

WonderWoods Nature School Parent Handbook

Forest Kindergarten History and Philosophy:

Friedrich Frobel, a German educator, opened the world's first outdoor "kindergartens" (German for "children's gardens") more than 150 years ago. He believed young children should spend their time playing in nature and away from so much emphasis on learning letters and numbers. Today, across Europe, thousands of these "forest kindergartens" have been established where children spend their entire class time outdoors year-round. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of nature schools in the U.S. They now total more than 585 as of July 2020.

WonderWoods Nature School is play-based and allows children to develop their skills and habits over time and at their own pace. Children learn naturally to be self-motivated, cooperative, respectful, grateful, and aware of their impact on the earth. Children experience outdoor adventures in all weather conditions. WonderWoods Nature School is made as safe as is reasonably possible, in order to facilitate children risk-taking. It provides a complete immersion in nature helping to build a child's sense of place in the world.

Research strongly supports the idea that young children, particularly ages 2-5, learn best through direct experiences with the world around them. Being outdoors provides them with not only fresh air, but it also encourages imaginative play, creativity, hand-eye coordination and balance, physical strength and mental clarity. By tapping into their innate sense of wonder about nature, we can help children learn basic environmental and natural science principles, as well as respect for all living beings. Lessons flow organically from the natural rhythms of the seasons and from the children's daily discoveries. There are no set lesson plans: each day is shaped by the animals, insects, birds, amphibians, weather and foraging that is encountered, providing spontaneous teachable moments.

WonderWoods Nature School Objectives

- Provide young children the time, space and play to develop their fullest potential
- Provide opportunities for all activities to be child-initiated and child-led, with adults acting as facilitators
- Provide individual attention with the following teacher to child ratio for nature school(ages 3-5) 1:5 teacher-to-child.
- Build children's on-going relationship with the land, to one another, and to themselves
- Provide opportunities to work collaboratively to create, problem solve, support one another, dream of a bigger and better world
- Encourage healthy habits and lifestyles
- Facilitate children's risk-taking, made as safe as is reasonably possible
- Increase motivation, self-esteem, and concentration
- Develop respect for the natural world and respect for its dangers
- Stimulate children's innate curiosity by being close to nature
- Teach children to become well informed and caring stewards of the natural world
- Encourage family involvement in nature-related learning on site and at their homes

Staff Information and Curriculum Overview

Teacher Qualifications

All teachers have current First Aid and CPR certification. All teachers and substitutes have completed an interview process, background check and come with strong references from their previous employers.

Nature School

Curriculum Overview: Nature School is play-based and allows children to develop essential skills such as self-motivation, cooperation, problem-solving, and creativity. There are no set lesson plans: each day is shaped by the animals, insects, birds, amphibians, weather and foraging that is encountered, providing spontaneous teachable moments.

Assessment: Two assessments will be completed for each preschool student—at the beginning and at the end of the school year. Parents may request to schedule a parent-teacher conferences at any time to address concerns or questions.

Communication

Parents can communicate with teachers and admin using the Remind app. Instructions to download app. will be provided before start of the school year.

Enrollment

- After completing the online application, you will receive an email to schedule a tour. The purpose of the tour is to ensure that both parties feel confident that WonderWoods Nature School is the right fit for your child and family.
- Following the tour, if it is decided by both parties to enroll, an enrollment form will be emailed to you. Enrollment forms, with \$150 deposit (payment options listed on the bottom of the enrollment form), should be completed as soon as possible and emailed or mailed to WonderWoods Nature School (1251 Buckingham Circle Franklin Tn 37064). Once this is completed your child's space in the class will be reserved.
- The deposit can be applied to tuition according to the payment plan chosen at the end of the school year, or it can be used for the re-enrollment deposit for the following year.

Withdrawal

Parents who wish to withdraw their child from WonderWoods Nature School, at any time during the school year, **must communicate their plan with the Director (email, phone or in person)**. The \$150 enrollment deposit is nonrefundable if you withdraw before the end of the school year.

Tuition Refund

If a student is withdrawn 30 days prior to the first day of school for the academic year, 100% of tuition will be refunded. For withdrawals made after the school year begins, pro-rated refunds will be applied according to the time of withdrawal and chosen payment plan:

Annual Payment Plan/Refund:

On or before October 18: 75% refund
October 18- December 17: 50% refund
December 17-March 11: 25% refund
After March 11: No refund

Semester Payment Plan/ Refund:

Fall Semester

On or before October 18: 50% refund
After October 18: No refund

Spring Semester

January 5- March 13: 50% refund
After March 14: No refund

Monthly Payment Plan/Refund:

Before the 15th of the month: 50% refund for current month
The 15th of the month and on: No refund

Illness: To control the spread of illness, children with vomiting, diarrhea, and/or fever should not be sent to WonderWoods Nature School until the child has been symptom free, without medication, for 24 hours. Should a child become ill while at school, parents will be contacted to pick up the sick child promptly. If a parent cannot be reached immediately teaching staff will call the next emergency contact to arrange pick-up.

Dispensing medication: You will need to provide a signed authorization that allows teachers to administer medication, even non-prescription. Specific instructions regarding dosage, frequency, and symptoms of the condition for which the medication is administered should be listed on the authorization form signed by a parent. The medication should be labeled with the child's name. The WonderWoods Nature School staff member who administers the medication will document the time, the dosage, and any noticeable side effects.

Academic Calendar

WonderWoods Nature School follows Williamson County Schools Academic Calendar for start and end dates, teacher professional development and all holidays.

Severe Weather Closings

In the event of inclement weather, WonderWoods Nature School will make every effort to open as usual. We strive for the children to experience all types of weather to embrace the values of a nature school. However, to preserve the safety of our children and staff, we will carefully assess the weather forecasts and current conditions, and close if conditions warrant such actions. If warnings are issued during school hours, or heavy downpours and lightning occur, all children will be moved indoors to the Nature Center until the threat is over. It is at the discretion of the WonderWoods Nature School Director to make the decision to dismiss early, open late, or close. In the event of delays or cancellations, a decision will be made by 7:30 a.m. and broadcast via the following outlets:

- WonderWoods Nature School Facebook page
- Remind 101 App
- If the director decides to dismiss early, families will be notified by Remind 101 app.

Teachers will carefully monitor the children's comfort level in cold temperatures and will move them indoors if they become too cold to enjoy their outdoor experience.

WonderWoods Nature School Daily Routines and Procedures

Arrival

Class will have a sign-in sheet for tracking attendance. An adult will accompany each child on their walk from their car in the morning. No child may be left at school in the morning until they are signed in and the teacher is aware of their presence. Nature School class begins at 9:05 a.m. Parents will not be able to sign in before 9:00. Should a parent arrive before that time, they may wait in their car until the class officially begins.

Late Arrival

Parents who will arrive late should communicate with the child's teacher via Remind and they will then be responsible for walking their child to their class site.

Absences: If a child will be absent due to illness or if it is a planned absence, the parent must communicate with their child's teacher in person or via Remind as soon as possible.

Punctuality: Because our classes are outdoors, and hiking to our sites each day is a part of the daily activities, it is important that children arrive on time. If arrival time will be delayed, parents must communicate via Remind with the teachers as soon as possible so alternate arrangements for meeting the group may be planned. Teachers should check the Remind app occasionally during the day for parent messages regarding their child.

After School Pick-up Policy and Procedures: No child is ever released to an adult who is not listed on the emergency form. If the adult is not listed on the authorized pickup list, the parent needs to inform the teacher ahead of time to add that person to the pickup list. Parents or authorized adult must sign out upon departure. Parent or other authorized adult will accompany each child on their walk to their car after school. Parents who do not pick up their children within 10 minutes of dismissal will need to complete a late pickup form. In the case of recurring late pick-ups, teachers should notify the director who will take further actions to address the issue.

Late Pick up Fee:

Children in our Nature School program must be picked up by 12:10 p.m. If a parent is late, they will be asked to sign a form indicating the time of pickup. Late pickup fees are \$10 for every 30-minute increment. Late fee payment is due within 30 days.

Food at School

WW strives to incorporate sustainable practices in all we do and encourage our parents to support those efforts. **Please provide your child with a snack in reusable container.** Teachers are aware of any allergies present in their class from the information provided on the emergency form.

Parents should supply natural, no-sugar snacks, appropriate to the season and weather for their children. In cold weather we recommend more substantial snacks such as cheese, nuts and other filling items that will help to provide extra energy.

Clothing and Gear List

Because WonderWoods Nature School embraces all seasons and aims to remain outside during many types of weather, it is **CRITICAL** that your child has clothes and gear that allows him or her to play comfortably. We adhere to the motto: **There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing choices.** Below you will find a list of appropriate and **NECESSARY** items as well as helpful tips and suggestions regarding clothing and gear. We have provided a checklist of required Items. This list of required gear is subject to change. As the school year progresses and children's engagement with natural elements are monitored, teachers may add or change necessary items and gear that are optimal for children's activities.

*We will hold a "clothing/gear swap and sale" at the end of each school year.

Everyday Basic Gear

- Water bottle (filled.) Children must be able to independently operate water bottle.
- Child-size backpack that is big enough to hold extra layers of clothing.
- **Waterproof, not water resistant**, rain pants (**Marmot, OakiWear, REI. No Columbia please**)
- **Waterproof, not water resistant**, rain jacket (**Marmot, Oakiwear, REI. No Columbia**
It is best to go with a non-insulated rain jacket. You can always add base layers.)
- **Rain boots**
 - Warm months: any kind of rubber rain boot
 - Cold months: **insulated rain boots - Bogs, Oakiwear (see information about discount). No insulated snow "duck" boots please.**
- **Labeled extra change of clothing** in zip lock bag that includes:
 - **Warm months:** short sleeve, quick dry shirt; quick dry shorts; socks; underwear
 - **Cold months:** base layer long sleeve shirt and pants, additional thick sweater or fleece jacket and fleece pants, wool socks, waterproof mittens, hat, underwear

Fall and Spring

- **Waterproof rain pants**

- Rain pants are important to keep your child dry and also protect legs from thorns, insects, poison ivy etc.
- When it is hot, teachers will tell you when only quick dry shorts are acceptable. Just pack rain pants in backpack and make sure to add bug spray and sunscreen to legs.
- No denim jeans please.

- **Waterproof rain jacket**

- Rain boots (any rubber pair will work) with lightweight socks
- Short sleeved quick-dry shirt
- Quick dry shorts under rain pants.
- Sunhat
- Sunscreen labeled with name (please apply before drop-off)
- Insect repellent labeled with name (please apply before drop-off)

- When temperatures are cooler:

- Long-sleeved quick-dry shirts
- Long pants
- Waterproof rain jacket
- Waterproof rain pants

Winter

- Insulated rain boots (Bogs, Oakiwear. No insulated snow “duck” boots please.)

- Full rain gear

- Waterproof rain jacket
- Waterproof rain pants. If you choose to wear snow pants or thick coats, they must fit under rain pants and rain jacket. Snow gear is only water resistant and not an acceptable outer layer. The outer layer must keep the wetness out!
- Two-piece long underwear
- Silk or wool is best, but polyester is also a good choice.
- Layers! We strongly recommend that your child wear several layers of these materials!
- Thick wool sweaters or fleece jacket • Thick fleece pants
- Wool socks (multiple pairs)
- Waterproof Mittens are warmer than five-finger gloves and easier to pull on and off (side-zip are ideal) Wool or fleece mittens for a base layer if you choose.
- Wool or fleece hat

Layering:

- Layering is key! Some days are 1-layer clothing days, some 2-layer days, some 3-layers. It is much easier to take layers off as needed than to warm a child that has already gotten chilled.
- The children's needs throughout the day are often unpredictable and will depend not only on the weather conditions but also the child's body temperature and activity level. We layer to adjust to the variety of conditions we encounter.
- In the winter:
- Wearing 2 layers of wool long underwear underneath a thick wool sweater and fleece pants is the most effective way to layer children under their rain gear to keep them warm without feeling too bulky.
- • We are going to get dirty! Please make sure you dress your children in clothes they can get messy.
- • Comfortability:
- **All clothing and footwear should be loose fitting and roomy to allow the body's own insulating layer to surround the skin. This is more comfortable and keeps the children warmer!**
- Pants are more comfortable for children when they have elastic waists instead of buttons or snaps.
- Please stay away from one- piece clothing such as snow bibs, as they can be problematic when using the bathroom.
- **VERY IMPORTANT: Please label everything with your child's name.**

Where to Obtain Gear

- Use Discount code "**wonderwoods**" (not case sensitive) for **25% off** orders of \$29.99 and up at **oaki.com** and get **free shipping**.
- There are many places to order soft wool products that are not itchy to sensitive skin. Secondhand stores are a great place for wool and fleece layers.

Maintaining your gear

- Once it is really wet and muddy: rain gear can go in the wash by itself when you get home on the rinse cycle (without soap - to preserve the waterproofing a little longer), and then either drip dry or put it in a low-heat dryer cycle.
- Jackets may be slightly less muddy than pants, so you may get a few days of wear out of them before needing to rinse them.
- 'Tear Aid' is a product that Puddle gear recommends for maintaining rain gear. This product is much more effective than duct tape in the long run (duct tape gets gummy), but for a short-term fix, duct tape works in a pinch.
- Kookaburra or Eucalan wool wash products protect the lanolin in the wool that maintains the warm when-wet properties. When aired out at night, wool does not hold odors and when worn under other layers, only needs to be washed every few weeks.
- If you purchase your pair of Bogs boots from REI, they will take them back if damaged and give you a new pair.

Child Safety Guidelines

Your child's safety is our utmost responsibility, and we will always be striving to make that a priority. The children are always within eyesight and earshot of an approved adult and we will maintain appropriate teacher to child ratios. The only people that interact with the school children during the day are preapproved by the faculty. Teachers always carry walkie talkies and emergency forms along with an official first aid kit. There are always two or more adults onsite. We are committed to keeping our children safe. We adhere to the following guidelines to provide consistent boundaries in the name of safety. We ask that parents uphold these same standards while onsite as well as at school events outside of regular school hours. It is also helpful to reinforce many of these practices at home.

General Forest Rules

- **No Toys:** Nature provides all the materials necessary for playing in the outdoors, so toys from home are not necessary. Art supplies and other learning materials will be provided.
- **Boundaries:** Children are expected to stay within the physical boundaries that have been established by teachers.
- **Climbing trees:** Children may climb trees at school while under adult supervision. They may not climb higher than twice their height and only after they have demonstrated competence.
- **Sticks:** The children may not play with sticks that are longer than their arm, unless it is clearly and responsibly being used as a walking stick, a tool (digging, for example), or for building, under the supervision of the teachers. Running is not permitted while holding a stick.
- **Ingestion:** Children will not eat or drink any substance found in nature without teacher permission.
- **Site Assessment:** The sites and structures are checked for safety each morning before the children arrives at school.
- **Fire Safety:** Children are only in the presence of fire while under supervision of their teacher(s). Although a child may be invited by a teacher to help tend a fire, they are given very specific instructions based on their age and ability to discern a safe distance. They will help to collect and haul firewood, but the teachers are always in charge. There is always direct adult supervision when children are in the vicinity of fire or hot coals.

● **Water Safety:** Our location is not in the proximity of Lake Van. If we were to take a trip to lake it would be under full supervision of the teachers. Children will be allowed to wade in water in vernal pond near our school site that is less than knee deep while wearing boots and only if the temperature is above 40 degrees.

Social & Emotional Safety

WW is committed to inspiring and teaching respect for the earth and all its creatures, and this includes modeling and always fostering respect for self and for others. Outdoor learning provides many opportunities for cooperative play and teachers are there to guide children into co-creative adventures.

There is a zero-tolerance policy for hitting, grabbing, pushing, name-calling, aggressiveness, or any other demeaning behavior. If these behaviors occur, the teacher will separate the instigating child from the group to a calm place for a one-on-one discussion. An incident report will be written and given to parents and director. Should the behavior in question not shift in a timely manner, the child will be removed from the group and be taken into the school office until the child is ready to return to his class. Recurring instances of disruptive behavior will result in a parent-teacher conference to implement a behavior plan. We will work as a team to support each child to ensure a successful experience at WonderWoods Nature School.

Although we wish to be able to serve all children that come to our school, we will not allow the health and safety of the class to be compromised. We do take any intimidating behavior seriously and recognize that it makes a deep impact upon others. Our teaching philosophy holds the dignity of each child at its very core. Our curriculum inherently supports empowerment, teaches judgment, honors boundaries, values intuition, increases awareness, models clear communication, and encourages healthy expression of all feelings. Thank you for contributing to the safety of our children and our community by modeling the types of behavior that we want to encourage in the children.

First Aid at School: In the case of a minor injury, the teachers may administer basic first aid—wash the injury with soap and water and cover with band-aids—as they see fit. The parents will be notified of any significant injuries at pickup (or after school via phone call if the child is picked up by another adult). In the case of a major injury, the teachers will call 911 and the parents/emergency contact and apply basic first aid until medical help arrives. All teachers always have easy access to First Aid kits. Children will always be sent to the nearest hospital if such extreme measure is needed.

Bathroom Safety: We will have access to the indoor restrooms in the Nature Center. And we will go as a group to take restroom breaks. If a child needs assistance using the bathroom, the teacher that helps is close enough to assist if necessary. The bathroom door is not closed while a teacher is physically assisting a child in that space but may be closed by the child for privacy when the child is in there alone while the teacher waits outside the door.

WonderWoods Nature School Behavior Plan

An important part of the preschool and kindergarten experience is helping children learn how to get along in the world, enjoy being with other children, and follow the direction of an adult other than their parent. A caring and positive approach will be taken regarding behavior management and discipline. Our goal is to help the children develop self-control and responsibility for their actions.

Discipline Strategies

1. Encouraging children to use their words during a disagreement with another child.
2. Facilitating children in their attempts to settle their own disputes.
3. Redirecting behavior when this seems potentially effective.
4. Separating a child from the group
5. Counseling children individually about their behaviors.
6. Making parents aware of disciplinary concerns (Incident Report).

Disruptive Behaviors

The following behaviors distract from the full benefit of the program and will result in consequences.

- Requires constant attention from the staff
- Inflicts physical or emotional harm on other children, adults, or self
- Disrespects people and materials provided in the program
- Consistently disobeys the rules of the classroom
- Verbally threatens other students and/or staff
- Uses inappropriate or offensive words repeatedly

Step One: Incident Report

Disruptive behaviors will be addressed in an incident report. This will be completed by a teacher to document inappropriate behaviors that directly impact other children, staff members, or the group. This report will be shared with the parent and will explain the behavior and how the behavior has affected others. It will also explain how the situation was resolved. The incident report will be given to the parent at the end of the day to be signed and returned the next day to the teacher.

Step Two: Parent/Teacher/Director Meeting If two incident reports are written for one week, documenting that the child has difficulty managing his/her behavior on a recurring basis, parents will be asked to meet with the child's teacher and School Director to develop a behavior plan.

Step Three: Child may be sent home or be removed from the program If, after Steps One and Two, the child's behavior continues to be inappropriate, consistently disruptive, and/or dangerous, it may be necessary for the child to be sent home for a time to be determined or removed from the program altogether.

Parent Handbook Agreement Form

The WonderWoods Nature School Parent Handbook lists the values, policies, rules, and regulations of WonderWoods Nature School. Its purpose is to assure the smooth operation of our program. Reading and understanding this handbook is imperative to the operations of WonderWoods Nature School. By signing this form, you are agreeing to abide by these written provisions of WonderWoods Nature School.

I understand that my signature on this form binds me to observe the policies, rules, and regulations as set forth by WonderWoods Nature School.

Signature

Date