

## Urban Farm & Forest School, Spryfield

## Parent Handbook 2017 – 2018

### Welcome to Forest School!

We are excited to be sharing the opportunities at this NEW community urban farm & forest school with you and your child(ren).

During our programs, we share the responsibility of protecting the health, safety, and well-being of your child and our policies outlined in this handbook are designed to do just that. It is your responsibility as a parent or guardian to read through, ask questions, and discuss any or all of these with your child prior to the start of the program.

Please contact us if you have questions or would like to discuss any information that is enclosed here and we look forward to having lots of fun in the woods,

Thank you,

Sally Trower

**[forestschoolsally@gmail.com](mailto:forestschoolsally@gmail.com)**

**Tel 902 225 6606**

### About Forest School

Forest School aims to provide the opportunities to support:

- children to explore, create, and learn in a natural setting,
- unstructured play in a safe environment,
- risk taking (physical, social, emotional, intellectual) in safe spaces while building a community of trust and individual confidence
- the needs of the individual child with a low child to adult ratio
- activities that impart respect for ourselves, others, and the environment
- getting dirty, having fun, and sharing joy!

## Core Learning Values of Forest School

Child led, emergent learning  
Experiential learning outdoors  
Repeated exposure to a natural space  
Leave No Trace principles

### Preparing for Forest School

The first morning is full of energy and expectation. We are all eager to get to start playing, but do need to make sure that all the important bits are in place before we head out.

The Forest School Team recommends arriving a little early at the start of the very first session. This provides us with a chance to meet you, your child(ren), do some admin check clothing, check gear, and answer any last minute questions that you may have for us.

On the first day, we take a picture of your child with their name to help us remember names and recognize them in subsequent photos. All participants are given a whistle that is to stay on them for the duration of the session.

When everyone is ready, we encourage a quick goodbye and all head off into the farm

**Young Forest Schoolers: All participants are required to be able to use the bathroom on their own. We will not change diapers, pull ups, or wipe private areas for children.**

At the end of a session, one of our instructors may head out ahead of the children to briefly discuss how the day went. We often ask the children to hang back while we collect whistles, and make sure everyone is signed out before leaving the site.

### Half Day Program & After School

Our Half Day Programs run from 9am until 12pm (unless otherwise specified) on the program dates outlined on the registration form.

After School runs from 3-5.30pm. Please ensure your child is collected ON or BEFORE this time. We understand that circumstances mean you might be delayed. PLEASE TEXT US to notify us of any late pick ups / drop offs.

Our Half Day Programs will have one snack break. PLEASE PACK A HEALTHY SNACK FOR YOUR CHILD. If the weather turns cold, this can be a warm snack in a thermos.

### What to wear?

It is the responsibility of the parent /guardian to ensure that your child is properly dressed for a session. For the health and safety of your child we do reserve the right to refuse a child's participation based on improper clothing and footwear.

We are sometimes able to loan outer layers based on availability and size, please contact us in advance to inquire if you may need to borrow items.

Appropriate clothing and outer layers are dependent on weather conditions which include temperature, rain, length of program, and wet/damp conditions. **Please check the forecast that morning to ensure your child has the proper gear to be able to participate safely and consider the length of time your child will be outside.** Also be aware that it is often cooler and more damp in the forest than in open areas.

Closed-toed shoes and long pants are a must, which includes on hot days and during the summer. Open sandals and flip-flops are not acceptable footwear. When rain or wet forest floor conditions prevail, waterproof footwear may also be necessary, especially on cool or cold days. Long pants help prevent scratches and scrapes and limit skin exposure to insect bites and ticks.

Socks can make all the difference. Good quality wool socks are better than cotton, especially during wet and cold conditions. Wool socks will continue to insulate and keep feet warm even when they are wet.

Keeping heads and hands warm can also be challenging in our damp cool climate, but necessary to keep children comfortable and safe. Wool is the best choice and mittens are better than gloves for little hands. Thin knitted gloves can make hands colder than wearing nothing, especially when they get wet and should be avoided.

During rain events or wet damp days, keeping the body dry and warm prevents hypothermia and keeps the grumpies away. A sturdy breathable waterproof jacket and waterproof rain pants will be required.

Please note that most snow pants and nylon splash pants are not waterproof and are not acceptable on wet rainy days. When purchasing gear, water resistant is not the same as waterproof.

Forest School is not a fashion show and your child's clothing will get dirty, wet, and possibly ripped. Second hand shops can provide cheap functional gear at a fraction of the cost. If quality clothing is a barrier, please discuss this issue with us in advance.

Dressing appropriately for extended play outdoors is necessary in order to be comfortable, safe, and willing to participate in forest school activities.

MEC has a great site explaining further for dressing for the weather and you can check that out <https://www.mec.ca/AST/contentprimary/learn/kids/clothingandgear/dressingyourkids.jsp>.

**See clothing checklist to follow.....**

### **Clothing Checklist**

#### **Always:**

- closed toed shoes
- long pants
- extra sweater or warm jacket
- spare dry socks

#### **On a rainy or wet day:**

- waterproof jacket
- waterproof rain pants
- rubber or waterproof boots

#### **On a rainy cool day, include insulating layers under rain gear**

- wool or polar fleece sweater
- wool or fleece pants
- warm socks (avoid cotton socks, wear wool)
- warm hat & warm mittens

#### **On a cool windy day:**

- warm coat or windbreaker shell with a warm sweater
- warm pants, possibly long johns underneath
- warm socks
- rubber boots (forest floor is often damp or wet)
- hat & mitts

### **What to Pack?**

We ask that parents ensure their child has all of the following items packed in a sturdy backpack that fits your child. It is good practice to pack the backpack with your child's help so that your child will be aware of what is in his/her backpack and where to find specific items.

Please refrain from packing extra items. Your child will be carrying their own pack while hiking and extra items will add extra weight.

Travel sized items or smaller portions in labelled containers for sunscreen and bug repellent, will help reduce the weight and space taken in your child's backpack.

All tools and equipment needed will be provided by Forest School. Please do not send any tools or knives from home.

### **Backpack Checklist**

- spare clothing in bag
- small water bottle
- nut-free snacks and lunch, preferably litterless
- sunscreen where applicable (non-aerosol only)
- bug repellent (non-aerosol only)
- extra sweater

#### **Please do NOT bring:**

- Toys of any kind.
- Pocket knives or other tools.
- Electronic devices including cell phones, mp3 players, & gaming devices.

We ask that children bring **non-aerosol** sunscreen and bug sprays. Aerosols are easily inhaled or ingested when sprayed with others in close proximity and also may negatively impact the ecosystem around us.

### **Lost Items**

We are not responsible for any lost or stolen items while on site. We encourage parents to label everything coming with your child to help ensure it ends up back in their pack.

### **Our Staff & Volunteers**

Forest School facilitators are passionate about child and nature connections while role modeling cooperation, respect for self and the environment, and fostering a caring, safe, and supportive community.

### **Experience and Certification**

Sally Trower, our main facilitator of the program at the urban farm, is the first in Nova Scotia to qualify as a Forest School Canada

and comes with experience in outdoor experiential education. The remaining team combines outdoor education youth leadership experience and/or working with children in a child care or a school setting, special needs inclusions and accommodations, wilderness survival, or hiking leadership.

At all times, at least one group leader holds First Aid and CPR certification, and some with additional Wilderness First Aid training, Field Leader (Hiking) certification, along with Forest School Canada Certification candidates.

All staff and volunteers have submitted an up-to-date Criminal Record Check with a Vulnerable Sector Screen and a Child Abuse Registry Search.

### **Health and Safety Policies**

#### **Privacy**

The Urban Farm and Museum Society of Spryfield is committed to keeping all personal data protected and private, except where consent has been given (in the case of photographic images or video). We do not share information with third parties without prior consent, except when legally obligated to do so.

When registering for an urban farm and forest school session, you are providing us with sensitive information about you and your child(ren). This information falls under the protection of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA). We collect this information in order to communicate with you and to protect your child's health and safety during our programs.

Certain pieces of information (allergies, medications, emergency contacts) will be printed and kept in a binder for select Forest school staff only. This binder will be carried in the leader pack in order to make it easily accessible in the event of an emergency.

Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns about privacy.

## ***Illness***

If ill, we ask that participants stay home and only return to a program 24 hours after their last symptoms have subsided.

We ask participants to stay home when:

- Temperature at or exceeding 101°F or 38.3°C
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Unidentifiable rash

In the event that a child displays one of these symptoms while during an urban farm & forest school session, parents will be contacted to pick child up immediately. Children may return to a session 24 hours after their last symptom has subsided.

In the event of communicable diseases, such as measles, chicken pox, flu, etc., a sick child may return once their family doctor has communicated that it is safe for them to do so.

Any outbreak of communicable disease will be communicated to parents via email.

If your child is being treated for lice, please let us know so that we can share this relevant information to other families.

## ***Food***

Food is fuel and when outside being physical, we need more of it and our appetites tell us so. Packing a little extra helps with maintaining energy and mood.

During the season Full Day when the weather is cool, we encourage warm drink or a hot snack that you know your child enjoys eating. It is also good practice to have your child help with packing their snack kit, so they know what is in it and where to find it.

We ask that participants refrain from bringing any peanuts or tree nuts to forest school due to the prevalence of life threatening nut

allergies. By providing nut free snacks for your child, we can strive to be a more safe and inclusive environment for everyone.

Participants are not permitted to share snacks.

We ask that participants try to bring a litterless snack with them, as less trash is better for our environment and our natural site. Educators and volunteers strive to follow a Leave No Trace policy which limits our impact on our surrounding environment.

If you would like to provide a snack that your child can share with the whole group, please inquire beforehand to ensure that it is inclusive for everyone.

## ***Emergency Procedures and First Aid***

Should emergency care need to be provided, parents will be notified immediately, and one of the team will stay with the child until parent or guardian arrives.

The first aid kit is carried in the emergency backpack and is well-equipped with all necessary items needed to treat minor injuries, such as band-aids and bandages, antiseptic wipes, bug bite gel, eye wash, allergy medication, and a hypothermia blanket, among other items.

An Educator trained in First Aid and CPR will be present at every session.

## ***Risk Management***

Risk is an inherent part of the program and child development, as is learning how to manage it. Our team and volunteers assess and manage the risks on-site, while striving to include the participants in this process to help them learn the skill of risk management.

The team will conduct on site risk assessments throughout the year, as well as daily risk assessments with the children.

Some of the risks inherent to the program are:

- Injuries from physical activity, sometimes on uneven ground
- Inclement weather
- Presence of wild animals, including ticks
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### ***Inclement Weather***

We consult weather forecasts regularly, and monitor the weather when making all decisions about activities for the day.

In the event of extreme weather (blizzard, severe storm, high winds, etc.), we reserves the right to cancel programming until it can safely be resumed. The lead member will monitor the weather and attempt to give 24 hours notice, however, the weather in NS is difficult to forecast and a cancellation may occur within a shorter timeframe.

If dangerous weather develops while in session in the woods, or if a session is cancelled, parents/guardians will be notified by phone and/or email and we will attempt to reschedule on a case by case basis. Remember this is Nova Scotia and we can sometimes be at the mercy of ever changing weather!

### ***Participant Ratios***

The ratio between staff/volunteers and participants varies by age of the group. Staff/volunteers and children have a ratio of 1:5, as per the Forest School Canada Guidelines.

### ***Forest School Team Responsibilities***

Our leaders and volunteers hold their roles:

- To ensure that all safety measures and risk assessments are in place.
- To support a child's experience outdoors in a safe, respectful, and meaningful manner.
- To encourage children in cooperative, unstructured and exploratory play.
- To engage in open and clear communication with children, families, and among staff.

### ***Parent/Caregiver Responsibilities***

A parent/caregiver is responsible for:

- Registration forms and the information submitted therein is to be accurate and up-to-date
- Providing staff with any additional information that would assist in meeting the needs of your child
- Ensuring their child is prepared for the adventures with us and with appropriate clothing, snacks, and water.

### ***Participant Sign In/Sign Out***

We will not release children to anyone who is not specified as a Primary Contact, Secondary Contact, or Additional Designated Release that has been provided on the completed registration form.

Parents must provide us written consent for anyone who will be picking up their child. If written consent is not possible, the parent must give verbal consent.

Everyone, including parents, who are authorized to pick up a participant **must be prepared to present photo ID.**

**For the safety of your child, children will not be released to ANYONE without documented (written or verbal) consent and photo ID.**

### ***Washroom Use***

All participants are expected to be able to use the washroom on their own without assistance. We encourage children to use the washroom at home before the start of the session.

The forest school team will encourage 'pee parades' at specified times for participants to relieve themselves and one member of the staff will supervise each area. During this time, participants are expected to give each other privacy and behave in an appropriate manner towards one another if the child wishes to carry this out in the woods

We do not change diapers, pull ups, or wipe private areas for children.

Water, soap, and hand sanitizer will be made available for children to clean their hands after washroom use.

### ***Behavior Management***

At forest school, we are proactive in creating a space and activities that are developmentally appropriate for participants.

When behavior management is necessary, our policies:

- are designed to help the child learn appropriate behavior;
- are implemented in a positive manner;
- consider the development needs of the child;
- help the child to learn confidence, communication, and decision making skills.

Our policies explicitly prohibit the following:

- Corporal punishment, sexual, emotional and physical abuse and harassment are strictly prohibited at all times. We have **zero tolerance policy** for the above, and all our team of staff and volunteers are expected to ensure that no harm comes to any child.
- The deprivation of food, water or shelter. Children will never be deprived of food, and will have access to clean water and safe shelter at all times. Threatening to withhold any of these is also prohibited.

Please note that we reserve the right to expel or suspend a child from the program should their behavior be deemed unsafe for themselves or others whilst at forest school. In this event, parents will be contacted and instructed to pick up their child.

### **Emergency Contact**

In the event that you need to get a hold of us during a session. please text us at the numbers below with your contact number and our leaders will contact you as soon as possible.

To maintain the magic and limit the disruptions during our programs our leaders will have mobile phones on them, but **the**

**ringers will be silenced.** Leaders will check their mobiles periodically throughout the session.

In case of an emergency, please text us with your contact number and our leaders will contact you as soon as possible.