

Wild Roots Nature School

Parent Handbook



Welcome to Wild Roots Nature School!

Our Story

Wild Roots is a new project that has grown out of the fertile soil of our own childhood experiences. Brandon grew up next to the Grand River in Southern Ontario. With nearby meadows, forests, and creeks, he spent his summers exploring the area and catching critters to later observe in aquariums. His mentor was Steve Irwin from the show *The Crocodile Hunter*. Brandon loved Steve's contagious enthusiasm for Wildlife Conservation, which has stayed with him ever since. Brandon received an offer to play Lacrosse for Lindenwood University in America, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Biology. After University, Brandon worked for a number of organisations in the Environmental field, and joined an Eco-Village to learn about a sustainable lifestyle. Jasmine grew up in the city and did not have access to a lot of natural resources. When she had her first child, she decided she wanted to foster the relationship between her son and nature, to give him a fulfilling connection that she did not receive as a child. Jasmine regularly talks her son on adventures, going on river walks, picking wild edible and medicinal plants, canoe trips, and more.

We have asked ourselves "What does the world need? What does our community need? What do we need?" The answer: be outside more often, engage with the natural world, and provide an opportunity for others to learn and grow as nature intended. In a world with lockdowns, cell phones, virtual reality, video games, and processed food, some of us need to remember our Wild Roots.

Our Team



Brandon Stuebing - Wild Roots Founder & Program Facilitator.

Credentials: Executive Board Member of Myriad Eco-Village, Nature Ally Forest School Educator, Biologist, Environmental scientist, Naturalist hunter, permaculture gardener, Wilderness First Aid Training, CPR, Program Facilitator for the Jack Miner Migratory Bird Sanctuary Summer Kid's Camp, Sports Coach, Childcare provider, Native Plant Solutions, Environment Canada, Fish and Wildlife Manitoba, Nature Interpreter, workshop facilitator, self-taught hunter,

Ethos

We believe providing kids with an opportunity to learn and grow in nature is necessary for healthy development. Nature provides all of the necessities needed to foster our natural instincts. Everyone knows that going for a walk through the forest calms us down, and this has been proven scientifically through numerous studies. In fact, it only takes 20 minutes in a wooded area for our stress hormones to decrease by up to 50%!

Kids benefit from a combination of structure and flow. Unfortunately, the schooling system has the ratio backwards. They get 15 minute recesses and hours of sitting, and forced learning; it should be the other way around. I have witnessed that children who have more freedom to move and follow their own curiosity become much more engaged in learning. A school board pre-determines the curriculum, which is the same for all kids of that age group, which is also backwards. A teacher's role is to witness a child's interests and to foster growth in those areas in a subtle way by asking questions and guiding them to find the answers for themselves. The schools do this because it is easier on a massive scale, but there is no room for diversity in learning styles and speeds. Schools don't teach us HOW to learn, they teach us what to learn.

Every child is different, we are all unique, and our needs differ greatly from individual to individual. In a Forest School environment, kids have freedom to explore curiosities and engage the world with their body, mind and spirit.

Kids will face challenges in a safe and mentored environment where they will be free to explore their interests when inspiration strikes! We will be there to give them the encouragement and experience needed to foster their growth in these areas.

Mission and Vision

The purpose of Wild Roots Nature Program is to be an incubator for reconnecting with the wild, enjoy the wonders of nature and help foster a healthy relationship with the land, the community, and ourselves. We strive to foster a rich outdoor learning experience for all children where they can explore, experience, and come to love the process of learning through a relationship to the natural world.

We envision a world where people remember their roots; that they have always been and always will be, connected with the Earth. A world where children are not forced to sit still, obey, do as they're told, but rather a world where children are encouraged to explore, invoke curiosity, ask questions, and learn through play.

What is Forest School?

Forest Schools are educational programs that offer children the opportunity to learn and explore through play and self directed exploration while building essential social, physical, and cognitive skills.

Forest Schools facilitate hands-on nature experiences to support an emergent curriculum that is, in part, derived from the daily and seasonal changes observed in nature. The children's curiosity is the driving force behind the direction and outcome of each day, with a flexible daily routine that includes skill building, nature education, a snack break, nature hikes, a significant amount of time for unstructured nature exploration, and group gatherings where we share stories, discuss plants and animals we discovered, weather safety, and more.

Forest schools are invaluable for young minds that need movement, stimulation, and the freedom to explore and learn at a pace that works for them. Building essential life skills and a care for the natural world, forest school gives children the opportunity to become stewards and students of the land.

The Child and Nature Alliance of Canada describes forest/nature school as a program that:

- 1) Takes place in any outdoor space, including urban greenspace, playgrounds, forests, creeks, prairies, mountains, shoreline, and tundra.
- 2) Is a sustained process of regular and repeated sessions in the same outdoor space, supporting children to develop a reciprocal relationship with the Land, and an understanding of themselves as a part of the natural world.
- 3) Views children and youth as innately competent, curious, and capable learners.
- 4) Is led by educators who share power with learners through play-based, emergent, and inquiry-driven teaching and learning methods.
- 5) Values children's play - self-directed, freely chosen, intrinsically motivated - in and of itself. FNS programs provide adequate time and space for children and youth to dive deeply into their play.
- 6) Views risky play as an integral part of children's learning and healthy development, and is facilitated by knowledgeable, qualified educators who support children and youth to 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) Prioritizes building reciprocal relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, who have been learning from this Land since time immemorial.
- 10) Practices, policies, and programming reflect and prioritize the building of engaged, healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities through consideration of access and equity in our decisions and actions.

Core Values

Forest School is founded on three main pillars:

- Trust
- Reciprocal Relationships
- Freedom

Wild Roots Values:

- Sustainability
- Community
- Health and Vitality
- Curiosity
- Compassion
- Courage

Trust

Through adequate risk assessments, experiential learning, and the freedom to explore, children build trust within themselves to make decisions, learn, and navigate the natural world with confidence. Trust is built between students and educators through consistency within the child group to foster a sense of safety, coregulation, kinship, and cooperation.

Reciprocal Relationships

Children are taught and shown first hand how to care for the earth through ecological land assessments, how to minimize damage, how and why it is important to clean up after ourselves, and understanding how human activity impacts the land and what we can do to make our footprint more sustainable.

Freedom

Encouraging children to enjoy the outdoors in all types of weather helps build a sense of resilience and freedom to explore without just waiting for the 'nice' days. Tolerating and learning to thrive in cold weather helps to build character and a sense of competence. Programs are intentionally designed to be loosely structured as to follow the interests of the children present, allowing them the freedom to dive deeply into the interests and passions that inspire them in the moment.

Preparing for Forest School

At Forest School, we encourage the children to work on developing skills that will benefit their independence and confidence, such as putting on their mittens, opening their snack containers, carrying their backpacks on walks, etc. It will be helpful if parents and guardians encourage their children to do the same at home.

Please send your child in clothing suitable for outdoor play that you don't mind getting dirty. We will provide seasonal updates and guidance on how to dress the children in all

types of weather. We ask that toys and stuffed animals are left at home or in the car.

Send a comfortable and child-sized backpack with:

- A litterless, nut-free, and pre-cut snack in a container that your child can open;
- A reusable water bottle;
- Extra clothes (pants, shirt, socks, and underwear).

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

- Ensure all forms and fees are submitted electronically prior to your child's attendance;
- Ensure your child is equipped with the proper clothing, outerwear, and other supplies for the season and length of the program; (A list will be provided separately depending on the season you are registering for)
 - If a child arrives with less than adequate clothing, they will be sent home
- Provide Wild Roots educators with information that would assist us in meeting the needs of your child.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Whole Child Approach

The whole child approach includes a holistic approach to learning where we learn with our mind, body, and senses. On a daily basis, we encourage the development of mindful awareness of our immediate surroundings using all our senses within nature. The whole child approach focuses on more than just results and believes that real, valuable learning can come with ease when a child feels inspired and is encouraged to follow their curiosity.

The Art of Wonder

At Wild Roots Forest School, our main goal is to ignite curiosity within our learners through the art of asking well timed, and open ended questions. Children ask questions all the time and can be very passionate about them. As Forest Program educators, we remember that they may not be asking for an answer; rather, it is important for us to be genuinely curious alongside them. Simply answering questions can extinguish the spark of curiosity and rob children of the opportunity to find the answer for themselves. A well-timed question can lead a child to discover many other questions and off they go on an adventure to find the answers. We start with children's natural curiosity, child passions,



learning cycles, and try to extend the boundaries of their knowledge, their comfort, and abilities, as far as we can, subtly and patiently.

How We Learn at Wild Roots

At Wild Roots we don't have a set curriculum; instead, we learn through an emergent curriculum. This means the things we learn about come from the children's interests, discoveries, and ideas. Rather than impose certain outcomes, the Forest School model is designed to pull or draw out learning experiences by ***nurturing a child's engagement in the learning process***. These include:

- Inquiry-Based, Emergent, and Experiential Learning
 - Children have an innate desire to explore and experience the world around them - this is a form of learning;
 - Build on their curiosities and observations of nature;
 - Use self-directed learning to promote engagement and motivate participation.

- Practising Core Routines
 - Sit Spot - visit the same spot everyday, and take notice of your surroundings. This builds intimacy with the wildlife, and promotes reciprocity.
 - Story time - share a story of your day, using our voice, drawing, acting, or writing.
 - Expanding Our Senses - Use and expand all your senses, focus deeply.
 - Questioning and Tracking - Track everything as a clue to a mystery. Ask questions about everything.
 - Animal Forms - Physically imitating different animals species to build mobility and a deeper understanding of each animal.
 - Wandering - No objective, to agenda, no time limit, be present in the moment and explore.

- Play-Based Learning
 - Takes place when children aren't told or shown how to play;
 - During play, children communicate, collaborate, solve problems, build skills, and use their imagination;
 - Play is a form of research, where children test their hypotheses.

When children are engaged and active participants of their own learning, they will spontaneously explore different realms of science, math, social studies, physical education, and so much more in a relaxed and inspired way. Such topics are covered organically, through simple questions and observations throughout the day.

A “Typical” Day

Every day is different as our days are structured based on the children's interests, needs, what is happening around us, the season/weather, and the theme and activities introduced by the educators. Children can be sure that they will have the day to explore through free play.

Rough outline of a typical day:

Beginning

- Gather together for a welcoming circle. Educators and learners take time to ground into the space and introduce themselves.
- We will check to make sure everyone has appropriate gear and then share gratitudes and inspirations for the day. Review safety guidelines, what to expect for the day.
- Share inspiring Nature stories that share a theme for the day, followed by a guided activity or lesson to channel their focus.

Middle

- Nature walk/free exploration
- Snack
- Nature walk/free exploration/meaningful work (hands on learning/building)

End

- Use wolf call to gather together
- Reflection on the day, ask introspective questions, go deeper into the lessons
- Integrate lessons we learned into our life

Health and Safety Procedures

Risk Management and Assessment

One of the core missions of Wild Roots is to stretch children's boundaries by risk taking. All risks that children take are self-directed and children are encouraged to listen to the feelings of safety in their bodies, as everyone's experience is different. Before the start of sessions, educators do a risk assessment to acknowledge any hazards or changes in environment since the previous session. Each activity is assessed for risk, as well. As often as possible, children are included in the assessment of risk, especially where activities are concerned. We believe this helps them work through the process of risk assessment and prepares them to engage in healthy risk taking for the rest of their lives. During these discussions, educators can inform others of potential hazards and methods of executing to minimize risks. All staff and volunteers will be briefed on the relevant risk assessments and the emergency procedures. Activities will cease if risks and hazards presented are too great.

More on Risky Play

Outdoor play is a basic need for children, and inherent to play is the necessity of risk. The risky play takes many different shapes but always involves pushing limits and comfort zones in a thrilling and exciting way. It's about testing and getting to know oneself while building strength and resilience for trying new things.

At Wild Roots Forest School, children can engage in the following six categories of risky play:

- **Play with Heights** which includes climbing trees, logs, straw bales, etc.;
- **Rough and Tumble Play** can include play fighting, chasing, and tumbling;
- **Working with Tools** includes working with hand tools like knives, hand drills, mallets, saws, etc.
- **Play with going Off Trail** "hide and seek" - children are encouraged to experience the feeling of going in unmarked territory to find the best hiding spot! Within reasonable boundaries of course.
- **Play at Great Speeds** includes running downhill and tobogganing;
- **Play near Dangerous Elements** which includes being around a fire or playing close to water.

What Risky Play is not:

- Letting children do whatever they want;
- Ignoring children as they play in their environment;
- Being far away from the child;
- Not stepping in when a child is doing something that is not safe.



How We Support Risky Play:

With ALL risky play, the children are closely supervised to make sure they are being 'as safe as necessary' rather than 'as safe as possible.' Educators provide guidance and hands-on tips to get through challenging situations.

Wild Roots educators fully recognize their responsibilities for safeguarding children. All staff and volunteers are responsible for keeping children safe.

This includes:

- Ensuring all children have a safe environment in which to learn and develop.
- Practice risk assessments and teach children how to manage risks.
- Raise awareness of potential dangers in nature (such as poison ivy) and how to proceed.
- Supervising and teaching the use of tools and keeping tools away in a safe place until in use.

First Aid Kit

The educator in charge is responsible for carrying the First Aid Kit at all times. It will include:

Small to Large adhesive bandages

Small to Large gauze pads

Rolls of gauze

Tape

Tunicate

Tensor bandages

Eye patch

Polysporin

Tweezers

Medical scissors

Clean water

Alcohol-free wipes

Safety pins

After-bite

Emergency Procedure

In the event of a serious injury:

1. Lead educator will assess the person.
2. 911 will be called if needed by an adult while the other children are managed away from the scene.
3. Wounds will be dressed and CPR administered, when necessary, until an ambulance arrives.
4. Parents will be contacted when an ambulance arrives.
5. Remaining children will stay with an educator after the ambulance leaves. One staff member may have to accompany the child to the hospital until parents are available.

Fire Use

When lighting a fire, the educator will ensure that all other adults are aware and that the weather conditions are suitable and safe.

Fire safety rules will be reviewed regularly: no running around the fire, no swinging fire sticks, and nothing can be thrown into the fire unless invited by an educator. The use of fire will not be implemented into a program until educators have deemed the children are ready.

Tick Prevention

Tick season is from April to November with the nymphs being active in the late spring and early summer and the adults being active in the spring and fall. Ticks are active until the first permanent snowfall or when air temperatures are consistently below 4°C. To reduce the likelihood of your child getting bitten by ticks please tuck their pants into their socks and check for ticks by the end of the day.

Poison Ivy

We show the children what poison ivy looks like and remind them that "leaves of three let it be."

Food Policy

It will be stressed that children never put anything found in the forest in their mouths unless encouraged to do so by an educator. Finding edible plants is a part of the program; however, this will not be implemented until it is deemed that the children are ready. As for snacks, children will only eat what they bring.

Inclement Weather Policy

Because this is an outdoor program, weather and the elements will play a role in program planning and ensuring safety. The weather will be assessed by staff as part of the daily risk assessment and the program will be adjusted accordingly. The following weather measures will be followed:

Sun/Heat

On warm and sunny days, we remind the children to drink water and wear their sun hats. We also make sure to spend our time in shaded areas. We take breaks during physical activities if feeling faint or dizzy.

Rain/Thunderstorm

Rain gear must be worn on rainy days. If children get wet, staff will make an effort to change them into dry clothes. If lightning is sighted, staff will bring the children to the closest indoor space and stay there until the lightning has passed.

Cold

We may choose to cancel a day's program if there is a significant safety risk. In the case of extremely hazardous road conditions or if extreme weather would keep us inside 100% of

the time, cancellation of the program would be considered, and families would be notified via Text/call and email no later than 7:15 am on the program day. During outdoor play in winter, staff monitor the children for frostnip (early signs of frostbite) and any other signs of cold ailments such as cold hands or feet, and will venture indoors for warm-up breaks as needed.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Terms and Conditions

In order to participate in pre-registered programs, registration must be completed in full online before attending the program

Payments can be completed all at once or through our monthly payment plan. Refunds will be determined on a case-by-case basis and are not given unless there are extreme circumstances that prevent a child from participating in Wild Roots Forest Program.

- Once registration and payment is received your child will be enrolled for the season.
- Refunds will not be given if a day's program is cancelled due to inclement weather.
- A child who is absent or leaves for a portion of the day due to illness, injury, expulsion, or any other reason will not be refunded any portion of that day's program fees. If the child is unable to return for the remainder of the program term, a refund may be granted for the remaining days.
- 30 days' notice is required if you decide to leave the program. You may be refunded the remaining balance, minus any administrative fees.

Confidentiality and Change of Personal Information

Access to a child's information record is given only to the legal caregivers of the child, the teacher of the class, and the educators on staff. In the case of an emergency or injury to a child, information may also be released to the proper authorities such as medical staff attending a child, or in the case of suspected abuse, the appropriate child protection agency. No other information, verbal or written, regarding a child or their family will be released without the written permission of the parent or caregiver. Parents or caregivers are responsible for keeping the information provided at the time of registration up to date. This can be done by completing a change form whenever there are changes to work/home phone numbers or address, child custody arrangements, banking information, or relevant emergency contact information.

Drop-off and Pick-Up

Pineridge Hollow

Toileting Procedures

Children will use the indoor bathroom facilities before the group goes out to the forest. All program participants must be able to use the washroom independently and are required to always bring an extra change of clothes. Compostable toilets will also be available on the forest grounds. Male and Female instructors will be on site for any children that wish to be accompanied by an adult.

Ratios

Each group has a maximum of 12-15 children. There will be no less than 2 educators every day, with additional support staff, volunteers, and special guests.

The reason we keep our child-to-educator ratio low is to ensure the deepest experience for the children to explore the environment, engage in various types of play, linger for extended periods of time in a chosen interest, learn about and use tools, ask questions, and look for answers, etc.

Educator and Volunteer Responsibilities

It is the role of the educators to take a lead in planning, delivering, and evaluating the program, based on the interests and opportunities presented. They also take primary responsibility in ensuring that policies and procedures, rules, and guidelines are adhered to. Volunteers and other adults may help with these responsibilities where they wish to and are qualified to.

Staff member on-site will have CPR and First Aid, as well as a Police Record Check and Child Abuse Registry.

The responsibilities of our educators and volunteers include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring the safety of the children;
- Assessing and managing risk;
- Creating a positive, welcoming space and community where everyone feels safe, and a program that supports our core values, mission, and vision;
- Modelling good behaviour and respect for others and the natural world;
- Co-creating in play and learning with the children.



Recording Policy

Before any sessions begin, parents will be asked to sign a photo release document for their child. These photos will only be used to share with the families involved, and the teacher of the class for projects, documentation of experiences, and advertising purposes. Information about the interests presented by the class will be recorded as well, in order to help in the planning of future sessions. Names will be protected.

Illness Policy

If your child is sick with symptoms that will interfere with their ability to participate, they will be sent home. We trust the discretion of the parents to assess the health of their child.

Absent/Sick Days

If your child is sick or absent for a day, please let Wild Roots staff know via **call/text or at 431-374-8486**.

Behaviour Policy

At Wild Roots, we treat conflict as an *opportunity for learning*. By using this philosophy, we can see that the process of solving conflict is as important as the outcome. We will support behaviour proactively by engaging in developmentally appropriate activities, and by nurturing a positive physical, social, and emotional space.

In the case of inappropriate (exclusion, name calling, etc.) or unsafe (not responding when called, running, hiding, or actions that are deemed dangerous to the child or to others)

behaviour, the following steps will be taken:

1. Staff will remove the child from the proximity of the group and the two will work together to define the inappropriate/unsafe behaviour and create a plan to modify it;
2. Staff will consult with other Forest School staff to be consistent with expectations and to discuss the best approach for the child;
3. Parents/guardians will be informed (face-to-face at the end of the day or by phone or private message) of the behaviour and consulted on solutions;
4. Staff will follow up with the child to be consistent with the expectations and approach as well as to offer feedback and positive reinforcement.

We believe providing a supportive environment and using positive guidance strategies help children learn how to respect, and develop positive, nurturing relationships with others. Our behaviour guide policy includes realistic expectations of children's abilities and natural, logical consequences for behaviour that help children grow. It is important for us to share this information with parents/guardians to help develop understanding and consistency between the child's home and Nature School.

We understand that all human actions are an attempt to have certain needs met. Our goal when addressing challenging behaviour is to get at the root of what the child needs at that moment and work with the child to find a healthy, appropriate way to fill that need. Conflict is growth trying to happen and we see challenging behaviours as a way to learn something about ourselves, each other, and how we relate to other people.

General Communication

Phone: 431-374-8486

This phone is carried by staff during program hours and is the fastest and most reliable method of contact. It will be used as follows:

- TEXT this number to notify us if your child will be late dropped off or picked up;
 - Please share this phone number with others authorized to pick up your child
- For emergency outgoing calls by Ourstaff;
- Staff may not pick up a call immediately if busy with children during program times;

Equal Opportunity Policy

We want to allow the gift of nature based learning available far and wide. Wild Roots is a newly established organisation, and growth will be organic. There will be limitations to our ability to accommodate everybody, and we ask for patience as we gain more resources. We welcome each child and family with an open heart with regards to their beliefs, behaviour and abilities. We will work with everyone to develop a clear set of boundaries and guidelines. Talking about how they wish to be treated and listening to the feelings of others is important as it will allow the group to work together, understand one another, and ultimately become more supportive and cooperative. We will learn about our similarities, our

differences, and how to respect one another. Should your child require one-on-one attention, a parent, caregiver or their own support worker will need to be present during the session.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Leave No Trace

The Nature School program aims to teach children to respect the natural world and be conscious of our footprint and impact. We act carefully and with intention as to not disrupt the home of the plants and the animals who live at the location we are exploring.

Living trees will be respected and therefore not to be used for shelter building, whittling, or crafting. Edible herbs, berries, and naturally found materials will be harvested sustainably, in small quantities and a gift is always given in return to the land. All trash and garbage is picked up and disposed of properly before, during, and after each day of programming. Children are included in all aspects of these sustainable practices to foster a care and understanding of how to walk lightly on the land.

Further Information

- Child and Nature Alliance of Canada: <https://childnature.ca/>

