



Nanaimo Forest School Parent Handbook

Frequently Asked Questions About Forest School:

[What is Forest School?](#)

Forests Schools are outdoor schools that provide children with the opportunity to spend time immersed in nature, playing and learning in local un-landscaped areas. Although forest schools can be found in many parts of the world, this approach is most popular in Europe, where forest schools have existed since the 1950's. Forest schools are typically child-centred, interest-led and place-based. Children study local ecosystems, plants and animals by means of direct, hands-on experiences. Educators present mini-lessons when children show interest in learning more about a topic. Using inquiry-based teaching styles, teachers prompt children to ask why and foster the development of the child's own critical thinking skills. Children spend a large portion of program time engaged in valuable unstructured play.

[How does playing outside help my child learn?](#)

Nature play teaches kids to: climb higher, think creatively, explore, imagine, rely on their senses, assess risk, test their boundaries, observe, nurture life, resolve conflict, cultivate a sense of place and

self, improvise solutions, feel free, recognize beauty, collaborate, be resilient, regulate stress, learn through play, wonder why, get messy, develop their strength, build immunity, gain perspective, FEEL CONNECTED TO THE WILD.

What do you do when it is cold and wet?

Play! We have large tarps that we rig up to provide wind-breaks and extra protection when we don't want to let a sudden downpour disrupt our games. We find that as long as children are warm and dry they are happy to play outdoors regardless of the weather.

Will my child get dirty?

Yes!

Who are the leaders?

Forest School leaders are trained educators who hold formal qualifications including ECE and B.Ed. They have experience in outdoor and experiential education and hold a minimum of current First Aid and CPR certification. Each leader also has a clear Criminal Record Check.

What is the ratio of adults to children?

Our maximum educator to child ratio is 1:8, with a group size of 15 children. When community volunteers are present this ratio is even lower.

What does a typical day look like?

While everyday a Forest School is unique, our day begins with a walk through the forest to our Forest school site, we then have our meeting circle and free play in the forest. We stop for a snack with more games and adventures in the forest afterwards. Lastly we walk back through the forest to say goodbye to our friends and meet or family.

What types of activities will my child participate in?

The forest provides endless opportunities for imaginative, open ended play but some examples of activities that educators provide are:

- Shelter building
- Nature crafts and painting
- Tool use, tracking games
- Knots & rope skills
- Identifying animal tracks, studying wildlife
- Creating fairy houses
- Leaf & flower pressings, sensory activities
- Scavenger hunts, team, group and other games
- Constructing pulley systems
- Running, jumping, splashing, climbing, rolling...

Each session provides natural opportunities for literacy and

mathematics through storytelling, song, rhyme, reading, drama, counting, sorting, classifying and predicting.

What if a child get hurts?

Risk, and learning how to manage it, is an inherent part of Forest School and child development. Staff conduct regular on site risk assessments as well as daily risk assessments with the children. This allows us to keep up with the ever changing aspect of the forest setting and to teach the children about risk management.

What if my child needs to use the washroom?

We encourage parents to have their children use the washroom at home before the program begins. Once in the woods, if a child needs to use the washroom an educator will help the child find a suitable location to go outside. Water, soap, and hand sanitizer will be made available for children to clean their hands after washroom use.

Where do sessions take place?

Westwood Lake Park and Linley Valley

Where can I find more information about Forest Schools?

We highly recommend “Forest and Nature Schools Canada: A Head, Heart and Hands Approach to Outdoor Learning” published by Forest School Canada as more in-depth resource.

Logistical Information

Hours of operations

Nanaimo Forest School is open Tuesday to Friday

Tues/ Wed/ Thurs at Westwood Lake Park: 9am to 11:30

- drop off and pick up in the Westwood Lake parking lot

Friday at Linley Valley: 9am to 11:30

- drop off and pick up a 5 min walk up the trail from the parking area on Rock City Rd (please be aware that parking is limited and the traffic is not child friendly on the road).

Closed for all school holidays.

Tuition

Nanaimo Forest School runs on a semester registration system.

Parents are encouraged to register and pay at the beginning of each semester. If this is not suitable for your family then other payment schedules can be arranged.

A \$50 registration fee is due when you enrol your child. This fee will hold your child's space and is non-refundable.



Important Information

Fall Semester begins September

Winter Semester begins January

Spring Semester begins April

Please check our webpage and Facebook page for exact dates.

Late Payment

If payments are not received on time, there will be a late fee of \$5 per day thereafter that payments are not received. Repeated late payments may be grounds for termination and parents who are more than 2 weeks late on payment will be considered as withdrawing from the program and we will begin to fill their spot with another family (see withdrawal procedure below).

Late Pickup

Parents picking up children after scheduled pick up times are considered late. Families who establish a habitual pattern of late pick-ups may be subject to late fees and will be notified in advance. Fees are \$5.00 for every 5 minutes after pick up time. Any expenses accrued will be added on and collected with the following semester's tuition.

Additional Expenses

Parents should anticipate occasional small expenses throughout the year, including but not limited to a waterproof journal, photos, a whistle, field trips and special projects.

School Closures

In case of closure, we will always do our best to notify you as far in advance as possible. If we should need to close early, due to extreme weather, we will notify you by phone. You will not be reimbursed for emergency closures.

Absences

Parents are required to pay for their child's space even when that child is away due to illness or vacation.

Trial Period

There is a one month trial period during which the lead educator and each new child's family will assess if Nanaimo Forest School is a good fit for the child. If it is decided, on either part, that enrolment will not continue, any tuition beyond that paid for the

attended one month will be reimbursed and there is no further financial obligation.

Withdrawal Policy

If you choose to withdraw your child we require one months written notice. Payment for that month is required even if the child will not be attending. The registration deposit is also nonrefundable. If tuition has been paid beyond that month, the remainder will be reimbursed. We aim to make our programs accessible and diverse, but we reserve the right to address issues of unsuitability with the parents at any time. We do our best to work with parents to assist a child transitioning into the program, but if necessary, we will discuss alternative options with families.

Enrollment and Admission Information

Enrollment Requirements

In order to enroll at Nanaimo Forest School, your child must be:

- 3 years old... or soon to be :)
- Potty trained (no pull up diapers and independent in the bathroom).

Unlike traditional indoor programs, your child will frequently be sorting through many layers of clothing. The ability to know and regulate toileting is therefore a necessity.

- Your child must be prepared (and want) to be outside rain or shine!
- Not prone to wandering

Enrollment options

Families may chose the days they wish to enrol their child/ children.

Forms: Please download and email the registration forms from our webpage, along with the registration fee to nanaimoforestschool@gmail.com

Parent Participation Policies

Communication

An open line of communication enriches the educational experience of our students and is an essential element for building

partnerships. Your input is important to us. We are always happy to schedule time to discuss any academic, social, emotional, or developmental questions either by phone, e-mail or in person. Please keep the lines of communication open with us and let us know of any significant events in your child's life. Visitors, work trips, moving, new babies, divorce, illness or death can affect children in class. When we are informed about these changes we are better equipped to offer support and encouragement to your child.

Open-door policy

Parents are always welcome! Parents may visit at any time. While visiting Forest School we ask that parents observe and encourage their child to adhere to school rules and routines. If you wish to visit for an extended period of time, it is a good idea to arrange a time with your child's teacher to avoid scheduling conflicts or multiple visitors. In order to assure as smooth a transition as possible, we ask that you refrain from visiting during the first month of school. This is a special time, both for your child and the staff. We do ask that if you plan on bringing friends or other family members to visit that you arrange this in advance with your child's teacher.

How to Get Involved

We always appreciate parents who can help with cooking projects, field trips, join us for a walk, read a story, or share something special about themselves with the class. Please discuss these, and other, possibilities with your child's teacher.

Food and Mealtime Policies

Mealtime Philosophy

We approach diverse family values around food in the same way we support the individuality of each child. Snack times are opportunities for coming together, sharing a blessing, stories and observations of the day. Facilitators, volunteers and students all eat together.

Hand Washing

Educators carry water and biodegradable soap for hand washing

before snack time at our forest school sites. If we are on a hike, we have hand sanitizer before snacks.

Allergies

In cases of severe allergies or diet restrictions, parents may be asked to exclude certain foods from their child's snack/lunch. If your child has an allergy or food restriction, documentation must be on file.

Guidance Policies and Procedures

If a negative behavior occurs at school, staff will address it and seek to resolve it directly with the child. It is important that parents and facilitators work together, but the consequences and problem solving need to be immediately tied to the behavior.

Our policy is as follows:

- Abuse of an activity or object leads to a loss of the privilege of using that object or material for a specific length of time.
- Repeated unprovoked hurting of another child and/or using objects as weapons to injure staff or children leads to a call to the parent(s) to come and take the child home.
- Serious injury of a child or staff member, or habitual behavior that compromises the safety of the children, may lead to termination of enrollment.

Discipline

The goal of discipline is to develop self-discipline. Our programs foster an environment in which children learn to respect others and their surroundings. We teach and encourage children to use problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Other discipline techniques we employ are prevention, facilitator shadowing, redirection, positive modelling and gentle reminders. Discipline shall be fair, consistent and appropriate for the age and maturity of the child. Physical punishment or discipline that is frightening or humiliating is never used.

Celebration Policies Festivals

Our proximity to a broad range of plant and animal life cycles means that we have the opportunity to celebrate and appreciate

the changes in seasons, the cycle of life, as well as to explore many holiday traditions from cultures around the world.

If you have a holiday or festival that your family would like to share with the class, let us know!

Environmental Sustainability

At Nanaimo Forest Kids we try very hard to minimize the impact we will inevitably have on the environment without limiting the children in their play and learning. We do this by conducting regular site impact surveys, documenting our use, communicating with City of Nanaimo Park staff, using biodegradable and organic materials and removing any garbage we create. We ask that parents help us in our endeavours to keep the parks clean by sending snacks in reusable containers.

Health and Safety Policies and Procedures

Sick Child Policy

Parents are required to keep children home if they exhibit any symptoms of illness as listed below. We understand the difficulty of this for working parents, but this must be done to maintain a healthy environment for everyone. Parents are obligated to report any communicable disease or condition (i.e., conjunctivitis, head lice, chicken pox, etc.) to the staff so that we can alert other parents as soon as possible.

Please consider whether your child is able to be outside for the program hours in addition to having any of the conditions listed below.

As stated in the BC Health Ministry's guide "Preventing Illness in Child Care Settings", please keep your child home if they have any of the following conditions:

- Pain - any complaints of unexplained or undiagnosed pain.
 - A common cold with listlessness, runny nose and eyes, coughing and sore throat. Once the child's temperature, well being and energy have returned to normal, the child may no longer be contagious, and may be able to return to the child care facility even though coughing and runny nose may persist.
- Generally speaking, a person who catches a cold can spread it to others or one day before symptoms appear, and about five days after the cold symptoms (above) begin.
- Difficulty in breathing - wheezing or a persistent cough.

- Fever (100 degrees F/38.3 degrees C or more)
- Sore throat or trouble swallowing.
- Infected skin or eyes, or an undiagnosed rash.
- Headache and stiff neck (should see physician).
- Unexplained diarrhea or loose stool.
- Nausea and vomiting may be early signs of illness.
- Severe itching, dry skin of either body or scalp if caused by head or body lice or scabies.
- Children with known or suspected communicable diseases.

Please call us at 250-591- 5122 to let us know if your child will be absent due to illness.

There are no refunds for days missed due to illness.

If a child becomes ill or injured while in our care

If a child arrives at school and exhibits possible symptoms of an illness, we will move the child away from others and have them lie down quietly and rest.

If a child continues to feel ill, we will call the parents. If parents cannot be reached, a relative or emergency contact will be called to pick the child up.

If a child were to vomit or have diarrhea we do not have the facilities to clean them up at Forest School. Therefore, we will change them into clean clothes and call the parents or other emergency contacts immediately.

If your child gets a bump, scratch, or a bruise, we will let you know at the end of the session.

All our staff is trained to provide first aid for minor injuries and emergency care while an ambulance is being called if a more serious incident should occur.

In the case of minor head or eye injury, the child's parents will be notified by phone. In the case of an emergency involving serious illness or injury, parents and 911 will be called. If we cannot contact the parents, we will contact someone on your emergency contact list.

Please ensure that you have signed the medical release form so that we have permission to perform the required first aid or transfer your child to a hospital if necessary.

Safety Policy

All educators at Nanaimo Forest School are trained in first aid and have a clear criminal record. We carry a first aid kit with us at all

times.

Please refer to our Safety Handbook for further information on how we make safety a priority.

Medication Policy

A note, signed by parent or guardian giving authorization to staff, is needed in order to administer medication or special medical procedures to your child.

Please follow the procedures below:

- Prescription drugs must be in the original prescription bottle with the child's name and dose indicated on the bottle
- Non-prescription medications (Tylenol, lotions, salves, etc.) must be in the original container with the child's first and last name and the date it was brought to school written on the container.

Medication will only be administered to the limit of the instructions on the label.

All medications must be dispensed by a staff member and may not be kept in the child's possession.

Confidentiality

Nanaimo Forest School respects the privacy of every child and family and holds confidential all records regarding your child's personal information. All records will be kept secure in the child's file in the office. Only the school management and educators have access to these records.