



# Community Nature Foundation

A Nonprofit Protecting Nature and Providing Holistic Outdoor Education

## Forest School Policies and Parent Handbook

At Fern Gully Forest School, we provide outdoor holistic education with small class sizes and an open-air environment for children to learn academics integrated with social-emotional skills, mindfulness, wilderness awareness, and natural magic! We help kids develop important life skills and positive connections with each other and nature that will help them excel in school and life. We honor the seasons and help children to experience the wonders of all weathers.

Our structure follows the Olympia School District schedule for holidays, closures, and start and end dates.

We are committed to helping families raise happy, healthy, and capable children. We offer a home away from home with supportive adults and a close connection to nature and other children to play, socialize, and learn.

### Our goal is to provide:

- ☺ **A safe and nurturing, holistic learning environment.** Forest School includes learning awareness, respect and care for nature through observation, outdoor adventures, and imaginative play, as well as place-based science and environmental education in an inquiry-based approach that increases critical thinking skills. Children develop character, physical strength, cognitive abilities, and social/emotional awareness for a well rounded education. We teach homesteading and survival skills along with other important life skills and values such as, honesty, respect, collaboration, independence, self-regulation and emotional moderation. Kids learn the importance of being trustworthy, dependable, compassionate, kind, inclusive, friendly and fair.
- ☺ **A gentle approach to discipline rooted in connection.** Since children occasionally need positive discipline, it is important that we share a similar philosophy, so that your child understands where the boundaries are and what is expected. Children are taught our *5 Agreements to: 1) keep each other safe, 2) listen, 3) be kind, 4) let the little things go, and 5) have fun!* We regularly discuss and model what the agreements mean, how to keep each other physically and emotionally safe, our expectations at school and specifically which behaviors are inappropriate, and why, and give alternatives that are acceptable through modeling kindness and appropriate behavior.
- ☺ **Waldorf and Montessori Methods**, as well as Whole Brain Strategies, such as “connect and redirect” (from *The Whole Brain Child* by Daniel J. Siegel, MD. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D). In this way, we provide the connection they truly need and encourage alternatives that show them how to change their behavior, without the need for punishment or making the child feel “bad” or shamed in anyway. This helps empower them to develop their self-esteem and teaches them how to handle difficult situations themselves in the future. We state our expectations for kindness and model caring for others to show children how to make amends. We give choices for alternatives, and in extreme situations of violent behavior or tantrums a child may be asked to “take a break” in the calm space because at times a child may need a few minutes to calm down, identify their emotions and co-regulate with a teacher to learn to self-regulate, and think about their choices before being shown alternative behaviors or talking with a teacher to get to the root of the issue and figure out how to make it better or learn what they could do differently in the future.
- ☺ **Unconditional love** and nurturing a child’s sense of belonging, security, self-esteem, and confidence.

**Working together and communication is key to success. The parent and provider need to be on the same page with open communication, understanding expectations, and doing our best to implement similar strategies.**

Please exchange pertinent information in your child’s life such as different routines, special events, or activities, as well as bigger changes such as death, divorce, separation, moving, visitors, etc. All this information can be important in understanding the child’s feelings, behavior, and well-being. We invite you to share with us in writing via email, by telephone, or schedule an appointment to talk in-person.



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## Example Daily Flow

Arrival and Greeting

Gardening and caring for animals

Circle time (including name games & our 5 agreements)

Activities: Yoga, mindfulness and sensory practice, music, songs, etc.

Bathroom and hand washing

Snack time: reading aloud and story telling

Forest Time. Team-building games & other learning activities

Bathroom and hand washing

Lunch: reading aloud and story telling

Activity: Arts and crafts, reading, wilderness survival skills, garden care, study time, etc.

Pick-up Time (your child is released to your care as soon as you walk in)

*Note: This is a general schedule and is determined mostly by the children's needs and feelings each day.*

## **Example Activities (all-weather):**

Team games, puppetry, singing, dancing, music-making, life and survival skills, arts and crafts, nature observation and exploration, swinging, climbing, balancing, running, gardening, dancing, imaginative play, mud kitchen, etc.

*Note: please remember to dress your child for the weather that day, such as warm layers with a waterproof outer layer*

## Policies and Procedures

If teacher illness or other emergencies should arise during school hours every attempt will be made to have a substitute teacher care for your child so that we can remain open. If a substitute is not available, you will need to pick up your child.

## **Holidays and school closures follow the Olympia School District Schedule.**

*We do reserve the right to close for any reason for which we cannot operate in a safe manner. i.e. inclement weather, or in extreme circumstances, medical epidemics. Tuition and fees are paid for any of these occurrences.*

## BEHAVIOR

We believe that all participants should have an equal opportunity to enjoy the adventure. Unfortunately, sometimes the behavior of an individual can take away from the rest of the group's experience. Therefore, repeated behavioral conflicts will have consequences.

- **The first time** an individual creates repeated disturbances due to violent or unacceptable behavior and not listening to the teachers redirection, they will be verbally notified, and the incident will be discussed.
- If there is a **second incident**, the individual will not be permitted to participate in the activities, they may need to take a break until they can follow the agreements, and the parent/guardian will be notified at the end of the day.
- If there is a **third incident or any repeated unacceptable behavior**, the parent/guardian will be notified immediately, and the individual will be removed from class (temporarily or permanently) without refund.

**Gross Misconduct: Any child whose actions endanger the welfare of another child will not be permitted to participate in the activities and may be released into the custody of their parent/guardian.** We will do our best to work with you and your child, but they must be able to follow basic instructions and safety rules. Violent, destructive, and repeatedly disruptive behavior will not be allowed – termination without refund will ensue if the behavior persists.

After incidents of repeated disruptive behavior, we will schedule a meeting with you to discuss expectations and agreements. We may need to create a behavioral plan with your child's collaboration in order to continue care and see if the behavior improves, so that all the children in our program get to enjoy our activities and learn in a safe environment.

We understand that behavior can change on a day-to-day basis depending on special circumstances and changes in our lives. Please help us by notifying us of any such circumstances or history of behavior and how we can best support your kid(s).



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## Our Mission

We are cultivating a culture of kindness, emotional awareness, caring for the earth, ourselves and each other by:

- ☺ Connecting young children and their families to the wisdom of nature,
- ☺ Nurturing healthy children with important social/emotional awareness and life skills,
- ☺ Building character and resiliency through outdoor education in all-weather, and
- ☺ Inspiring community connections and environmental stewardship

We use the ABC Goals of building:

- ☺ Accomplishment
- ☺ Belonging
- ☺ Character

We lead by example, encouraging positive behaviors, such as friendliness, kindness, collaboration, compassion, and accountability to help children take responsibility for their actions without shame or blame.

We help children to:

- ☺ Self-regulate using emotional awareness and coping techniques, such as “Name it to Tame it” with big emotions, making observations of how they seem to be feeling or the behavior they’re exhibiting and what they could do to help themselves feel better and make good choices. We focus on encouraging positive behavior and choices, raising awareness and empathy by seeing how we impact others, and normalizing the struggles we all go through.
- ☺ Create a safe, shame-free space. We believe there are no bad kids, only a need for connection and learning.
- ☺ Develop independence and confidence by doing things on their own or with other kids and,
- ☺ Work together as a team to build life-long friendships and positive connections with one another and nature.

We fulfill our mission through:

- A focus on social-emotional learning, compassionate and open communication, accountability, respectful feedback, curiosity and creativity, observation and exploration.
- Awareness of the cycles of nature and the more-than-human world, developing a strong foundation and sense of awe.
- Involving parents and creating opportunities to be a part of building community with seasonal celebrations and work parties. Join our efforts to build gardens and protect forests and wildlife habitats for the children and the future!

**In summary, we create a nurturing environment with positive discipline and clear communication of our agreements and expectations every day. We use compassion, connection, and social-emotional awareness before redirecting inappropriate behavior by providing alternative choices and nature-based types of play. We focus on modeling positive behavior, providing calm redirection, and utilizing restorative practices, often involving empathy and active listening, rather than punitive measures. The teachers talk with the children with respect and compassion, seeking to get to the root of the issue and showing how to apologize and care for the other students. We strive to create physically and emotionally safe and affirming outdoor spaces that support children’s holistic development.**

**As holistic educators, we aim to develop all aspects of a child’s development (social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical and language/communication) in a low-intervention manner rather than instructing the children to think or act in a certain way. Development is encouraged instead with inquiry-based and experiential learning, such as raising interesting questions, being a role model for behavior, and encouraging children to self-discover, self-regulate, and work together. We are empowering children and building independence as well as team spirit, kindness and collaboration.**

## DIVERSITY AND ACCEPTANCE

Please be sure to read our 5 Agreements and the following pledge with your children:

*“I do hereby pledge to treat all individuals equally and do my best to be inclusive and kind. I will not make insults, use mean words, or comments regarding the personal characteristics of others. As I know, such remarks are hurtful. In short, I will follow the Golden Rule and treat others the way I wish to be treated.”*



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## Health and Safety Guidelines

Your child cannot be admitted with symptoms of illness as specified below; unless written documentation from a licensed physician states the child has been diagnosed and poses no serious health risk to the child or to other children.

Should your child have signs or symptoms requiring exclusion, he/she will be isolated and the parent/guardian or other authorized person by the parent will be notified immediately to pick up your child.

Please make other arrangements if your child is sick and respect our decision if we feel your child is too sick. We are sympathetic to the difficulties of taking time off, so discretion will be used.

The symptoms of illness for possible exclusion shall include, but are not limited to any of the following:

- A. The illness results in a greater need for care than we can provide with out compromising the health and safety of the other children in our care, or
- B. The child has any of the following conditions:
  - Temperature: Oral temperature 100 degrees F or greater; accompanied by behavior changes or other signs or symptoms of illness, such as unusual lethargy, uncontrolled coughing, irritability, persistent crying, difficult breathing, wheezing, or other unusual signs, until medical evaluation allows inclusion.
  - Uncontrolled diarrhea, that is, increased number of stools, increased stool water - until diarrhea stops.
  - Vomiting illness (two or more episodes of vomiting in the previous 24 hours) until vomiting resolves or until a health care provider determines the illness to be non-communicable, and the child is not in danger of dehydration.
  - Students and staff who have COVID-19 symptoms are required to stay home and should get tested and/or see a health care provider. Individuals should follow the most current health department's return to work/school protocol accordingly and generally may return to school when:
    - Their symptoms have improved, or they are asymptomatic, AND
    - They are without a fever for the past 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.
  - Purulent conjunctivitis (defined as pink or red conjunctiva with white or yellow eye discharge), until 24 hours after treatment has been initiated.
  - Scabies, head lice, or other infestation, until 24 hours after treatment has been initiated.
  - Tuberculosis, until a health care provider or health official states that the child can attend school.
  - Impetigo, until 24 hours after treatment has been initiated.
  - Strep throat or other streptococcal infection, until 24 hours after initial antibiotic treatment and cessation of fever.
  - Chicken pox, until at least 6 days after onset of rash or until all sores have dried and crusted.
  - Pertussis, until 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment (currently; erythromycin) to prevent an infection have been completed and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return.
  - Mumps, until 9 days after onset of gland swelling and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return.
  - Hepatitis A virus, until 1 week after onset of illness or as directed by the health department when passive immunoprophylaxis (currently, immune serum globulin) has been administered to appropriate children and staff and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return.
  - Measles, until 6 days after onset of rash and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return.
  - Rubella, until 6 days after onset of rash and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return.

**Injuries:** We supervise your child closely to prevent injuries, but accidents resulting in injury do occur. All teachers have been trained in first aid and CPR. If the injury is minor (requiring only a band-aid or ice), we will tell you about it when you pick up your child or via text/email/phone later if in-person is not possible. If it is serious, we will call you and may even suggest that you take your child to the doctor or emergency room. If an injury is very severe, we will call 911 for assistance. If we cannot reach you, we will call the emergency contacts listed on your enrollment form.





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## **Child's Medication:**

We cannot give medication to any child without written and signed consent from the parent or guardian. Explicit directions and a "medication log" **must** accompany any over the counter medicine.

## **Late Drop Off and Pick Up:**

Please understand that the contracted drop-off time is important because we plan our day around the collective time frame of each child as well as each phase of our morning routine. Please call us if you will be more than 15 minutes late dropping your child off. It is very important to us and the other children to be able to work as a team and move along from one activity to another together. We understand that there may be an occasion of major traffic congestion or bad weather conditions causing a delay in your travel – please call us and perhaps we can work out a contingency plan.

Following the first 10-minute grace period, a \$1 late fee for each additional minute past our agreed pick-up time will be due.

## **Supplies:**

Please provide a change of clothes in a plastic bag with a variety of warm layers, extra socks and shoes, gloves, hats, etc. and a waterproof layer in a backpack daily.

The parents/guardians must provide a water bottle, a sack lunch and snacks. Please include plenty of protein and nutritious food. Additional snacks may also be served as needed and on special occasions. Allergy-friendly treats may be served during events like birthday parties and holidays.

## **Potty Training:**

Potty training shouldn't be rushed; it is important that your child is psychologically and physically ready for training. Your child must be potty trained prior to coming to Fern Gully Forest School. This is when your child maintains at least 2 continuous weeks of bladder/bowel control and **can communicate their need to go to the bathroom**; of course, it is okay if your child still needs assistance with the bathroom. If your child regresses, we will work with you and assess the next step.

## **Release of Children:**

It is important that we protect your child by ensuring that your child does not leave with a person you have not authorized to pick up your child. Also please tell us when someone else that you have authorized will be picking up your child. We will need the person's name and a description of what he or she looks like if we have not met them yet. The person picking up your child will have to show a picture ID before we release your child.

We must assume that both parents have the right to pick up your child, unless you give me a copy of a court order stating otherwise. We will need to discuss how we should handle the non-custodial parent who arrives to pick up your child. Without a copy of the court order, we cannot refuse a parent. If we have a court order and a noncustodial parent tries to pick up the child, we will immediately call the custodial parent. If the non-custodial parent leaves with the child, we will immediately call the police and report the situation. We will not place the other children at risk in a confrontation with the non-custodial parent.

## **Fee Payment Guidelines:**

Tuition is paid in advance monthly. Payment obligation is based on the days agreed, not on actual attendance. There is no change in fee due to your child's absences. In the case of your vacation or absence, please postdate your check for the upcoming date due and make payment before you leave.

Late payments – A \$50 late payment fee (per child) applies for any payment not received by the fifth of the month unless a payment plan has been worked out in advance. If payment is not received by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, an additional \$10.00 fee per day will be charged. Your child will not be permitted to return until both the payment and the late fee are paid in full.



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A personal check, cash or transfer will be accepted for payment, however if a check is returned for any reason and any charges are incurred from the return of your check, those charges will be added to the following months tuition fee. After 2 check returns, all further payments must be made in cash. Non-payment or consistent late payments is cause for termination immediately without 2 weeks' notice. A two-week notice of any increase in tuition or fees will be posted.

## **Early drop off**

Any care needed prior to our normal opening time or after pick-up time will need to be scheduled at least one week prior. There is a charge of \$5.00 per 15 minutes of care prior to normal opening time or after pick-up time. This fee is non-refundable. This includes if you decide not to bring the child early without notice.

## **Termination:**

We reserve the right to suspend or end services at any time without a refund as set forth in our policies and procedures (pg. 2). The Parent/Guardian must give 30 days' written notice and full payment for the month to terminate your child's enrollment regardless as to whether your child is present. If notice is not given, you forfeit any enrollment deposit and tuition paid.

## **A Few Final Thoughts:**

As a parent in Fern Gully Forest School, please...

- ☺ Take an interest in your child's activities here, and share your child's habits, fears, and concerns with us or any changes in their life or routines that may be important for us to know.
- ☺ Read all policies and correspondences, and those posted. Promptly sign and return the forms needing to be signed.
- ☺ Remember that you are responsible for your child while you are on the premises so, please remain in complete contact with your child during that time.
- ☺ Call or email us and we'd be happy to set up a time to talk! Your concerns, questions, ideas and feedback are important.

Kind regards,

*Charissa Waters*

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