



Wild Child Nature Project

Parent Handbook



2025



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At Wild Child Nature Project, we recognize that the forest is not just a place — it is a living, breathing community. The land, the trees, the waters, and all living creatures hold wisdom and offer guidance.

We commit to walking gently here — listening and learning from the land, and from each other. We strive to care for the land as it cares for us — with curiosity, kindness, and a spirit of reciprocity.

May we continue to learn, grow, and build relationships grounded in gratitude, respect, and a shared responsibility for the well-being of this place and all who live here.



About Us

Wild Child Nature Project is a Forest and Nature School offering outdoor, nature-rooted learning for children ages 2.5 to 13 years.

Our vision is to support children and families as they build meaningful connections—with nature, with community, and with themselves. Through curiosity and kindness, we cultivate a way of learning that honours the land and carries a spirit of respect and reciprocity into all we do.

We are located in the Township of Mississippi Mills; on Ramsay Concession 7A, and serve communities within Lanark County.



What is Forest School?

The Child and Nature Alliance defines forest and nature school as an educational approach that focuses on outdoor, nature-based learning and play for children. Forest and nature schools provide regular, repeated access to natural settings and feature child-led, inquiry-based learning that is guided by trained facilitators. Children are encouraged to explore, play, and learn in nature, and are supported in developing skills and knowledge related to nature, environmental stewardship, and overall well-being.

What is Risky Play?

Risky play is a pedagogical framework to play, that we value as an essential part of childhood development. Risky play refers to exciting, challenging experiences that allow children to test their limits, develop physical skills, and build confidence.

It is “thrilling, exciting, and unstructured outdoor activities that involve uncertainty and the possibility of physical harm—but with important distinction between risk (manageable) and hazard (unmanageable)” - Canadian Paediatric Society.

Why do children need it?

Risky play is a vital part of childhood that helps build confidence, resilience, and real-world problem-solving skills. Children today spend more time in digital spaces, missing out on the kinds of experiences that help them grow strong and self-reliant.

By encouraging safe, supervised risky play, we give children the chance to develop independence, manage fear, and build the inner resources they need to thrive in a complex world.



Categories of Risky Play

- Play at Great Heights- Climbing where there's a chance of falling
- Play at High Speeds -Running, biking, sliding, swinging fast
- Play with Dangerous Tools -Using real tools like knives, saws, or hammers under supervision
- Play Near Dangerous Elements - Exploring near water, fire,
 - Rough-and-Tumble Play - Wrestling, chasing, or play-fighting
 - Play Where Children Can "Disappear" or Get Lost
 - Play with a Risk of Injury - Balancing on logs, jumping from rocks



Risk Benefit Analysis

We prioritize safety through a dynamic risk-benefit analysis, ensuring that each activity aligns with the developmental stage of the child. This approach allows us to create an environment that challenges and supports children appropriately, promoting growth while maintaining a secure setting.



"When children experience nature, they learn to appreciate it, they learn to respect it, and they learn to protect it. The environment becomes a teacher, a friend, and a source of inspiration."

- Richard Louv, author of "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder"



Preparing for your child's day

Time outdoors is full of wonder, challenge, and change—and being well-prepared helps your child make the most of it. Here's how you can support a smooth, joyful start to each day at Wild Child Nature Project:

Dress for the Weather

We spend our days outside in all kinds of weather. Please send your child in layers that can be added or removed as needed. Waterproof outerwear, warm base layers, and sun protection are essentials, depending on the season. A full change of clothes (including socks and underwear) in a labelled bag is always recommended.

Footwear Matters

Choose sturdy, weather-appropriate footwear: insulated boots in winter, rain boots for wet days, and closed-toe shoes with good grip for warmer months. No “Crocs” or opened toed shoes please!

Nourishment

A nutritious breakfast sets your child up for a successful day. For snacks and lunches, please pack something hearty and simple to eat outdoors. Add extras, as time outdoors makes for hungry children. Water bottles are essential—filled and labeled daily.

Daily Check-Ins

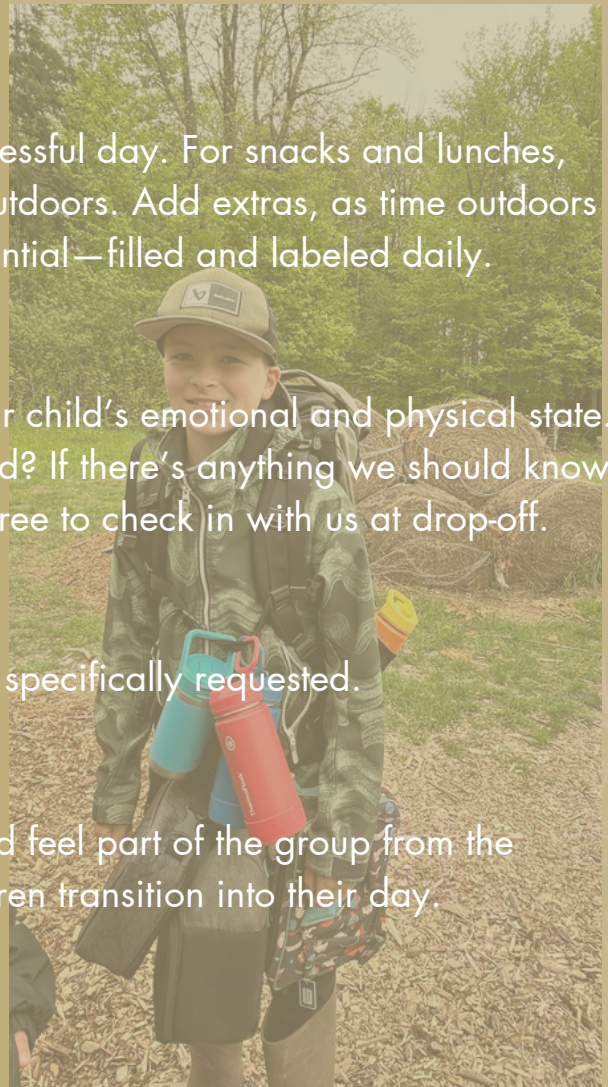
Take a moment before leaving home to check your child's emotional and physical state. Are they rested? Do they have everything they need? If there's anything we should know (a tough morning, a late night, a recent illness), feel free to check in with us at drop-off.

Keep It Simple

Avoid sending valuables or toys from home unless specifically requested.

Arrive Ready to Play

Try to arrive on time so your child can settle in and feel part of the group from the beginning. A calm, confident goodbye helps children transition into their day.



A photograph of a person and a child on a forest path. The person is wearing a yellow backpack and a blue cap, and the child is wearing a blue tank top and a grey cap. They are standing in a lush green forest with tall grass and dense foliage.

Health and Safety

Policy and Procedures

Emergency Procedures and First Aid
Risk Management
Behaviour Guidance
Food Policy
Natural Hazards Policy
Child Protection Policy

Health and Safety

Emergency Procedures and First aid

Your child's safety is our top priority. While forest and nature school takes place in dynamic outdoor settings, all staff are trained and prepared to respond calmly and effectively in case of an emergency. Below is an overview of our procedures:

First Aid Response

All educators hold valid First Aid and CPR certification.

Minor injuries (scrapes, bumps, stings) are treated on site, and caregivers are notified at pick-up or sooner if needed.

For more serious injuries, parents/guardians will be contacted immediately, and emergency services will be called if necessary.

Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency, we will contact families using the phone numbers provided in your child's registration. Please ensure your contact information is always up to date. If we are unable to reach a parent or guardian, we will contact the listed emergency contact.

Emergency Evacuation

If we need to leave our site due to extreme weather, wildfire, or other safety threats, we will evacuate to our designated emergency location (listed below). You will be notified by phone and/or email with instructions for pickup.

Missing Child Protocol

Our team conducts regular headcounts and uses a check-in/check-out attendance system. If a child is unaccounted for, we initiate a calm, immediate search of the area while alerting necessary authorities and contacting the family.

Severe Weather

We monitor forecasts and environmental conditions closely. Programs may be modified, shortened, or cancelled in advance when safety risks are high (e.g., thunderstorms, high winds, extreme cold/heat, poor air quality). Families will be notified by email and/or phone.

Emergency Procedures cont'd

Medical and Health Emergencies

If your child has a medical condition or allergy that requires emergency care, please ensure we have an up-to-date care plan and any necessary medications. All medications are stored safely on-site and carried by staff during outings.

Emergency Meeting Location:

In the event we must relocate the site due to an emergency, our safe space is located at 895 Ramsay Concession 7A. The residence of the land owner. We will seek shelter in a building on site.

Risk Management

Wild Child Nature Project believes that risk is not something to eliminate—but something to manage wisely. Engaging with nature involves a level of risk, and we see this as an opportunity for children to grow in confidence, competence, and resilience.

Our Approach to Risk

We follow a “risk–benefit” approach, which means we thoughtfully weigh the potential risks of an activity against the developmental, educational, and emotional benefits. Risky play—such as climbing, using tools, or exploring near water—is carefully introduced in age-appropriate ways, with clear boundaries and supervision.

What We Do to Keep Children Safe

Site Assessments: Our staff regularly inspect and assess outdoor spaces for hazards (e.g., unstable trees, sharp objects, wasp nests).

Daily Safety Checks: We perform daily checks of weather conditions, air quality, and terrain before and during each program.

Tool Use Protocols: Children are introduced to tools slowly, with guidance, protective gear, and close supervision.

Risk Management cont'd

Staff Training: All educators are trained in risk assessment, emergency response, outdoor first aid, and how to support children's safe risk-taking.

Group Ratios: We maintain low child-to-educator ratios to ensure close supervision and support. Our preschool Owls maintain a ratio of 5 children to 1 educator, while our older groups maintain an 8 children to 1 educator ratio. Our educators work in teams of two at minimum.

Clear Boundaries: Children are taught to respect natural hazards, understand limits, and communicate their needs and awareness.

Risk management is also about teaching children how to identify and navigate risk themselves. Through guided experiences, they learn to test their limits, problem-solve, make decisions, and take responsibility for their safety.

We are always happy to speak with families about our risk management philosophy and specific practices.



Behaviour Guidance

At Wild Child Nature Project, we view all behaviour as a form of communication. We know that children thrive in environments where they feel safe, seen, and supported—and our approach to guidance reflects that belief.

We operate on the simple yet powerful foundation of safety and kindness. In navigating challenges, setting expectations, and supporting social interactions, we often return to two guiding questions:

Is it safe? Is it kind?

These questions help children—and educators—pause, reflect, and make thoughtful choices. They form the heart of how we build community, support one another, and care for the land.

We support the children in creating a community standards agreement together at the beginning of each session. The agreement is our commitment to each other to be safe and kind. It reflects the abilities, development and needs of the group, and is centered around our values at Wild Child Nature Project. The agreement is re-visited as necessary.

What Is Considered Challenging Behaviour?

We understand that all children experience big emotions and moments of dysregulation. However, we pay close attention to behaviours that:

- Put the safety of the child or others at risk
- Disrupt the emotional or physical well-being of the group
- Interfere significantly with a child's ability to engage in the program
- Consistently disregard boundaries, even after support and redirection

These are indicators that a child may need additional connection, guidance, or regulation tools—not as problems to be punished.

How we approach Challenging Behaviour

- Connection before correction
- Clear, consistent boundaries rooted in kindness and care
- Natural and logical consequences
- Opportunities for choice, reflection, and repair

Behaviour Guidance cont'd

We guide children with compassion, helping them understand how their actions affect themselves, others, and the environment. We aim to build internal regulation and community awareness—not simply compliance.

Family Involvement

If a child is experiencing ongoing challenges, we will connect with families to co-create a supportive plan. We deeply value the home-Wild Child relationship and believe that with shared understanding, children thrive.

By grounding our work in safety and kindness, we empower children to grow into thoughtful, capable, and compassionate humans—at forest school and beyond.



Food Policy

Nourishing food supports children's energy, comfort, and joy—especially during a full day of outdoor exploration. Here are a few guidelines that we follow to keep us safe.

Food Allergies

Children are encouraged and reminded to eat only their own food and not share with others, as even small exposures can cause serious allergic reactions.

We are mindful of allergies that exist in each group and accommodate restrictions as necessary. We currently ask that children refrain from bringing dairy in liquid form (yogourt, yogourt drinks etc.)

Please ensure that all allergy and medical information is up to date so we can support your child with care and confidence.

Eating Outside

We eat outside in all seasons. Children may need seasonally appropriate clothing to enjoy snack and mealtime comfortably, especially as the weather cools. Thin gloves can be helpful to keep hands warm and still enjoy their meal. Hand washing, or sanitizer is always available, and used before eating.

Mealtimes are unhurried and social—a time to rest, reset, connect, and enjoy the sights and sounds around us.

Food from the Garden

When seasonally available, children may be invited to taste herbs, vegetables, fruits, or flowers grown in our garden. These moments offer hands-on experiences in learning where food comes from and how to care for it. We are mindful of allergies, and always ensure children know they can say yes or no to tasting garden-grown food.

Litter-less Lunches


We encourage litter-less lunches—using reusable containers, beeswax wraps, and cloth napkins where possible. Any litter remaining from lunches will be sent home.

Celebrations and shared food

From time to time, we may invite families to contribute food for a seasonal celebration or special gathering. In these cases, we'll communicate clear guidelines in advance.

Natural Hazards Policy

At Wild Child Nature Project, we spend our days outdoors in nature, which means encountering the many wonders—and occasional challenges—it offers. We take a proactive approach to awareness, prevention, and education around these elements, helping children build both safety skills and a respectful relationship with the land.



Natural Hazards Continued

Tick Policy

Our time at WCNP is spent almost entirely outdoors in forests, meadows, and fields. The Spring, Summer and Fall months are peak times for ticks in our area, and as such, we take every reasonable precaution to prevent exposure to ticks for our staff, children, and families while on site. In an effort to reduce exposure to ticks we do, and encourage the following:

- We conduct daily tick checks with the children during program time, using a lint roller and visual inspections. We encourage families to check again at home.
- Children are encouraged to wear light coloured long sleeves and pants when appropriate.
- We recommend families apply a deet insect repellent on clothing before arriving, and including a preferred repellent for staff to reapply in the afternoon.
- Educators are familiar with safe tick removal procedures, and families will be notified if a tick is found on their child. Families can make follow care plans as necessary
- We encourage families to familiarize themselves with signs and symptoms of Lyme disease.

Stinging Insects Policy

Children are supported in developing awareness and calm responses around bees, wasps, and other stinging insects. We teach respectful observation and help children understand how to move gently and avoid disturbing nests. Staff are trained to respond to stings with appropriate first aid, and families will be notified if their child is stung. For children with known allergies, EpiPens must be provided and will be carried by staff at all times. Minor stings and bites may be treated with topical antihistamines, or natural itch relief.

Poison Ivy, Wild Parsnip, and Other Irritants Policy

We have identified several plant irritants on site, and are able to avoid them in our usual travel routes around the site. Children, are however gently taught to recognize and avoid plants like poison ivy, wild parsnip, and stinging nettle. Our staff regularly monitors the site and sets clear boundaries to keep children safe.

If contact does occur, the area is rinsed with soap and water, which is carried in our first aid back pack. Families are informed at pick up for minor contact. Any serious reactions are handled according to our first aid protocols.



Natural Hazards Continued

Weather Hazards Policy

Weather plays an important role in how and where we spend our days. We take into consideration temperature, precipitation, and winds when we make plans for each day.

High Heat and Humidity

Monitoring weather and temperature is part of our daily safety practice. In warmer months, if the forecast calls for temperatures of 37°C or higher, with or without humidity, for more than two hours of the program day, we may shorten the day or cancel the program to ensure everyone's well-being. A refund will not be offered for programs cancelled due to weather.

To prevent heat exhaustion and heat stroke, we take several precautions:

Hydration is prioritized. Fresh drinking water is always available, and children are encouraged to refill and drink regularly through scheduled hydration breaks.

We choose cool, shaded areas for play and rest as much as possible, adding water play into our day more often.

Children are closely observed throughout the day for any signs of overheating, and adjustments are made as needed to keep everyone safe and comfortable.

High winds, Thunder and Lightning, Tornado

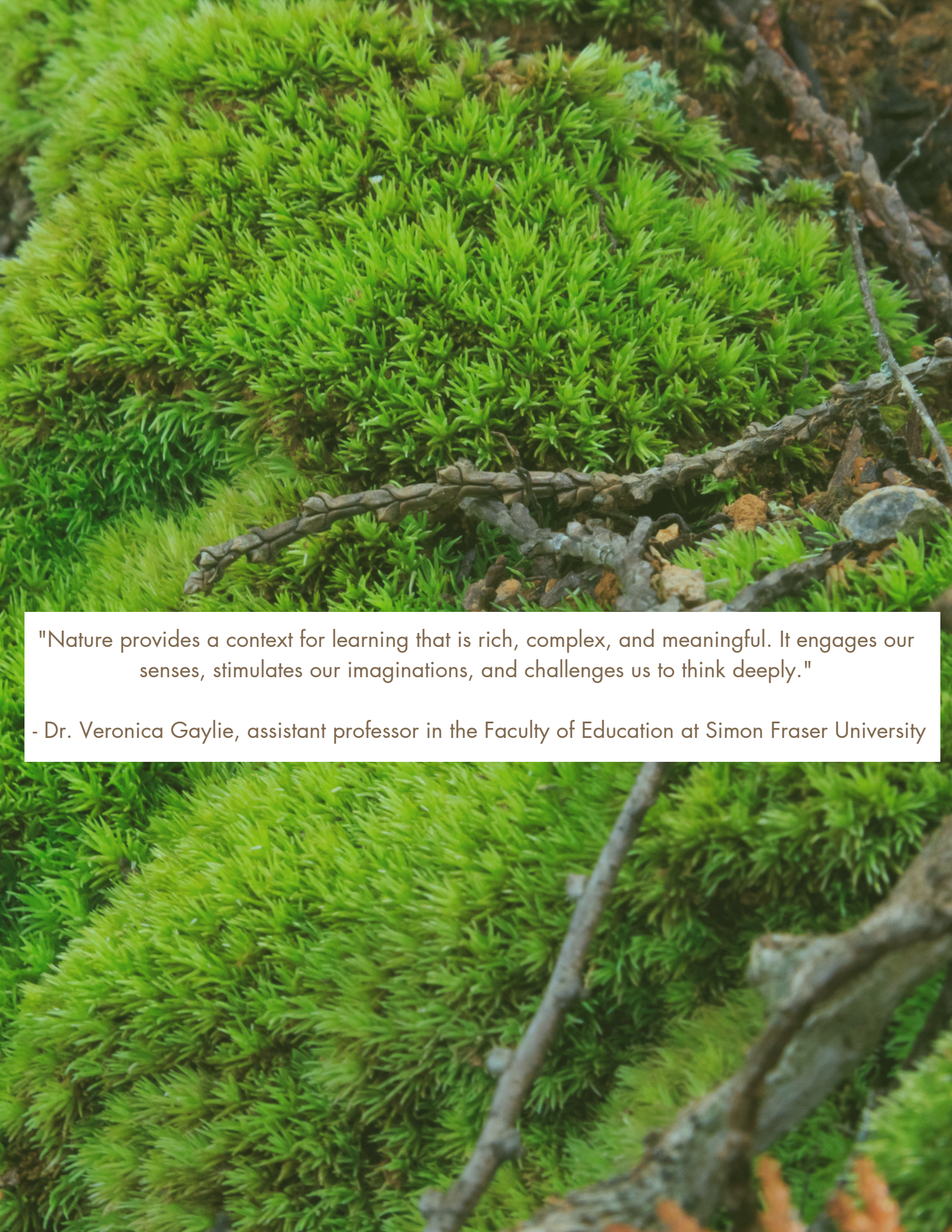
When extreme weather is forecasted or arises during the day, we adjust our plans to ensure children stay safe and sheltered. Play will take place near or under shelter so we can access protection quickly if needed.

In the case of high winds, we move to open areas away from overhanging branches and loose debris, or remain under sturdy shelter. If wind gusts reach 60 km/h or more, staff will assess conditions and may request early pick-up if safety is a concern.

If thunder is heard, we return to our main site where we are close to tents, shelters, and low-risk play areas. If lightning is seen, groups will relocate to an indoor location and families will be contacted for early pick-up.

If a tornado warning is in effect at any point during our day, we will shelter and call for immediate pick-up. Programs will be cancelled, if the warning is in place to start our day.

During all extreme weather, we remain sheltered until it is safe to resume outdoor play.



"Nature provides a context for learning that is rich, complex, and meaningful. It engages our senses, stimulates our imaginations, and challenges us to think deeply."

- Dr. Veronica Gaylie, assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University

Natural Hazards Continued

Winter Temperatures

We continue to play and learn on the land through all seasons. During the colder months we alternate our time between the outdoors and the warmth of our wood stove warmed tent. We want to create positive experiences with the outdoors, and that means allowing time to warm up, get dry and reset.

To keep children and staff safe and comfortable we encourage the following:

Dressing in three key layers:

A base layer to stay dry, a middle layer for warmth, a waterproof outer layer to protect from wind and snow.

Packing warm snacks, lunches and beverages when possible.

On cold days we adjust our plans. We stay closer to the tent for easy access to warmth, as needed.

Inclement Weather/Closure Policy

There may be times when winter weather makes travel to/from Wild Child Nature Project unsafe, and non essential travel is not recommended. When this occurs, programs for the day will be cancelled. We often follow the direction of STEO (The bus transportation authority for CDSBEO and UCDSB school boards in our area) for bus cancellations .

We will notify families by 7:30am if there are any program cancellations, please be sure to check your emails prior to leaving in the morning. Refunds will not be provided for days cancelled due to weather.



Health and Safety Continued

Child Protection Policies

Wild Child Nature Project is committed to the safety and well-being of all children in our care. We have a zero-tolerance policy for any form of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children. Abuse is defined as any act or omission that causes harm or threatens to cause harm to a child.

All staff members, volunteers, and contractors who work with children in our program are required to undergo a vulnerable sector check and provide references prior to working with children.

Child Abuse - Duty to Report

Under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, every person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may need protection must report the suspicion to Children's Aid Society. This includes persons who perform professional or official duties with respect to children, such as teachers, and/or operators and employees of childcare centres and programs.

Staff at Wild Child Nature Project have been made aware of and trained on the use of the Children's Aid Society's reporting procedures.

Child Pick up and Release

Upon registration caregivers will provide authorization in the form of name and contact number for one additional authorized pickup person. Should alternate arrangements need to be made, Wild Child Nature Project requires written (text or email) notice of the intended change. We always act in the best interest of the child. If there is ever any confusion or uncertainty, we will call the primary contact for clarification and follow the Unauthorized pick up procedure.

Child Protection Policies continued

Unauthorized pick-up Procedure

If someone other than a parent/guardian or authorized alternate pick-up person arrives to pick up a child and we have not been notified in advance by the authorized parent/guardian, we will call the primary contact for verbal authorization.

If the contact cannot be reached, the child will not be permitted to leave Wild Child Nature Project, until confirmation/approval has been received. A staff member will remain with the child until an authorized pick-up person arrives.

Custody Access to Children

Wild Child Nature Project respects the importance of both parents having equal access to a child, including any relevant information about the child's development, health, and welfare. Wild Child Nature Project can only deny the access of a parent when there is written documentation of a separation agreement or court order. These documents will need to be provided if we are asked to deny access.

Child Privacy

Your child's privacy is important to us. We take the following steps to ensure this privacy is always maintained.

Any personal data received will only be used to maintain accurate and up to date health and wellness records, primary and emergency contact information and any other agreed upon uses.

Information will not be shared with a third party, unless legally required to do so. A physical copy of pertinent health and safety information will be kept with staff everyday, and a record will be kept in house.

You will be asked to sign/agree to a media release consent form upon registration. Photos and videos will only be shared on WCNP media accounts with consent.



Administrative Policies

Our administrative policies help us run a safe, consistent, and responsive program for all families. Please review the following carefully, and feel free to reach out with any questions or clarifications.

Attendance & Absences

Regular attendance helps children feel settled and connected. If your child will be absent, please notify us as early as possible by phone (text) or email. Missed days are not refundable or transferable .

Drop-Off & Pick-Up

Please arrive on time to help your child transition smoothly into their day. We understand that on occasion, circumstances may cause a late pick up. We kindly ask that you reach out as soon as possible to let us know. Late pick-ups can result in a late fee to respect our staff's time.

Only authorized adults may pick up children; identification may be requested.

Communication

We value open and respectful communication. Program updates, weather alerts, and reminders are sent by email. We will communicate non urgent, daily updates at end of day pick-up. Please ensure your contact details are current. If you have concerns, we welcome conversation and aim to respond within 24–48 hours.

Registration, Payment & Fees

Registration must be completed; including Informed Consent and Assumption of Risk forms prior to a child participating in the program. Program fees must be paid according to the schedule outlined during registration. Late payments may result in a pause in attendance until the account is up to date. If your family is experiencing financial hardship, please contact us—we aim to be as supportive as possible.

If cost is a barrier, we warmly invite you to reach out. We will do our best to explore and support an accommodation to met your needs.

Administrative Policies Continued

Refund Policy

We understand that plans sometimes change, and we strive to be fair and transparent with our refund process while supporting the sustainability of our small program.

Withdrawals

If you withdraw your child before the start of the session, a partial refund may be issued, less a non-refundable administrative fee (outlined during registration).

Once a session has begun, refunds are not available except in exceptional circumstances (e.g., medical with documentation), and are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Cancellations & Weather Closures

Programs may be cancelled due to extreme weather, unsafe conditions, or unforeseen events. In these cases, we will notify families by email and/or phone as early as possible. Credits or make-up days may be offered at our discretion, but are not guaranteed.

Illness Policy

If your child is unwell (fever, vomiting, contagious illness, etc.), please keep them home to rest and recover. Children must be symptom-free for 24 hours before returning. If a child becomes ill during program hours, families will be contacted for early pick-up.

Missed Days

We are unable to offer refunds or make-up days for individual absences due to illness, travel, weather preferences, or other personal reasons. Our program runs rain, snow, or shine and is staffed and prepared in advance.

Privacy & Confidentiality

We respect your family's privacy. All personal information is stored securely and used only for program-related purposes. Staff are trained to uphold confidentiality and discretion in all interactions.

These policies are in place to create a stable, caring environment for children, families, and staff. Thank you for supporting the shared rhythms and responsibilities of our forest school community.

Ecological Impact statement

At Wild Child Nature Project, we are deeply aware that we are guests on this land. We believe that learning in nature comes with a responsibility to care for the land, its living creatures, and its rhythms with respect and intention.



Our program is guided by the principle of "**leave no trace, learn in place.**" We teach children to move gently through natural spaces, to observe before acting, and to take only what is needed—if anything at all.

We recognize that children learn through hands-on experiences—they may pick up a stick, gather leaves, or explore a fallen log. When something is picked or moved, we treat it as a moment for reflection and learning:

Why did we take this? Can we return it? What might the land need from us in return?

We know that "Leave no trace" does not always mean leaving no impact at all—being in nature will naturally leave footprints, impressions, and evidence of play. What it does mean is that we will strive to be thoughtful and gentle in our actions.

"Learn in place" reminds us to slow down and build a relationship with the land we're on, rather than constantly seeking novelty or change. It means returning to familiar spaces to notice how they evolve and what they can teach us. It is noticing seasonal rhythms; like frogs returning to the ponds, longer/shorter days, trees in full leaf, watching squirrels gather nuts in the fall.

By practicing care for the land each day, we hope to nurture a generation of children who are not only connected to nature—but who feel a deep sense of responsibility, gratitude, and belonging within it.



A Day at WCNP

We take each day as it comes and let the children's interests and curiosities lead the way

Play and Adventure



Risky play



Building Connections



Wonder and Curiosity

Get in Touch!

We can't wait to hear from you. Or better yet,
see you in the forest!



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[wildchild.natureproject](https://www.instagram.com/wildchild.natureproject)



[The Wild Child Nature Project](https://www.facebook.com/TheWildChildNatureProject)

