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Kootenay Nature School

Parent Handbook

2018-2019

Wednesdays and Fridays: 9:30 a.m -12:00 p.m.
At Canyon-Lister Elementary School

10 Week Sessions:

Fall: SEPT 12-NOV 23 (Excluding Oct 19)

Winter: JAN 9-MAR 15

Spring: APR 3-JUNE 12 (Excluding April 19)

The Creston Kids Outside Society

'Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.' Lao Tzu

Mission and Vision

Our mission is to provide children and families with opportunities for outdoor play, ecological awareness and connection to Creston's natural spaces. We do this by offering safe, supportive, guided learning experiences in nature that help fulfill children's needs for exercise, fresh air, exploration and discovery. Our programs connect Creston to the growing international Child and Nature movement, educating and informing families about current research into the importance of children's immersion in nature, through social media, workshops and community events.

Our vision is to enable each child attending Creston Kids Outside programs to develop an inquisitive mindset about nature, cultivating a positive relationship with peers, adult mentors and the natural world.

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Program

Our program is inspired by the Forest and Nature School movement, the Waldkindergartens ('Forest Preschools') of Germany, the Ottawa Forest and Nature School, the Sooke Nature Kindergarten program, CedarSong Nature Kindergarten, Wisdom of the Earth Wilderness School and the WorldMind Nature School.

Through songs, games, nature crafts, play, discovery, curiosity, exploration, imagination and physical challenges, children will gain a sense of deeper understanding about who they can be and what they can accomplish! We will be outside, rain or shine, moving indoors only if the weather prevents us from having fun or poses a safety hazard. Nature is our teacher, and the program will flow with the seasons and the discoveries we make together.

The curriculum is emergent and play-based. Some of our nature awareness activities will include listening closely to forest sounds, observing weather, changes in seasons and natural cycles and finding special spots in the trees. The children will learn scientific thinking as they ask questions, make predictions and learn about the ecological principles happening all around them.

Our Values:

- Ecological awareness
- Child-led learning
- Experiential learning
- Compassionate communication

Activities (varying with the weather, children's interest and energy levels):

- Fort building
- Imaginary play
- Hiking and exploring
- Observing bugs, insects, animals, birds and plant life
- Splashing in puddles
- Learning knots and rope tying
- Scavenger hunts and other group activities
- Running, jumping, sliding, climbing, balancing, digging, pouring...
- Nature crafts
- Storytelling
- Identifying animal tracks

Background

The Kootenay Nature School is a program run by the Creston Kids Outside Society (a registered not-for-profit) in partnership with Canyon-Lister Elementary School and supported by a number of community regional organizations.

Creston Kids Outside began in March of 2016 as a volunteer initiative to help bring families with young children into nature. Starting with the premise that there is safety and comfort in numbers, families gathered at different natural locations each week--Summit Creek, Kuskanook Beach, the Goat River, Ralph's Grove, Schikurski Park--providing the children with a chance for unstructured play in creeks, forest and beaches. In March of 2017 Creston Kids Outside hosted a weeklong 'Forest Camp' for 3-6 year olds at Schikurski Park, a successful endeavour which served as the foundation for the 2017/2018 Kootenay Nature School pilot program. 2018-2019 will be our second full year of operations.

What is the Forest and Nature School Movement?

Forest and Nature School provides opportunities for children to be fully immersed in nature, year-round, in (almost) all kinds of weather. These programs are located in 'nearby-nature' settings close to towns and can take place in forests, fields, creeks and a variety of natural settings. They provide children with repeated access to the same natural space, allowing children to witness firsthand the changes in seasons and to build relationships with the plants, animals and ecological systems in their 'backyards.' Forest and Nature Schools help children learn to navigate risk as they play, viewing risk as an important part of healthy development and learning. See the excellent document from Forest School Canada: FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL IN CANADA: A Head, Heart, Hands Approach to Outdoor Learning (http://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/FSC-Guide_web.pdf)

Will the Kootenay Nature School be a good fit for your family?

Even though it is a children's program, family mindset and attitudes can greatly influence a child's experience. You are signing your whole family up, in theory! Our program might not be the right fit for every child/family, and if so we can point you toward some of the other great options in Creston.

Here are a few questions you can ask yourself to help determine if the program will be a good fit for your family:

- 1) Has your child has previous experience away from home?
- 2) Do you think your child feels comfortable being away from parents?
- 3) Does your child have a tendency to wander or run away from you, or groups he/she has been part of? Will he/she listen and respond to calls of 'stop!' ?
- 4) Is he/she independent with the bathroom, and comfortable peeing outdoors?
- 5) Are you comfortable taking home wet/muddy clothes at the end of the day?
- 6) Could you make a strong effort to keep positive mindset about the weather, dirt and insects? (a child who hears parents complain about rain/cold/wind/bugs/dirt might have a harder time developing resilience and interest in playing outdoors)
- 7) Are you willing to keep an open-line of communication with program staff about your child's behaviour, clothing, and general experience?

Where do sessions take place?

Sessions take place at Canyon-Lister Elementary School, in 2.5 acres of fenced and forested area at the back of the school. The School is located in the Kootenay region of southeast British Columbia, situated in a wide valley between the Selkirk and Purcell mountain ranges, with Duck Lake and Kootenay Lake to our north, and the Idaho border to our south.

What does a typical day look like?

While every day is unique, this is a brief schedule:

- 9:15 Arrival & sign-in and snack at the gazebo. Playing on the field.
- 9:30 Hike across the field to Tipi
- 9:45 Welcome circle and song in Tipi, group discussion about the day
- 10:00 Snack, play & exploration in the forest, activities (ie: craft, scavenger hunt, treasure hunt or special guest)
- 11:30 Sit spot time, sharing and tea
- 12:00 Meeting parents at parking lot

How does playing outside help my child learn?

Nature play helps kids develop creativity, confidence, resilience, motor skills, creativity, problem-solving, risk-assessment, observation skills and ecological

awareness. An emergent curriculum provides opportunity for developing ‘academic’ skills as well: when we’re counting snails, telling stories, or discussing the water cycle as a child inquires where their favourite puddle has gone; when we’re talking about the bigger questions of life, as a bird gulps an earthworm, or a bug is squashed intentionally or accidentally. Studies have shown that children participating in outdoor programs during their preschool years are prepared for kindergarten, especially in the areas of social and emotional development, motor skills, problem-solving abilities and creativity.

Activity	Developmental Benefit
Playing imaginative games using whatever resources and ideas come to mind	This helps children to explore their own thoughts without the guidance of a toy designer
Role Play	Shared imagination, drama, teamwork, recollection of models of behaviour
Building shelters or other large structures from branches, with the help of other children and adults	Mathematics, visual recognition
Counting objects or looking for mathematical patterns	Memory, naming objects
Memory games using naturally available objects	Memory, naming objects
Listening to stories; singing songs and rhymes	Art, drama, concentration
Arranging items to make a picture, or building a toy	Art
Drawing scenes	Art, creativity, accurate inspection and copying
Climbing trees and exploring the forest	Improves strength, balance and physical awareness
Playing hide-and-seek with others	Playing hide-and-seek with others Develops children's theory of mind by rewarding accurate anticipation of the thoughts and actions of others

Walking to the forest	Improves strength and stamina; preparation (e.g., route selection) improves planning and communication skills
Exploring or reflecting alone	Aids self-awareness and character development
Resting	Aids consolidation of memories and facilitates activities later in the day

(From: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_kindergarten)

What do you do when it's cold and wet?

We keep playing to stay active, which is the best way to stay warm in the outdoors. If it's drizzling, we might take refuge in the tipi or huddle under a tarp in a thicket of trees to do a craft or tell a story. Or, we might cinch up our rain jackets and hoods and stick our tongues out to catch the raindrops. Children are often much more impervious to the elements than adults!

Here are a few other measures we will take to help children stay warm:

- In the event of torrential rain, thunder and lightening or frigid winter temperatures, we will retreat to our indoor room.
- Our educators will observe carefully to notice if children are getting cold, and can take various steps to help: engage children in an active game to elevate heart rates; check on the status of toes and fingers, adding extra warm/dry layers if needed or offering warm tea.

Who are the leaders?

Our leaders are passionate nature-lovers and kids at heart. They also have clear criminal records checks, and other certifications including First Aid, teacher training and wilderness experience.

Facilitators:

Kristina Leidums is a mother of two, a BC certified teacher and outdoor educator with experience facilitating groups of all ages in the wilderness.

Zavallannah Young is a mother of two with extensive experience working with young children as a music teacher, leading music camps and teaching lessons. She has experience in a Waldorf educational setting.

Melissa Flint Melissa teaches permaculture, gardening, design, sustainability and environmental education. She is a fun and knowledgeable educator working at the primary and secondary level.

Volunteers: We have a network of excellent volunteers, and will share with you the primary ones at the start of each session.

What is the ratio of adults to children?

We aim to have 3 adults for a group of 13 children, maintaining a ratio of between 1:5 and 1:7.

What if a child gets hurt?

A facilitator with first aid qualifications will assess the situation. See the 'Safety' document for more on our procedures.

What if my child needs to use the washroom?

We encourage parents to help children use the bathroom for #2 at home before they get bundled up, if possible. If a child needs to 'go while in the forest, we will help them 'pee on a tree' or take them to our portable potty. Hand wipes will be available after using the bathroom.

Allergies

If there is a child with a severe allergy, parents may be asked to refrain from bringing certain foods. If your child has an allergy, please make sure to let us know in your medical information. Our first aid kit will contain children's Benadryl in the event of a serious allergic reaction.

Program closures

If the weather forecast prior to a program session calls for dangerous weather, such as high winds, extreme cold or torrential rains, we will have an indoor day. If local schools have a 'snow day,' the program will be cancelled. If both of our main instructors need to be away (in a rare event), the program will also be cancelled.

Attendance, Drop Off and Pick Up

If your child will be absent, please call one of our leaders before the program begins (phone numbers will be provided before the first session). Please aim to have your child at the gazebo by 9:15 at the latest, so we can start our walk down by 9:30. If you arrive late, we would ask you to walk your child down to the Tipi. If you arrive

earlier than 9:15, please plan to stay with your child until 9:15, as our staff will be busy preparing for the morning.

At drop-off and pick-up a sign-in/out sheet will be provided. Please notify a leader if a different person will be dropping off and picking up your child. We cannot release a child to someone who is not listed on your child's registration form, or who hasn't been verbally confirmed by a parent (in person/over phone).

Late Pick-Up Fee:

Families who establish a habitual pattern of late pick-ups may be subject to late fees and will be notified in advance. The fee is \$5.00 if you are more than 15 minutes late.

Bringing Toys

Please avoid bringing toys from home to Nature School. We want to make sure that they do not get lost. We will announce periodic 'show and tell' days where children can bring special nature treasure to share with the group.

What to Bring

Please see the 'What to Bring' PDF on our website. At Nature School your child's clothing may get dirty and wet. Second-hand shops can provide cheap functional gear at a fraction of the cost. Please ask us if you have any questions about clothing.

If we feel as though your child is inadequately dressed for the weather conditions and does not have the appropriate clothing with them in their backpack, we reserve the right to contact the adult that is responsible for them and request that they immediately bring adequate gear. A failure to dress appropriately for the weather is not only a safety risk, but can have a negative impact on the well-being of the entire group's learning experience.

Parent participation policies:

Communication

Open communication will help enrich our program for families, staff and children. Your input and feedback on the program is important to us and we will always make time to speak with you about any concerns you have. If there are any major changes or upheavals happening in your child's life (moving, illnesses, new babies) please

keep us informed so we can support your child. Our facilitators can also be reached via email at any time.

Open-door policy

If you would like to check out what your child is up to during Nature School, you are welcome to visit. We'll fill you in on our routines and rhythms to keep things regular for the children. Please let us know ahead of time if you'd like to come visit.

Parent Involvement

This year we will be enlisting a small amount (approx. 1 hour per session) of your time to help prepare morning snacks and supervise children on the field at drop-off time. If you aren't able to volunteer in-person due to job/time constraints, we can talk about other options for helping. A calendar will be made available in the fall to organize snack helpers and volunteers.

Guidance policies and procedures

Getting to know your child: When your child first starts Nature School, we will keep in good touch with you about how your child is doing. We'll also aim to chat with you to hear a little about your child's personality, temperament and experience in a group setting.

Transition: We understand that children who are new to the program need some time to transition into the program. Let's talk about a plan for helping your child transition and grow his/her independence.

Readiness: Every child who participates in the Kootenay Nature School must be physically able to take part in program activities or have a support person who is capable of helping them participate. Consider these indicators of readiness for our outdoor program: 1) Child responds when name is called 2) Can alert adults when they need to use the bathroom 3) Can remember and follow basic safety rules 4) Generally tolerant to varying weather conditions 5) Gets along with other children 6) Not prone to running or hiding when upset 7) Able to communicate needs or issues to an adult (cold, discomfort, etc) 8) Willing to wear appropriate clothing for various weather conditions (e.g. raincoats, hats, gloves, boots)

Additional Care: If we find that an individual child's need for support is greater than the facilitator and the volunteers can provide, we will work with you to look at additional care for your child. Some options may include: You can hire someone who will support your child every day that he or she attends. You can attend yourself, or designate a friend or family member to attend. Anyone hired or volunteering to support a child must submit a criminal record check.

Siblings: If you plan to volunteer, please find alternate care for siblings (unless babies-in-arms who can stay in a front or backpack)

Negative behaviour: if negative behaviour occurs at Nature School, staff will address it and seek to resolve it directly with the child, helping them to communicate their needs to each other. The consequences and problem solving need to be immediately tied to the behaviour. We will do our best to help children problem-solve and resolve issues/conflict in the moment. If problematic behaviour occurs frequently, we will work with you to discuss if Nature School is a good fit for your child, and if the behaviour issues continue we do reserve the right to terminate enrolment.

--Repeated unprovoked harming 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.

—Habitual running or refusal/inability to listen to instructions away may be a sign that your child is not ready for Nature School.

—Some 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.

Sick child policy

Parents are required to keep children home if they have been vomiting or feverish in the previous 24 hours. Because we are outdoors, if a child has a cold or sniffles, it is still ok to send them to Nature School (provided they have energy!). If a child is listless or lethargic following/during an illness, please keep them home. Nature School requires a lot of energy and resourcefulness on the part of young children and illness can make this difficult.

Confidentiality

We respect the privacy of every child and family and hold confidential all records regarding your child's personal information. All records will be kept secure in the child's file in the office. Any information disclosed will be used in a discretionary manner to assist in the well being and care of that child.

Safety policy

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

Tuition fees and schedule

Fall Session: Sept 12-Nov 23 (Excluding Oct 19)

Winter Session: Jan 9-Mar 15

Spring: Apr 3-June 12 (Excluding April 19)

One annual payment: \$1020 (\$330 per session + \$30 registration fee)

Pay per session: \$390 first session (\$360 +\$30 registration fee)

Pay per session: \$330 subsequent sessions

Fees are due by:

*Fall Session: Sept 1, 2018

*Winter Session: Nov 23, 2018

*Spring Session: Mar 15, 2019

*We ask for a \$30 non-refundable registration fee, per child, for new families, a contribution to the Kootenay Nature School program which secures your spot in the program and will help us purchase supplies and insurance.

*Children must be 3 or over by session start date, and not yet 6 by end of the current session. They should be toilet independent and able to give enough notice of impending pee to remove layers (able to come in a pull-up if pee accidents are likely)

- 1) Fees are payable by cash or cheque, made payable to the Creston Kids Outside Society, P.O. Box 972, Creston, BC, V0B1G0
- 2) There is no refund or reduction in fees for any days on which a child is absent from the program due to illness, vacation, snow days
- 3) Registration for the next session will be open first to currently enrolled children and their siblings.
- 4) Please note that you are not registered until we receive all of your forms and your registration fee.
- 5) Criminal Record Check: Anyone from your family volunteering in the forest needs to get a criminal record check. Please do this before the program begins. It's free!

Siblings

There will be a 10% discount for siblings registering in the same session.

Withdrawal policy

To help build a strong community amongst our children, we only admit new students at the beginning of sessions, and in some circumstances up to 2 weeks into a session. When children enter mid-stream, it can be harder to adjust to learning rhythms and rules. In most cases if a spot opens up mid-session, we'll wait until the start of the next session (i.e.: Winter) to admit a child on the waiting list. Registration fees are non-refundable

POLICY:

If paying annually:

- If you need to withdraw during the first two weeks of the year, we will try to fill your spot and refund the remaining weeks of the first session, as well as the remaining sessions. Please provide us with as much notice as possible if you feel you need to withdraw your child.
- If withdrawing after two weeks of programming, there will be no refund for that session, but subsequent sessions will be refunded.
- Refunds will be based on a rate of \$17 per day.

If paying per session:

- A refund is possible in the first two weeks of the session. Beyond two weeks, there will be no refund.
- Refunds will be based on a rate of \$18 per day.

*The reason for these policies is to keep Kootenay Nature School fiscally sound. There is much prep work (including time, resources, and staffing) that goes into running a program and it is generally based on an accurate count of registered participants. We understand unforeseen circumstances may cause people to change their plans. If this situation has arisen, please get in touch with us ASAP to discuss any available options.

Trial period

There is a two week trial period during which the lead educator and each new child's family will assess if the Kootenay Nature 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 two weeks will be reimbursed and there is no further financial obligation.

Where can I find more information about nature play?

childnature.ca/forest-school-canada/

Forest and Nature School in Canada: A Head, Heart, Hands Approach to Outdoor Learning (http://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/FSC-Guide_web.pdf)

Last Child in the Woods: Richard Louv

Barefoot and Balanced: Angela Hanscom