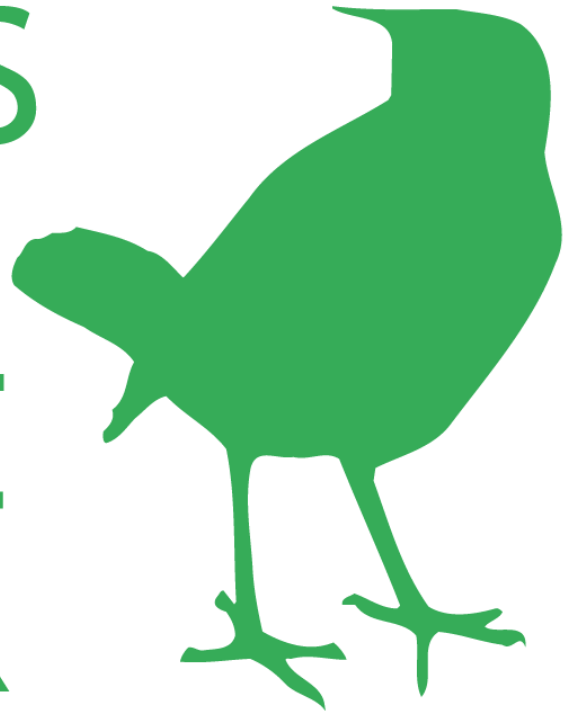


**FRIENDS
OF RYE
NATURE
CENTER**



**Forest Preschool
Parent Handbook
2023-2024**

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Mission, Values, & Curriculum

Our Mission

Friends of Rye Nature Center (FRNC) is an independent, not-for-profit organization which offers programs to people of all ages and abilities. We encourage conservation, provide environmental education, and support our community's access to nature.

Our Values

We believe that children are inherently creative and curious and that they are naturally joyful, helpful, and kind. We strive to create a place where children can be mindful, test their limits and have experiences that help build strength, confidence, and independence. We feel that physical strength and sensory experiences are essential for brain development.

Our culture is one of kindness and connection to nature. Peaceful interactions are encouraged, and conflicts are met with empathy, inner peace, listening, and using language to find resolutions. Our program is designed to help children feel “at home” in nature find peace in the outdoors.

Our Curriculum

Nature is the teacher. We are mentors and facilitators helping children connect with themselves, with nature, and with Others. As mentors, we are part of the group and we engage their imaginations and incorporate sensory experiences to help make learning stick.

Most of what we do each day looks like play, but there is so much learning accomplished through each of our core routines.

Our Core Routines

Hazard Identification—what everyone needs to know to stay safe outdoors. This includes plant IDs, trail safety, our buddy systems, stick play, and daily risk assessment.

Sensory Awareness—exercising our senses sharpens them and attaching sensory information to a learning experience makes it more memorable.

Games—sometimes organized, oftentimes not. Most games and activities are the creations of our imaginative students.

Animal Forms—through thinking and moving like animals, we can exercise our bodies and imaginations as well as understand characteristics of various species and adaptations over time.

Navigating and Mapping—as we wander, we sometimes use maps to improve cognitive development and sense of place. Natural landmarks are identified and used to help us remember locations and certain trails.

Group Singing and Storytelling—songs and stories are used to inspire, teach, set a class mood, practice listening skills and bring a group together. For young children, talking about what they just did, or a previous experience is an opportunity to practice language skills and reflect.

Primitive Technology Skills—shelter-building, fire-making, chopping vegetables, and using tools are hands-on activities that involve experiential problem-solving and creativity. Additionally, children become more self-sufficient and confident through their independence.

Celebration—inspires learning and builds community as we always have something to celebrate!

Drop-Off/Pick-Up Instructions

Morning Program-

Our day begins at 8:45 am with an opening circle by 9:15 am. Teacher-led instruction and creative play follows, with lunch beginning at 11:00 am. Class ends at 11:45 am and children will be picked up from the garden. Parent/guardians need to park and walk for BOTH drop-off and pick-up. If your child is being walked to RPNS or CCNS, the group will depart by 11:40 am.

Afternoon Program-

Our afternoon session begins at 11:30 am. Children being walked from RPNS or CCNS will arrive by 12:00 pm. Children will eat lunch upon arrival to the Nature Center and circle time will begin by 12:45 pm. After teacher-led instruction and creative play, class will end and pick-up will begin at 2:30 pm. Parent/guardians need to park and walk for pick-up.

*For the morning sessions, please note that we need children to be dropped off as close to the designated time as possible so that we can start our day appropriately as a community. We understand that children who are attending the afternoon session come from other programs with different pick-up times. Please try to have your child at the Nature Center as close to 12:00 pm as possible so they do not feel rushed through lunch.

Saying “Goodbye”-

We find that, for most children, most of the time, a shorter goodbye is better. However, if you feel that your child needs more time during the first week, we are happy to work with you. Together we can make a plan that will help your child transition successfully into Forest Preschool.

Gear

Top 5 Dos & Don'ts of Dressing for Outdoor Fun

Do

- Dress in layers.
- Focus on staying dry, both from the outside (snow and rain) and the inside (sweat).
- Base the amount of insulation on temperature AND the amount of physical activity you expect.
- Pay special attention to your child's hands and feet: wear warm, waterproof mittens, thick socks, and warm boots. Make sure boots start out dry inside!
- Wear a comfortable, warm hat with a good cover. Soft fleece tends to get better compliance than rough wool. Consider scarf/neck gaiter/balaclava.

Don't

- Wear cotton—it absorbs moisture and conducts heat away from the body!
- Wear mittens or boots that allow snow in.
- Wear fleece or flannel on the outside where they can be “snow Velcro”.
- Wear plastic or rubber boots that have no insulation—they aren't warm enough and they trap moisture inside.
- Wear cotton socks! Always wool

Rain	Cold Weather	Mild Weather
- Jackets - Boots	- Base Layers - Socks - Gloves - Balaclavas - Gators - Boots - Snow Suits	- Bug Spray - Wicking Layers - Hiking Boots - Sun Hats

How to Layer Up

	Base Layer	Insulating Layer	Weatherproof Layer
What	Top: Long underwear Bottom: Long underwear Head: Thin balaclava Feet: Non-cotton liner socks.	Top: Long-sleeved top Bottom: Pants Head: Hat Feet: Wool socks	Top: Jacket Bottom: Snow pants, bibs, or one-piece suits Head: Hood Feet: Mittens with shells
Why	Wicking, Comfort, Thin	Insulation, Wicking	Keeping Wind, Snow, and Rain Out
Fabrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polyester stretch knits • Silk • Polypropylene • Lightweight wool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fleece • Puffy synthetic insulation • Heavier weight wool • Down 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nylon • Polyurethane (“PU”) • Neoprene • Waterproof/breathable shells • Leather, fur, shearling
Fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snug fit • Fabrics with stretch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose fit/slides over base layer easily • Turtle or polar necks • Hats that cover the ears • The “puffier” this layer, the better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rain gear with taped or sealed seams • Jackets with snow skirts/elasticized waists, extra-large with a slippery lining to fit over layers • Boots are mid-calf with closable tops • Mittens cover cold spots and keep snow and rain out • Pant cuffs come past top of the boots

What To Bring:

Extra clothing for their storage bin, lunch, snacks, water bottle.

What Not To Bring:

Please do not send glass containers for snacks and water. Even when covered in plastic mesh, there is too great a risk that these items will break.

Some children may feel that they need to bring a security item to preschool. Please minimize this as the item can get lost or dirty and are a distraction to the children and our routines.

Roles and Expectations

What Your Child Can Expect From Us

- A Positive, friendly learning environment
- To be cared for and nurtured as an individual
- To be taught and mentored patiently

What You Can Expect From Us

- Physical risks will be managed appropriately
- We will communicate with you if your child is having difficulty meeting expectations, and together we will make a plan to help your child succeed
- Regular updates and photographs of what we have been doing

What We Need From Your Child

- To treat self and others with kindness and respect
- To follow directions
- To stay with the group
- To treat nature with empathy and respect

What We Need From You

- To communicate with us any special needs or concerns
- To bring your child to school each day, prepared for the weather and with food and water
- Your feedback on the program

Class Parents

This year we are asking for volunteers to be class parents. The responsibilities for class parents would include the following:

- Act as a parent liaison between teachers and parents.
- Put together a collection of funds donated by parents in your child's class that will support a holiday (December) and end of year (June) gift for the classroom teachers.
- Call or email parents to support the class when needed.
- Teacher Appreciation Day (Tuesday, May 7, 2024), prepare a bouquet of flowers and a card from the children (anything else special the children come up with).

Communication

Your primary method for communicating with the Rye Nature Center is through the main office, which is located at:

Rye Nature Center
873 Boston Post Road
Rye NY 10580

The main office phone number is: (914) 967-5150. Use this number to reach the Executive Director, Education Director, or registrar.

Email lisa@ryenaturecenter.org for questions regarding registration, payment, logistics, lost and found, and basic program information.

Email alli@ryenaturecenter.org to reach the Education Director or for more in-depth program information.

You may also text directly with Alli if that seems appropriate (such as letting us know you will be late). Texts are sometimes preferred over calls during program times. You will be given Alli's phone number at orientation.

Potty Policy

Enrolled children must be out of diapers and need only minimal assistance with toileting. This could include helping children with clothing and coaching on wiping or how to pee outside. The only staff assisting with bathroom needs are the administrative staff and they have been fingerprinted and are background and sex offender checked annually.

Sick and Injured Child Guidelines

Forest Preschool is an active, outdoor program. Your child needs to feel well enough to participate to be out with us. If your child becomes unwell and in need of one-on-one attention during program hours, we will call you to come pick him or her up.

The CDC recommends that people remain home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medication.

Medications

You are required to provide a doctor's note and prescription for any medication that your child may take during Forest Preschool. All medication must be in its original container. The medication will remain with the teacher throughout the school year and will be carried in the first aid kit during class times.

Weather-Related Closures

If Rye City School District cancels school due to snow or hazardous weather, Forest Preschool will be cancelled. If RCSD issues a delayed opening, morning classes will start at 10:00 am. If there is an early dismissal, afternoon classes will be cancelled. All communication will be texted, posted on Google Classroom, and announced via social media.

Discipline Philosophy

Our discipline policy is based on respect for children and a belief in the importance of our relationship with them as individuals.

We recognize that preschool-aged children may still be learning to stay with the group, follow directions, and show kindness to others, and so it is our role to model these behaviors and coach children on appropriate problem-solving techniques. We do not believe in “timeouts” but depending on the situation, might suggest some quiet time or invite them to take a breath.

Risk-Assessment Philosophy

Tree Climbing:

- Make sure surface is dry
- Observe the tree before allowing children to climb
- Children may climb to own comfort knowing they will be expected to return their own bodies to the ground.
- Before a child climbs, they must ask a teacher – that teacher will be near the base of the tree keeping an eye on children and spotting as necessary
- Children should only climb as high as they are tall.

Rock Climbing:

- Evaluate the space (close rock climbing for the day if too slippery or hazardous debris beneath)
- Scaffold usage to age of the child
 - Younger children may crawl until comfortable
- All children should be able to climb up by themselves and confidently walk/crawl in the manner that they feel most comfortable. Children should not run on the rocks.
- All children to check in with a teacher before they begin to climb
- The teacher should be near while children are climbing
- If children are jumping down, it should be from a height not higher than the child is tall and the area below, free of debris.

Foul Weather:

- Extreme heat: seek shade, drink lots of water, seek shelter mid-day, water play, monitor children closely for signs of exhaustion
- Sun: encourage parents to apply sunscreen, sun hats, seek shade frequently, encourage children to drink lots of water
- Wind: if there is a wind advisory, seek shelter and return indoors, stay in open areas such as fields
- Cold weather: Encourage parents to dress children in layers (base layer beneath regular clothes and have waterproof outdoor gear. Be sure all children have appropriate outdoor clothing, check on children frequently, encourage them to stay active and moving. (Teachers use best judgement in cases where children do not have appropriate gear or are simply too cold)
- Extreme Cold: when temperatures are below 20 degrees with a wind chill of 9 degrees, limit outdoor time to 15 minutes, being cautious and aware that children are properly dressed for extreme cold and adequately moving- provide warm beverage like tea.
- Rain: ENJOY! Be aware of children who's rain coat may have soaked through, or boots that have filled with water.
- Thunder/ Lightning: If thunder is heard or lightning is seen, all preschool classes should remain indoors or seek shelter indoors immediately.

Animal Holes/Findings:

- Roll logs towards you – for full control and to give critters space
- Don't put hands into holes or under rocks that you cannot see fully into
- Be observant and cautious when interacting with wildlife
 - When in doubt watch from a distance
- Teach kindness towards all living things – if they are scared encourage them to just look from a distance and express what they notice
- Teach children appropriate methods and monitor them.
- Always return log when finished investigating

Jumping from Heights:

- Clear landing area of all debris (i.e. sticks and rocks)
- If they can climb up then they can climb or jump down on their own
- Children should not jump from a height taller than they are
- Child must check in with teacher before jumping so teacher can be located near activity

Pests/Ticks:

- Routine tick checks of exposed skin - educating children of hot spots
- Light colored clothing, limit skin exposure
- Knowledge of pest/poisonous plants,
 - ID with children and again each time you pass it for recognition
- Bees: know of all allergies, stay away from hive, move away from bees if persistent, teach children to be calm while bees are present
 - Sting- treat with ice pack and removal of stinger and observation for symptoms of anaphylaxis. If a child has a known allergy, treat with Benadryl/EpiPen as directed and call 911. Follow protocol as outlined in doctor's Emergency Management Plan.

Pond Play:

- BE EXTREMELY VIGILANT NEAR WATER WITH CHILDREN. Have eyes on the children AT ALL TIMES.
- Children should keep their feet out of the pond and do scooping from the 'shore' or dock.
- Be aware of animals that live in each pond – keep eyes out for larger fauna.

- Children should **NEVER** drink pond water – always keep fresh water on hand
- Wash hands after pond play/scooping
- Have children carry pond nets at the base of the net/neck of the handle
- Iterate to children that nets are tools and shall not be used to hit/play with

Puddle/ Vernal Pool Play:

- BE EXTREMELY VIGILANT NEAR WATER WITH CHILDREN. Have eyes on the children AT ALL TIMES.
- Muddy areas should be tested by teacher before children interact with it – testing depth
- Children should only go ankle deep in puddles and vernal pools
- Be aware of animals that live in each pond – keep eyes out for larger fauna
- Children should **NEVER** drink puddle/ vernal pool water – always keep fresh water on hand
- Wash hands after water play/scooping

Stick Play:

- All classes should establish stick rules as a group in the beginning of the school year
- Stick size is determined by the child's ability to deftly wield that length of stick-“tickle spot to wiggle spot”
- Sticks longer than the child's arm shall be dragged when child is in motion unless getting assistance from another child
- Constant reminders that sticks do not touch human or animals' bodies
- Good reminder is 'small sticks in a small space, larger sticks in a larger space'
- Teachers reserve the right to withdraw stick privileges for the day if a child is not being safe

Ice:

- Children are not allowed on the icy ponds in any circumstance
- Children may play on the icy puddles and vernal pools that form in the woods and fields.
- Encourage children to move their bodies slowly and carefully

Barefoot

- Children must wear shoes at all times

Mud

- ENJOY THE MUD!!!
- All classes should establish rules around mud play.
- If teachers determine that children are allowed to play in the mud regardless of appropriate gear, please communicate this expectation to parents.

Foraging

- Children should never eat anything they find outside.
- The exception is for the community garden with adult/ teacher permission and supervision

Notes: