

Outdoor Preschool

Family Handbook

2015-2016

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## **Welcome!**

Dear Families,

Thank you for choosing a nature-based preschool program. You have made an excellent choice for your growing family. We will have many fun adventures and lifelong learning experiences. I look forward to getting to know you and your family better!

Sincerely, Annabelle Knight

*Founder and Lead Educator*

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of Outdoor Preschool is to provide children with time to explore, appreciate and connect with their environment while building a variety of essential life skills. Outdoor Preschool strives to cultivate an inclusive community of lifelong learners and ecologically conscious citizens through nurturing strong, respectful partnerships among adults, children and the natural world. We value and advocate for families' voices, diversity, unique perspectives and expert knowledge of their children. Outdoor Preschool does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, color, religious beliefs, national and ethnic origin, age, socioeconomic status, marital status, family structure, disability, or sexual orientation.

## **Philosophy**

The Outdoor Preschool program combines play-based and child-led philosophies while focusing on the outdoor environment as the primary learning space. Educators act as facilitators of children's learning, providing stimulation and support only as needed. We nurture children's innate curiosity, creativity and healthy risk-taking in the outdoors, which enables them to connect and grow independently, and as community members. Outdoor Preschool aims to promote equity, while actively challenging prejudices and injustices through anti-bias education. Through meaningful interactions in nature, children learn how to take care of themselves, and how to respect themselves, each other, and the Earth.

Our program emphasizes social and environmental responsibility with the goal of providing contextually and developmentally appropriate educational care. We acknowledge, encourage and respect that each child (and their family) brings diversity to our community. Educators routinely reflect on their own cultural and social identities, attitudes, strengths and challenges while embracing and facilitating expression of similarities and differences in the community. The program is flexibly structured to balance the needs of individual children, along with the needs of the group.

## Curriculum

Educators synthesize a wide variety of scientific research, prominent developmental theories, and world-wide philosophies to inform an open-minded, innovative and nurturing anti-bias approach to working with young children. Our program offers children a dynamic and engaging, culturally responsive environment that supports the whole child (physical, emotional, social and cognitive development and well-being). The program integrates many skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, cooperation, social and environmental responsibility. We prepare children for future learning by developing positive social identities, confidence, self-awareness and self-regulation alongside peers in a safe and trusting environment.

Each day of our program is guided by children's play, interactions with their environment and daily routines. We provide children with ample free time for unstructured play, which is a child's primary mode of learning. Educators encourage experiential, hands-on learning, which allows children's play, imagination and imitation to guide everyday work. The physical environment is an unlimited source of rhythm, meaningful patterns and daily inspiration. We regularly incorporate the use of photos, videos, fine arts materials, music as well as natural materials found on our grounds. Throughout the year, children contribute their work to a portfolio as evidence of their progress in the program. The portfolio is used during conferences to reference a child's work and is always accessible for families to see.

### Daily Schedule/ Flow of the Day (TBD)

The program operates Monday through Friday 8:30am to 1:15pm or 3:30pm, except for national holidays. The program begins at 8:30 am and pick-up ends at 1:15 pm, unless children are enrolled in full day sessions which require rest time in the afternoon and last until 3:30pm. A lead educator and an assistant educator work with a maximum of 9 children, which allows for low child to adult ratios of 4.5:1. *Predictability and routine are very important for young children, in addition to flexibility based on children's needs.* Our program will have similar routines each day, but may vary slightly depending on the environment and children's needs on that particular day.

8:30-8:45am	<b><u>Drop-off/Arrival</u></b>	Sign-in, morning communication*, hand-washing, clothing check, bathroom visits
8:45am	<b><u>Morning Circle</u></b>	greeting, weather check, hazard identification, safety protocols as needed**
9:00-10:00am	<b><u>Outdoor Exploration</u></b>	child-led outdoor time, conservation/preservation and safety

		reminders**
10:00-10:30a m	<b><u>Morning Snack</u></b>	organic, vegan snack provided outside
10:30-12:00 pm	<b><u>Outdoor Play</u></b>	imaginative play, project work, independent/small/large group play
12:00-1:00p m	<b><u>Lunch</u></b>	food/table preparation, sharing circle
1:00-1:15pm	<b><u>Relaxation and Reflection</u></b>	storytelling, stretching, yoga
1:15pm	<b><u>Dismissal/Pick-up</u></b>	Sign-out, afternoon communication*
1:15-2:30pm	<b><u>Rest/Quiet Time</u></b>	
2:30-3:00pm	<b><u>Afternoon Snack</u></b>	organic, vegan snack provided, storytelling
3:00-3:30pm	<b><u>Yard Play/Pick-up/Dismissal</u></b>	Sign-out

*\*Morning and Afternoon Communications*

Morning Communication is essential to ensuring a positive experience at Outdoor Preschool for your child. Please inform an educator upon arriving at school if your child did not sleep well during the previous night, refused breakfast, etc., so that we may be better informed at helping them during the day. Educators will communicate with families and caretakers in the afternoons to share unusual, as well as usual events from the day's activities.

*\*\*Hazards and Safety Awareness*

Educators help children identify and learn about potential environmental hazards that exist outside. As a group, we discuss the potentially dangerous object or area and we work together to mark it and create a boundary for future reference. Sometimes educators use a whistle to ask all children to stop where they are and respond with their immediate attention. We regularly share the First Aid Backpack with children and call their attention with songs and rhymes when needed. Educators practice many safety routines, including daily risk assessments of the tools and the environment. While there are unique hazards associated with outdoor learning, we do our best to ensure that all children are safe at all times. Please read our Hazards section on the website for additional information related to insect stings and ticks.

## Skill Development Guide

### **Environmental Science/Nature Awareness:**

Children will develop knowledge of weather patterns, how living things, including people, are connected and how to care for the physical environment, plants and living creatures. While species identification is not our main emphasis, we will eagerly pursue it when relevant.

- *Ex. Each day children observe the weather conditions outside through experiencing first-hand how the plants and animals change and adapt throughout the seasons.*

### **Play:**

Educators observe children's interests in activities, as well as their approach to play whether it's imitation-based or fantasy, independent, parallel or collaborative. Outdoor and indoor play involves creativity, sensory integration, object manipulation, risk-taking, physical coordination, cooperation, listening and physical motor skills (gross motor: body awareness, flexibility; fine motor: grip, hand dominance).

- *Ex. When children play by pretending to put on a concert with sticks and stumps, they are engaging various senses, along with physical coordination and social collaboration.*

### **Routines/Transitions/Self-Help:**

Daily routines and transitions offer opportunities for children to develop their interests, sense of humor, confidence, self-esteem and executive functions. They develop their independence, flexibility, listening, eye contact, perseverance and ability to transition and follow directions.

- *Ex. Transitions, particularly during indoor to outdoor environments are important times for children to dress themselves appropriately, requiring making choices and persistence in order to get dressed by him or herself.*

### **Social and Emotional:**

Preschool-age children are actively developing their social and moral knowledge. Through daily interactions with peers and educators, children will develop self-regulation, self-identity, self-discipline, awareness and articulation of feelings, impulse control, adaptability, resilience, feelings of competence, collaboration, conflict-resolution, problem-solving, understanding and respecting differences, and showing empathy.

- *Ex. Community Reflection Meetings and Sharing Circles encourage children to voice their opinions and feelings, while also listening to others. Puppets are also used to encourage open discussion of feelings.*

### **Cognitive:**

**Language-** Children will explore and develop language cognition using verbal and nonverbal, receptive and expressive language. They will learn to communicate respectfully, to reason, and to articulate feelings and plans with others.

- *Ex. Active storytelling occurs everyday in the program and engages children through asking questions about the plot, character and setting along with questions regarding children's predictions and thoughts.*

**Literacy-** Children will practice literacy cognition through letter recognition, letter sounds, print awareness, rhyme, writing and drawing habits, and understanding and relating to stories. Children have daily exposure to creative writing tools and both oral and written stories.

- *Ex. The Children's Sign-in sheet enables children to explore mark-making and the meaning of print everyday.*

**Numeracy-** Children will practice numeracy cognition through shape and color identification, sorting, counting, number recognition, one-to-one correspondence, sequencing, and patterning. These activities are done regularly by observing objects within indoor and outdoor environments.

- *Ex. Collecting acorns and fallen leaves for pretend food rations among children enables individuals and groups to have an authentic experience with sorting and counting.*

**Social-** Children will engage in social cognition by developing their ability to recognize social situations, interpret feelings and intentions, show and understand empathy, listen to others and express feelings safely and productively, especially when dealing with disappointment.

- *Ex. The Montessori concept of a Peace Flower is used regularly when children are experiencing peer conflicts. The Peace Flower allows children to own their feelings and feel empowered by their ability to share their thoughts with others, while understanding the importance of listening and respecting others. (See Behavioral Guidance below for more information on Peace Flowers)*

### **Behavioral Guidance**

The Outdoor Preschool environment is designed to offer children a wide space, plenty of materials, appropriate modeling, and time which improve children's attitude and discourage behavioral issues. Educators communicate explicit expectations, appropriate boundaries and respectful limit setting with children.

When a child seems stressed or withdrawn we want to address the most common causes: Is he/she tired? Did he/she eat and drink enough? Has there been a change in routine at home or at school? When it is clear that a child needs more support, our program provides children with 1:1 time with an adult. We understand that every child has a right to their feelings. We will incorporate physical restraint if a child is in danger of severely injuring him/herself or others. We know the importance of breathing techniques and

peaceful spaces for taking a break when needed. Additionally, community meetings can help children resolve issues as a group.

Children are encouraged to resolve their own peer to peer conflicts. For example, children use the Peace Flower as a part of their own conflict resolution process with peers. This tool is used in Montessori classrooms and has shown many positive results for children as it helps them slow down, share their feelings and listen to others from a place of empowerment. The Peace Flower is similar to a Talking Stick since it allows children to take turns and voice their feelings independently.

### **Challenges and Support Process**

Educators make daily observations of all children's development and we need families' observations from home in order to best meet children's needs at school. We will actively work with families to explore and find effective strategies for working with children with challenging behavior and children with disabilities at home and at school.

When an educator has multiple observations of difficult, unsafe or unhealthy behavior and does not feel that he/she can continue providing safe, accessible and quality care for all children in the program, we will ask the family to seek additional support from specialists. Specialists help in assessing and supporting children with challenging behavior or special needs. If deemed appropriate, an IEP (Individualized Education Program) will be created in partnership with specialists or other agencies and implemented as soon as possible. Outdoor Preschool is proud to partner with additional agencies, such as physical therapists and psychologists during school hours.

There are many advocacy and support groups for families in the area and families routinely seek out support from educators at one time or another for challenges great and small. Please ask for more information and contacts for additional support, including Early Intervention Specialists, Special Needs support and responsibility, connections to parent advocacy and support groups, parent education, referrals and information around IFSP (Individualized Family Service Program) and IEP (Individualized Education Program).

When strategies have been exhausted by the program staff after partnering with additional specialists and a child's progress or behavior has not improved his/her participation to an acceptable level for the needs of the child and overall program, educators will meet with the family to discuss further options, including disenrollment. Although we will try our best to support all children in our program, Outdoor Preschool reserves the right to terminate the enrollment contract at anytime.

### **Conferences and Communication**

Outdoor Preschool offers annual conferences for families each fall and spring. The conference will address your child's progress and any questions you may have. Informal meetings can be arranged at anytime throughout the year.



Families are asked about their preferred method of communication during the enrollment process. In addition to daily check-ins at drop-off and pick-up, educators will communicate with families through monthly email newsletters and daily blog posts (available in print by request) that describe and document classroom activities.

## What to Bring

Each day, children should be prepared to go on an adventure with the following items and proper gear:

- *ensure child wears **appropriate clothing and gear***

(see Dressing for the Weather below)

- **Small Backpack with:**

- **water bottle**

- **lunch**

- **sunscreen and lip protectant** (if you want reapplication in the afternoon)

- **small handkerchief** in pocket (for nose wiping)

- **empty plastic bag** for wet clothes and **plastic bag of extra clothing** for cubby, as needed (see Extra Clothing below)

### Dressing for the Weather (required!)

*“There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate gear.”*

Outdoor Preschool is an outdoor preschool. We will spend most of our time outside each day, in rain, snow, or shine, so please be prepared for your child’s clothes to get wet and dirty! Children and adults must be dressed appropriately in order to be comfortable and gain the most out of each day in the program. An educator will be available upon arrival to help ensure that children are appropriately dressed for the day’s weather conditions. **If children do not have appropriate gear and clothing, he or she will not be able to participate in the program.**

When choosing appropriate gear, please keep in mind, Outdoor Preschool encourages and supports all children to be able to dress and relieve themselves each day. Children will be assisted to relieve themselves appropriately outside when a toilet is not accessible and it is best not to have the child undress entirely in order to squat. If you have concerns, need assistance finding or affording gear, please ask an educator for additional information and help!

*Limitations to Time Outdoors:* If weather conditions drop below 15 degrees or above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, there is heavy precipitation, thunder, lightning or high winds, children’s time outdoors will be limited. Outdoor Preschool has many options for indoor activities. Educators follow exposure recommendations from the NOAA website for wind chill factors and frostbite risk.

### **Required Clothing and Gear**

<b>Shoes</b>	<p>Please work with your child to wear shoes that are comfortable and functional in outdoor settings.  <b><i>Open-toe shoes, such as flip flops are prohibited.</i></b>          Crocs are discouraged for outdoor play. <i>Please leave a pair of slippers (crocs are OK) at school for children to wear indoors.</i></p>
<b>Cold Weather Gear</b>  <i>Layer, Layer, Layer!</i>	<p><b>Top:</b> Long-Sleeve Wicking Shirt (ex. wool or fleece long underwear), Long-sleeve Insulation Layer (ex. wool or fleece sweater), Vest, Waterproof Rain Jacket with Hood, Warm Hat, Neck warmer, Insulation Mittens, Waterproof Mittens</p> <p><b>Bottom:</b> 1-2 pairs of Insulated Pants (ex. wool or fleece long underwear), Waterproof Rain Pants, 1-2 pairs Wool socks, Waterproof Boots</p> <p>*Wool blends and synthetic fabrics wick sweat and moisture and dry more quickly compared to cotton blends.</p>
<b>Warm Weather Gear</b>	<p><b>Top:</b> Fully-Brimmed Sun Hat, Long-sleeve Wicking Shirt, Light Insulation Layer, Waterproof Rain Jacket with Hood</p> <p><b>Bottom:</b> Long Wicking Pants, Waterproof Rain Pants, Synthetic or Wool Socks, Lightweight Sneakers when it's dry, Rubber Boots and Closed-toe Sandals for splashing when it's wet</p> <p>*Lightly colored, brown and grey long pants and long-sleeve shirts are best for sun and bug protection.</p>

### **Extra Clothing**

Please ensure that your child's cubby always has a complete extra change of clothes including: 2 pairs of wool or synthetic socks, 2 pairs of underwear, 1 long-sleeve shirt, 1 short-sleeve shirt, 1 pair of pants, 1 pair of mittens, preferably waterproof and 1 warm hat.

***Please write your child's first name and last initial on all of your child's clothing and gear tags.***

## **School Procedures and Policies**

### **Media and Toys**

Outdoor Preschool asks children and families to leave toys and screen media at home. We have found that if children are struggling during drop-off, it is best to comfort them with hugs, to remind them of the plan for pick-up and to follow through with confidence. Sometimes during exceptional circumstances, personal items such as a family photo, handkerchief, or small soft toy can be kept with the child as a comfort piece to aid in transitions. We also ask families to refrain from bringing toys or commercial gifts to school during birthdays or holidays. Please ask an educator if you would like additional information.

### **Arrival and Dismissal\***

The school day runs from 9am until 3:30pm. The state requires families to Sign-in at the time of children's drop-off and pick-up times, so please use Outdoor Preschool's Sign-in and Sign-out sheet TWICE each day your child attends the program. Please also indicate if someone other than a parent or guardian will be picking up your child.

**DROP-OFF:** An educator will greet you and your child in the morning, have you sign-in and help your child transition from the car. Please say goodbye to your child by 9:15am, so the program's activities can begin promptly and smoothly for all. Thank you for your support and please reach out to an educator with any questions.

**PICK-UP:** Please arrive promptly to pick up your child. We cannot extend pick-up time. In extenuating circumstances, please notify the school by phone.

\*If you would like to speak or meet with an educator in privacy or for more than a minute or two, please reach out by email or phone to schedule a time to talk or meet.

### **Snacks and Meals**

Children are provided a morning and afternoon snack of organic fruit, crackers and/or organic vegetables. Snacks are always vegan, meaning they do NOT contain animal products, meaning no dairy, egg or meat. Lunch is NOT provided and should be brought from home. We recommend zero-waste lunches that use reusable packaging and promote healthy eating habits. An ideal lunch will be balanced and contain mostly natural whole fruits, vegetables and grains. Thermoses of soup can be especially tasty during cold weather months. Please avoid using glass containers for food.

### **Emergency Closings and Emergency Plan**

The program will follow local public school closings. The program will do its best to alert families of Emergency Closings via email or phone no later than 7am on the day of closing. In case of emergency during the day, children will be evacuated and parents will be notified as soon as possible. The school has an emergency backpack containing basic medical supplies, emergency contacts, food, water, books and mark-making materials.

### **Health and Illness**

If your child did not sleep well overnight, is recovering from an illness or has been traveling long distances, please consider giving them an extra day's rest before returning to school. When a child is showing signs of illness or injury, we will do our best to contact parents and guardians first, before contacting Emergency Contacts. Children showing any of the following symptoms, must be symptom free for 24 hours before they may return to the program: fever (over 100 degrees Fahrenheit), more than one instance of diarrhea, vomiting, severe coughing, conjunctivitis, jaundice and/or rash may not participate in the program.

Children or staff diagnosed with any of the following diseases or infections, may not participate in the program until given written permission from a medical professional stating that it is safe to return: bacterial meningitis, campylobacter, chicken pox, cryptosporidiosis, diphtheria, E. coli, giardia, hepatitis A, impetigo, measles, mumps, pertussis, polio, rubella, salmonella, shigella, strep throat, and active tuberculosis.

***Please contact Outdoor Preschool if your child is diagnosed with a communicable disease, so we can ensure a safe and healthy environment for all families.***

### **Traditions and Birthdays**

Outdoor Preschool celebrates classroom traditions that emerge and grow from our community and the natural world around us. We strive to reflect diverse cultural and social identities that empower children and families and resist prejudice and bias. We welcome families to share traditions that reflect their family life or cultural identity. We look forward to partnering with families to find simple, meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways to include these traditions in the program.

We like to acknowledge children's birthdays by offering to create and bake a classroom snack as a class. The child celebrating a birthday chooses ingredients to make their treat special and unique. Please avoid bringing gifts or party favors to school. We ask families not to bring in birthday party invitations/cards unless all children in the class are included.

### **Absence/Vacation**

Please contact Outdoor Preschool at your earliest convenience by text, email or phone when your child will not be attending due to illness or a planned absence.

### **Parent/Guardian/Family Involvement**

Families are always welcome and encouraged to visit the school, share with children and join us on our outdoor excursions. Since we are often outside exploring or on a hike, ideally, families will let us know when they want to visit, so we can be sure to spend time effectively together. Do you have a special hobby, skill, language or story that you would like to share? Would you like to help us with garden projects? Would you be willing to pick-up and return library books to and from our schoolhouse? Outdoor Preschool loves to have visitors help out and teach us new things.

*We ask that families who are visiting, dress appropriately for the weather, including wearing similar items that we ask children to wear in order to model appropriate gear. Also, please keep in mind the following school policies when participating in Outdoor Preschool:*

- ***Adults do not help children climb higher than the child can climb by him or herself.***
- ***We can pick up material that is no longer living and we avoid picking up items/materials that are still alive.***
- ***Children may take home pieces that are smaller than a finger and inanimate.***
- ***We can use sticks for walking if the child can adequately control movement. Sticks may be incorporated into play if they are arm-length or shorter and responsibly moved.***
- ***Smoking is prohibited across the school's campus.***

### **Confidentiality and File Information**

All of our interactions with families and our families' information is very important to us, so we keep it in the strictest confidence. We will never share information unless parents/guardians have given written permission for us to do so. Families may access children's written records at anytime during business hours.

### **Mandatory Reporting**

By law, it is a responsibility and requirement for early childhood educators to report suspected child abuse and neglect.

### **Parking and Safety**

Please turn your car off when dropping off and picking up your child.

### **Enrollment**

- 1) **Initial Contact:** Interested family contacts Outdoor Preschool
- 2) **Site Visit:** Family and child visit school campus, receive Curriculum Guide+Family Handbook- Director meets with family, Educator interacts with child
- 3) Family **Submit an Application for Enrollment**, including \$45 application fee
- 4) If accepted (or waitlisted?), **submit an Admission Form + Enrollment Contract** (Waiver of Liability), including **immunization record** and **tuition deposit**
- 5) **Home Visit:** Educator will visit your home to help build a connections with family
- 6) **Orientation:** For Adults only: 30-60 minute overview of program routine, expectations, and important policies, events and questions

### **Tuition and Payment**

Tuition for the 2015-2016 program year, including (Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring Sessions): 9am-1pm, M-F \$/week, \$/session, \$/year

There is a non-refundable \$45 registration fee that must accompany all Application for Enrollment forms. A non-refundable tuition deposit of first and last month's tuition is due upon return of the Admission Form and Enrollment Contract. The annual tuition fee can be paid using one of the payment plans below:

- 1) Annual payments
- 2) Session payments
- 3) Semi-Monthly payments (paid on the 1st of every other month)

There is a \$10.00 late fee for payments made after the 7th of the month and a \$25 NSF (non-sufficient funds) fee for checks. Please contact us to discuss a special payment plan if needed. If tuition is over two months late, your child's enrollment will end until the bill is paid to date.

### **Notice of Schedule Change**

At Outdoor Preschool, we will do our best to accommodate schedule changes. A written request is required 2 months in advance of a change in schedule.

### **Notice of Withdrawal**

A written request must be submitted 2 months prior to the withdrawal date in order to give us enough time to fill the space. If we fill the space before 2 months is through, you may have the opportunity to withdraw earlier. If sufficient notice is not given prior to withdrawal, families are still required to pay for all scheduled days corresponding to the full 2 month period. No refunds will be given for dates missed due to illness, vacation, national holidays, and inclement weather.

### **Transitions/Transfers**

Outdoor Preschool can help transition a child between programs by offering collaboration and information sharing between educators with parental permission. Educators will work

with families to create a plan to help the child prepare for a transfer in a way that is consistent with his/her ability to understand the change.

### **Staff Directory and Important #s**

Location: Corner of

Address: 127 Forest Hill Rd Anytown, VT 02213

Owner and Lead Educator: Annabelle Knight

Cell phone #: (207) 409-2792

Email: [annabelle.knight@gmail.com](mailto:annabelle.knight@gmail.com)

School Website:

Community and State Services

Local Library:

WIC:

Prevent Child Abuse:

Child Care Consumer Concern Line telephone number (1-800-540-7942)

### **School Calendar**

School is Closed on the following dates for 2015-2016:

**Summer Session:** June, July, August

Independence Day- July 4th

**Fall Session:** September, October, November

Labor Day- 1st Monday in October

Columbus Day- 2nd Mon in Oct

Veterans Day- November 11th

Thanksgiving Day- 4th Thurs in Nov

**Winter Session:** December, January, February

Christmas Day- Dec 25th

January 1st- New Years Day

Martin Luther King Day- 3rd Monday in Jan

President's Day- 3rd Monday in Feb

**Spring Session:** March, April, May

Memorial Day- last Monday in May

