

Risk Management Policies & Procedures

Forest School 2026

Boundaries for Outdoor Classrooms

In addition to the fenced boundaries of the Forest which are gated, locked, and monitored by camera, the three classrooms further establish boundaries using visual aids to delineate the classroom space. These boundaries may change at teacher discretion based on classroom needs.

Staff will teach students the boundaries intentionally and in a clear, developmentally appropriate way, especially emphasizing these boundaries during the first month of school. This might include having the children paint rocks to add to the border, walking along the border, playing games where students stop their bodies at the edge, or other such activities.

Climbing Policies

Climbing offers children an opportunity for careful planning, gross and fine motor development, risk taking, and more. The following are specific policies for tree climbing that must be followed:

- Staff will remove hazardous objects or mitigate hazards wherever possible from the surrounding area where children might fall, such as removing rocks or covering stumps with sharp edges.
- Children should ensure that a teacher will be within reach when they begin climbing and for the duration of their climb.
- Adults may not help children into a tree. They may guide them verbally. A child must be able to get into the tree on their own.
- Children may not climb higher than the teacher's reach or twice the child's height (whichever distance is closest to the ground).
- Children may not have items in their hands while climbing.
- Children will take off their gloves before climbing.
- One child climbing a tree at a time.
- Weather may impact climbing availability.

Leaving the Classroom

At the Forest

For walks during the school day, whether forest exploration or between classrooms, teachers will perform regular head counts (at least every 5 minutes if not more often) for child safety and to ensure proper student to teacher ratio (6:1).

Away from the Forest

For any trips which involve leaving the Forest property, teachers will secure and store any materials before departure (food, tools, supplies, etc.) and will bring along:

- Classroom clipboard (which contains attendance information as well as emergency contact information)
- First Aid Kit
- A communication device

Before departing and after arrival at the field trip location, teachers will count the children and do a roll call from the sign-in sheet.

During the “trip” teachers will:

- Conduct a head count every 10 minutes and/or every stop or start.
- Be within sight of each other for the count every 10 minutes.
- Be sure that teachers are within shouting distance of one another at all times. If teachers become separated visually, they must conduct a child count and shout out with the total number of students they have eyes on every 10 minutes.
- When appropriate, communication devices may be used for teacher communication.

Outdoor Clothing Policy

Families are instructed to follow the clothing guidelines in the Kaleidoscope Family Handbook to minimize chances of illness and exposure to extreme weather. Staff will work with families who require assistance in meeting their children’s clothing needs.

Staff must remain aware of children’s verbal and non-verbal cues regarding their warmth and comfort and respond appropriately to ensure children’s health and safety. These responses may include, but are not limited to:

- Keeping children active and moving in cold weather.
- Resting in shaded areas to cool off or near the fire to keep warm.
- Assisting children to remove or add layers of clothing, while supporting their development of self-regulation skills.

Once all the child's backup clothes are used, Kaleidoscope will provide **one** set of extra clothing after which the family will be contacted to drop off more weather-appropriate gear or pick up their child.

Foraging Policy

Employees and students may forage known species. Students will be instructed to always ask before they pick and put something in their mouth, even if they have consumed it before. Instructors will ensure that foraging will not occur in areas outside the Forest fence.

Commonly foraged items that educators may invite children to eat in moderation include:

- Berries, including salmonberries, blackberries (various types), salal, Oregon grape
- Leaves, including nettles (carefully harvested for tea), baby Oregon grape, dandelion, miner's lettuce, cleavers
- Cedar or Douglas fir tips (for tea)

Parents/guardians agree to foraging these items by signing the risk waiver or must let their child's teacher know if they do not want their child to consume any of the above.

To prevent consumption of unsafe plants or items in outdoor preschool, in addition to instructing students to ask before they pick and put something in their mouths even if they have eaten it before, students will be educated as to which species are edible and which are not safe for consumption.

Use of Real Tools Policy

Children will have opportunities to use age appropriate, real, sharp tools. This may include manipulating real tools with careful adult supervision, including hammers/nails, hand saws, hand drills, and more.

To keep children safe, staff will:

- Offer preliminary opportunities for students to practice skills needed to stay safe while using tools (such as those to promote fine motor skills, using golf tees to hammer into the ground, mindfulness of surroundings)
- Be present and within reach of students using tools, including but not limited to those listed above.
- Teach students tool safety, including staying in a designated area while using tools, pointing shovels/scissors/hammers downward toward the ground, wearing protective gear as appropriate, etc.

Stick Safety Policy

Students and staff are permitted to use sticks throughout the day. Staff will help students to work toward an understanding of safe stick use by using the following practices:

- Students will be reminded to notice the size of the stick they are using, using an arm measure test or height measure test.
- If the stick is longer than the student's arm and/or taller than the student, students will be asked to find open spaces away from other people to use or swing the stick safely, i.e. "Big sticks, big spaces."
- Students may use sticks that are longer than their arm for construction or other dramatic play tasks under close supervision of a staff member.
- If students are not adhering to classroom safety agreements with their stick, the stick will be removed or used for firewood.

Campfire Activities Policy

Staff and students may participate in campfire activities within a designated fire structure designed for the express purpose of a fire.

Kaleidoscope will have signed written permission for campfire activities from each child's parent or guardian in the form of a risk waiver. Teachers must use developmentally appropriate teaching practices to ensure children understand safe behavior around a campfire, prior to any campfire activity.

Each class may have only one campfire activity at a time and must have at least one fire extinguisher available and must have a first aid kit nearby.

Staff must create a boundary around a campfire pit/structure, such as a line of sticks or log seating, that:

- (a) Ensures children remain at least 3 feet away from the edge of the fire pit;
- (b) Ensures adults are able to easily walk between the fire pit and children; and
- (c) Remains clear of tripping hazards such as bags or other materials;
- (d) If creating a seating area, make sure that chairs or seating logs have an emergency escape route between them.

Children wearing highly flammable clothing must not be allowed to attend the fire, and adults and children should be reminded to tie back long hair and secure loose clothing to reduce the risk of it catching fire.

While a campfire is burning and until after it is cool, staff must remain near enough to the fire to respond to any fire-tending needs and to prevent children from accessing the fire, if necessary.

Running and pushing must not be tolerated within 6 feet of the edge of the fire.

Water Activities Policy

Some Forest School sites may include exposure to bodies of water, in which children and teachers will occasionally explore. There will be no swimming activities at any time.

Before a child can participate in water activities, the teachers must obtain written permission via a signed risk waiver from the child's parent or guardian that allows the child to participate in such activities.

For all water activities where the water is more than twenty-four inches deep, or when children are within one quarter mile of an accessible body of water more than four inches deep:

- A certified lifeguard will be present and on duty. A staff member or volunteer counted in the ratio may be the certified lifeguard.
- At least one attending staff person present be able to swim, regardless of whether or not the children are engaging in a water activity.

Life-saving equipment will be kept readily accessible during water activities if a body of water is six feet or more in any direction and two feet or more in depth. Life-saving equipment may include a ring buoy and rope, a rescue tube, or a throwing line.

Dogs & Pets Policy

Students may not touch or interact with dogs while attending Forest School.

Families who bring their dog to drop off/pick up will be asked to leash their dog outside of the classroom area.

Teachers have the right to ask people to leash their dogs while around children.

Wild Animal Encounters Policy

While wild animal encounters are less frequent, teachers must follow policies regarding interacting with wild animals. These include:

Raccoons: Use the emergency whistle procedure to call the kids together, then move away from the area. Raccoon feces is toxic.

Stinging/Biting Insects: If a nest is found, teachers must contact the director.

Squirrels/Crows: Squirrels and crows are frequent visitors. Students may never touch these animals. To prevent squirrel/crow mischief, keep backpacks and any bags/containers containing food in a covered bin or locked shed.

Bats: Teachers or students should never touch live or dead bats. Teachers should mark and sanitize any impacted areas.

Deer: Moving calmly and slowly, teachers and children will gather together away from the deer. If needed, teachers may make a loud sound to encourage the deer to retreat from the classroom.

Dead animals: Don't touch, or in special cases for learning purposes touch with one finger and then wash hands with soap and water immediately after.

Missing Child Procedure

In the event that a child is missing or unaccounted for an immediate search is made and parents and authorities are notified at the appropriate stage.

Prevention Procedures:

- Head counts must be conducted every 15 minutes
- Children must stay within eyesight of a teacher at all times during the day

Students will be taught to:

- Hug a tree or other object when separated from the class. Hugging an object prevents children from wandering and increasing the search area.
- Respond orally when a teacher calls their name.
- Immediately go to the nearest teacher at the sound of whistle blasts.

The following procedures will be followed in case of a missing child:

1) Verify that the child is missing from the setting.

2) Teacher #1 does a sweep of the immediate area, calling the child's name, checking under/ around hiding places.

Teacher #2 gathers remaining children together by blowing emergency whistle 3 times, counting them. Check the sign-in sheets to make sure that no other children are missing.

3) If the child is not found after the initial sweep, Teacher #1 does a more extended search, considering places the child favors (e.g. the gate, a favorite bush or tree, etc.)

Teacher #2 keeps children calm, reading a story or singing a song.

4) After a thorough search (no more than 15 minutes), the following people must be contacted:

- The police (9-1-1)
- The Director (The Director will contact the child's parents)

In the event that the child is not found, staff will cooperate with police and the family to ensure best possible outcomes, including completing a comprehensive incident report.

Extreme Weather

Hot or Cold Temperature

During times of extreme weather (hot or cold), staff will utilize a variety of strategies to ensure children's physical health and safety. Appropriate gear is a requirement for all children and changes seasonally. Staff will be trained in the signs of hypothermia, frost bite, cold discomfort, heat exhaustion, heat stroke and dehydration. Shelter will be used when necessary.

During extreme **cold** the following strategies will be utilized:

Limit time sitting still

Teacher directed physical activities

Campfires

Use rocks warmed by fire as a heat source

Hot meals and snacks provided/warm cider/cocoa available

During extreme **heat** the following strategies will be utilized

Encourage drinking LOTS of water

Frozen "treats"

Water Activities

Shaded play

Frequent "rest" breaks

Forest School High Wind Policy

1. All staff will download the Weather Channel App and regularly monitor for weather notices regarding wind
2. Families will be notified when Wind Advisories and/or Warnings are in effect and possible impacts will be shared (e.g. relocation, cancellation).

Wind Advisory

A Wind Advisory is issued when the following conditions are **EXPECTED**:

1. Sustained winds of 31 to 39 mph for an hour or more
AND/OR
2. Wind gusts of 46 to 57 mph for any duration

High Wind Watch

A Wind Advisory is issued when the following conditions are **POSSIBLE**:

1. Sustained winds of 40 mph or more for an hour or more
AND/OR
2. Wind gusts of 58 mph or more for any duration

High Wind Warning

A Wind Advisory is issued when the following conditions are **EXPECTED**:

1. Sustained winds of 40 mph or more for an hour or more
AND/OR
2. Wind gusts of 58 mph or more for any duration

Extreme Wind Warning

An Extreme Wind Warning is issued for surface winds of 115 mph or greater (NOT associated with a tornado), or sustained hurricane winds are **EXPECTED** to occur within one hour.

When a weather notice regarding wind is announced, the corresponding Action Plans will follow:

Action Plan for **Wind Advisory**

1. Monitor changes in local weather conditions.
2. Relocate to Golf Course if necessary (actualized wind of 39 mph or greater or wind gusts of 46 mph or greater).
3. After one hour of relocation, contact families to pick up children.

Action Plan for **High Wind Watch/Warning**

1. Monitor changes in local weather conditions.
2. Relocate to Golf Course if necessary (actualized wind of 39 mph or greater or wind gusts of 46 mph or greater).

3. After one hour of relocation, contact families to pick up children.

Action Plan for **Extreme Wind Warning**

1. Monitor changes in local weather conditions.
2. Depending on actualized weather, follow the Action Plan for High Wind Warning.
3. If actualized winds reach 115 mph or greater, contact families to pick up children.

All Action Plans are dependent on actualization of weather predictions.

Beaufort Wind Scale (For Reference):

Relocation to a site outside of the Forest will occur at approximately Beaufort number 8 or higher (wind of 39 mph or greater or wind gusts of 46 mph or greater).

1. 1-3 mph: light air, direction of wind shown by smoke drift only
2. 4-7 mph: light breeze, wind felt on face, leaves rustle, vanes moved by wind
3. 8-12 mph: gentle breeze, leaves and small twigs in constant motion, wind extends light flag.
4. 13-18 mph: moderate breeze, raises dust and loose paper, small branches move
5. 19-24 mph: fresh breeze, small trees may begin to sway
6. 25-31 mph: strong breeze, large branches in motion, whistling heard
7. 32-38 mph: near gale, whole trees in motion, inconvenience felt when walking against the wind
8. 39-46 mph: gale, twigs break off trees
9. 47-54 mph: strong gale, slight structural damage may occur
10. 55-63 mph: storm, trees uprooted

Sources:

<https://www.weather.gov/lwx/WarningsDefined>

<https://www.weather.gov/mfl/beaufort>

(Updated 11/28/2022) Current 2024