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## Kootenay Nature School 2017-2018 Safety Protocols



Our Nature School takes place at Canyon-Lister Elementary School, in 2.5 acres of forested area. Activities vary from day to day, including hiking, fort-building, rope-tying, digging, pouring, puddle-jumping, tasting wild edibles, examining plant, animal and insect life. The safety procedures in this handbook are designed to keep the children safe while allowing them the freedom to explore and interact with nature. Our educators work to ensure that safety measures are in place and followed daily, following these safety principles:

- constantly assess risk as conditions change
- regular head counts are performed
- observe the children's interactions with each other and nature
- spot the children during more challenging physical activity
- gently guide the children to safer activities if required
- model safe and responsible behaviour
- use radios to stay in communication with facilitators in different parts of the forest

### **Statement on Risky Play:**

'As safe as necessary, instead of as safe as possible.'

While nature-based play does have an element of risk, it is mostly of the lumps and bumps, bruises and scrapes variety. At Nature School healthy risk-taking might look like running, jumping, climbing hills, balancing on logs, sliding, playing with sticks and rocks and experiencing a variety of weather conditions. In a Nature School setting, children are supervised and supported to learn their limits and capabilities, as well as being coached to learn to recognize healthy risk.

Many societal factors have "contributed to eliminating the active, independent, unstructured (risky) aspect of outdoor play. Yet, children need this type of play, as it contributes to their physical, emotional and psychological development which supports the skills necessary to thrive as adults." Canada has a position on play which states that "access to active play in nature and outdoors – with its risks – is essential for healthy child development, and that opportunities for self-directed play outdoors should be increased in all settings. This statement is based on the findings from a systematic literature review which indicated that the positive health effects of risky play outweighed the benefits of avoiding it." (<http://www.cpha.ca/en/about/digest/40-1/3.aspx>)

Adults working or volunteering with our Nature School will perform site and activity risk assessments, taking into consideration potential hazards and ways to minimize risk. We will always be undertaking dynamic risk assessment, adapting our activities for changing weather and children's abilities, and including the children in the discussions about safety.

*Articles about the importance of healthy risk-taking:*

'Outdoor Risky Play for All'

'Risky Play Positively Impacts Children's Health:' UBC Study

## **Safety Protocols:**

**Morning sweep:** An adult will take a walk through the trail system in the morning, to check for any hazards (downed trees, animals etc).

**Boundaries:** Our forest area is fenced, and children will be reminded not to exit the gate until the end of our session, when an adult is ready to walk children to the parking lot. When children are exploring the forest during free time, adults will spread out to supervise groups of children as they move around (between the tipi, the trail, the sliding hill etc).

**Ropes:** As educators we will teach children knot tying if they are interested. Children using ropes will be closely supervised at all times, and will be reminded to never tie a rope onto anyone's body.

**Clothing:** For play in the outdoors, certain clothing can pose a risk to children (ie: long scarves and sandals) and facilitators may ask that parents choose a different option. We will keep an open line of communication with parents about what clothing is working and what isn't. No child will be permitted to attend Nature School without appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of heat or cold and keeps them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes. Children will need to wear long pants, even in warmer weather, to reduce the risk of scrapes, bug bites, puncture wounds and ticks. Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, choosing utility over appearance, and to be aware they are likely to take some of our mud home with them after a session.

**Playing With Sticks and Stones:** Children can carry sticks and are encouraged to think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks may be dragged or carried with the help of another person when each person is at either end. The children are taught to consider the space around them before throwing: Are there other children close enough to be hit and what is beneath where I am dropping it? Sticks and stones may be picked up and transported, but must be thrown away from other children and thought must be given to whether this is safe. Children will be reminded to walk when carrying sticks.

### **Carrying and Transporting Materials:**

Carrying and transporting heavy objects is a great opportunity for children to problem solve and work together. Children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag, and pull materials with their hands or by using ropes.

### **Collecting Flowers, Leaves and other natural items:**

This will be a dynamic, ongoing discussion with the children, who will be encouraged to ponder the questions that arise when collecting. Is it alive and growing? What is the item's role in the local ecosystem? Would others like to watch it grow/change throughout the seasons? What might happen if we pick all of certain plant in one area? Rather than

creating a hard-and-fast rule around collecting, an important schema in child development, we will seize it as an opportunity to help foster critical thinking. We will encourage care and observation of living things, discouraging breaking branches or bark off of living trees, or the wanton destruction of animal or insect homes. We will help the children learn to do as little harm as possible while nurturing the joy that arises from touching, feeling, holding (and pocketing!) natural things.

**Eating and Drinking:**

Children will be asked to only eat in the Tipi area, and to remain seated while they are eating.

**Animal Encounters:**

While we are in the forest (especially as it is a fenced area) it is very unlikely that we will encounter a bear, cougar or wolf. However, to be prepared for such an encounter we will practice safety through games and role playing (the children will pretend to see a bear, and will all move together into a big clump with their hands high in the air, talking loudly and confidently to the animal. They will then move backwards slowly away from the animal).

**Running Games:** Running games, both organized by leaders and informally, are excellent for fun, socialization, learning cooperation, listening/following directions and exercise. While we will help the children become aware of their surroundings and strive to direct running games to safe ground, learning to walk and run on uneven ground will be a large part of Forest School. If the ground is slippery or hazardous children will be helped to find a safer activity.

**Edible plants:** if a child finds something that looks edible, children must bring it to an adult who is confident they can identify the plant. No mushrooms will be eaten during any programs. Common edible plants we might find include roseships, saskatoon berries, raspberry, thimbleberry, blackberry, wild strawberry.

**Activities that involve being off of the ground:**

Being off the ground provides children with the opportunity to challenge themselves while having fun and exercising. This could include climbing on rocks, balancing on logs or climbing trees. Climbing trees brings children into contact with nature and some children will find being in trees calms them. Climbing trees also stimulates the senses. Some children can excel at this activity because they are low in body weight, fearless, and have an unlimited abundance of energy. Tree climbing is a great way to build a child's self-confidence. An adult must be present to 'spot' a child wanting to climb a tree at Nature School. A visual check must be made for loose or rotten branches and the child and educator must agree how high is safe to climb based on the size of the tree branches, the type of tree, adult: child ratio, ground cover, etc.

Other guidelines for climbing will include:

\*Encourage children to be aware of others and sensitive to different abilities and the speed that others can climb

\*Respect children's self imposed limits on how high they want to climb

\*Children not to be put under pressure when climbing, allow children to focus on the activity and speak to them calmly and reassuringly.

\*Children must only climb where they can climb unaided. We will work under the premise that when children are physically and mentally ready to perform a physical challenge, they will be much more confident and capable than if they are 'helped' beyond their capabilities.

**Play with loose parts** (ie: sticks, rocks, rope, etc): this kind of play provides children with the opportunity to use open-ended materials, be imaginative, creative and self-directive. Rules will be in place around not hitting, poking, or throwing heavy objects. A child who is acting dangerously will be asked to move away from other children, or have a parent called for pick-up if they are having a very challenging time.

**Hiking:** Our hiking will be slow, child-paced and cover minimal ground. Hiking is an opportunity for exercise, exploring new terrain, challenge and building stamina. Leaders will ensure that children are wearing adequate, supportive footwear (ie: no sandals).

**Emergency equipment kept on site (at the Tipi):**

-First Aid kits

-Personal medication for children

-Cell phone and walkie talkies

-Emergency contact information for children

-Accident forms

-Thermos of tea in cool weather

-Sunscreen

-Spare clothing

-Clean bottled water

-Wet wipes

## Kootenay Nature School Emergency Procedures

A copy of these procedures, including emergency phone numbers, is kept at all times in the First Aid kit and program binder. The procedures are as follows:

### *ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURE*

In a severe accident or emergency the Kootenay Nature School facilitators will follow this procedure:

1. Establish the nature and extent of the emergency. Refer to the first aid SAMPLE protocol. A lead facilitator will take the lead responding and administering first aid, after initial treatment/assessment by first available adult on the scene.
2. In consultation with other available adults, make sure the area and all other members of the group are accounted for, safe, adequately supervised by co-educators or volunteers. This means they fully understand what they must do to remain safe e.g. stop climbing, running on trails etc.
3. Assess the casualty and ask another adult to call 911 while a lead facilitator administers appropriate first aid. The person phoning will need to respond to the following questions:
  - Nature of emergency
  - Injured party details: age, gender, medical history ('Emergency Medical Forms' kept in binder in bin near Tipi)
  - Location: Canyon-Lister Elementary School, 4575 Canyon-Lister Road
  - First aid administered
  - Discuss with 911 attendant how quickly ambulance will arrive and whether child should be transported more immediately in a car to meet the ambulance mid-way
4. Send an adult to meet the ambulance in the school parking lot and direct them to the Nature School site.
5. Ensure that an appropriate adult attends the receiving hospital, taking with them any medical information available for the injured person.
6. Ensure that remainder of the children:
  - a. are adequately supervised throughout
  - b. Receive appropriate support and reassurance
  - c. Parents are called for early pick-up if deemed necessary
7. As soon as reasonably possible after the event, the accident will be reported using an Accident Report Form.