:**

At Wild Path, child learning is assessed by mentors through regular observation and discussion. Ongoing documentation of learning through note-taking and photography allows mentors to reflect upon student learning and plan future programming based on student interest and need.

Learning will be communicated to parents through monthly newsletters sent directly to parent/guardians. These newsletters will outline student activities and discoveries. We suggest that parents and students review the newsletters together so that students can share and reflect on their time at forest school.

Direct discussion with mentors about student learning via email or at the end of the school day is always welcome!

# Behaviour Management Policy

**At Wild Path Forest School, we believe that children are:**

- equal, unique, and valuable
- competent and capable learners
- able to experience and navigate appropriate risk with support from mentors - naturally curious, and deserve to drive their own learning processes

We aim to create a learning environment that is peaceful and safe for all learners. At the beginning of a session we discuss what this looks like with students, and encourage their input in shaping our community values. We strive to empower students with the tools to communicate their needs, make positive decisions, and problem solve when conflicts arise. Mentors are always present to observe this learning process and to step in when assistance is needed.

If challenging behaviour occurs repeatedly, a plan may be created with students to come up with appropriate solutions and consequences. Parents may be contacted at this point and be asked to collaborate with mentors.

In the unlikely event that a positive outcome cannot be reached, we reserve the right to ask that a student not return, or to take a break from a session. We strive for every child to find their place at Wild Path.



## **Staff**

Our mentors are OCT trained teachers, forest school practitioners, outdoor educators, and individuals with outdoor skills and experience.

## **Staff to Participant Ratios**

All programs have a mentor to child ratio of 1:6, with a maximum of 15 children in attendance on a given day. Our small ratios allow us to create a safe and engaging learning environment.

## **Staff Responsibilities**

Wild Path mentors are responsible for creating a learning community that is inviting, safe, and joyful. They will model respect for others and for the environment, and will help children to resolve their conflicts peacefully. Mentors will provide opportunities for risk-taking and encourage children to challenge their “edges” while assessing and managing risks on an on-going basis.

Mentors will facilitate student learning by observing, questioning, documenting, and encouraging children in their discoveries. They will provide resources such as field guides, stories, songs, and tools that extend student learning.

Mentors at Wild Path Forest School may have backgrounds in education, the arts, and environmental science. They are experienced with children of different ages. All mentors have an up-to-date Criminal Record Check with a vulnerable sector check.

### **Volunteer Responsibilities**

Occasionally we may have volunteers visit our learning community. All volunteers must have an up-to-date Criminal Record Check with a vulnerable sector check. Volunteers are asked to observe and follow the children's play, and to take the opportunity to join in the fun and get messy!

### **Contact Information**

222145 Concession Rd 14 Neustadt ON

N0G 2M0

Phone: 647-588-6572

wildpathschool@gmail.com

## **Health and Safety Policies and Procedures**

### **Privacy**

Pictures of children will not be shared on social media or in advertising without express parental or guardian consent. Student information will be kept in an on-site binder and an electronic file in case of emergencies.

### **Illness**

In order to ensure the wellness of other students, please keep your child at home if they have experienced any of the following symptoms in the past 24 hours:

- Fever
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Significant cough - Head lice

If a student becomes ill at school a parent will be contacted and the student will be sent home.

Our Covid-19 policies are updated on an ongoing basis, and are shared directly with parents upon enrollment in programming.

### **Absent/Sick Days**

If your child is going to be missing a day of school, please call or text as soon as possible. Please note that there are no refunds for missed days due to illness.

### **Food/Allergies**

We ask children to carry their own lunch, snacks, and full water bottle in their backpack each day. We encourage litter-less lunches whenever possible. We ask that children do not share food with other students due to allergies. We will be consuming known wild edibles, as well as engaging in campfire cooking.

### **Toileting and Handwashing**

Children must be toilet trained prior to the start of drop-off programs. While we have access to outdoor toilets, school-aged children must also be comfortable using the washroom outdoors unassisted. Mentors carry toilet paper, wipes, spray bottles and soap at all times.

### **Risk Management**

Wild Path Forest School recognizes the right of children to experience risk in play and to learn from challenges, testing limits and exploring boundaries.

Wild Path mentors conduct daily and seasonal risk assessments on site, in addition to dynamic experience-based and activity-based assessments. Mentors work with students to co-assess risk on a daily basis, teaching students valuable risk-assessment strategies.

All parents must submit a signed participation waiver for each child prior to the start of programming.



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

All mentors carry a copy of emergency procedures, including emergency phone numbers, at all times. Each group carries an emergency kit with bandages, splints, antiseptic wipes, anti-allergy medication, and a hypothermia blanket.

All mentors have Standard Level “C” CPR training. Mentors carry cell phones so that parents/guardians and/or EMS can be called if necessary.

### **Child Protection**

In accordance with the Child and Family Services Act, it is the responsibility of forest school mentors to immediately report to a Children’s Aid Society if child abuse is suspected.

### **Inclement Weather/Closure**

Mentors will consult the weather forecast each morning and plan the day's activities accordingly, as well as dynamically assessing the weather throughout the day. In the event of severe weather (i.e. wind warnings, extreme cold, thunderstorms, etc.) mentors and students will make use of our indoor classroom.

In deciding to close due to severe weather we will consider the Bluewater District School Board snow day criteria and school bus cancellations. In the event of closure due to severe weather families will be notified in the morning prior to 7:30 am via email provided upon registration.

\*Please note that there are no refunds available for closure due to inclement weather.

### **Procedures for Tool and Fire Use**

Mentors will demonstrate the safe use of tools and invite students to explore tool use and develop their skills under close supervision.

Students will have the opportunity to participate in fire making and campfire cooking. Their level of participation will be determined based upon their readiness, as decided by mentors through ongoing observation.

### **Tick Prevention**

All mentors carry tick removal kits. In addition we advise parents to conduct regular tick checks and ensure their children are wearing appropriate clothing to protect against ticks.

## **Inclusion and Accessibility**

Our goal is to make our programming accessible to any child regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and physical ability. If your child requires assistance in order to participate please let us know and we will collaborate to find a solution.

Outdoor clothing and gear can be expensive, which can create a barrier to participation. We are currently building a lending library of outdoor clothing

and equipment. If your child needs gear in order to participate, or if you have anything to contribute, please let us know!

## **Environmental Sustainability**

Forest School offers a unique opportunity for students to learn in a rich outdoor setting. We believe that it is our job to ensure that the forests and fields in which we learn continue to be safe for the plants and animals who live there. To this end we follow an environmental site plan that minimizes the impact of our activities on the land and its inhabitants, while also allowing students to engage with nature in a hands-on way.

We invite parents to help us to contribute to our environmental commitment by sending children with litter-less lunches, by not idling cars during pick up and drop off times, and by carpooling with other families when possible.

## **Communication and Concerns**

We are always open to feedback, questions, and concerns from our forest school community members. While we can always discuss briefly at pick-up times, more specific concerns may be best addressed via email or phone: [wildpathschool@gmail.com](mailto:wildpathschool@gmail.com)

Katrina Gataveckas: 647-588-6572

We will do our best to ensure that concerns are addressed in a timely manner.

Information about upcoming events and sessions will be shared via email.

## **Payment and Refund Policy**

For a list of program pricing please refer to the Wild Path website: [www.wildpathschool.com](http://www.wildpathschool.com). A \$100.00 deposit is required upon registration in each session to ensure a child's spot. Payment can be made in full prior to or at the start of a session (summer, fall, winter), or can be made in monthly instalments. If you choose to pay monthly, payment is expected within the first week of each month.

If you need to cancel your child's participation in summer camp the following refund policy will apply:

14 or more days notice: Full refund

Less than 14 days notice: No refund available

If you need to withdraw your child from regular programming, we require 30 days written notice. Any fees due within this 30-day time frame are required to be paid in full and are not refundable.

Please note that deposits for our programs are non-refundable, nor are they transferable, unless upcoming programming is cancelled due to Covid-19.

Wild Path Forest School does not offer refunds for illness or snow days.

## **Preparing for Forest School: Clothing and Equipment**

Detailed packing lists will be sent by email to parent/guardians prior to the start of programming.