

Discovery's Field & Forest Nature School



Welcome to Field and Forest Nature School at Discovery

Discovery's Field and Forest Nature School is a predominately outdoor, part time pre-kindergarten program. Our aim is to create an opportunity for children to develop a sense of wonder and appreciation for our natural world and experience the benefits of spending time outdoors. Studies have shown spending meaningful time in nature positively affects children physically, emotionally, socially and cognitively. Our hope is that this connection to nature will develop into a life-long appreciation of our environment.

Throughout the year, the children will learn about flora and fauna, seasonal change and sustainability all through valuable play experiences. After establishing trust through building relationships with one another, the children will have opportunities to learn how to tie knots, use hand tools and cook over a fire in a fun, social setting.

Where and When

Field and Forest Nature School (FFNS) operates on Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday afternoons from 1:00-3:30 pm. Mondays and Fridays will be held at the Hampton Street location. *Wednesdays* will be at Living Prairie Museum (LPM) located at 2795 Ness Ave. Parents are required to arrange their own transportation to and from LPM. We will meet at the LPM doors at 12:55 pm and start our program at 1:00 pm sharp. Please bring your child completely dressed for the day, along with their backpack. We ask that all parents ensure their child uses the bathroom before we begin each session.

What the Day Looks Like

The day will start with a gathering song as the children meet in their 'classroom' without a room. We will all arrive dressed to learn; to get dirty, explore, touch, engage the senses, ask questions, find answers, observe our surroundings and assess risks as we interact within our environment. We will also use storytelling as a vehicle for learning. During this time, the children will have the opportunity to share their ideas. With a sense of community we will also share the happenings from the day while we eat snack.

Snack

On the days we operate out of the Hampton Street location, a nutritious snack will be provided. On the days we are off-site at Living Prairie Museum we ask you to provide a simple snack and a full bottle of water both in re-useable containers. Some suggestions are:

- pre-cut fruit
- nut-free granola bar
- muffin
- nutritious dry cereal/trail mix
- sandwich

We will provide a thermos of warm water and soap for handwashing at both locations for our outdoor snack times.

Drop off and Pick up

Children must be signed in and out at all times by an authorized adult. If someone other than the parent or authorized alternate is picking up we require written authorization or a phone call for verbal consent. Please ensure all persons picking up your child (including yourself) always have photo identification with them. All persons not known to the staff will need to produce I.D. Your help in being on time picking up your child is a huge support to our staff who have other duties at the Centre after FFNS ends. If you are going to be late please call the Centre.

Inclement/Extreme Weather Policy

In the case of inclement weather on a day where we are expected to be at LPM, the staff will make the decision to cancel our off-site outing by contacting families by telephone and through email at least one hour before the program starts. On these days, the program will continue at Hampton location. In the case of extreme cold (-25C or below) or extreme heat (30C), FFNS staff will limit the length of exposure based on outerwear and will constantly monitor and assess the children's comfort level and safety, watching for signs to avoid frostbite, hypothermia, heatstroke, etc. We will also head indoors in the case of lightning and thunder. We will have access to shelter at both locations.

Clothing/Daily Supply List

Parents should be aware that children in natural environments will get dirty and soiled therefore, please bring a backpack with an extra change of clothes. Because FFNS is predominantly an outdoor program, special care must be taken to assist your child(ren) in having comfortable days throughout all the seasons. The following is a suggested clothing list that should be included in your child's backpack daily and will go home with your child at the end of the day:

- underwear
- pants
- socks
- tops
- Indoor shoes (only required on Mondays & Fridays)

During Cool Weather: Fall/Early Winter/Early Spring

- Warm windproof jacket
- closed-toed shoes
- waterproof rain-suit
- good quality rain boots that don't leak and have wiggle room for an extra pair of socks
- long sleeved-top made of Merino wool, wool or synthetic material (not cotton because cotton absorbs sweat and can make the child cold)
- fleece jacket or pull-over
- good quality, insulated socks (i.e. Merino wool or regular wool socks)
- hat

During Cold Weather: Winter

- winter hat (must cover ears and stay on head)
- balaclava or neck warmer (no scarves please due to risk of strangulation)
- two pairs of insulated mittens with water resistant outer material (no gloves please)
- insulated, waterproof snowsuit or ski pants
- insulated, waterproof winter boots with some wiggle room
- good quality, insulated socks (i.e. Merino wool or regular wool socks)

Warm Dry Weather: Fall/Late Spring

- closed-toed supportive shoes
- long pants and long-sleeved t-shirts (they will protect your child from scratches, sunburn and insect bites)
- full brimmed hat
- sunscreen (please apply sunscreen to your child before drop off)

When it comes to purchasing boots, find a boot that is one size larger than your child's foot. This creates dead-air space to assist in insulation. Socks help to wick moisture away from the skin and therefore recommend socks made of wool or Merino wool instead of cotton. Quality clothing can be purchased at local thrift stores or outdoor clothing stores such as Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) or Cabela's.

Play

Learning through play at FFNS can be defined as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas, and interests in their own way for their own reasons" (Hughes, 2013). FFNS follows this type of loose structure. Children need structure/routine but freedom within that. "We know they will drive the energy and ideas for the day and each day is different when nature is our teacher" (Jon Cree, Canmore, 2014).

This structure allows children to encounter 'loose parts' which are materials that don't come with any specific set of instructions. The children will decide how they are to be used. Sticks, rocks, pine needles and cones, fallen branches, stumps, logs, leaves, seeds, water (in all its forms), feathers, grasses, ropes and tarps are all loose parts that may be found in our FFNS environments.

Discovery is proud to offer a music program once a month when we are at the Centre. Ms. Sonja of 'Wee Be Jammin', who is an ECE (Early Childhood Educator) has been with us for years and we love her! Her plan is to join us for a unique, outdoor music experience starting in mid-November.

Documentation

Throughout the year we will be documenting our program by taking pictures, videos and blogging in order to share with you the learning that is taking place. Each family will have access to the blog and

will only be available to parents and/or family members (i.e. grandparents) who we invite to the blog site.

Toileting

If a child needs to use the bathroom while we are in the forest we will encourage them to “pee on a tree’ which will have some privacy away from the others. It will be a learning experience for all. Evidently, peeing-on-a-tree adds nitrogen to the ground and is beneficial for the tree. If a B.M. is required, we will provide a trowel to dig a hole and toilet paper. A thermos of warm water and soap will be provided for hand washing.

Inclusion

Discovery is committed to the inclusion of all children (regardless of their needs) into our program. Children of all abilities have equal access to participate in learning experiences provided through the interactions and relationships, the environment and the experiences we provide. Where additional staffing is required to help include these children into the program, it will always be utilized according to the goals of inclusion, namely:

- Provide as little assistance as is needed to maximize independence and develop self-confidence.
- One-on-one time with a child will not be provided except under very rare conditions.
- Small group learning while in the forest/classroom will be the most frequently used model of teaching those skills that are not easily learned through other methods.
- Every attempt will be made to normalize the child’s stay at Discovery. This will include the sharing of any extra tasks, as required, by all staff in the program.
- Make the program accessible to a wide range of participants regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language, physical ability or socioeconomic status.

Communication

Since we will be operating out of two locations, please direct any calls to the office (204-889-2689) and they will contact the FFNS staff with pertinent information. The FFNS staff will have a cell phone with them at all times in order to make any necessary calls in the event of an emergency.

We are happy to answer any questions/concerns you have about the program or your child.