



Parent Handbook
Sept. 2023 – June 2024



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Welcome to Seedlings Forest School!

We're glad you're here. This handbook aims to provide you with a sense of what Seedlings Forest School is all about, as well as our practices and procedures.

What is a Forest School?

Forest school describes an educational approach based on Scandinavian and traditional Indigenous pedagogy. Forest schools exist in a wide variety of settings and formats. They take place in any natural space where children spend most of their time outside and use an emergent, play-based approach to programming. Children explore and learn with the help of an experienced facilitator.

Mission

Providing opportunities that support children's natural desire to explore, wonder, experiment, connect and create through the power of outdoor play.

Our Values

Seedlings Forest School was created out of a passion for learning and the belief that for children, play in nature is an important aspect of healthy, holistic development. Through outdoor play, children learn social skills like communication, cognitive skills like problem solving, physical skills like how to move their bodies and understanding its limits, and emotional skills like how express their feelings. The learning that happens through play is powerful because it is of the child's own creation. An outdoor environment is rich in stimuli to spark creative play and inquiry, and repeated visits to the same outdoor space fosters a connection to the land.

Land Acknowledgement

Sudbury occupies the lands of the Atikameksheng Anishinabek and Wahnapiatae First Nations, both members of the Anishinabek Nation, and is part of the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850. In Anishnaabemowin, N'Swakamok means 'where three roads meet' and is used by some Indigenous groups to refer to Sudbury. Seedlings Forest School acknowledges the original caretakers of this land, and strives to exemplify the care and respect owed to the land. We also acknowledge that many forest school practices are similar to Indigenous teachings practiced for thousands of years before colonization.

Environmental Sustainability

One of the principles of a Forest and Nature School (from the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada) is that there "is a sustained process of regular and repeated sessions in the same natural space, supporting children to develop a sense of place, and ethic of care towards

nature, and an understanding of themselves as part of the natural world.” We strive to support this principle a number of ways:

- Learning the names of the living things around us
- Modeling respect for all living things when handling insects, small animals, plants
- Being stewards to Kivi Park by helping with bird feeders, picking-up garbage, etc.
- Using natural materials as often as possible to minimize the impact of non-biodegradable materials
- Balancing playing, using natural materials, and exploring, with minimal disturbance to the land



Staff



The Role of the Facilitator – Planning, Observing and Documenting Learning

A forest school facilitator's role is exactly how it sounds: they facilitate the creation of a meaningful experience. They do this by *engaging* children with a story, question, or idea generated by the group, then stepping back to *observe* and document the children in their activities. Acting as a *co-learner*, the facilitator will also explore, build, imagine and celebrate alongside children. Throughout the experience the facilitator ensures the *safety* of the group, involving participants in assessing hazard and risk. Through *reflection*, the facilitator can draw the children's attention to their experiences, bring awareness to growth and learning that occurred, and planning future opportunities to build on these experiences.

Each session is documented in a field journal with notes, videos and photos that are summarized and emailed to caregivers on a regular basis.



Owner/Operator: Steph Klein (she/her)

With a long history of teaching, learning and playing outside, Steph knows that the natural world can provide a rich environment for personal growth and connection. Watching students, participants and her own children develop curiosity, resilience, confidence, problem solving skills, and social skills in outdoor settings, Steph was motivated to offer a space for children in Sudbury to have similar experiences. The freedom to explore through play is the foundation for learning and development at Seedlings Forest School.

Steph is a certified Forest and Nature School Practitioner through the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada. She holds a current Standard First Aid CPR-C certification and a clear vulnerable sector police check. A former certified Canadian Ski Patrol, wilderness first responder, and lifeguard, Steph has experience managing risk and responding to emergencies in outdoor settings.

Steph has spent eleven years as an outdoor educator, camp counsellor, and camp director across Canada. She was a college instructor for seven years and holds a B.Sc. Wildlife Biology, an M.A. Recreation and Leisure Studies, and a diploma in Adult Education.

Assistant Facilitator: Lindsay (she/her)

Lindsay joined us in September 2022 as an assistant facilitator to the Forest Kids program. She is an avid outdoorsperson: from gardening to hunting, snowmobiling to skiing, Lindsay has a wide variety of outdoor skills. As a Red Seal Carpenter, Lindsay is also our resident tool expert. Lindsay has a keen interest in child development and play, and has no shortage of songs or activities to share with the group. With her enthusiasm for all things outdoors and her gentle leadership style, Lindsay is an asset to Seedlings and we are fortunate to have her!



General Information

Phone: 705-822-9143

Email: seedlingsforestschool@gmail.com

Website: www.seedlingsforestschool.org

Program Information

At Seedlings Forest School, our programs are spent entirely outdoors at Kivi Park in Sudbury, Ontario. A Kivi Park membership is not required to participate however members receive a 15% discount on registration fees. We currently offer two programs:

Preschool

Ages 30 months to 4 years old, Tuesday/Thursdays 9:45-11:45am OR 12:30-2:30pm

We'll spend our time exploring the forest around us through story, song and play with lots of opportunities for developing movement, communication and numeracy skills. This childcare program is not licensed by the Government of Ontario. Maximum group size of 5.

Forest Kids

Ages 4 – 7 years old, 9:45am – 12:45pm Wednesdays

This group is for children who homeschool or as a supplement to formal schooling. In addition to exploring the forest through story, song and play, we'll introduce outdoor skills like fire starting, shelter building and tool use. We'll take children's inquiries about the natural world deeper and encourage them to work together, experiment and wonder to answer their questions. Maximum group size of 10, 1:6 ratio of adults to children.

Inclusion and Accessibility

We strive to create a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for all our participants! If there is something specific you or your child needs to feel comfortable at forest school give us a call and we can talk it through. Listed below are some of the physical challenges children may experience at forest school:

- children will spend the entire program outdoors
- you will need to ensure they are dressed appropriately for all weather conditions
- we will be walking moderate distances (~500m) and may do activities that are physically demanding for a child such as climbing small hills, building forts, walking through the woods etc.
- healthy risk is an important part of our program and falls, bumps, bruises and scratches are all possible with outdoor play. Our approach to managing these risks is discussed further in the risk management section.

If you are hesitant about any of the considerations listed, please contact us.

Schedule

We operate from September to June. There will be no programming running during the two weeks of Christmas break or March break. Program days that fall on stat holidays will be cancelled and session prices will be adjusted to reflect this. Please refer to the website for current dates and fees.

Holidays affecting programs:

Family Day	National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
Good Friday	Thanksgiving Day
Victoria Day	

Waitlist

Registration for further sessions will be offered to participants currently attending Seedlings Forest School first, then to those on the waitlist, then the general public.

Fee payment

- Families can pay in full upon registration or provide a \$50 deposit to secure a space and pay the remainder before the first day of the session.
- Payments may be made by:
 - cash
 - cheque (made out to Steph Klein – Seedlings Forest School)
 - or e-transfer (send to seedlingsforestschool@gmail.com)

Cancellations/Refunds

- If a child must withdraw from the program due to illness or injury, the remaining program fee can be refunded with a doctor's note.
- Individual days missed due to vacation or illness cannot be refunded.
- In the case of cancellation due to inclement weather or emergency closure, a 50% refund of the daily fee can be applied as a credit to future sessions.

Privacy Policy

Any personal data we collect will remain private and confidential, and will not be shared with a third party without consent except in circumstances where we are legally required to do so. As per our media consent form in the registration package, we will never 'tag' you or share your child's name on social media and you may revoke your media consent at any time.

Communication Policy

Clear, respectful dialogue with you is important to us. We try to respond to emails and phone calls as soon as possible however we may not be available to respond until evenings. During programming you can send us a text message if you need to get in touch. Please only call if there is an emergency. Our contact number at all times is 705-822-9143.

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of our programs, please get in touch so that we can discuss further. For short questions we can talk briefly before or after programming, but in some situations, we may need to schedule time to have a more involved conversation.

Health and Safety

Arrival and Departure procedures

Children must be signed in and out of the program. The facilitator will not release the child to any adult at pick-up time unless they are included on the list of authorized persons provided by the parents. ID will be required if the adult at pick-up is different than at drop-off. Additionally, we will not release a child to anyone without suitable ID or who is incapable of safely transporting a child.

Illness

- Please keep your child at home if they exhibit any of the following:
 - vomiting or diarrhea (must be 24 hrs since last occurrence)
 - pink eye, fever, unexplained rash, head lice
 - worsening cough, shortness of breath
- If the participant becomes ill during a program, we will call you to pick them up.
- In the event of a communicable disease exposure the public health unit will be notified and you will be informed as soon as possible.
- Please see additional Covid-19 protocols available on our website.

Allergies and Snacks

Participants must bring their own snack and water. If possible, containers children can open themselves is appreciated. Any garbage from snacks may be sent home as we will not always be near a garbage can.

As long as there are no severe nut allergies in a group, tree nuts and peanuts are allowed. You will be informed before a session begins whether nuts will be permitted.

Toileting and Handwashing

Please make sure your child uses the washroom before forest school. We will take bathroom and snack breaks as needed throughout the program. Sometimes children find outhouses scary, so it might be helpful to practice using the outhouse at Kivi with your child so they become comfortable using it.

Because our adventures can take us farther away from the outhouses, in emergencies we may need to encourage a “nature pee”. We will also have access to a small portable toilet for “nature poop” emergencies. If your child has an accident while at forest school, we will do our best to clean up but, in some cases, we may need to call a parent or guardian for backup.

Children always have access to hand sanitizer (ours or their own) for use before and after eating, and after using the washroom. In warmer months we are able to have a station with soap and water.

Behaviour Guidance

At forest school, we model respect, empathy and kindness in our communications with children. As with assessing risk together, we also navigate social interactions and appropriate behaviour together. We do this by:

- building relationships with each participant and a sense of community within each group
- making agreements on safe and positive behaviour as a group throughout the program
- labelling and acknowledging difficult feelings
- discussing and implementing a solution

If the above steps do not resolve the issue, we will discuss natural consequences and choices. For example, “If you swing a big stick close to someone you might hurt them. We need to give ourselves space to play with sticks. Where can we play with this that’s safer?” If a behaviour becomes unsafe for the participant or others, we will need to call the parent or guardian to pick up their child and arrange a time to discuss how to resolve the issue.

Prohibited Practices

Seedlings Forest School strives to provide an accepting and positive environment for emotional development. Behaviours by staff, volunteers, parents or participants that are verbally or physically abusive will not be tolerated.

As outlined in Section 48 of O. Reg. 137/15 of the *Child Care and Early Years Act*, no staff member, volunteer or student is permitted to engage in the following practices:

- corporal punishment or any bodily harm
- physical restraint
- using threats, derogatory language, or tones of voice that would humiliate, shame or frighten the child
- remove food, drink, shelter, or prevent toilet use

Additionally, no staff member will ever be alone with a child one-on-one in an enclosed area unless required in an emergency. If privacy is required the staff member and child will step out of earshot but remain in public view.

Child Protection Policy

As a childcare provider, under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, Seedlings Forest School has a duty to immediately report any suspected abuse, or risk of abuse to a child, to the appropriate agency.



Risk Management

A note on risk from the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada:

“Risk is often seen as a bad word. But in play, risk doesn’t mean courting danger – like skating on a half-frozen lake or sending a preschooler to the park alone. It means the types of play children see as thrilling and exciting, where the possibility of physical injury may exist, but they can recognize and evaluate challenges according to their own ability. It means giving children the freedom to decide how high to climb, to explore the woods, get dirty, play hide ‘n seek, wander in their neighbourhoods, balance, tumble, and rough-house, especially outdoors, so they can be active, build confidence, autonomy and resilience, develop skills, solve problems and learn their own limits. It’s letting kids be kids – healthier, more active kids.” (p. 31, [Risk Benefit Assessment for Outdoor Play: A Canadian Toolkit](#))



Our goal in risk management is to balance the every day risks in children’s play with taking reasonable steps to reduce harm. Though minor injuries are common in outdoor play, serious or life-threatening injuries are rare. As a business, we manage major risks by meeting industry standards for first aid training, developing emergency procedures and carrying an emergency kit. Daily, we assess the site and weather for hazards and adjust our activities accordingly. During activities, we involve children as much as possible in recognizing and managing risk, and staff will intervene when necessary to prevent serious injuries.

Procedures for Tool Use

Using tools is an opportunity to develop fine motor skills, confidence, new skills and safety knowledge. Tools used at forest school may include:

- peelers, knives, saws, shovels, matches, flint and steel, shovels, ropes, pruning shears, hammers, mallets, hand drills, glue gun

A group’s age, ability to follow instructions and the ratio of facilitator to participate are considered when deciding which tools to use and when. In general, when using any tool, we will discuss safety hazards and rules prior to use and participants will be supervised during use.

Tool Specific Procedures:

1. Sharp tools (peelers, knives, saws, pruning shears)

- all tools will be inspected prior to use
- facilitators will count tools before and after to make sure they have all been collected

-covers will be kept on when not in use

-tools are only used with facilitator supervision and instruction, in a designated area

2. Fire and Matches

-lighting fires are only done with facilitator supervision and instruction

-fire lighting tools (flint/steel, sparker) will be counted before and after use, matches will be handed out one at a time to make sure there are no stray sources of ignition

-water or snow must be available before a fire is lit

-if the fire is not in an enclosed fire pit, we will make a designated marking to show the “no go” area

Staff Qualifications, Screening, and Participant to Staff Ratio

All staff must have a valid Standard First Aid and CPR-C certificate or higher.

All staff, volunteers and students must provide a clear vulnerable sector police check (dated within 6 months of the start of employment) prior to interacting with children.

Our maximum group ratio is 5 participants with 1 facilitator.

Inclement and Extreme Weather

We consult the local weather forecast and monitor conditions during programming to minimize risk from weather hazards. We assess for signs of frostbite, heat exhaustion and participant’s comfort levels during programming. On rainy days we will have access to a tarp for shelter and snack time, but we do not have a regular indoor space.

While we believe in being outdoors in most weather conditions, we may need to cancel programming if conditions present a significant hazard. This includes but is not limited to:

- temperatures below -20°C (including windchill) or above 30°C
- high winds, freezing rain, thunderstorms and lightning
- severe weather warnings from Environment Canada or the Weather Network

If we need to cancel programming you will be contacted by phone with as much notice as possible, however sometimes this may not happen until the morning of the program. As per our cancellation policy, you can receive a 50% credit for the day cancelled to put toward future sessions.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid

During programming, staff will always carry a cell phone, emergency contact information for participants, bear spray, first aid kit, and hand sanitizer. Our contact number is always the same: 705-822-9143, and you may want to set our number to ring through when your phone is on silent, in case we need to contact you during programming.

Minor Injuries

- Cuts, scrapes, bumps, bruises, stings – participant will be assessed, treated and monitored by staff.
- Incidents will be recorded and parents will be informed at pick-up or by email if there is an alternate pick-up.

Major Injuries

- In the event of a more serious injury, parents and 911 (if required) will be contacted immediately. Kivi Park has allowed the use of their main chalet in the event of an emergency and we will administer first aid and move here if necessary. All parents will then be contacted for pick-up.



What to Bring

Being prepared for the outdoors with the right clothing can make cool and wet weather a non-issue. You don't necessarily need expensive gear; you can find a lot of good quality items second-hand and you may even prefer that because anything sent to forest school has a good chance of getting wet, muddy and torn. If you need some advice or assistance finding outdoor gear, please let us know, we can help!

EACH DAY

Dress appropriately for the weather, including applying sunscreen or bug spray, and use the washroom before program. Example photos of the layers needed for each season can be found on our website at <https://www.seedlingsforestschool.org/blank-page-1>

Pack:

- snack and water bottle
- full change of clothes in a Ziploc or plastic bag (including an extra pull-up if your child uses them)
- hand sanitizer if you prefer your child to use their own
- emergency medications (i.e., asthma inhaler, epi-pen)
- a backpack to fit all of the above

*Please label all belongings! Hats and mitts are especially prone to wandering....

AVOID cotton layers where possible. Opt for fleece, wool or polypro instead.

AVOID scarves, they may get tangled and present a choking hazard.

AVOID gloves, mittens are much warmer.

Spring/Fall (warm days)

Base layer – none

Mid layer – long pants and shirt to prevent bug bites

Outer layer – sun hat, pack rain suit, closed toe shoes with a good grip, sunscreen/bug spray optional

**Sometimes spring and fall temperatures can reach 20°C and higher. On these days shorts and a t-shirt are more comfortable, and a water bottle with ice cubes can make staying hydrated more appealing!*

Spring/Fall (cool days)

Base layer – same as winter

Mid layer – same as winter

Outer layer – waterproof pants and jacket, or waterproof one piece. Tuffo and Oakiwear make great one-piece suits for outdoor adventures. A light toque, rubber boots (Bogs insulated boots are great for this time of year), and two pairs of mittens.

Winter

Base layer – this layer should be snug, warm and wick moisture. Look for wool or poly blends and avoid cotton! Wee Woollies makes excellent merino base layers that are very durable.

Mid layer – this layer provides extra warmth. Fleece or wool are the best materials for this layer. (Fleece pajamas can do this job pretty well!)

Outer layer – this is your insulating and waterproof/resistant layer. A one or two-piece snowsuit, warm boots, toque that covers ears, and two pairs of waterproof mittens are key. A neck warmer or balaclava is great on cold days.

**Hand and foot warmer tip* – these make a big difference on extra cold days. Activate and insert them BEFORE arriving at forest school so they can keep hands and feet warm. These can become quite warm for preschoolers and shouldn't be next to skin if possible, so look for mittens with a handwarmer pocket or keep them in jacket pockets to be used as needed.

**Winter snack tip* – snacks that are calorie dense, won't freeze and can be eaten with mittens are helpful. A warm drink in a thermos like cocoa, tea or even warm water is another great way to keep body temperature and spirits up!

Wow, that was a lot of information! Thanks for reading it through to the end. Keep a copy of this handbook for reference, and we're just a short text/call/email away if you have any questions. A copy of this handbook is available on our website, as well as the registration package.

