

OTTAWA FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL

Fall – Winter – Spring Handbook



With grateful acknowledgement to Child and Nature Alliance Canada (CNAC) for their generosity, commitment and belief that all children benefit from spending time in the forest.

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ABOUT US





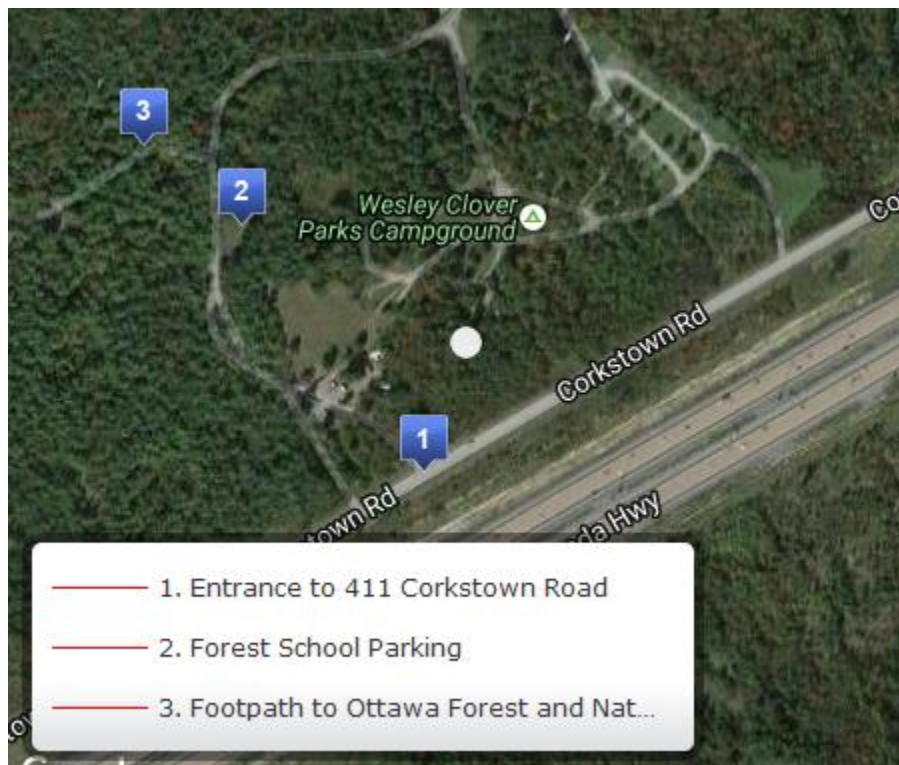
About Ottawa Forest & Nature School

Forest and Nature School programs adhere to two principles, which distinguish them from other outdoor and environmental education programs:

- regular and repeated access to a natural space
- child-directed, emergent and inquiry-based learning

The defining feature of this type of nature-based education program is that children are provided with opportunities to build an ongoing relationship with the land, to a dedicated educator, to one another and with themselves.

The Ottawa Forest and Nature School is located at the Wesley Clover Campground (formerly the Ottawa Municipal Campground/Nepean Tent and Trailer Park), approximately 10 minutes west of Ottawa. From our “home base” - a warm and inviting cabin and yurt set in a forest clearing alongside our outdoor eating areas, campfire areas, an outdoor Amphitheatre and natural playscapes - we can access and explore hundreds of acres of greenbelt land, including NCC trails.



ADDRESS: 411 Corkstown Road, Ottawa, ON, K2K 0J5

DIRECTIONS COMING FROM WEST: Take ON 417 E. Take exit 138 Ottawa 49/March Rd. / Eagleson Rd. Turn left onto Eagleson Road. Stay on Eagleson Road for approximately 1 km. Turn right onto Corkstown Road for approximately 2.5 km. Signs for the Wesley Clover Park's Campground will be on your left. Enter the campground and drive past the campground office on the left. Continue on the main campground road for about 100 meters. You will see a sign for "Forest School Parking". Park and walk down the path (across the road) to the Forest School.

DIRECTIONS COMING FROM EAST: Take ON 417 W. Take exit for Moodie Drive. Merge onto Moodie Drive and take first left at lights on Corkstown Road. Follow Corkstown Road past the first entrance for Wesley Clover Parks (Equestrian Park) past the train tracks until you reach the Campground on your right. Enter the campground and drive past the campground office on the left. Continue on the main campground road for about 100 meters. You will then see a sign for "Forest School Parking". Park and walk down the path (across the road) to the Forest School.

A History

Forest School Canada launched in the Spring of 2012 as an education initiative of the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, hosting a series of professional development workshops for educators currently working with or interested in working with the Forest and Nature School model. In June 2014, thanks to a partnership with the Wesley Clover Foundation, construction began at the current site, and the Ottawa Forest and Nature School, our cabin, storage shed, outdoor amphitheater and natural playscape, began to take shape. In August of that same year, the very first young students entered the site and the surrounding forest with their discoveries, exploration, adventures and artwork, and it began to feel like home.

So many communities, educators and families have contributed to make the Ottawa Forest and Nature School what it is. Over the last six years, the Ottawa Forest and Nature School has learned and benefited from partnerships with Indigenous communities, and from the generous teachings of Indigenous elders, leaders, partners, educators, parents, and children. We are grateful. We seek to honour these offerings, and to continue to learn what our role is in supporting Indigenous families, communities, schools, and other institutions who have a vested interest in children's play and connection to the land.

In July 2019, the Ottawa Forest and Nature School joined Andrew Fleck Children Services. Today we build on the foundation established with the intention to reach even more children and families. We offer Forest and Nature School programs to all ages, from infants and their caregivers to preschool and elementary aged children and extending to whole families.

At the Ottawa Forest and Nature School we are dreamers and builders. We are collaborating with the Child and Nature Alliance Canada (CNAC) and the Healthy Active Living and Obesity team (HALO) from CHEO to create a Canadian Centre for Outdoor Play - that will bring people together to support more children in muddy boots to play, in nature. We are building a new facility to house three primary functions:

- To mainstream outdoor play through a nature-based licensed childcare program for infants, toddlers and preschoolers
- To convene people, demonstrate emerging best practices and support increased knowledge and thought leadership on outdoor play in Canada
- To increase the evidence-base and research in the field of outdoor play

We expect the Canadian Centre for Outdoor Play to be open by December 2020.

What is Forest School?

The movement to connect children and youth with nature is not new. Indeed, it has been and *is* a fundamental way of being, knowing, and learning, for many Indigenous communities and cultures since time immemorial.

Forest and Nature School (FNS), as an educational approach that has existed worldwide since the late 1950s, with over ten thousand Forest School programs in the UK alone. FNS is known by many different names (i.e. Nature Kindergarten, Outdoor School, Waldkindergarten, etc.) and can take many different forms. Some programs are offered to students for half a day per week, for example, whereas other schools have embraced the FNS approach on a more full-time basis, resulting in students spending the majority of their days outdoors. Similarly, FNS can take place in many different climates and settings - urban or near-urban parks, natural spaces adjacent to or on school grounds, natural playgrounds or outdoor classrooms, forests, meadows, or beaches - and with varying age groups.



The activities that happen in FNS also vary depending on the season, climate, landscape, animals that have visited the night before, trees that have blown down in the wind, the kinds of provocations elicited by the educator, various tools and loose parts for building and creating, the children who are in attendance, how long the group has been formed, and, most importantly, what interests the child. Sometimes children will work independently, finding solace in their own world and creations and ponderings. Other times children will work collaboratively to create something, problem solve, support one another, dream of a bigger and better world. FNS is frequently described as a 'magical' thing to witness, as it's often a microcosm of collaboration, communication, trust building, and a working model of consensus building.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES





Registration, Payment and Refund Policies

- In order to participate, a registration must be completed in full online before the program begins.
- Payment must be made in full for the duration of the session; all program fees are paid by credit card or debit through our finance office

Refund Policy:

- Registration for community programs is non-refundable.
- If a child is withdrawn from programs due to illness, injury, expulsion, or any other reason a refund will not be issued for any portion of the program fees.
- Refunds will not be given if a day's program must be cancelled due to inclement weather. (Please see our Inclement Weather Policy/Closure Policy).
- Programs may be cancelled if there is insufficient registration. In this event, a full refund will be issued.



Privacy Policy

Andrew Fleck Children's Services takes the privacy of its clients and visitors seriously, and we have taken steps to protect it. Any personal data shared with us, including photographic images, will be processed strictly in accordance with privacy legislation, and will be used for the purposes that you have consented to. All families communicate their wishes regarding photo consent during registration. Your consent can be withdrawn at any time through written communication to the Program Coordinator.

We will not share details with third parties without consent, except where we are legally compelled or obligated to do so. Please note that where consent is given to share images on the internet, they can be viewed worldwide including countries where Canadian data protection law does not apply.

Social Media Policy

The Ottawa Forest and Nature School has both a Facebook and Instagram account where photos and stories are posted. Our Facebook page is the Ottawa Forest and Nature School. On Instagram you'll find us at Ottawa_fns. Featuring children on hikes, unique creations and sculptures, simple machines and quiet moments in the forest – it's a window into our day. Our photo consent policy is in effect on our social media platforms.

Our community programs also enjoy the use of Storypark to share directly with parents about their child's group. When a story is posted on Storypark you'll receive a notification. Early in the season you'll receive an email introducing you to Storypark and asking for your consent to participate.

Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns about photo consent or protecting the privacy of the information you provide.

Illness Policy

In the following cases, we ask that participants stay home from Forest School for at least 24 hours after their last symptom has subsided:

- Temperature over 101 degrees F or 38.3 degrees C
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (watery, profuse stools)

Should the above-mentioned situations arise while at Forest School, the affected participants will be asked to return home. Participants affected by communicable diseases such as measles, chicken pox, mumps, flu, strep throat, viral pneumonia, conjunctivitis (pink-eye), etc., are asked to stay home from Forest School until their health care provider has communicated that it is safe for them to attend.

Food Policies

Nut-Free Zone

Due to the prevalence of life-threatening nut allergies, we ask that participants refrain from bringing nuts to Ottawa Forest and Nature School. Soy and sunflower seed substitutes for nut butters are welcome.

Snack-Sharing

In addition, we ask that participants do not share nor trade snacks - as this ensures the health, safety, and happiness of the community.

Garbage-Less Lunches

We encourage participants to try to bring a garbage-less lunch. In the case of lunches with garbage, children will be packing their garbage home with them. We ask that parents/caregivers consider the size/weight/safety of the containers in which their child's snacks are packed. At Forest School we seek to empower even our youngest participants to carry their own snacks and water bottles on our adventures, which is totally possible with small containers. Please also keep in mind that children tend to eat more over a day of play in the Forest.

Handwashing and Drinking Water

Participants will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water before eating and after using the bathroom. They will also be able to refill their water bottles on site with potable water.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid

Ottawa Forest and Nature School has written emergency procedures with which all educators and volunteers are familiar. A copy of the procedures, including emergency phone numbers, is carried by an educator/volunteer at all times in the emergency/first aid backpack.

Accident and Emergency Procedure

In a severe accident or emergency, the Ottawa Forest and Nature School staff will follow this procedure:

1. Establish the nature and extent of the emergency. Lead educator, or senior OFNS educator, to take the lead responding and administering first aid.
2. In consultation with other educators, make sure the area and all other members of the group are accounted for, safe, adequately supervised by co-educators or volunteers.
3. Assess the casualty and ask another adult to **call 911**, emergency services, while the educator(s) administer appropriate first aid. The person phoning will need to respond to the following questions:
 - Nature of emergency
 - Injured party details: age, gender, medical history (see Emergency Medical Form in first aid backpack)
 - **Location: Wesley-Clover Campground, 411 Corkstown Road, Ottawa, ON, K2K0J5**
 - First aid administered
4. Send another adult to meet the ambulance at the main campground entrance, to direct EMS to the Forest School site. In case there is no other adult on site, call the campground head office or CNAC/AFCS colleagues on-site to meet the ambulance at the campground entrance.

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5. Inform the child's emergency contact, Wesley Clover Campground staff, AFCS Director and /or Executive Director, of the injury as soon as possible.
 6. Ensure that an appropriate adult attends the receiving hospital with the casualty, taking with them any medical information available.
 7. Ensure the remainder of the group(s):
 - a. Are adequately supervised throughout the emergency
 - b. Return to their base/facility as early as possible
 - c. Receive appropriate support and reassurance
 8. The Program Coordinator, or other staff designate, will continue to liaise with the emergency services until the incident is over.
 9. As soon as reasonably possible after the event, the accident will be reported using an Accident Report Form.

Risk Management

Risk - the experience and management of it - is an inherent and integral part of Forest School practice and play, and indeed of healthy child development. Ottawa Forest and Nature School educators and volunteers endeavor to co-assess and co-manage risk with participants. We believe this to be an essential skill for children to acquire and for adults to support. Forest School educators and volunteers conduct seasonal and daily site risk assessments, as well as activity risk assessments and individual risk assessments on an ongoing basis - always considering the balance between risks and benefits when doing so.

Before participation all children, volunteers and teachers are required to signed the Assumption of Risk Informed Consent document.

Some of the risks inherent to Forest School and outdoor play include, but are not limited to:

- Injuries from executing strenuous and demanding physical activities, possibly on uneven ground and terrain in the forest
- Injuries from failing to properly use tools, such as carving knives
- Injuries resulting from matches or fire
- Contracting poison ivy
- The presence of wild animals and ticks
- Inclement weather



OFNS Staff: Participant Ratios

The Ottawa Forest and Nature School educator ratios are 8 children to 1 educator. All of our staff are experienced and qualified educators with first aid training.

Educator Responsibilities

The responsibilities of an Forest and Nature School educator are wide-ranging and include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Ensuring the physical safety of participants, by co-assessing and co-managing risk with them on an ongoing basis such that all participants feel connected to and comfortable in the natural world
- Considering the social and emotional safety of participants, and endeavoring to foster a caring and respectful community so that the risk taking and question posing necessary for deep, inquiry-based learning can occur
- Modeling care and respect for the natural world, as well as safe use of the tools and supplies at Forest School
- Playing with and closely observing students - the

trajectory of their play, the evolution of their interests, their questions and struggles - in order to support children and share meaningful feedback with caregivers and families.

Preparing for Forest School - Supply List

This is what your child needs for a great day in the Forest, to support their play in all weather conditions:

Fall and Spring

- Long sleeved shirt (required)
- Long pants (required)*
- Long socks (required)* - pull up over pant cuffs for bug protection
- Running or hiking shoes (required, no sandals or open toed shoes)*
- Sun Hat (required)*
- Rain gear (waterproof boots, pants, jacket - required)
- Bug Jacket (optional)

*There are ticks and poison ivy at OFNS - see additional details below

Children also require:

- Small backpack
- Lunch and snacks (children tend to eat more over a day of Forest School play!)

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- Water bottle
 - 2 extra changes of clothes (including underwear and socks)
 - Sunscreen on sunny days
 - Bug spray in the Fall and Spring months

Winter

As temperatures drop children will require base layers and winter gear.

- Base layers – synthetic long underwear/top
- Snowpants and jacket or snowsuit
- 2+ pairs mittens or gloves
- Warm hat
- Boots

It sounds like a lot of gear! Many families will bring a backpack with a lunchbox and water bottle and a second bag with back- up clothing. But it's not necessary to invest in expensive brand names. Thrift stores are great places to find children's clothing at cheaper prices. If you are looking for a regular store to purchase outdoor clothing, Mountain Equipment Coop (MEC) has excellent children's outdoor wear for all seasons. If your child is missing a mitten or hat, we will be happy to lend them one from our gear library.

Poison Ivy Policy

Poison ivy is present in the woodlands at Ottawa Forest and Nature School through the Spring and Fall. To limit exposure, we require that all participants wear long pants, long socks, and closed toed shoes while taking part in our programs in all seasons. Washing affected skin within 15-60 minutes of exposure is likely to remove the oil that can lead to a reaction, so staff carry potable water and soap at all times. In the event of a participant coming in contact with poison ivy, we are able to wash the affected area immediately.

Tick Policy

Ticks are present at Ottawa Forest and Nature School through the Spring and Fall. To limit exposure, we require that all participants wear:

- Long pants
- Long sleeved shirt
- Long socks
- Closed toed shoes
- Hat

We suggest that participants tuck their pant legs into their socks and shirts into their pants to also limit possible tick exposure. We recommend using insect repellent to deter ticks. Staff always carry insect repellent that contains DEET, as well as essential oils alternatives, to offer families at drop off and to re-apply as required throughout the day.

If a tick is noticed on a participant, it is brushed off. If a tick is attached, we will remove the tick using a tick key or tweezers and save it in a small bag. Parents/guardians will be informed at pick-up and given the opportunity to take the tick to the health unit for testing.

After a day at Forest School, remember to remove outerwear and do a tick check in our parking area, then to do a more thorough all-body check upon arriving at home.

For more information about ticks in Ottawa we recommend visiting the City of Ottawa public health website:

<https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/index.aspx>

This site also shows how to remove ticks and shares information about the risks of Lyme disease.

For more information about supporting children's play during tick season, visit a blog post on our website: <http://childnature.ca/what-can-we-do-about-ticks/>

Staff will also have Off insect repellent and essential oil natural barrier bug relief on hand

For more information about the products please click on the following links:

<https://off.ca/en-ca/product/family-care/familycare-insect-repellent-for-use-on-kids-tropical-fresh>

<https://www.planttherapy.com/shield-me-kidsafe-essential-oil-bug-relief-plant-therapy>

Head Lice Policy

Head lice may affect participants at Ottawa Forest and Nature School. Head lice is not considered a communicable disease but rather an annoying condition which spreads rapidly. If head lice or nits are present, we ask that you:

- Contact staff at Ottawa Forest and Nature School immediately so that other families can be informed (the affected individuals will remain anonymous)
- Follow the treatment suggestions on the information sheet provided by Ottawa Public Health

Inclement Weather Policy/Closure Policy

In the event that the weather/road conditions make travel to/from Ottawa Forest and Nature School unsafe and we need to cancel programs for that day, we will contact families by email to inform them of our closure for the day.

Extreme Weather Policy

Educators and staff at Ottawa Forest and Nature School consult the forecast regularly, and weather-related safety is considered in all decision-making (i.e. how far to venture away from the cabin, how long to be outside).

In the case of predicted thunder and lightning or high-winds - OFNS educators/staff will ensure participants are close to shelter for quick access should thunder and lightning or high-winds occur. During thunder and lightning and high winds, participants will stay under shelter (in the cabin or under the

campground pavilion, for example). Tornado or funnel cloud warnings will have staff ready to use a solid campground building should this weather occur.

In the case of extreme heat (30C), OFNS educators/staff will limit participants' length of exposure based on age and outerwear, and will constantly assess participants' comfort and safety, watching for signs of heat exhaustion, etc.

In extreme cold (-20 and colder) programs will continue to run. Our yurt and cabin are warmed up by woodstoves in advance of children's arrival. Educators will play close to warm shelter with frequent warm up breaks. They support children in keeping skin covered and staying warm and comfortable. A back-up gear library donated by Mountain Equipment Coop ensures that we have excellent warm clothing to lend to children who need more dry warm layers or alternatives.

Very occasionally program is cancelled due to weather related road conditions for the safety of our staff and families. We will inform families by 7am if program will be cancelled due to road conditions.

Child Entry and Release Policy

Parents must give Ottawa Forest and Nature School written authorization for the people who may have access to their children (i.e. a relative who picks up child, emergency contacts in cases where parents cannot be reached). Parents must notify OFNS before changing the usual pick-up routine. We always act in the best interests of the child if there is any confusion or uncertainty.

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 haven't been notified in advance by these authorized persons we will:

- Call the parent/guardian
- If parent/guardian cannot be located, the child is **not** allowed to leave FS until a parent/guardian has been contacted.
- FS staff will remain with the child until an authorized pick-up person arrives.

Custody and Access to Children

According to the law, both parents of a child have equal access to a child and to the information about the child's development, health and welfare. The only time a staff member can deny access of a parent to a child is when there is a written separation agreement or a legal court order. OFNS requires a copy of this document.

Release of Children to a Person Who Appears Intoxicated/Impaired:

Staff will not release a child to a person who appears intoxicated or impaired. In such cases, staff will assist in making other pick-up arrangements (i.e., a spouse or other authorized person). Staff members are legally responsible to protect the children in their care from any perceived risk.

Child Protection Policy

Ottawa Forest and Nature School is committed to taking a proactive position regarding the prevention of child abuse. In accordance with the Child and Family Services Act, it is the responsibility of every person in Ontario, including a person who performs professional or official duties with respect to children, to immediately report to a Children's Aid Society if s/he suspects that child abuse has occurred or if a child is at risk of abuse. Andrew Fleck Children's Services, including Ottawa Forest and Nature School staff, take this responsibility seriously. Reporting procedures and training are provided to all staff.

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT



A Typical Day

While every day at OFNS unfolds differently based on the children, their interests, the weather, and the various loose parts found or introduced at the site, participants can be sure that they will be welcomed by the Education team.

Some children, both preschoolers and older, find separation hard. If you anticipate your child might struggle to say goodbye we welcome a conversation before the first day to discuss how to best support you and your child. You will find a caring and patient team of educators to help you find your way through those first few mornings.

The first day will include a brief tour of the site, including the bathroom, so that participants can begin to settle in and feel at home. Educators will also lead a short discussion and story to ensure the safety of all participants. From there, groups will be invited to play! Educators will have chosen specific areas and set up specific learning provocations based on the group's previous experiences at Forest School.

Children will be afforded the large periods of time necessary to really settle into the kind of play from which rich, deep learning can emerge. Educators are encouraged to both play with and closely observe children during this time. Throughout the day, stories will be read and told and children will be encouraged to spin their own stories, perhaps based on their experiences at Forest School, perhaps based solely on imagination, or perhaps a mix of both! As the day ends, we will share our highlights of the day, and share one final “hoot and howl” before gathering gear, heading down the path to the parking lot, and saying goodbye!

Emergent Learning

Learning at Forest School can and often does look different than it does in a conventional school or camp setting. At OFNS, we are committed to student-led or emergent, and inquiry and play-based learning. This means that we believe that all students who come to OFNS, including very young children, are capable of constructing important knowledge through pursuing their own interests, asking questions, and expressing themselves in multiple, complex, and interrelated ways.

Play

At OFNS we believe that unstructured, free play is fundamental to healthy development and learning. Play is the primary way through which children make meaning of the world around them, and this form of play is something that children get less of in our current society. Play at OFNS can take many forms. For example, symbolic play involves the use of an object (or a sign or symbol) to “stand in for” or represent something else - at OFNS, an acorn might become a person. Social play requires participants to effectively negotiate rules and procedures - this is a part of nearly all play at FS. Regardless of the type, all play provides the building blocks for greater cognitive functioning and learning for children and adults alike.

Role of the Educator

Understanding participants at OFNS as knowledge builders making meaning of the world through play and other self-selected activities means that the role of an OFNS educator is also quite different than the role a teacher may play in a conventional classroom. Instead of being an “expert” or the one who has all the “right answers” (and thereby occupying a position of power over and above learners) OFNS educators seek to be co-learners with participants. They aim to prompt questions and extend and deepen participants’ thinking about and compassion for the world around them by themselves posing questions, or by using or introducing tools, loose parts, and supplies that change the learning environment and therefore elicit a change in the learner.

From Planning to Observation and Reflection

In order to truly follow the interests of OFNS participants - to nurture emergent learning - OFNS educators shift their emphasis from planning to observation and reflection. Instead of pre-determining the activities for the day, educators closely observe participants, intervening with open-ended invitations and “provocations” like those described above.

OFNS educators support their observations by taking photos, videos, and written notes which are themselves used to extend learning, refocus it, or redirect it. For example, educators might show participants a photo of themselves engaged in an activity from the session before, and prompt them to revisit that activity by asking, “What were you doing there?” “What were you thinking about?” “Were you able to accomplish what you were trying to do?” “What if we tried... today?”

Behaviour Guidance

The emotional and physical well-being of children in our care is priority of Andrew Fleck Children’s Services. Positive forms of Behavior Guidance with emphasis on dialogue, encouragement and positive reinforcement comply with the agency’s philosophy to promote the healthy development of the children. At Ottawa Forest and Nature School we manage behaviour proactively by engaging in developmentally appropriate activities, and by nurturing a positive physical and social/emotional space. In general, our behaviour guidance approach will:

- Consider the child’s developmental level and needs
- Make expectations clear and provide scaffolding to help children participate positively
- Focus on the behaviour and choices rather than the child
- Be implemented in a positive and consistent manner
- Be designed to help the child to learn appropriate behaviour and techniques
- Involve consulting with parents/guardians/teachers to include their input of successful approaches with a child, as well as to keep them informed of issues/concerns as they arise
- Help children to develop self-regulation, self-confidence, decision making skills, the ability to communicate effectively and sensitively in their interactions with others

At Ottawa Forest and Nature School **inappropriate behaviour** is defined as using actions or words that make others feel uncomfortable or unsafe. **Unsafe behaviour** is defined as any behaviour that puts a child or Educator at risk. This includes not responding when called, running, hiding, taking risk without consulting staff, and not following guidelines so that behaviour becomes potentially dangerous to the child or others.

In the case of inappropriate/unsafe behaviour the following steps will be taken:

- Staff will remove the child from proximity of the group and the two will work together to define the inappropriate/unsafe behaviour and create a plan to modify it.
- Staff will confer with other Forest School staff to be consistent with expectations and to agree on the best approach for the student.
- Parents/guardians/teachers will be informed (by phone or at the end of the day face-to-face) of the behaviour and consulted to discover the cause.
- Staff and parents/guardians/teachers will, together, develop strategies to adjust the inappropriate behaviour. These strategies will be implemented with the child at home and at Forest School to offer a consistent approach. Staff and guardians will stay in contact to keep each other informed of the child's progress with regard to the behaviour in question.
- Staff will follow up with the child to be consistent with expectations and approach as well as to offer feedback and positive reinforcement,
- In the extreme case that a child's behaviour is consistently inappropriate or unsafe for the child or others, and after the above process has been implemented, the child may be asked to leave the program for a short term or permanently.

Prohibited Practices

- Corporal punishment of the child (which may include but is not limited to, hitting, spanking, slapping, pinching)
- Physical restraint of the child, such as confining the child to a high chair, car seat, stroller or other device for the purposes of discipline or in lieu of supervision, unless the physical restraint is for the purpose of preventing a child from hurting himself, herself or someone else, and is used only as a last resort and only until the risk of injury is no longer imminent.
- Locking the exits of the premises for the purpose of confining the child or confining the child in an area or room without adult supervision, unless such confinement occurs during an emergency and is required as part of the agency's emergency management policies and procedures.

EQUALITY AT FOREST SCHOOL



Accessibility Policy

One of the primary goals of Ottawa Forest and Nature School is to make our programs accessible to a wide range of participants regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language, physical ability, or socioeconomic status. We seek to dismantle the barriers to participation in Forest School by making our site physically accessible for everyone and our community safe and welcoming. In the future, we hope to set registration fees on a sliding scale based on need, to build an accessible path to the Rocky and Mossy Place and to establish a “gear bank” or “lending library” of outerwear (snowpants, hats, mitts, etc.) so that the supplies needed to safely enjoy the Ottawa Forest and Nature School are not themselves a barrier to participation. We welcome your feedback and suggestions in the realization of those goals.

COMMUNICATION



General Communication

Generally, OFNS will communicate with families, predominantly via email. To reach us in a timely manner, please send an email to lpurvis@afchildrensservices.ca Please be sure to communicate the following:

- if you will be late/absent
- if your child is ill with a communicable disease
- if your child is being treated for lice

Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency at OFNS, parents/guardians will be contacted by telephone once emergency personnel (if needed) have been contacted.

Questions and Concerns

Our goal is for all visitors to OFNS to feel comfortable and supported as they learn about the natural world, their students/children and themselves through outdoor and potentially risky play. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding your own or your child's visit at OFNS, please do not hesitate to ask to speak with OFNS staff directly. If you or the OFNS staff member feels that you require an extended or more focused conversation than can be had in the moment, plans can be made to do so.

Grievance Policy

Your concerns matter to us, and issues may arise in your dealings with OFNS staff. Please communicate your concerns with the Forest School staff in person, or via phone or email. We will make every effort to address and resolve these issues in a timely manner.

If you should have a complaint or concern that cannot be resolved directly with OFNS staff, please bring that concern to the Program Director, Lyne Tremblay, ltremblay@afchildrensservices.ca or Kim Hiscott, Executive Director, khiscott@afchildrensservices.ca

In the unlikely event that the concern still cannot be resolved, a letter can be submitted in writing or electronically to the board of directors of Andrew Fleck Children's Services - <https://www.afchildrensservices.ca/about-us/governance/>

Environmental Sustainability



One of the many special features of Forest School is that sessions are held in the same area of woodland over a period of time, allowing participants to become very comfortable in and knowledgeable about the area. Indeed, we believe that it is only through a deep connection to place that children grow up to be stewards of the land. Although this is very positive for learning, it can have an adverse environmental effect due to overuse of an area. We therefore strive to meet a delicate balance whereby we promote children's connection to nature through exposure and meaningful experience, while at the same time fostering an ethic of care and sustainable use of the land we are connecting to. We minimize our ecological impact by rotating our sites for play, staying on trails as much as possible and keeping activities with the highest impact in our main area in front of the cabin.

At Ottawa Forest and Nature School, environmental sustainability is at the heart of our motivation for running programs. We therefore conduct ongoing ecological impact assessments of our presence in the forest, taking into account such factors as denudation/erosion, compaction, pollution, and the corruption/introduction of species. We have created a plan both for the monitoring, management and limitation of our potential negative impact and for the positive development and improvement of the ecology of our site.



Volunteers and Visitors

The Ottawa Forest and Nature School is grateful for its many volunteers. From students doing their practicum to retired teachers and community members each person brings new energy, perspectives and care to our groups in the forest.

If you are interested in volunteering please contact the Head Teacher to inquire about suitable days and where help might be needed. We ask that volunteers commit to regular and repeated visits as we value the relationship building in each group. All volunteers are required to present their Vulnerable Sector Check and sign AFCS policies before their first day. Volunteers are also encouraged to take time to understand and learn the Forest and Nature School approach to learning and play.

If you're interested in visiting but cannot commit to volunteering the Ottawa Forest and Nature School in partnership with the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada will be offering program tours. Contact admin@childnature.ca for more information.