

nature

PRESCHOOL

Play • Learn • Explore



PARENT HANDBOOK

What is a Nature Preschool?

The concept of nature-based, outdoor learning 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 area over a period of time, allowing participants to become very comfortable in and knowledgeable about their play space.

Why a Nature Preschool?

There are many benefits of an 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



About Our Nature Preschools

Our preschool programs are developed as the educator actively listens and observes children in play. Observations inspire meaningful experiences, allowing children to explore their ideas and engage with others. Creating a collaborative approach to learning gives everyone a voice. Making connections to nature is the first step toward learning about the natural world and becoming a steward of the environment.

Our Nature Preschool programs run almost exclusively outdoors and use nature as a venue for play and exploration in all seasons, strengthening the connection between children and the natural world. During every session children and educators have many opportunities for unplanned natural learning such as when an eagle soars overhead or a slug crosses their path.

A responsive curriculum focuses on all areas of healthy child development: social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive. It is our hope to inspire exploration, critical thinking, creativity and community.

Our Nature Preschools follow the City of Surrey's Early Years Philosophy of a responsive curriculum.

More details of our Early Years Philosophy can be found in the Preschool Parent Handbook.

Reflection & Mindfulness

As Early Childhood Educators, we are reflective in our practice. We do this by reviewing with the children the work that we do together every day. We also work to inspire reflectiveness through journaling, different art forms, creative expression and independent time with sit spots. In our sit spots we encourage quiet time for reflection on the day's experiences.

We also begin everyday with stretching, songs or chants that help connect us with our own bodies, minds and with the environment.

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is important to us. We monitor the impact that our presence has on the park's environment, and have a plan to limit our impact and make improvements. We will engage children in discussions around care for the environment and involve them in stewardship activities.

Weather

Exploring nature can happen in all types of weather. Children will be required to dress appropriately and be prepared to participate fully.

Our Nature Preschool will operate rain or shine.

Staff closely monitor weather forecasts and conditions, and follow City of Surrey guidelines for programming in wind and other adverse weather conditions.

Risk Management

Safety is a priority. Staff will carry out environment checks prior to each session. They will visit the site, scan for hazards and identify risks. That being said, risk is an integral part of the program and will be woven in as part of the curriculum.

We recognize that children will come to us with 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 outside. We will help them to safely and gradually push their limits – for some children this may mean climbing a tree, for others it may mean getting wet or muddy!

All parents must read and sign all risk and liability forms and waivers.

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

Staffing

Two Early Childhood Educators lead this program. Nature Preschool Instructors are certified as Early Childhood Educators/Assistants. Both teachers have a keen interest in nature and bring their passion and expertise to the program.

The staff-to-child ratio is 1:8.

All staff hold current First Aid and CPR certificates and are trained in the City's Community Recreation Services policies and procedures for situational and emergency management. Police Information Checks are a prerequisite for employment for all staff working with children.

A Typical Day

Each day, participants meet in a designated outdoor location and gather with a welcome song and sensory wakeup activity. Although staff will have a plan for the day, activities are largely based on children's interests. Our instructors support children's inquiry by giving them time and space to make their own discoveries.

Activities will involve natural materials daily and may also include stories, arts, problem solving, exploration and imaginative play. Examples include creating patterns or art on the forest floor, sorting and counting natural materials, the use of bug jars and magnifiers to take a closer look at nature's tiniest discoveries, or finding the symbol for a letter in a tree's bark!

Each day will look a little different while still maintaining a subtle routine.

Welcome Gathering
Play and Exploration
Snack
Play and Exploration Continued
Gathering and Reflection

Preparing for Nature Preschool

CLOTHING & NECESSITIES

The program takes place almost exclusively outdoors. A commonly heard phrase in Nature Preschools is "There is no poor weather, only poor clothing."

When people are dressed properly, the barrier of discomfort is removed, allowing everyone to freely enjoy the outdoor experience. Part of the learning experience of Nature Preschool is assessing weather and properly dressing for it. Participants need to come prepared for our seasonal weather.

Dressing in warm clothes and layers as necessary, every child will need daily:

- + Waterproof boots
- + Waterproof jacket
- + Waterproof pants
- + Gloves (not mittens)
- + Small waterproof backpack to carry:
- + Refillable water bottle
- + Snack
- + A complete change of clothes, including socks and underwear

Each child will be responsible for carrying their own pack.

LABELING

Please label all items of clothing, bags and backpacks. This helps to keep everyone's items organized.

SNACK

Nature Preschool participants enjoy their snacks outside. To minimize our impact on the environment, please try to send litter-free snacks whenever possible.

A parent orientation will be held prior to the start of the program.

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HOW TO REACH US

NORTH SURREY

Surrey Nature Centre

14225 Green Timbers Way | 604-502-6065

SOUTH SURREY

Redwood Park

17900 20 Avenue | 604-592-6961

In Partnership with: Surrey Parks | Recreation Surrey

surrey.ca/preschool

