



Nature's Tracks Forest Play



Parent Handbook June 2021 edition

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Gratitude & Honouring of Mentors & Place

Forest Play is grateful for many individuals and organizations that have helped Forest Play staff and directors to offer programs that connect children to nature, themselves and others. We recognize nature herself as our most powerful teacher and honour the land and the heritage of those who came before us.

Our programs take place on the traditional territories of the Nakoda, Siksika and Ktunaxa people and we honour those people and their ongoing connection to this place. In the spirit of respect, reciprocity, and truth, we honour and acknowledge the traditional Treaty 7 territory. We also recognize this is home to the Metis Nation of Alberta, Region 3, within the historical Northwest Metis homeland. We acknowledge all Nations, Indigenous and non, who live, work, and play here and help us steward, celebrate and honour this land.



Many of the lands we operate programs on are now protected as part of Bow Valley Wildland Park or Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park. We are grateful we have the privilege of using these protected spaces for our programs and know those locations themselves are an important part of fostering a connection and love of place in Forest Play children.

We are also grateful for the Rocky Mountain Heritage Foundation and the Town of Canmore for continuing to protect and make accessible spaces like Quarry Lake Park and the many municipal trails and parks where we run programs.

The work at Forest Play draws heavily from the 8 Shields/Coyote Mentoring and Forest School movements. From training programs, to resources and one on one mentoring, we have benefited from the wisdom and experience of many individuals and groups including:

Jon Young, 8 Shields Institute

Jeannine Tidwell and Tim Corcoran, Twin Eagles Wilderness School

Wes Gietz, Windwalker

Forest School Canada and the Child and Nature Alliance

Interpretive Guides Association

Dave and Brenda Holder, Mahikan Adventures

Thank-you also to the parents who continue to support us. We hope this resource will serve as an important and useful guide for Forest Play parents and care givers and that it will continue to evolve to meet the future needs of Forest Play.

Welcome to Forest Play!

Our philosophy for our Forest Play programs has evolved through years of experience working with children, youth and adults in wilderness areas and parks, studying nature connection mentoring, and through our own experiences as parents of young children. Positive experiences in nature can heighten our children's natural curiosity, awe and wonder. Through play, stories, natural living skills and the art of observation, listening and questioning, we aim to connect children to nature, themselves and their community.

We've put this Parent Handbook together to provide you with some important information and to answer common questions we receive about our program. If you have additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

We are looking forward to growing the relationship we have with many of you and getting to know those of you who are joining our program for the first time.

Thank you for supporting Forest Play!



Who Are We?

We are nature connection mentors, professionally accredited guides, teachers and parents who believe nature is one of our greatest teachers.

Vision

By fostering a deep connection with the natural world, children and adults become fully alive and inspired to share their gifts.

Mission

Through play, stories, natural living skills and the art of observation, listening and questioning, we connect children and adults to nature, themselves and others.

Our Team

Forest Play leaders are the heart of a successful program and are selected in part because their sincere desire to help mentor children and youth to develop a deep connection with nature, self and others. You can read about our current and incredible team of staff on our website [here](#). The following minimum qualifications have been set to ensure staff have been properly trained and evaluated:

Formal education

- Lead Mentors: University Degree in a related field (e.g. Education, Early Childhood Learning, Outdoor Recreation, Leadership)
- Assistant Leaders: Minimum of 2 years training (or equivalent experience in a related field)

First Aid training:

- A minimum of one staff member in all programs is trained and current in Wilderness First Aid (40 or 80 hr course)
- All other staff are required to hold current Standard First Aid and CPR certifications (or higher)

Outdoor Leadership and Nature Connection Training:

- Forest School Canada certificate (or equivalent); Day Hiking Guide Certification (one or more of: Outdoor Council of Canada Field Trip Leader, Interpretive Guides Association Apprentice Hiking Guide or higher, Association of Canadian Mountain Guides Day Hiking or higher, or have equivalent training and experience as defined and recognized

by Alberta Parks and/or Parks Canada.); Coyote Mentoring/8 Shields Training (foundational training and experience with the model – to be approved by Director)

Experience:

- Lead Mentors: Three years or more in a related profession and at least one year experience working for Forest Play as an Assistant Leader
- Assistant Leaders: One year experience in a related field

Clean background check:

- RCMP vulnerable sector record check (completed yearly)
- Must be 20 years or older and have a valid driver’s license and transportation to Forest Play

Mentoring Philosophy

We believe nature experiences should be fun, magical and facilitated in a way that children feel safe and supported as they explore the edges of their world. When children are connected to the natural world, they are more connected to themselves, they are happier and more hopeful. We assist children in building new strengths and awareness of who they are as individuals and members of a larger community.

Children learn best when they are curious and having fun. We emphasize experiential and play-based learning through sensory awareness and active contact with the environment.



We have built Nature's Tracks Forest Play programs around cycles in nature and the life stages children naturally move through. Our programming foundation draws from the 8 Shields/ Coyote Mentoring Model (www.8shields.org) and Forest School model (www.forestschoolcanada.ca). Coyote Mentoring is unique blend of traditional knowledge from cultures around the world, scientific research on nature connection and is grounded in the rhythms of the natural world.

Forest School is an educational approach that emphasizes developing a strong connection with the land through regular and repeated experiences in nature, as well as child-directed, emergent and inquiry-based learning.

Coyote Mentoring/8 Shields Mentoring

Coyote mentoring is a method of sharing knowledge of, and connection to, nature. It taps into the passions that exist within each child and inspires them to extend and expand this motivation. The model evolved out of how traditional hunter-gatherer cultures around the globe passed on knowledge and connection to their children. It was mapped by Jon Young and is often called the “invisible school” because it is a cultural learning model that gets kids learning and connected without them knowing it.

Coyote Mentoring is founded on the gift principle – the knowledge that everyone comes into the world bearing unique gifts to share with their community. Our job as parents, friends, teachers and mentors is to help children grow more fully into their gifts. We do this by gently drawing children to the edge of their knowledge and experience and guiding them into new territory. At its best (and over the long term), Coyote Mentoring helps awaken the “8 Attributes of connection.”



When we grow more fully into ourselves more of these attributes emerge and we feel more alive and healthy.

Fully awakening these eight attributes takes a life time and the work of a village. At Forest Play, we are committed to modelling these attributes to the best of our ability and working with children to awaken them as they move forward within our program.



The Natural Learning Cycle

The 8 Shields mentoring model is based on the patterns that can be observed in nature – patterns that affect us on a day to day basis, but that many of us are unconscious of. If you were to choose a point on a compass to place the sunrise, or the Spring thaw, or a child’s birth, you would probably place them in the East. When you associate these cycles with the basic directions you get the “feeling” for the symbolic or archetypal energy of each “shield” or direction. This is how we guide our planning, instruction and reflection process. We will provide more information about this concept to anyone who expresses interest.

Core Routines

We use a number of techniques or “Core Routines” to draw out these 8 attributes. Core Routines are learning habits people practice to learn nature’s ways. Here is a short list of some of the core routines we practice within Forest Play on a regular basis:

- 1) **Story of the day** – At the end of each day, we review some of the highlights and provide space for reflection and recalling stories from the day. As parents, you play a key role in receiving the stories from your child. It is critical that the story is received well by those who are told about it. Pay attention & ask questions that take them deeper. Celebrate the wonder and magic that is shared. Share your own stories too.
- 2) **Exploring field guides** – We turn to field guides to find some of the answers to our questions. More often than not, the answers we find lead to more questions and the magic continues!
- 3) **Animal forms** - Children learn to move as different animals, learning new ways of moving for strength and flexibility as well as identifying the strengths of each animal.



4) **Sit spot** – With most young children, this time of being quiet with all senses alert takes place during games like hide and seek. This time is important and establishes brain patterns that will help them have a more refined sit spot as they get older. As the child matures, the skill also matures.

5) **Questioning & tracking** – Questioning is used to increase awareness and attention to specific identifying information. This type of questioning often encourages children to form their answers in their own mind without saying them out-loud, so that other learners can form their own knowledge.



6) **Expanding our senses** – Children are naturally in tune with their senses. We regularly get kids to smell, taste, listen, touch, and see things that stretch their awareness and knowledge. This might include tasting rose hips, feeling the difference between common juniper and creeping juniper, smelling pine needles and fir needles, searching for objects that are hidden, etc. It might also be practicing “deer ears,” “owl eyes” and other techniques specifically designed to enhance sensory awareness.

7) **Gratitude/Thanksgiving** - When we say “Thanksgiving,” we mean remembering and expressing gratitude for the things around us that support our lives that make it possible for us to be alive, every day. It is a general sharing of appreciation for things that are going well and support us daily to live happy, healthy lives.



Forest and Nature School Philosophy

At Forest Play, we also borrow from many of the 10 Principles of Forest and Nature School developed by the Child & Nature Alliance of Canada

10 Principles of Forest and Nature School

1. Takes place in a variety of natural spaces, including local forests, creeks, meadows, prairie grasses, mountains, shorelines, tundra, natural playgrounds and outdoor classrooms.
2. Is a sustained process of regular and repeated sessions in the same natural space, supporting children to develop a sense of place, an ethic of care towards nature, and an understanding of themselves as part of the natural world.
3. Views children and youth as innately competent, curious, and capable learners, and aims to promote their holistic development.
4. Is led by a qualified FNS educator* who is rooted in and committed to the FNS pedagogical framework, its theoretical underpinnings, and practical applications. FNS educators use place and play-based, emergent, and inquiry-driven teaching and learning methods. Their role is that of facilitator, guide, supporter, and co-learner, rather than expert, and they are constantly balancing those roles.
5. Values play in and of itself, as a vehicle for learning and skill development, and as a way for children and youth to exercise agency in their lives. FNS therefore carves out and protects the time and space for children and youth to dive deeply into their play.
6. Views the opportunity to experience risk as an integral part of the children's learning and healthy development. FNS educators are knowledgeable about and qualified to support children and youth to assess and co-manage risk.
7. Relies on loose, natural materials to support open-ended, creative play and learning.
8. Values the process as much as the outcome.
9. Seeks to honour the past and current realities of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples by building reciprocal relationships with members of those communities in order to learn how Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, teaching, and learning intersect with FNS theories/ practice, and how one can support the other.
10. Is grounded in and prioritizes building engaged, healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities by always considering issues of access and equity.

**While some Forest Play leaders may have Forest and Nature School (FNS) training, all Forest Play Leaders are highly qualified according to our program requirements. See "Our Team" for more detailed information.*

Borrowed from The Child & Nature Alliance of Canada's Practitioner's Course (2019).

Operating Procedures

Registration

To participate in pre-registered programs (e.g. After school Forest Play, Summer Camps, Adult Learning programs, etc) registration must be completed in full a minimum of 24 hrs before the start of the program.

Program Fees: Fees will be due no later than 1 week prior to the first day of the program. Totals will be emailed to registered participants and/or posted on the website. Summer programs must be paid in full. After school programs can either be paid seasonally in one lump sum or in monthly instalments. If these options do not work, please contact us to set up an alternate arrangement.

Preference is given to families who sign their children up for a program in its entirety (seasonally or as noted in the schedule).

If space remains in a program, we will consider “drop-ins” but this must be discussed/arranged the night before (at the latest) the start of a program with the program director or manager.

Payment Options: Fees may be paid by credit card, cash, cheque (made to “Forest Play”), or e-transfer (send to: info@forestplay.ca)

Late Fees: Unless a previous arrangement has been made with Forest Play, any payments not made within 10 days from the due date are subject to a late fee of \$25.00. If program fees are not paid within 30 days of the program start date, the child will not be invited back to class until tuition is paid in full. If alternate payment plans are required, please contact the office.

Please note:

- Credit is not given due to absence or delinquency.
- A \$25.00 returned check fee will be charged for NSF returned checks.

Additional Childcare

Additional childcare hours may be arranged on an individual basis providing staff are available and it is pre-arranged with the leaders.



Withdrawals

Parents may withdraw a child from the program at any time. If the program is cancelled by Forest Play for any reason, a full refund will be provided. If you cancel your registration 2 weeks ahead of time, a full refund will be provided minus a \$35 administration fee. If you cancel within 2 weeks and we are able to fill that spot with another child, a full refund will be provided minus a \$35 administration fee. If we are not able to fill that spot with another child, we will refund 50% of the program cost. In the event of a last minute emergency (illness, death in family) contact the office to discuss refund options.



Late Pick Up

We understand that there are unforeseen events and emergencies that may arise in your schedule. If for any reason you should be delayed when picking up your child, please call/text us and inform us that you will be late as soon as you possibly can. If you do not arrive within 15 minutes of the scheduled pick up time, we will begin calling the emergency contacts that you have provided to pick up your child. If individuals are consistently late, we may charge a late fee of \$10/half hour.

Programming Schedule and Holidays

Prior to the start of each program you register your child for, an email will be sent outlining the dates for each program. We do not offer Forest Play on the following days:

Labour Day
Thanksgiving
Winter/Christmas Vacation
Family Day
Easter Friday
Victoria Day
Civic Holiday (August long weekend)

Examples of questions to ask your child:

What happened in the story today?

What animals did you notice?

Where was the best hiding spot you found?

Was the creek frozen? Where did you find this dirt?

What did it feel like when your shoes got wet?

What did you create with your friends today?

Parent Involvement

Parent interaction and involvement is valued and encouraged. As your child(ren) returns home from one of our programs (sometime with wet or dirty clothing!) you have an opportunity to receive their experiences or catch their stories. Showing a genuine

interest and encouraging them to share in increasing detail helps validate and deepen their experiences. Some days, they may be excited to share a lot and other days, not very much – it all depends on the child and the day!

Occasionally we have parents who are interested in learning more about our program and philosophy. We are very happy to meet with you and answer questions you have. Please contact us if you would like to learn more!

Staff Responsibilities

As professionals in the field, it is our responsibility to adhere to known Best Practices and to provide the highest level of care for children. We will adhere to “Wild Smart” and Leave No Trace Practices while on the trail to decrease our impact on the environment. We are aware that providing effective care for children and reading the environment throughout the day is the best way to manage risk and ensure a positive experience.



Role of the Forest Play Leader/ Mentor

Forest Play leaders contribute to the creation of a safe learning culture that aims to build connection to nature, self and others. We observe, listen carefully, learn alongside the children and look for cues about what gets them excited, curious, uncomfortable, or stumped. We look for edges of experience, knowledge and comfort and then gently pull them beyond those edges.

“The job of the mentor is not to determine the shape of the flower, but to nurture well the sprouting seed.”

Wes Gietz, Windwalker

We love to do things that deepen our own connection to nature self and others and understand we need these connections ourselves in order to awaken them in others.

Focus on the Children

Forest Play Leaders focus on the needs and interests of the children. The interests, ambitions and desires of children in the group can help guide the program - this is part of child-centered

programming. Children will be encouraged to learn to assess risks and manage hazards. If their interests, actions or desires could compromise the safety of themselves, leaders or the group, the leader will need to redirect them.



Through observation and understanding of the individual child, leaders will gauge whether children's needs are being met (food, water, etc) and if additional supports are needed to help them.

We know that nature and experience in nature are the most powerful teachers and understand that sometimes the most important thing we can do is get out of the way.

We keep everyone safe while artfully allowing children to experience the feeling of risk, the frustration of failure and the thrill of success.

Health and Safety Policies

Privacy Policy

Forest Play respects your privacy and we have taken steps to protect it. Any personal data shared with us, including photographic images and data about your child's medical history will be processed in accordance with privacy legislation and used for the purposes you have consented to. We will not share your details with third parties without your consent, except where we are legally compelled or obligated to do so.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you should have any questions or concerns about protecting the privacy of the information you provide.

Food Policies

Snack-Sharing: To ensure the health, safety and happiness of the community, we ask that participants do not share or trade snacks.

Drinking Water: Leaders will carry extra water so participants are able to refill their water bottles on site if they drink all the water they bring to Forest Play.

Nuts: If a student with a life-threatening nut allergy is in the group, a note will be sent home to request that participants refrain from bringing nuts to Forest Play. Otherwise, nuts are permitted.

Allergies

If your child has any allergies, please notify leaders before the start of each program. If your child's allergy information changes in the year, please provide all updates.



If your child has been prescribed an EpiPen, she/he must keep it on their person at all times. A fanny pack works well for this purpose. In cold weather, please ensure that your child knows to keep the EpiPen close to his/her body to ensure that the EpiPen does not freeze.

If there is a child with a severe, life-threatening allergy to a particular food or substance, that food or substance will be banned from their program. Families will be notified at the beginning of the program which foods

or substances are not allowed and must not to be included in their child/ren's snacks and lunches.

Toileting Procedure

At Forest Play, many of our programs run where there are no toilets or indoor plumbing facilities. Children practice "wild pees" or peeing in the woods in all seasons. When a child needs to go pee, a leader will show the child where a good location to go is (this will vary according to where we are, but it will always be a safe distance from the group and the lunch area and away from water sources and main trails). If a child needs assistance (this is common with 4-5 yr olds, especially in winter when clothing is bulky and there are many layers), a leader will assist the child if requested and required. Leaders and/or peers will instruct children who are unfamiliar with "wild pees" in appropriate techniques.

Our primary method for dealing with feces in all seasons is using a portable toilet. When this is not possible we will dig a cathole. Catholes are the most widely accepted method of waste disposal in the forest where no toilet facilities exist. We carry a shovel with us at all times and leaders will accompany younger children to assist them with digging the hole and burying the feces. Older children will be instructed in proper cathole procedures and given the toilet kit (shovel, toilet paper and hand sanitizer) so they can dig a hole on their own.

We follow the following Leave No Trace guidelines for Catholes:

Selecting a Cathole Site:

1. A site is chosen at least 200 feet (approx. 70 adult paces from water sources
2. The side is inconspicuous and away from high traffic areas used by people (e.g. in thick undergrowth, near downed timber, or on gentle hillsides.)
3. We try to find a site with deep organic soil. This organic material contains organisms which will help dispose the feces. (Organic soil is usually dark and rich in colour.)
4. We choose an elevated site to keep the feces out of water. Over time, the decomposing feces will percolate into the soil before reaching water sources.

Digging a Cathole:

1. Dig a hole 6-8 inches deep using the military shovel we carry with us to Forest Play.
2. When finished, the cathole is filled with the original dirt and disguised with native materials.

Illness

The most comforting place where a child can be properly nursed through an illness is at home. If your child has any of the following, please keep your child at home until she/he is symptom free for at least 24 hours:

- fever, deep productive cough, watery eyes, sore throat, diarrhea, a new unexplained rash, any infectious condition (e.g. pink eye) or has been vomiting prior to the day;
- headache and stiff neck, or any complaints of unexplained or undiagnosed pain;
- a known or suspected communicable disease;
- displays any other signs or symptoms of illness.



If your child starts displaying symptoms of illness or becomes sick while at Forest Play, you will be contacted to pick up your child. Please ensure that your child stays at home until she/he no longer poses a health risk to other children or teachers.

Emergency Illness & First Aid

In case of illness or accident requiring first aid, program leaders (with First Aid training) will administer first aid. Each leader has a travel first aid kit and can assist with basic first aid. If further medical assistance is necessary, emergency assistance will be called and parents or an emergency contact person will be contacted.



If a child requires immediate medical attention and must be transported to a health facility for emergency assistance, staff will go with the child to the health facility by ambulance and stay with him/her until a parent or emergency contact person arrives. Every effort will be made to contact a parent before the child leaves Forest Play. However, the health of the child is the primary concern.

If further medical assistance is not necessary, but staff judge that the child

should be removed from the program, the parent or emergency contact person will be called to pick up the child.

Medication

Please notify the program director if your child has any medical issues or is on any kind of medication. We cannot administer medication, except for an Epipen and Benedryl, to a child as a life saving treatment. If your child requires an Epipen, please notify staff and provide an Epipen with clearly marked instructions.

Medical Emergencies

In the event of a medical or dental emergency or accident, we will contact 911 and the parents of the child.

Emergency Procedures

In case of an emergency (fire, floods, mudslides, etc.) parents and or emergency contacts will be notified by telephone. In the event of evacuation, parents will be contacted and instructed to pick their children up immediately. In order for your children to be safe, it is vital that we have your current contact information on file.

Inclement Weather Days

At Forest Play, we run our programs outdoors and we always have plans in place to keep children safe in inclement weather (i.e. extreme cold or heat, heavy rain, wind or thunderstorms). Please ensure your child is adequately dressed for the day (see seasonal clothing and gear lists below). If your child is not adequately dressed for the day we may call you to come pick them up.

Very Cold Weather

In the winter, we have a wall tent with a wood-burning stove as a warm up shelter. For days where the weather forecast is colder than -25 Celsius, we will contact parents to communicate what our cold weather plan is. In all likelihood we will continue the program because we have a shelter with a fire, so relief from the cold is available. On very cold days, time outside our shelter will be limited, based on age, gear and other factors. We often have children moving in and out of the shelter regularly depending on their comfort level and their need as assessed by staff. Staff will visually monitor students for frostbite, cold response and hypothermia and will help the children learn to do their own body scans to assess signals their bodies are giving them regarding their temperature.



High Winds

High winds can be dangerous because of falling branches and trees. We monitor the weather forecast and conditions specific to the areas where we run programs closely. The wind experienced in Canmore at any given location is highly dependent on local topography and other factors. It is often windy at our drop off locations (Canmore Nordic Centre main parking lot and Quarry Lake Parking lot), but due to protection afforded by slopes, gullies, mountains, etc. we can often find protection from the wind at various locations within our site and keep risk associated with high winds low. We will keep to wind-protected areas of the forest when it is windy or there are moderate-strong wind gusts. If it is deemed to be safer out of the forest and in open meadows, we will make that choice as needed. In extreme situations when wind speed and direction is deemed unsafe or if we feel we cannot adequately mitigate risks associated with wind or gusts, we will cancel programs to keep children and staff safe.

Clothing and Equipment for Forest Play

Children will be outdoors everyday they are with us throughout the seasons. Weather in the Canadian Rockies changes quickly and often. We can experience snow, cold, heat, rain and sun in every season. It is imperative that children arrive prepared for outdoor play and adventure. Children who are well dressed and prepared are comfortable, happy and able to participate fully in all activities. Here are our gear lists (organized by season):

Summer Gear List

- **rain coat & rain pants**
- **sun hat**
- **water** (750ml-1000ml for a full day program)
- **sturdy footwear** (rubber boots on rainy days, shoes on others, flip flops for water play)
- **snacks & lunch** (a morning snack, lunch and an afternoon snack)
- **extra set of clothes** in a ziploc bag (at bottom of pack) - this is for accidents or days we get wet playing in puddles or mud
- **change of clothes** (see above) and/or bathing suit for hot days, when we'll be splashing in the nearby creeks and ponds
- **day pack** (comfortable enough for your child to carry and big enough for all of their stuff. We recommend a backpack with a chest strap, if possible. They won't be wearing it all day, but they need to carry it from one location to another.)
- **sunscreen** (should be applied before your child arrives at Forest Play)
- **a small hand towel/face cloth** (when children's hands are visibly dirty we will assist them with washing their hands with a spray bottle and soap before providing them with hand sanitizer)



Optional:

- bug spray
- tuque (yes - it can be cold in the summer, especially during or after a rain)
- mitts or gloves (see above - kids use these more often that you might expect)

****Please keep home toys and objects (e.g. figurines, stuffed animals, other treasures) for play at home. Special items that children have brought from home have sometimes gone missing or been broken in the past. We have also found the children are better able to form friendships and use their creativity in games and activities when toys and other objects are left at home.***



Winter Gear List

- **water** (500ml for a half day, 750ml-1000ml for a full day program)
- **snacks & lunch** (a morning snack (full day only), lunch and an afternoon snack)
- **2-3 pair of mittens** (gloves are not warm enough for most winter days)
- **extra set of clothes** in a ziploc bag (at bottom of pack) - this is for accidents or days we get wet playing in puddles or mud
- **day pack** (comfortable enough for your child to carry and big enough for all of their stuff. We recommend a backpack with a chest strap, if possible. They won't be wearing it all day, but they need to carry it from one location to another.)
- **small bottle of hand sanitizer** (particularly for older children who might want their own. We will provide hand sanitizer to any children who do not bring their own)
- **non-medical mask** (for use only if circumstances require during the program)

****Please keep home toys and objects (e.g. figurines, stuffed animals, other treasures) for play at home. Special items that children have brought from home have sometimes gone missing or been broken in the past. We have also found the children are better able to form friendships and use their creativity in games and activities when toys and other objects are left at home.***

Please see below guidelines for dressing for cold weather

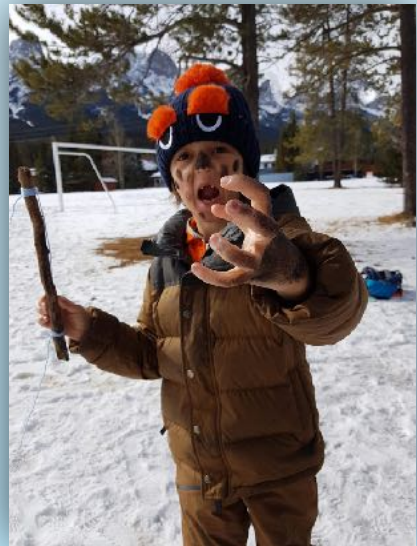
Dressing for Cold Weather

Feet

- **warm wool or wool-poly blend socks** (When we slide down slopes, they often get snow in their boots because their internal gaiters slide up. When cotton socks get wet, they are VERY cold, so please do not send your child with cotton socks). If your child's boots are big, consider wearing two pairs of socks (note: if your child's boots are snug with one layer of socks, do not add a second layer - squished toes get cold quickly)
- **warm winter boots** - Bogs are not warm enough for temperatures below -10C (despite what the advertising says). Boots should have thick insulation - particularly around the bottom (sole) part of the boot. Baffin boots or others with removable liners work well.

Legs

- **long underwear** (poly or wool blends are best)
- **fleece pants** are great to wear over top of the long underwear (if you don't have fleece pants, wear a warmer layer of pants over top of the long underwear)
- **snow pants/ski pants** - these insulated pants are great for trapping the heat and keeping kids warm as they play in the snow



Torso

- **base layer** (light poly or wool-blend shirt is best to wear against the skin because it wicks moisture away from the skin)
- **insulation layer** (fleece or wool sweater - depending on the thickness, consider wearing two or three layers of insulation)
- **snow jacket/ski jacket** (something thick with lots of insulation)

Hands

- dress kids in the **warmest mittens** you have and send along 2-3 extra pairs in case they get wet (fingers are colder in gloves)

Head & Face

- **a tuque** (warm, insulated hat) is a must
- **baclava or scarf or neck tube/ Buff** is also a must- they are great for helping keep neck, ears, face and noses warm when we are outside. In very cold weather we often tell children we only want to see their eyes uncovered when they leave the tent.

Risk Management

Risk- the experience and management of it – is an inherent and integral part of Forest Play and healthy child development. Forest Play leaders and volunteers endeavour to co-assess and co-manage risk with participants, believing this is an essential skill for children to develop. Leaders have developed activity risk assessments and modify this on an ongoing basis, always considering the balance between risk and benefits.

Some of the risks inherent to Forest Play include, but are not limited to:

- Injuries from executing strenuous and demanding physical activities, possibly on uneven ground in the forest
- Injuries from failing to properly use tools such as carving knives
- Injuries resulting from fire
- Injuries from falling on uneven terrain
- Inclement weather



Wildlife Safety, Natural Hazards and Awareness

Keeping children safe while at Forest Play is our number one priority. We stay up to date with wildlife reports in the areas we use, actively look for sign during our programs and have connections with local wildlife experts. Throughout our programs, we use a variety of techniques (including games, scenarios and stories) to raise awareness of natural hazards and how to respond if we encounter any wildlife.



At times, the stories and activities we use have scared some children. Although this is not our intent, we would like to inform parents that this is a possibility and encourage all parents whose children express concern or worry to let program leaders know. We will not modify our emphasis on safety, but can take steps to connect with individual children who we know are scared and modify stories so they are reassured that the forest is a safe place to be.

One of our key strategies for staying safe at forest play is to stay together as a group- this is the first step in preventing dangerous wildlife encounters. As a result, we take the issue of staying together as a group very seriously. We have zero tolerance for children who decide to “run away” from the group and are not willing to listen to staff regarding safety issues.

Depending on the situation and based on our judgment, parents will be asked to pick up their children who have run away from the group - IMMEDIATELY. In these situations, children will not be invited back to Forest Play.

Ratios

For all Forest Play programs (ages 4-6) the guide to child ratio will not exceed 1:6. For all Forest Play programs (ages 7-12) the guide to child ratio will not exceed 1:8.



Learning and Development Guidance and Discipline Policy

The foundation of the guidance and discipline policy at Forest Play Program is to encourage positive behaviour and social competence.

Our underlying assumptions:

- All children want to feel a sense of “belonging”; they want to feel important and included.
- All children desire positive attention from the adults around them; however, when they do not gain positive attention, they will seek negative attention.
- All behavior is a form of communication. Children are trying to meet their needs (to gain attention, to obtain something, to avoid something). It is our job as mentors to understand what they need and to teach them a more appropriate way of getting their need met.

We put our greatest effort in preventing inappropriate behaviour. Forest Play provides a supportive and nurturing environment where communication from each child is valued and encouraged. We create an environment where positive behaviour is reinforced and where



inappropriate behaviour is not necessary. We teach children how to use words to express what they want, what they need, and how they feel. We teach them how to treat themselves and others with respect, and we facilitate verbal problem solving when children are in conflict.

Forest Play Code of Conduct

At the beginning of all our programs (and if necessary, in mid-program), we go over and have each child agree to (with a show of hands) our Code of Conduct.

Forest Play Code of Conduct

1. **Respect Yourself** (by: staying hydrated, adjusting layers for heat/cold, eating food, being kind to yourself when you make a mistake, etc)
2. **Respect Others** (by: using kindness in our actions and words, helping when needed, listening to leaders and friends etc)
3. **Respect Nature** (by: harvesting using respectful protocols, not damaging or defacing nature etc).

Even when all preventative measures have been put in place to encourage positive behaviour, children will sometimes test the limits. They will also sometimes forget the Code of Conduct. Following, is the progression we tell children we will follow at Forest Play:

- The first time they forget, we will remind them of the element of the code of conduct that they have forgotten
- If it happens again, we will remind them again and inquire to see if there is anything else going on or that we can do to help them
- If it happens a third time, we will remind them that we will need to contact their parents to take them home if they are not able to respect the code of conduct or our instructions (consider calling parents to let them know where their child is at on this progression so the phone call home is not a surprise and they can help support the child at home)
- If the above steps do not work, contact parents and let the child know that they have shown that they are not ready for Forest Play.

Two other key elements in our **Code of Conduct** include:

1. Raven Call is our signal to group back up (come to the sound of the Raven)
2. Stay within sight of one of the Forest Play leaders. Staying together as a group is the first step in preventing dangerous wildlife encounters and preventing kids getting lost. As a result, we take the issue of staying together as a group very seriously. We have **zero tolerance** for children who decide to “run away” from the group and are not willing to listen to staff regarding safety issues.

Depending on the situation and based on our judgment, parents will be asked to pick up their children who have run away from the group - **IMMEDIATELY**. In these situations, children may not be invited back to Forest Play (exceptions must be approved by the director and parents)

Rudeness, Being Mean and Bullying

At Forest Play, we know children are learning how to socialize and get along with peers. Part of this learning involves some conflict. Our core philosophy involves building respect for others. As we work through the issues that arise between children, we feel it is helpful to distinguish between several types of behaviour – behaviour that is rude, behaviour that is mean and behaviour that is characteristic of bullying.

Rude behavior is inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else (e.g. jumping ahead in line, accidentally stepping on another child's lunch). Incidents of rudeness



are typically spontaneous, unplanned, based on thoughtlessness and poor manners. These incidents will be dealt with on a case by case basis to help children become aware of their actions and to avoid repetition.

Mean behaviour is purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone once (or maybe twice). Children can be mean to each other when they criticize clothing, appearance, intelligence, etc. Mean behaviour aims to hurt or depreciate someone and is often motivated by angry feelings. We know mean behavior can hurt

deeply and children be held accountable for mean behaviour and strategies will be developed to avoid repetition and to support those involved.

Bullying: Experts agree that bullying entails three key elements: an intent to harm, a power imbalance and repeated acts or threats of aggressive behavior. Kids who bully say or do something intentionally hurtful to others and they keep doing it, with no sense of regret or remorse -- even when targets of bullying show or express their hurt or tell the aggressors to stop.

Bullying may be physical, verbal, relational or carried out via technology.

At Forest Play, bullying is inexcusable, and we have a firm policy against all types of bullying. Our philosophy is to foster within children a respect for all life and develop a deep connection to the natural world through direct experience, cooperation and skill acquisition. We work together as a team to ensure that program participants gain self-confidence, make new friends, and go home with great memories.

Persons who are bullied may not have the same potential to get the most out of their experience. We address all incidents of bullying seriously and promote communication so both staff, parents and program participants will be comfortable alerting us to any problems during their experience at Forest Play. Every person has the right to expect to have the best possible experience at Forest Play, and by working together as a team to identify and manage bullying, we can help ensure that all children have a great experience at Forest Play.

Observation, Planning and Documentation



Forest Play staff meet and prepare a loose plan for the day in advance of each program, taking into consideration environmental factors such as weather and terrain as well as group dynamic and individual needs of the children. Staff also meet at the end of each day to debrief and reflect on the flow of the day and discuss any issues that may have arisen. Communication between staff and the director occurs on an ongoing basis to ensure programs are being delivered according to the mission and vision of Forest Play.

Photographs will be taken of children (see privacy policy for more information) and used as part of debriefs and reflections, planning, and sharing with the broader community using various channels such as Forest Play social media (Facebook and Instagram), email updates to parents and blog posts available on the Forest Play website. Often our summer

programs culminate in a shared slideshow/video showcasing the fun, adventures, discoveries and projects we worked on during our week(s) together. These are shared with families to help give a glimpse into our world at Forest Play and provide an opportunity for dialogue between Forest Play staff and parents/families.

Safeguarding Children

Child Protection Policy

Forest Play is committed to taking a proactive position regarding the prevention of child abuse. It is the responsibility of people who perform professional or official duties with respect to

children, to immediately report to Social Services or the police if s/he suspects that child abuse has occurred or if a child is at risk of abuse. Forest Play takes this role seriously and has taken steps to ensure children are protected while at Forest Play including:

- Ensuring all necessary checks are made when recruiting staff and volunteers, which includes:
- Criminal Record Check with Vulnerable Sectors Check
- Minimum of 3 professional reference checks
- Maintaining strong child protection systems and procedures for staff and volunteers.
- Training all staff and volunteers and providing a common understanding of child protection issues to inform planning and practice, including asking staff to complete the Little Warriors Training program (<https://littlewarriors.ca/prevention/workshop/>)
- Sharing information about child protection and good practice with children and parents/guardians.
- Sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parent/guardians and children appropriately



There will be occasion when some form of physical contact with students is inevitable. Examples include: if a child has an accident, is hurt or is in a situation of danger to themselves or others around them. However, at all times the agreed policy for safe restraint must be adhered to. At Forest Play if staff, visitors, volunteers or parent helpers are working with children alone they will, wherever possible, be visible to other members of staff. They will be expected to inform another member of staff of their whereabouts outside, who they are with and for how long. Leaders are asked to ensure they spread out in the area and maintain visibility with other staff whenever possible.

Mandatory Reporting

Staff at Forest Play are obliged to report any suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect.

Prohibited Behaviour Management Practices

Forest Play is committed to providing a safe environment for all children attending our programs. Corporal punishment, sexual abuse and harassment are strictly prohibited at all times. This includes hitting, spanking, pushing, shaking, pinching, biting, grabbing, slapping, etc.

- Forest Play mandates zero tolerance for sexual abuse, harassment, molestation, corporal punishment or neglect of any child. There must be a safe environment for each child at all times and all employees and volunteers are expected to ensure that no harm comes to any child at any time.

- A child must not be humiliated, either physically or verbally, through sarcasm, taunting, teasing, degrading, etc. Deliberately harsh or degrading measures that would humiliate a child or undermine a child's self-respect are not acceptable.
- A child must not be confined or locked in any space or area.
- A child must not be deprived of basic needs for food, clothing, or shelter. Food must not be used as a punishment or threat at lunch or snack. Access to liquids (water, juice, etc.) must always be available for the child.

Safeguarding Adults

Forest Play is committed to a healthy work environment free of discrimination and harassment for all our employees. A company-wide policy has been developed with the intent to prevent harassment of any type, including sexual harassment, of its employees, clients and to deal quickly and effectively with any incident that might occur.

Guidance about acceptable conduct and safe practice will be given to all staff and volunteers during training. These are sensible steps that every adult should take in their daily professional conduct with children. All staff have signed off on and are expected to follow the guidelines set out in the *Full Value Contract* as they encourage respect, civility and responsible citizenship. In addition, Forest Play Leaders must not:

- engage in any form of bullying, whether it is in person or through technology, like email or cell phones
- commit sexual assault
- traffic weapons or illegal drugs
- commit robbery
- give alcohol or cannabis to a minor
- be in possession of a weapon, including firearms
- use any object to threaten or intimidate another person
- injure anyone with an object
- be in possession of alcohol, cannabis (except by an individual who is authorized to use cannabis for medical purposes), or illegal drugs
- be under the influence of alcohol, cannabis (except by an individual who is authorized to use cannabis for medical purposes), or illegal drugs
- provide others with alcohol, illegal drugs, or cannabis (unless the recipient is an individual who has been authorized to use cannabis for medical purposes) inflict or encourage others to inflict bodily harm



- engage in hate propaganda or other types of behaviour caused by hate or bias

Inclusion and Accessibility

We believe Forest Play should be accessible to everyone regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, physical ability, gender and more.

We also believe that cost should not be a barrier to participation in Forest Play programs. If your family requires financial assistance, please contact us. We have had families access Canadian Tire's Jumpstart program funding in the past and have also adjusted fees for families in need of support.

If your child has needs that may require extra support from staff, please contact us so we can learn more about how best to support your child in our programs. One to one support is not currently available at this time, but we are happy to discuss possibilities that are available.

Communication Policies

General Communication Policy

Forest Play will communicate with families, and school groups through their teachers, and predominantly via email. To reach us in a timely manner, please send an email to info@forestplay.ca

Parents are asked to inform us:

- if their child will be late or absent
- if any member of your group is ill with a communicable disease
- if any member of your group is being treated for lice
- if your child has different abilities or needs that would impact their participation and/or safety in the program



Questions and Concerns

Our goal is for all visitors to Forest Play to feel comfortable and supported as they learn about the natural world, their children and themselves through outdoor and potentially risky play. Should parents have any questions or concerns do not hesitate to ask to speak with Forest Play staff. If you or the Forest Play 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 Forest Play staff. Please communicate your concerns with Forest Play 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 Forest Play staff, please bring that concern to Forest Play director (info@forestplay.ca).

Environmental Sustainability

Building a deep connection with nature is at the core of what we do at Forest Play. We understand people are part of nature and know that by visiting the same places on a regular basis that the forests where we conduct Forest Play become a second home for those in our program. We believe that coming to love the natural world and the specific places we visit will encourage children to grow up and become stewards of the land. We consciously work to foster an ethic of care and to sustainably use the lands we visit during Forest Play. We manage adverse environmental effects by rotating our sites (you will hear children call them “camps”). We have multiple camps we visit at each of our sites and we rotate the location of our program seasonally (e.g. we run winter programs at the Canmore Nordic Centre, summer programs at Quarry Lake and Spring and Fall programs at Ridge Road). Higher impact activities and gathering spots are focused in areas that are already impacted or that are “hardened” by nature of what is or is not growing there (e.g. dense spruce forests have a forest floor of spruce needles and dirt and are less impacted than open aspen forests in the spring when wildflowers are out). We have a plan for monitoring, managing and limiting potential negative impact and for the positive development and improvement of the ecology of our sites.

It Takes a Village

It takes a village to raise a child to his/her potential. We look forward to getting to know you and your family over the course of the time your child is in Forest Play. We feel lucky to have the opportunity to work with so many wonderful families and are always amazed at the growth we see in the children who have been in our program for longer periods of time.

