

nature

PRESCHOOL

Play • Learn • Grow



2021/2022
FAMILY HANDBOOK

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Surrey acknowledges the traditional and unceded land of the Katzie, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt, Semiahmoo, and Tsawwassen First Nations on which Nature Preschool gathers. We are grateful to be able to learn, teach and play on this land which Indigenous peoples have stewarded since time immemorial and continue to do so today.

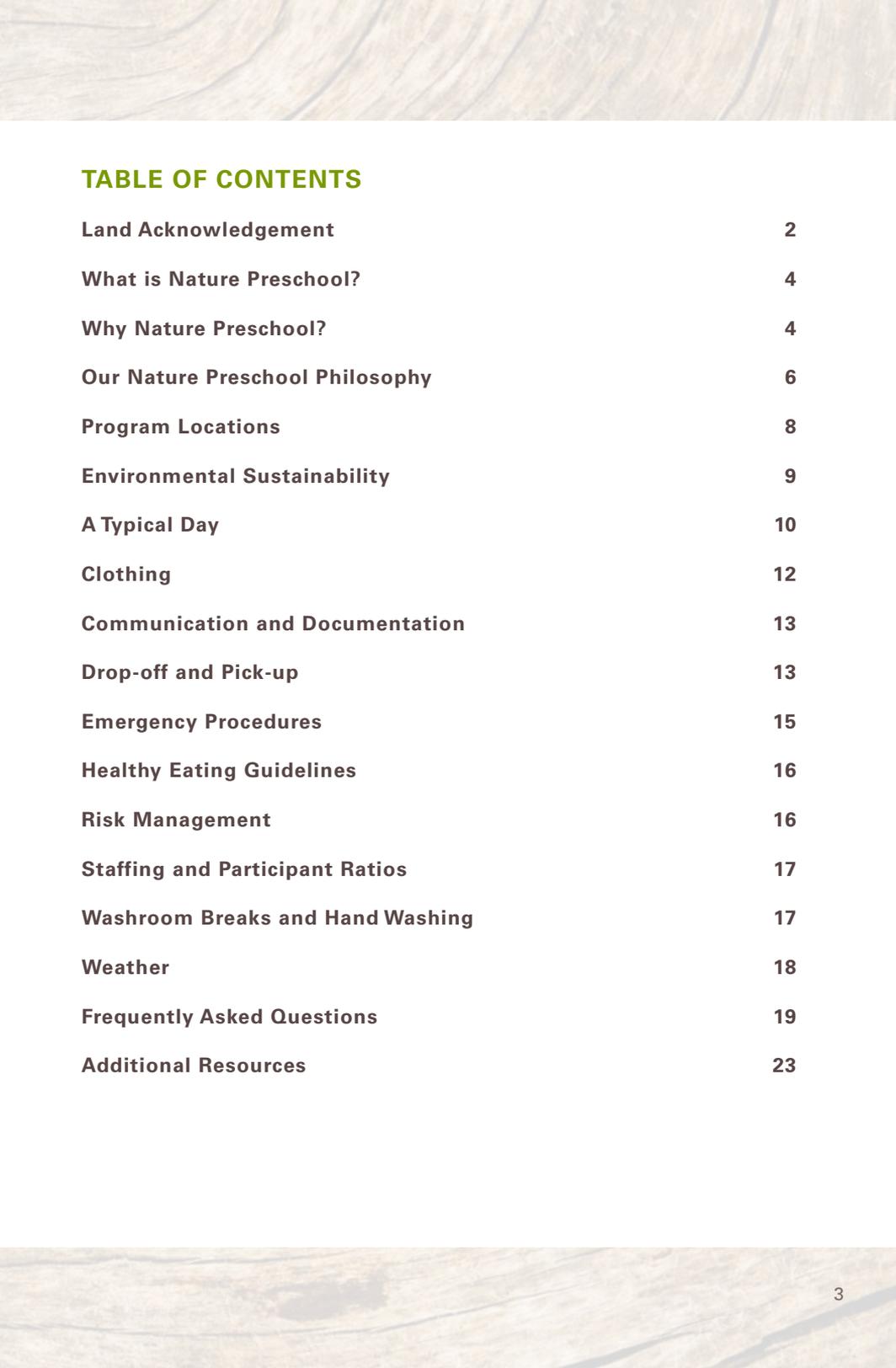
The page features a background of a light-colored wood grain texture. At the top, there is a horizontal band of a darker, more pronounced wood grain pattern. The main body of the page is white, and at the bottom, there is another horizontal band of the darker wood grain pattern.

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WHAT IS NATURE PRESCHOOL?

The concept of nature preschool started with the Forest School movement in the 1950s in several European countries, and has been gaining momentum in North America since the late 2000s. One of the many special features of a Nature Preschool is that all of the sessions are held in the same natural space over a period of time, allowing children to become very comfortable in and knowledgeable about the natural environment, and to build an ongoing relationship with it.

WHY NATURE PRESCHOOL?

There are many potential benefits of outdoor, play-based preschool, including:

- + Improved confidence, social skills, communication, motivation, and concentration
- + Improved physical stamina, fine and gross motor skills
- + Positive identity formation for individuals and communities
- + Increased knowledge of environment, increased frequency of visiting nature within families
- + Healthy and safe risk taking
- + Improved creativity and resilience
- + Improved academic achievement and self-regulation
- + Reduced stress and increased patience, self-discipline, capacity for attention and recovery from mental fatigue
- + Improved higher level cognitive skills

Source: Forest and Nature School in Canada, June 2014



Our Nature Preschool program follows the City of Surrey's Early Years Philosophy and BC's Early Learning Framework.

This handbook, an addendum to our Early Years Preschool Family Handbook, outlines some of the differences in policies and procedures and additional information for this specialized program. Please refer to both for a complete overview of the program.

OUR NATURE PRESCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

Our Nature Preschool program takes place almost exclusively outdoors in the rich learning environments of our urban park spaces. Children's experiences at Nature Preschool are shaped by what is happening around them in terms of the landscape and seasonal changes and their interest in them. As children become more comfortable in these natural environments, their relationship with the land and their connection to it grows.

Our educators are committed to honoring and respecting each child's individual learning styles, strengths and abilities. The responsive curriculum and collaborative learning process focus on all areas of healthy child development: social, emotional, physical, creative and cognitive.

Spending time in nature has many health benefits and together with our educators' guidance, each child is empowered to play, learn and grow in ways that will support them to reach their highest potential and prepare them to be active participants in their own learning.



We do this by:

- + Providing them with enough time and space to settle into deep and meaningful play.
- + Providing access to areas that allow them to assess risks and navigate physical challenges.
- + Providing additional tools and supplies to build on their interests, address their curiosities, and support them in developing important mathematical, artistic and literacy concepts.
- + Encouraging them to use their senses, be curious about their surroundings, notice seasonal changes over time, make observations, and explore the answers to their own questions.
- + Exploring the relationships between living and non-living things and increasing their knowledge and understanding of their relationship with the natural world.
- + Strengthening their awareness of environmental stewardship and fostering a sense of place.
- + Ensuring the learning is fun and that they are emotionally invested and actively engaged.
- + Taking on the role of facilitator and co-learner; closely observing, listening, posing questions, and introducing materials and activities to extend children's thinking.
- + Empowering them to confidently handle challenging situations, successfully navigate social-emotional conflict, and build confidence in themselves and each other.
- + Supporting them to understand, navigate and comprehend the expectations of the program, follow routines, recognize boundaries, and show respect for the land, the children and oneself.
- + Inspiring them to be critical thinkers, creative problem solvers and communicate their learning in creative and imaginative ways.

PROGRAM LOCATIONS

The Surrey Nature Centre

The Surrey Nature Centre is nestled in North Surrey's Green Timbers Park, British Columbia's "birthplace of reforestation". The site's second growth forest, arboretum, grove of Douglas-fir trees, tall grass meadow, grass fields, large hill, nature trails and Quibble Creek, provide a rich learning environment and abundant places to explore. The program has access to washrooms and Dogwood Room classroom in the Nature Centre's main building as needed.

Redwood Park

Redwood Park is located just south of 20 Avenue at 180 Street in South Surrey. It is the legacy of the tree-loving Brown brothers. The magnificent arboretum of over 50 different species of trees and the five towering groves offer year-round interest as the trees change through the seasons. Trails winding through these groves, forest and meadows provide infinite possibilities for wonder and play. The program uses the park's public washrooms and covered picnic shelters but does not have access to indoor space.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Surrey has long been a leader in urban forest management and environmental stewardship. We monitor the impact that our presence has on the park's natural environment and have a plan to limit our impact and make improvements. Our program finds meaningful and responsible ways to connect with place while staying on trails and open lawn, and in designated outdoor classroom areas.

Environmental stewardship is an integral part of the curriculum. Educators will engage children in discussion around how to interact with the natural world in respectful and caring ways. With time, and as their relationship with place strengthens, children will care for the spaces they play and learn now, and well into the future.

A TYPICAL DAY

While each day of Nature Preschool differs, we maintain a rhythm that children can look forward to and a structure that is flexible and sets program participants up to succeed. Our days are not rushed but are full of wonder, play, exploration and an appreciation of the natural world.

ARRIVAL: Children meet in a designated outdoor space where they are free to play and explore as they await the arrival of other program participants.

WELCOME CIRCLE: This is an opportunity for everyone to connect, share thoughts and ideas, reflect on previous experiences, and review important guidelines. Educators may introduce stories, songs or activities that scaffold on the children's interests, extend learning, and inspire new ideas, questions and curiosities for the day.

OUTDOOR EXPLORATION: The group packs up and explores other areas of the park that offer new challenges and different opportunities for play. We take advantage of unplanned learning opportunities such as an eagle flying overhead, a slug crossing our path, an unexpected puddle, or new life emerging from the forest floor.

FREE PLAY: Loose parts and natural materials such as cones, sticks, rocks, seed pods and leaves provide for open-ended play where children’s imaginations and creativity can thrive. Loose parts can be counted, sorted, compared, used to create ephemeral art and patterns on the forest floor, or as props in children’s imaginative play. The dynamic nature of these outdoor spaces, together with their uneven ground, slopes, hills and slippery logs provide ample opportunities for the safe and healthy risk taking that is integral to the program.

SNACKTIME: Educators assess the group’s energy in deciding when to interrupt their play for snack. They gather to wash hands, eat their food, have intimate conversations, and connect as a group. Educators can introduce stories or prompt discussions that relate to the experiences of the day. It is a wonderful opportunity for sharing, communicating knowledge and activating children’s motivation to learn more.

GROUP PLAY/REFLECTION TIME: Educators may introduce activities, games or materials that focus the children’s learning, or allow them to burn off surplus energy before coming together at the end of the day. Educators make time for reflection through journaling, art, creative expression, and independent time in sit-spots.

TRANSITION/CLEAN UP TIME: A team effort is made to collect supplies or materials and to pack up personal belongings. The group hikes back to the designated pick-up location where they are invited to practise gratitude for the spaces they have played in and friends they have played with before they transition back home.

CLOTHING

The program takes place almost exclusively outdoors. Part of the learning experience of Nature Preschool is assessing weather and properly dressing for it. When children are dressed appropriately, the barrier of discomfort is removed, allowing them to freely enjoy their outdoor experience, focus on their play and be successful.

Children need to come prepared for our seasonal weather. Dressing in layers is best. Depending on the weather and activity, both of which can change without much notice, children can choose to add or remove layers to maximize their comfort. Consider a fitted base layer such as wool, a middle insulating layer such as fleece, and an outer waterproof shell. New outdoor gear can be expensive; secondhand is a great option.

- + long-sleeved shirt
- + wool or fleece sweater
- + long pants
- + long socks to cover ankles (wool socks will insulate even when wet)
- + hat
- + lined/insulated waterproof gloves (not mittens)
- + waterproof rain pants and jacket
- + waterproof hiking shoes (lined/insulated waterproof boots on wet/cold days)

Children are responsible for carrying their own waterproof backpack with the following:

- + healthy snack
- + refillable water bottle
- + complete change of clothes, including socks and underwear (in a Ziploc bag)
- + 1-2 extra pairs of gloves (when applicable)
- + sunscreen (when applicable)

Please label all items and clothing sent to Nature Preschool. This helps to keep everyone's items organized and ensure they return home at the end of the day.



COMMUNICATION AND DOCUMENTATION

Maintaining a strong relationship with families is an important part of supporting the children in our program. We value open, two-way communication and strive to keep families up to date with children's day-to-day experiences at Nature Preschool.

Educators document children's learning and development with photos, stories, art and reflection throughout the year. Parents/caregivers will receive this at the end of the year as well as various art and other pieces of children's work throughout the year.

DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP

Our morning welcome is a special transition time from home life into the world of Nature Preschool and should not be rushed. It's our time to greet everyone and collaboratively plan for the day. Please allow enough time for your child to use the washroom and get fully dressed before sign-in.

In the same way, our end-of-day closing is also important as it's our time to pack up, reflect on our learning, and show gratitude for the day.

We appreciate every effort in ensuring your child is able to participate in these gatherings. Educators will designate an area for sign-in and -out to reduce distractions during these times.



EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Lockdown

In the event of a potential nearby threat, staff will direct children to a safe location away from the source of the threat as per the direction of the RCMP.

Earthquake

If the group is outdoors during an earthquake, staff will direct children to get low to the ground, crouch, and protect their head and neck from flying debris.

If the group is indoors during an earthquake, staff will direct children to take cover, crouch under a table, desk or along a wall, and protect their head and neck from flying debris.

After the earthquake, staff will prepare children for aftershocks, check themselves and children for injuries, and lead children to a designated meeting place.

Evacuation

In the event of an emergency facility evacuation (e.g., fire, gas leak, bomb threat), regardless of being indoors or outdoors, staff will immediately lead children to a designated meeting place.

HEALTHY EATING GUIDELINES

Families are encouraged to pack healthy, litterless snacks while also being mindful of the size and weight of reusable containers. Children are responsible for carrying their own backpacks and packing out their litter. While educators support children with their snacks, they're also building independence within children. Including your child in snack preparation provides an opportunity to learn about healthy eating and responsible packaging, and to practise opening and closing containers.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Nature Preschool takes place in public parks which are very dynamic spaces. Staff conduct daily site checks to remove garbage, scan for hazards and identify risks prior to each class.

Risk is an integral part of the program and will be woven in as part of the curriculum. Assessing and managing risk is an important part of healthy child development.

We recognize that children will have different experiences and comfort levels with the outdoors. We will be sensitive to this and observe children carefully to gauge their needs, so that all children can successfully connect with nature and enjoy their time outdoors. We will help them to safely and gradually push their limits—for some children this may mean climbing a tree and for others it may mean getting wet or muddy!

It is the parents'/caregivers' responsibility to understand the risks associated with our unique Nature Preschool program.

STAFFING AND PARTICIPANT RATIOS

A minimum of two educators (including at least one certified Early Childhood Educator) lead the program. Both have a keen interest in nature and bring their passion and expertise to the program. A staff:participant ratio of 1:8 is in place to ensure quality and safety.

All educators are certified in First Aid and CPR and are trained in the City of Surrey Community Recreation Services policies and procedures for situational and emergency management. Educators also receive additional training related to outdoor play and nature interpretation.

At times, volunteers will assist with daily activities. Volunteers are required to go through the City of Surrey's volunteer application process.

Police Information Checks are a prerequisite for employment for all staff and volunteers working with children.

WASHROOM BREAKS AND HAND WASHING

Washroom breaks take place indoors. Due to the nature of the program, program activities could be some distance from the washroom. To help minimize transitions and interruptions to our play, parents/caregivers are asked to take their child to the washroom prior to sign-in.

Educators ensure children wash their hands with soap and water after washroom breaks and before eating snack. Educators carry a carafe of warm water, a spray bottle of soap and towel to allow handwashing outdoors. They also carry hand sanitizer for when hands are not visibly dirty but do require additional cleaning in between hand washing.

WEATHER

Changing seasonal weather inspires a lot of our play and learning. Children are required to dress appropriately to enable them to participate fully in all weather conditions.

Staff regularly monitor weather forecasts and conditions and follow City of Surrey guidelines for programming in wind and other adverse weather. While staff adapt the program accordingly, in some cases inclement weather may result in class cancellations or relocation.

Air Quality: When moderate-high air quality advisories are in effect, educators will reduce physical outdoor activities and schedule more time indoors. If sufficient indoor space is not available, the class may be cancelled. In the case of very high air quality advisories, the class will be moved indoors or cancelled.

Extreme Cold: While snow and ice provide new opportunities for play and learning, safety is the priority. Forecasts of -6°C or below (including windchill) require a heated, walled shelter for respite in order for the class to go ahead. If a heated, walled shelter is not available, the class will either be moved to an alternate location or be cancelled.

Sun and Extreme Heat: Children should have sunscreen applied prior to the start of class by their parent/caregiver. Educators model sun safety behaviour and include sun safety education as part of the program. In the case of extreme heat (30°C and above), educators will seek out shade and schedule increased indoor water breaks throughout the program. If sufficient shade or indoor space is not available, the class may be cancelled.

Lightning: If lightning is forecasted and there is no indoor space to take shelter, the class will either be moved to an alternate location that can provide this or be cancelled.

Wind: In the case of a wind-related weather alert, statement or advisory issued by Environment Canada, the class may be relocated within the park, moved indoors or cancelled. In the event of a wind-related weather warning issued by Environment Canada, the class will be moved indoors or cancelled.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How can we prepare for Nature Preschool?

Families are encouraged to visit the park prior to the start of the program. This will help to familiarize yourself and your child with the space and facilities. At times, our play can be some distance from washrooms. All children entering preschool should be toilet trained. Refer to How to Prepare for Nature Preschool for more detail.

What type of rain gear/gloves/boots do you recommend and where can I buy them?

Dressing appropriately for the weather will ensure that your child is comfortable and ready to learn. New outdoor gear can be expensive; looking for things secondhand is a great option. Your child's educator can help you decide on what gear is worth the investment and suggest some options on where to buy them.

How much time is spent outdoors?

The program takes place almost exclusively outdoors, throughout all seasons and weather conditions. The program uses indoor washrooms and will only access an indoor space in the event of inclement weather such as extreme heat, extreme cold, lightning or wind-related alerts and warnings.

What happens if it rains or snows?

Seasonal weather inspires much of our play and learning. Experiencing the park throughout all seasons provides new learning opportunities and strengthens children's sense of place. We explore how wildlife adapt to stay warm and dry and relate it to concepts familiar to the children. We seek shelter from the rain under trees and/or picnic shelters and can even set up tarps. We play active games to keep our bodies moving and warm. Children learn how to dress appropriately for the weather and manage their comfort in it.

Do classes ever get cancelled due to inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances?

Yes, while every effort is made to adapt the program accordingly, inclement weather (e.g., wind and lightning) and other unforeseen circumstances can result in class cancellations or relocation.

In the event of snow, classes at the Redwood Park location may be relocated to an alternate park as Redwood Park's parking lot can become inaccessible.

How will we be notified of class cancellations?

Families will be notified by email and/or phone. While we do our best to provide families with as much notice as possible, cancellations can happen the morning of.

Will we be refunded for any cancelled classes?

Refunds will be issued for any cancelled classes. A credit will be applied to your City of Surrey account and can be applied to future registrations, or you can request that the amount be refunded back to the credit card on file.

How will nature preschool prepare my child for kindergarten?

Nature Preschool develops the foundational skills needed for success in kindergarten. Some of the foundational skills are coordination (e.g., balancing and jumping), fine motor skills (e.g., holding a crayon with proper pencil grasp), classification (e.g., grouping leaves based on shape, colour, or size), language skills (e.g., rhyming and storytelling), literacy and numeracy (e.g., recognizing letters and numbers), and social competence (e.g., turn-taking, decision-making, and self-regulation).

Play is an integral part of developing kindergarten-readiness and is the basis of our Nature Preschool curriculum.

What happens if my child is sick or away and misses a day?

Families should notify staff when their child is expected to miss a class. Refunds are not provided for any missed classes.

How many other children are there? How many teachers are there?

The program can have up to 16 children, has a ratio of one educator to eight children and operates with a minimum of two educators regardless of registration numbers. Refer to Staffing and Participant Ratios for more detail.

Can parents/caregivers attend? If yes, can I bring my other child (their sibling)?

Yes, parents/caregivers can attend. This is approached on a case-by-case basis. It is strongly recommended that siblings do not attend.

Will my child be given priority enrollment for next year’s program if they are enrolled this year? Are siblings given priority enrollment?

The City of Surrey does not have a priority enrollment process. All families are required to register online, in person or over the phone each year.

How much does the program cost?

The program follows the City of Surrey’s Fees and Charges. Refer to our online registration system for the most up to date cost of the program.

Can I make monthly payments?

Yes, the City of Surrey offers a scheduled payment option. Contact your local facility or the City’s Call Centre at 604-501-5100 to arrange.

Can I register my child for just one day a week?

No, daily or part-time registration is not available for this program.

Can I register my child in both the Monday/Wednesday/Friday and Tuesday/Thursday programs?

Yes, you can register your child in both programs.

Where do I drop-off and pick-up my child?

Prior to the program start, you will be notified of the designated meeting place for your program’s drop-off and pick-up location. In the event where a class is relocated due to inclement weather, you will be notified of an alternate meeting place in advance. Refer to Drop-off and Pick-up for more detail.

What if I need to pick my child up early or drop them off late?

Our morning welcome and end-of-day closing are an important part of the program, and we appreciate every effort in assuring that your child is able to participate in these gatherings. Families should notify staff in advance of when they expect to pick their child up early or drop them off late. In the event where it is unplanned, please call the Surrey Nature Centre Front Desk (for the Surrey Nature Centre location) and your educator directly (for the Redwood Park location) on the day to arrange a time and meeting place.

How long does the Nature Preschool program run?

Nature Preschool is a year-long program beginning in September and ending in June. The program aligns its winter and spring breaks and professional development days with the Surrey school district's calendar. In some years, the City will program Nature Preschool day camps over these breaks as well as the summer. Check the City's online registration system for the most up-to-date schedule.

At what point does my child have to be the minimum age to register?

They will have to turn the minimum age by December of the program year.

Do you have an indoor facility as a backup?

The Surrey Nature Centre program has access to the Dogwood Room classroom inside the main building of the Surrey Nature Centre. The Redwood Park program has access to covered picnic shelters in Redwood Park and will relocate to an alternate park with a building should an indoor space be required.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

childnature.ca

childnature.ca/Active-Outdoor-Play-Position-Statement.pdf

childrenandnature.org

naturalcuriosity.ca

richardlouv.com

davidsobelauthor.com

davidssuzuki/microbes-biodiversity-and-the-benefits-of-getting-dirty

outdoorplaycanada.ca

nature

PRESCHOOL

Play • Learn • Grow

WHALLEY

Surrey Nature Centre

14225 GreenTimbers Way | 604-502-6065

SOUTH SURREY

Redwood Park

17900 20 Avenue | 604-592-2605

This location is coordinated through
Kensington Prairie Community Centre
16824 32 Avenue

In Partnership with: Surrey Parks | Recreation Surrey

surrey.ca/preschool

