

RPNS FOREST AND NATURE School Program

Parent Handbook



The world's forests are a shared stolen treasure that we must put back for our children's future. *Desmond Tutu*

Defining Forest School

How is it different from other outdoor learning experiences?

Forest School is different from other outdoor learning experiences in two ways. First, Forest School takes place in the same setting on a regular basis over an extended period of time. This gives students the opportunity to learn a great deal about the area and enables them to develop a lasting connection with nature.

Second, while there are some structured elements, the Forest School curriculum is largely emergent, child-directed, and play-based. The ethos of Forest School allows learners the time and space to develop their interests, skills, and understanding through practical, hands-on experiences. At Forest School, young people have the freedom to explore, play, build, create, imagine, and use their senses to experience the outdoor environment and engage with one another. Sustainability is woven into the culture of the classroom, and as nature becomes the third teacher, sustainability becomes the foundation on which both children and teachers stand.

At Forest School, there is a strong emphasis on educators observing, learning with, and teaching students in the context of the environment. This process of observation allows children the space and opportunity to delve into various activities and experiences guided by their imagination, rather than explicit, external direction. It also leads to a process of inquiry in which educators' primary role is to ask a multitude of questions based on what is emerging from a student's questions, experiences, and imagination. The guiding principle at Forest School is that children are competent, **capable** and engaged learners, and with guidance and support, are able to lead their own learning process in directions far beyond what an educator can initiate on their own.

Principles of Forest and Nature School:

- *takes place in a variety of spaces, including local forests, creeks, meadows, prairie grasses, mountains, shorelines, tundra, natural playgrounds, and outdoor classrooms.*
- *is a long-term process of regular and repeated sessions in the same natural space.*
- *is rooted in building an on-going relationship to place and on principles of place-based education.*
- *is rooted in and supports building engaged, healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities.*
- *aims to promote the holistic development of children and youth.*
- *views children and youth as competent and capable learners.*
- *supports children and youth, with a supportive and knowledgeable educator, to identify, co-manage and navigate risk. Opportunities to experience risk is seen as an integral part of learning and healthy development.*
- *requires qualified Forest and Nature School practitioners who are rooted in and committed to FNS pedagogical theory and practical skills.*
- *requires that educators play the role of facilitator rather than expert.*
- *uses loose, natural materials to support open-ended experiences.*
- *the process is as valued as the outcome.*

- requires that educators utilize emergent, experiential, inquiry-based, play-based, and place-based learning approaches.

Taken from: "Forest and Nature School in Canada Guide" pub Forest School Canada, July 2014



EXPLORATION AND POSSIBLE OUTCOMES!

We will be exploring the forested area at the back of the church property (called Otterson Park); walks to other nearby natural spaces; and the shoreline of the Rideau River.

Learning Outcomes in Forest School ~

- appreciation for nature (why worms are good for the environment)
- fine and gross motor skills (moving rocks)
- cooperation with peers (building a fort with branches)
- using all our senses (finding animal tracks in the snow and "Sit Spots")
- learning new skills (tying knots in ropes)
- taking risks (climbing trees)



Risky Play in Forest School

Avoiding hazards and risks is often deemed necessary as a means of avoiding injury, litigation, and insurance claims, as well as keeping children “safe”. These assumptions are fueled by societal norms that now view overprotection as a fundamental part of the role adults should play as they care for children.

Avoiding all risks and hazards comes at a great cost *as healthy risk plays an important role in the development of the child*. “An exaggerated safety focus of children’s play is problematic because while on the one hand children should avoid injuries, on the other they might need challenges and varied stimulation to develop normally, both physically and mentally” (Kennair & Sandseter, 2011). As our children tell us that they want to experience age-appropriate risk through their every effort to climb trees, jump rocks, run down hills, build shelters, and get their hands full of mud, *how* do educators in Forest and Nature School programs begin to support and navigate healthy and age-appropriate risks?

The first step is to acknowledge children’s competencies and capacity to navigate risks and hazards, and that recognizing and experiencing risk in childhood is a fundamental component of healthy development and learning. In doing so, we are setting the stage for children to begin navigating risk in healthy and controlled doses. Additionally, FNS supports children as they learn to self-regulate: as children experience more risky activities and terrain, they learn to determine for themselves whether something feels safe or not, rather than look externally to adults to decide this for them.

Secondly, in Forest and Nature School risk management is viewed as a fundamental skill needed for young people’s safety and well-being. It is through risk management that we are then invited into a world where we can be supported to experience risk in their day to day. Educators have a duty of care towards young people, and therefore have responsibility not only to keep young people safe, but also to enable them to learn to manage appropriate risks for themselves.

In FNS, it’s very important to engage children in calculated, age-appropriate, purposeful and meaningful levels of risk. This is both an art and a science, and an educator spends a significant amount of time in the “Forest and Nature School Practitioners Course” developing appropriate policies and procedures to communicate this to their community at large. This process is, and should be, dynamic and revisited on a regular basis.

Taken from; “Forest and Nature School in Canada Guide” pub Forest School Canada, July 2014



RPNS FOREST SCHOOL SCHEDULE (flexible)

<i>time</i>	<i>location</i>	<i>activities</i>
8:30 am (8:00 am for Before Care children)	Screening table near entrance to RPNS	As per our Covid-19 Pandemic Protocols, all children are screened prior to starting in the program. Temperature check and screening questions answered by parent/guardian. Children keep their backpacks with them. Parents/guardians cannot enter the building. It is important to toilet your child at home just prior to leaving for nursery school.
8:35 am to 10:00 am	RPNS Forest School (wooded area at back of church parking lot)	*forest explorations and uninterrupted play *tool use *creative arts using natural material *physical challenges *Sit spot
10:00 am to 10:45 am	Nature Room (indoors room 8)	*hand washing/toileting SNACK TIME *circle time and further research/reflection of outdoor experiences
10:45 am to Noon (or 12:30 for After Care children)	RPNS Outdoor classroom or explorations along Rideau River/Mooney's Bay pond	*explorations *physical challenges *pick up children from Outdoor Classroom



BACKPACK ITEMS

Children will be bringing their backpacks with them to the forest. This will ensure that they will have access to all needed items (such as bug spray) and it promotes the skill of 'responsibility'. Parents/guardians are encouraged to have their child participate in packing needed items at home. This way children know exactly where the items are in their backpack and they can identify their own items. LABEL everything please! Your child needs to be dressed accordingly to the weather conditions (see 'Dressing for Outdoor Weather!' below).

Kindly ensure that you and your child have packed the following items every day:

- a change of extra clothes (right down to the underwear!) Make sure the change of clothes is seasonally appropriate.
- Water bottle
- Indoor shoes
- Extra socks
- Extra mitts/ extra snow pants if not quick dry (in winter)
- Sunscreen and bug spray (for fall and spring)
- Lip balm (especially for winter)

DRESSING FOR OUTDOOR WEATHER!

Note: Children should be able to dress themselves with whatever clothing you provide. We can zip and snap. Please test out your gear beforehand.

Dressing for the Early Fall:

- Rain gear [waterproof boots, pants, jacket]. We provide 'muddy buddies'.
- Water proof boots
- Sun hat
- Long sleeved shirt and pants ~ we provide long sleeved sun shirts
- Socks and shoes (no sandals)
- Pack extra socks

Dressing for the Late Fall:

- Rain gear [waterproof boots, pants, jacket]. We provide 'muddy buddies'.
- Water proof boots
- Winter hat
- Warm Jacket [fleece or other breathable fabric ideal]
- Pack extra socks

Dressing for the Winter:

- Winter hat [must cover ears and stay on the head]
- neck warmer [no scarves please due to risk of strangulation]
- Two pairs of warm, waterproof mitts (make sure they are child sized)
- One warm, waterproof snowsuit
- One set of warm, waterproof boots (should be big enough for child to wiggle their toes)
- Wool socks
- Three base layers: thermal shirt and pants, middle layer, wool/fleece sweater [cotton is not recommended for cold weather conditions]

Warm, good quality outdoor clothing can be pricey, so check out second hand stores (Boomerang Kids) or online places like kijji and usedottawa.com

During cold weather please consider the following factors when dressing your child:

- 1) **Insulation:** Natural fabrics such as wool or silk work well as an inner layer, as does fleece. Polyester pyjamas are another good option. The key for this layer is to wick moisture away from the skin and insulate it with a breathable layer.
- 2) **Middle Layer:** This is another insulation layer that creates 'dead-air space' between skin and the elements. This airspace helps in keeping warm. Wool sweaters (Merino wool is exceptionally warm and soft on sensitive skin) and fleece tend to work well.
- 3) **Outer Shell:** This layer should be waterproof and wind-proof, as well as breathable.



Dressing for the Early Spring:

- Rain gear [waterproof boots, pants, jacket] ~ we provide 'muddy buddies'
- Water proof boots
- Light weight hat or sun hat
- Long sleeved shirts and long pants (no shorts)
- Spring Jacket [fleece or other breathable fabric ideal]
- Pack extra socks

Dressing for the Late Spring:

- Rain gear [waterproof boots, pants, jacket] ~ we provide 'muddy buddies'
- Water proof boots
- Socks and shoes (no sandals)
- sun hat
- Long sleeved shirts and long pants (no shorts) ~ we provide long sleeved sun shirts
- Pack extra socks

TOILETING IN THE FOREST

Parents may ask “What if my child needs to use the washroom while participating in Forest School?”.

We have scheduled one washroom routine in the morning right before snack time. Parents should encourage their children to use the toilet at home right before leaving for nursery school. When we are in the forest and a child says that they need to pee, then they pee in the forest! Children use a designated area away from the play. Boys have it easier and can simply pee standing up by a tree. For girls and boys (who prefer to sit) we set up an outdoor ‘toilet’. Tissues and handwipes are provided.



Insects- Yes, there are bugs in the forest!

Unfortunately, you cannot enjoy the forest without encountering biting insects! This is why we need to be properly dressed for the forest and need to apply bug spray. Parents are encouraged to apply bug spray to their child prior to Forest School and to ensure that the bug spray is in the child’s backpack. RPNS will apply a natural spray to the children when needed.

RPNS Bug Spray

Ingredients:

Witch hazel

Water

Vegetable glycerin

Citronella oil/ Eucalyptus oil

For information on ticks, visit Ottawa Public Health website:

<http://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/lyme-disease.aspx>

Food for Thought!

This change, signified by many teachers and parents withdrawing their children from parks, streets and community facilities, is predominantly fed by a culture of fear, insecurity and litigation. This is in light of current childhood research that states by not allowing children to participate in the life of their communities, teachers and parents are denying children the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and experience to be safe and confident to confront the challenges complex urban environments now present for them.

—Malone, *Place-Based Pedagogies in Early Childhood and Primary School Settings* (2012, p. 2)

Resources

Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play: <https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/B.-EN-Active-Outdoor-Play-Position-Statement-FINAL-DESIGN.pdf>

Risk Reframing Tool for Parents: www.outsideplay.ca

Lawson Foundation: Outdoor Play Strategy: <http://lawson.ca/our-approach/impact-areas/healthy-active-children/outdoor-play-strategy>

<https://scienmag.com/children-who-play-outside-more-likely-to-protect-nature-as-adults/>

<http://www.nature-play.co.uk/>

<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/2020/06/18/covid-19-and-childrens-play/>

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