



Connections Nature Play

2023/2024 Parent Handbook

Updated Dec 2023

Connections Nature Play.....	4
What is Nature School?.....	4
Our Philosophy.....	4
Our Vision.....	5
Our Mission.....	5
Our Land Acknowledgement	6
Our Commitment to Centering and Honouring Indigenous Voices.....	6
Our Nature-Based Child Care Program	8
Program Location.....	8
Connections Nature Play Home Base MAP.....	9
Pick-up and Drop-off.....	10
Late Pick-Ups.....	11
A Few Moments of Your Time Can Really Help	11
Program Calendar	11
Our Educators	12
Contact Information.....	13
A Typical Day at Nature School.....	13
Daily Update to Parents.....	13
Off-Site Play Areas Map	14
Play-Based Learning.....	15
Forest & Nature Schools	16
How Forest and Nature Schools Came About.....	16
Registration, Fees, Payment, Waitlist and Refunds.....	17
Registration.....	17
2023/2024 Monthly Fees.....	17
Annual Registration Fee.....	17
Drop-Ins.....	17
Payment.....	18
Waitlist.....	18
Refund Policy	18
Governmental Child Care Subsidies.....	19
Health and Safety Policies.....	19
Child Protection Policy	19
Illness Policy	20

Emergency Procedures and First Aid Policy.....	20
Medication Policy.....	22
Food and Food Allergies Policy	22
Child Protection Policy	23
Inclement Weather and Closures	23
Air Quality	24
Tornado Warnings and Watches.....	24
Extreme Weather.....	24
Other Helpful Information	24
Toileting and Hand Washing	24
Napping.....	25
Educator to Child Ratios.....	25
Ticks.....	25
Educator Responsibilities.....	25
Parent and Guardian Responsibilities.....	26
Volunteer Responsibilities	26
Inappropriate and Unsafe Behaviour.....	28
Conflict Resolution Process.....	28
Children’s Body Awareness and Knowledge.....	29
Supporting Your Child’s Transition to Nature School	29
Smoking and Vaping.....	30
How to Dress for the Weather.....	30
Dressing for Each Day’s Forecast	30
Tips to Ensure Your Child’s Comfort	31
Additional Gear Based on the Season.....	32
Spring and Fall.....	32
Summer.....	32
Winter	33
Things to not send to Nature School	33
Communications Strategy.....	33
General Communication	33
Emergency Communication.....	34
Grievances, Questions and Concerns	34
Insurance.....	34

Environmental Sustainability 34
 Minimizing Impact 34
 Sustainability 35
 Journaling and Creative Expression 35
 Holidays..... 36
 Photos 36
References & Resources 38

Connections Nature Play

What is Nature School?

Child Nature Alliance of Canada (CNAC) defines Forest/Nature School as an educational philosophy and practice that centres the Land and the child-at-play. Children and educators build a relationship with the Land through regular and repeated access to the same outdoor spaces over an extended period of time. Educators support learning through a pedagogical framework that is rooted in place and play, directed and inspired by the child (emergent curriculum), and driven by a process of inquiry.

Our Philosophy

Connections Nature Play's philosophy centres on the idea that, in order to learn and grow holistically and to develop strong relationships with the Land and within themselves, children benefit from ample time in nature to play freely with the support of attentive and caring Educators.



The concept of Forest/Nature School is founded on the three pillars of trust, freedom and reciprocal relationships. Our program follows CNAC's Principles of Forest and Nature Schools:

1. Takes place in any outdoor space, including urban greenspace, playgrounds, forests, creeks, prairies, mountains, shoreline, and tundra.
2. Is a sustained process of regular and repeated sessions in the same outdoor spaces, supporting children to develop a reciprocal relationship with the Land, and an understanding of themselves as part of the natural world.
3. Views children and youth as innately competent, curious, and capable learners.
4. Is led by educators who share power with learners through play-based, emergent, and inquiry-driven teaching and learning methods.
5. Values children's play - self-directed, freely chosen, intrinsically motivated - in and of itself. Forest and Nature School programs provide adequate time and space for children and youth to dive deeply into their play.
6. Views risky play as an integral part of children's learning and healthy development, and is facilitated by knowledgeable, qualified educators who support children and youth to co-manage risk.
7. Relies on loose, natural materials to support open-ended, creative play and learning.
8. Values the process as much as the outcome.
9. Prioritizes building reciprocal relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, who have been learning from this Land since time immemorial.
10. Practices, policies, and programming reflect and prioritize the building of engaged, healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities through consideration of access and equity in our decisions and actions.

Adapted from: https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-Principles-of-Forest_Nature-School-.pdf

Our Vision

We envision a world where the leaders of tomorrow see the world through and make decisions based on their strong connections to Land, culture, community and self.

Our Mission

Connections Nature Play (CNP) aims to foster these connections among 3- to 6-year-olds through outdoor, place-based, inquiry-driven and play-based experiences that support physical, social-emotional, cognitive and creative development.

Here are some examples of how these connections are fostered:

- Honouring each child's unique and individual curiosity, needs, interests and abilities
- Fostering in each child positive habits that support emotional regulation
- Working with children to resolve interpersonal conflicts
- Actively supporting children to become independent through skill development
- Offering open-ended play materials and loose parts so that children can direct their own play and learning through creation, experimentation and personal challenge
- Introducing sit spots where they can listen, observe and connect with the natural world
- Inviting in Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to share culture
- Encouraging activities that help children feel connected with the Land and each other
- Cultivating gratitude and reflection through Sharing Circles, an Indigenous practice that we have been granted Elder permission to implement in our program

We honour the potential for an outdoor program to cultivate sustainability awareness, ethics and skills in our community's young children and their families.



Our Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this land is the Traditional Territory of Treaty 7 Nations, including the Stoney Nakoda, made up of Goodstoney, Chiniki and Bears paw First Nations, the Blackfoot Confederacy, made up of Piikani, Siksika and the Kainai First Nations, the Tsuut'ina Nation and the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.

Just as these First Peoples cared for these lands for millennia and continue to do so today, we strive to learn from these cultures so we can also be good stewards of the land, fostering gratitude and respect, both for the land and for the Indigenous cultures who call Turtle Island home.



Our Commitment to Centering and Honouring Indigenous Voices

At Connections Nature Play, we are committed to supporting the next generation in developing a strong understanding of, connection to as well as gratitude and respect for Indigenous Peoples who have preserved their strong connections to the land since time immemorial.

We are actively working to build relationships with Indigenous community members. We believe that greater understanding and appreciation can only come once relationships have been built. We would love to learn traditional games and medicine, make and enjoy traditional foods and hear origin stories that honour Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

We invite Indigenous community members share their knowledge and skills in the program, we aim to support their involvement by fairly compensating them for their time and expertise.

We aim to honour, preserve and support the sharing of Indigenous Knowledge. When appropriate, and when permission has been granted, we will aim to incorporate Indigenous Teachings into day-to-day activities such as Sharing Circles, Land Acknowledgements and Stories, and will credit the source of these teachings each time.

Some of the ways we actively work toward Reconciliation:

- Opening our minds and hearts to Indigenous Ways of Knowing
- Taking part in Foothills School Division's Indigenous Advisory Circle gatherings
- Being open to relationship building with Indigenous community members
- Incorporating Indigenous-made resources into the program, such as story books and play materials reflective of their Indigenous cultures
- Continually fostering greater understanding and appreciation through independent and group learning opportunities



*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed people can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*
Margaret Mead

Our Nature-Based Child Care Program

Connections Nature Play is the Diamond Valley Sustainable Living Centre's nature-based childcare and education program, open to children age 3-6 (not yet in grade one), focusing on cultivating connections with the Land, culture, others and self.

Connections Nature Play provides opportunities for children to build their social-emotional, physical, intellectual and creative well-being through outdoor adventure-based and inquiry-driven play.

Spending time in nature, with repeat visits to the same natural areas, allows children opportunities to build their relationship with the land, self-confidence and emotional regulation skills, as well as develop their positive self-image and ecological literacy. [Click here to view the Child Nature Alliance of Canada's Principles of Forest and Nature Schools.](#)

We offer:

- Outdoor place-based and play-based curiosity-driven experiences for children
- Attentive and supportive guidance from certified Early Childhood Educators and trained Forest & Nature School Practitioners
- Core hours and extended hours attendance options
- Small group sizes (1:5 ratio)
- A licensed child care program, enabling families to take advantage of governmental child care subsidies
- Parented nature play programs, day camps and other opportunities for youth

Program Location

Through a partnership with the Turner Valley Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, Connections Nature Play utilizes both indoor and outdoor space at their Branch, located at **121 Sunset Blvd SE in Diamond Valley**, as our home base.



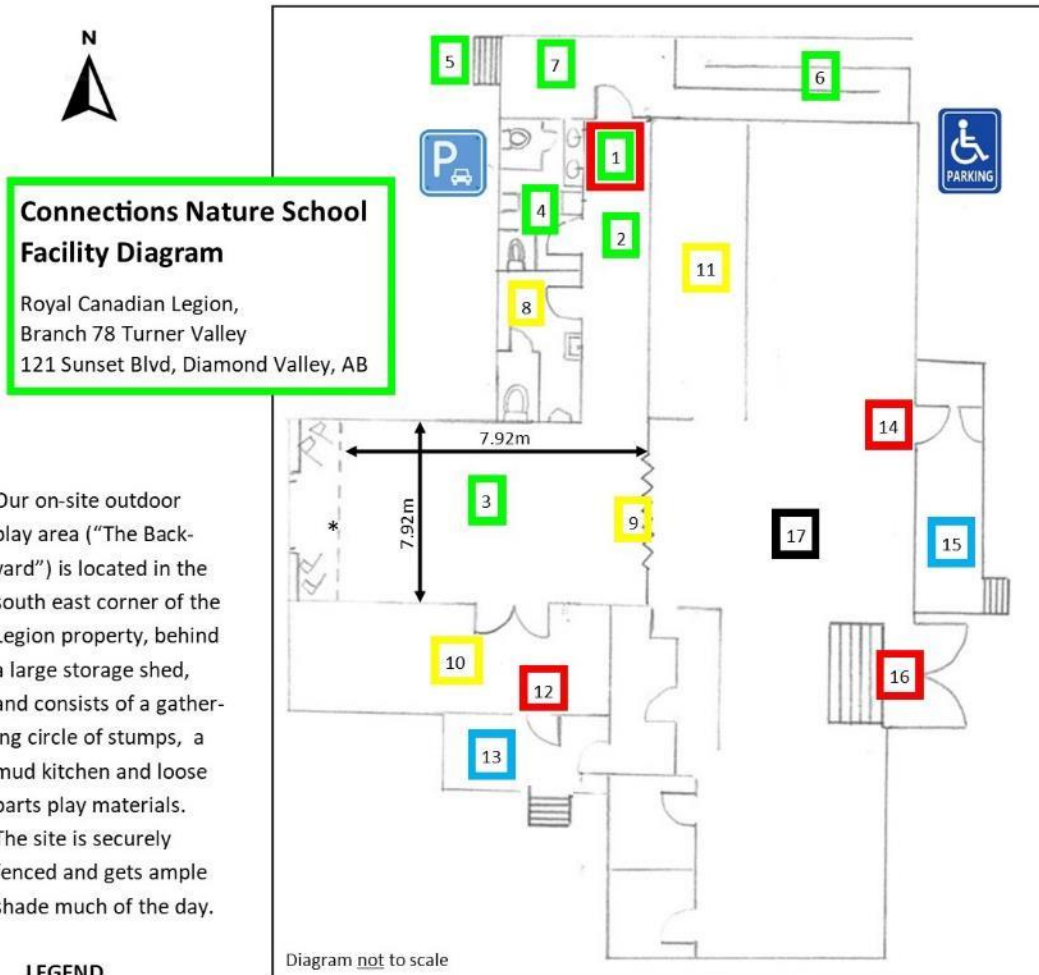
As a nature-based program, we walk with the children to explore and play in various nearby pockets of nature within walking distance (<1km) of our home base.

Please use the front door on the north side of the Legion, which faces Sunset Blvd, when dropping off and picking up your child(ren). If we are inside, you will see a colourful flag, net or pinwheel on the north deck.

When the weather is conducive, we are typically in 'The Backyard' during morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up times. The Backyard is our fenced outdoor play space on Legion property, located in the southeast corner of the property, behind the storage shed. Please drive slowly (max 10km/hr) and carefully when on Legion property, to ensure safety of all, especially the children, and to ensure potholes don't increase in size.

Connections Nature Play Home Base MAP

The following facility diagram shows (in green) the parts of the building and property Connections Nature Play Program uses. Areas we do not use at all, such as the restaurant area, are shown in black. Red denotes fire exits and yellow shows areas used by CNP staff but not by children.



LEGEND

Nature School Program Areas:

(accessed by participants & educators)

- 1—Connections Nature School Entrance (North Entrance), Fire Exit A
- 2—Hallway - bulletin board, coat racks, etc. for program participants
- 3—Veteran's Hall - indoor play space (62.73m²) * dotted line indicates barrier blocking off fragile items at west end
- 4—Washroom (2 toilets, 2 sinks)
- 5—Stairs to access CNS Entrance
- 6—Accessibility Ramp to CNS Entrance
- 7—Exterior Deck to access Entrance

Behind-The-Scenes Areas:

(may be accessed by staff, but not by program participants;

- 8—Utility Closet (door locked)
- 9—Accordion Door (blocks access to rest of building)
- 10—Storage Room (door locked) and Fire Exit egress
- 11—Kitchen (location of our designated toy washing facility, to be used only outside of program hours and when kitchen is not in use (ex. Friday am)

Fire Exits: emergency use only

- 1—Fire Exit A (main entrance/exit)
- 12—Fire Exit B
- 13—Exterior Deck & Stairs (blue)
- 14—Fire Exit C
- 15—Exterior Deck & Stairs (blue)
- 16—Fire Exit D

Off-Limits Areas:

(not accessed by participants or staff)

- 17—Legion Facilities

Pick-up and Drop-off

If a child or children are to be picked up by someone other than the parent(s) or legal guardian(s), they must be listed on the *Emergency Contacts & Pick Up Alternates* form completed when the child(ren) begin attending the program. If someone that was not included on this form is to pick up your child(ren), please text the first and last name of the person picking up your child to the Educator responsible for your child's group. When they arrive, we will ask for identification to confirm that the name matches.

Connections Nature Play Educators understand that both parents have a legal right to their children. We cannot not deny access to a child by a parent unless a legal separation agreement and/or a legal court order is in place. Connections Nature Play will need a copy of this document to be able to enforce. No child or children will be released to anyone who seems intoxicated or impaired.

CORE HOURS

Drop-off & Pick-up Times:

Drop-off: 9:30-10:00am

Pick-up: 2:00-2:30pm

At drop-off each day let us know what time you will pick up, so we can return from our daily adventure before that time.

A 2:30 pick up gives the group more adventure time!

EXTENDED HOURS

Drop-off & Pick-up Times:

Drop-off: 8:30-9:00am

Pick-up: 3:30-4:00pm

DAY CAMP

Drop-off & Pick-up Times:

Drop-Off: 9:00-9:30am

Pick-Up: 3:30-4:00pm

Between these times, and on typical days when weather allows outdoor play, we are typically outdoors, supporting children in inquiry-driven, child-led nature play on adventures away from the indoor play area between 10:30am to 2:30pm. It is important that we stick to this

schedule so that the children have the maximum allowable time for free play in nature with as few disruptions as possible.

Occasional variations to established drop-off and pick-up times are allowed for doctor's appointments, etc. In these situations, please text staff during the business day (8:00am to 4:30pm) the prior business day to notify us, and another text the day of to remind us. When you text us to remind us, we will let you know where the group will be at your requested drop-off or pick-up time, so you can come find us if we are not at the home base.

Late Pick-Ups

Because the Legion restaurant opens at 4:00pm, we must be out of the building by this time. On afternoons when we are indoors due to weather or other circumstances, Educators accompany any children who have not been picked up by 3:55pm to the outdoor play area (aka 'The Backyard').

If you will be late, please contact us via 403-498-6321 to let us know what time you expect to arrive for pick up so we can make proper arrangements. A fee of \$1 per minute will be charged for pick-ups after 4:00pm. These fees must be paid the day of via e-transfer to dvslc.treasurer@gmail.com with "late fees" in the e-transfer memo.

A Few Moments of Your Time Can Really Help

We understand that sometimes parents need to have quick drop-offs in order to get to work. When possible, we encourage you to spend a few minutes at drop-off so we can learn about any recent changes to their eating, sleeping, routine, behaviour, etc. so we can understand how your child might be starting the day. If there is time, we welcome you to allow a few moments to see what your child is up to before bringing them home at the end of the day. The exception to this is if you are picking up your child(ren) right at 4pm; because the Legion opens to the public at 4pm, we need to expedite goodbyes at that time of day.

Program Calendar

Connections Nature Play runs September to June and follow the Foothills School Division School Calendar. [Visit the FSD website for current school year calendars](#). Connections Nature Play is closed on the following dates for the 2023/2024 school year:

Statutory Holidays: - September 4 - October 9 - November 13 - February 19 - May 20

Division Professional Learning (PD) Days: - Sep 22 - Oct 20 - Nov 27 - Dec 15 - May 17 - Apr 22/23

Elementary PD Days: - Feb 2 - Jun 21

Reading Break: - November 14-17 (following Nov 13 Stat)

Christmas Break: - December 25 to January 5

Easter Break: - March 29 to April 5

School closed/Teacher convention: - February 20 to 23 (following Feb 19 Stat)

Our first and last day each year align with Foothills School Division (2024 year ends June 27).

Our Educators

Katie Bakken

Katie has enjoyed working with children of all ages, in a variety of outdoor settings, including provincial parks, schools, summer camps and more, for over 25 years. She loves fostering children's natural curiosity in the great outdoors. Katie has achieved her Level 3 Early Childhood Educator certification and is working on completing her Forest School Practitioner certification through the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada. She enjoys learning about Indigenous cultures, values and practices, and loves to get outdoors cross-country skiing, paddling, gardening and spending time with her son in nature.



Kirsti Sarrazin

Kirsti has been working with children in her dayhome for the last 7 years. Her background in Fisheries mixed with her love of the outdoors makes her a valuable asset to Connections Nature Play. She has completed her Level 1 Early Childhood Educator certification, and has achieved her Forest School Practitioner certification through the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada. In her spare time, she enjoys to fishing, cooking, gardening and dabbling in herbology.



All staff at Connections Nature Play hold current First Aid certification, have completed a Police Check with Vulnerable Sector Search.

Additional staff are being recruited and will be added to the website when they begin work, then added to the Parent Handbook when this document is updated each summer for the following program year.

Contact Information

You can contact us in various ways, depending on the nature of your inquiry:

- For time-sensitive communications, please text or call us at 403-498-6321 Monday to Friday between 8:00am and 4:30pm.
- For matters you wish to discuss with us, we recommend texting first to arrange a time to talk so that we can ensure we are able to focus our attention on your inquiry.
- For all other matters, feel free to email us at natureschool@dvslc.ca.

A Typical Day at Nature School

- Free Outdoor Play: Loose Parts
- Gathering Circle – Morning Check In
- Snack
- Walk to the day's outdoor destination
- Sit Spots
- Free Outdoor Play
- Lunch
- Journaling
- Free Outdoor Play: Activity Invitations (mud kitchen, shovels, stories, etc.)
- Snack
- Walk back from the day's outdoor destination
- Gathering Circle – Gratitude/Debrief the Day



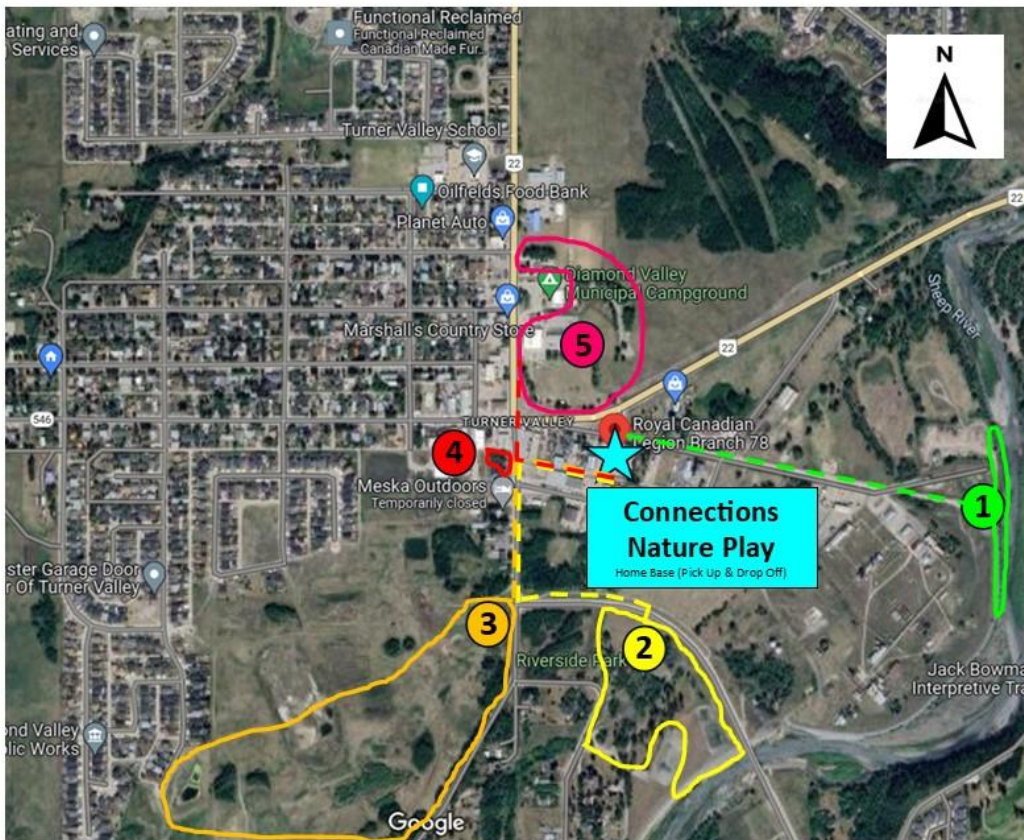
Daily Update to Parents

Each day, we share a short update with a photo or two with parents. Please ensure we have cell phone numbers for the individuals who you wish to receive these updates. The information shared here is meant to keep parents informed and also inspire family conversation about what your child is doing and learning at Connections.







Off-Site Play Areas Map

By signing the Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk Consent form, you are authorizing Connections Nature Play Educators to walk with your child(ren) to the off-site play areas shown on the following map.

Connections Nature Play Off-Site Play Areas Map



Legend

-  Connections Nature Play Home Base, 121 Sunset Blvd
-  1 Sheep River (700m from home base)
-  2 Riverside Park (750m)
-  3 800 Okalta Road (900m)
-  4 St. George's Anglican Church grounds (not inside buildings), 200 Main St. SW (100m)
-  5 Millenium Park & surrounding grounds including Sheep River Library (200m)

When walking to and from off-site play areas, we walk as a group, with an Educator and the day's Helper in front, an Educator in back and the rest of the children walking in between the Educators. Whenever possible, we walk on sidewalks and cross at crosswalks and intersections. Where there is no sidewalk, we will walk on the left side of the road, facing traffic, as recommended at <https://www.alberta.ca/pedestrian-safety>.

Play-Based Learning

At Connections Nature Play, children are always learning, although it may not be in a traditional way. Here are some of the types of learning children encounter and in our program:

Play-Based Learning: Children use their imaginations to interact with the world around them and encourages hands-on, curiosity-driven learning. It is a holistic way of learning that provides many benefits to children encouraging development of the child as a whole. It nurtures the child intellectually, promotes physical literacy, cultivates social-emotional awareness and inspires their natural creativity. There are many types of play-based learning including adventurous play, imaginative play, and creative play. Children naturally do this, but life can be so busy that sometimes children do not get much free play time. This will be a primary focus of Connections Nature Play.

Emergent Curriculum, Inquiry-Based Learning: A curriculum that emerges throughout the day based on children's observations coupled with their interests, concerns and ideas. Children are naturally curious, and by basing curricular ideas on their very own interests and questions ensures that each child's unique learning goals and styles are supported.



Loose Parts Play: Can be anything whether it is natural, such as a pinecone, stick or rock, or human-made, such as buckets, baskets, fabric, string, measuring cups or lumber. Loose parts facilitate problem solving, promote physical literacy and self-regulation, build self-confidence, independence and learning from mistakes. This type of play allows the child to steer their own play and learning, which can reduce stress and fears. The parts can be used in a myriad of ways and encourage hands-on, open-ended learning that supports holistic childhood development. Loose parts are great for stimulating a child's curiosity, experimentation, challenging themselves to try to new things, learning to deal with and learn from failure when their experiments don't work out as planned and more.

Adventurous Play: Allows children to have to freedom to truly play while also practicing their self-assessment and self-awareness skills and push their boundaries, extending their comfort zone. During adventurous play, Educators tune in with high awareness and low to moderate intervention as needed to offer supportive guidance. Some examples of adventurous play are tree climbing, balancing on logs, rough and tumble play, play at high speed.

Forest & Nature Schools

How Forest and Nature Schools Came About

Forest Schools first started out in the 1950s in Denmark by a woman named Ella Flautau who was taking care of her kids and other local children in a nearby forest in an unofficial daycare. Parents began to notice and joined together to form the first Forest Kindergarten. Then in Sweden in 1957 an ex-military man Goesta Frohm began his own version called "Skogsmulle" where he had developed four fictional characters that taught children about nature. Later, Frohm's idea was adapted and called "Rain or Shine School." In the 1960s the forest school in Germany was opened and called Waldkindergarten or Waldkitas. In Canada, forest and nature schools didn't show up until 2008 with the first one just outside Ottawa called Carp Ridge Forest School.

Nowadays there are many Forest and Nature Schools across Turtle Island from coast to coast to coast. The terms Forest School and Nature School are interchangeable. We have chosen the name *Connections Nature Play* for our program because there is a lot more to nature than forests (such as grasslands, wetlands and more) and because young children learn exceptionally well through play.



Registration, Fees, Payment, Waitlist and Refunds

Registration

Submitting a Registration Request form does not guarantee registration for Connections Nature Play, nor does it oblige the family to register. The purpose of this form is to communicate the family's interest in possibly registering a child and to be added to the email list to receive program updates, such as registration link when registration opens.

After submitting a Registration Request form, please wait to be contacted to discuss your child's potential involvement. Once you have decided which days and times you would like to enroll your child, we will send an email confirming your family's registration days and times. This email will also include payment instructions. If the days you would like are currently full, you will receive an email confirming that you have been added to the waitlist and be informed of days that there is availability.

Upon registration, please inform Connections Nature Play if your child has any particular needs, challenges or considerations so we can ensure that we are able to provide the appropriate supports for their successful participation.

2023/2024 Monthly Fees

Core Hours (9:30am to 2:30pm)

\$225/month for 1 day/week
\$450/month for 2 days/week
\$675/month for 3 days/week

Extended Hours (8:30am to 4:00pm)

\$275/month for 1 day/week
\$550/month for 2 days/week
\$825/month for 3 days/week

Annual Registration Fee

An annual registration fee of \$60 also applies to each family, regardless of the number of children being registered. This fee entitles each family to free programming opportunities, such as Jr Maker workshops and more.

Example: To register your child for Core Hours on Mondays and Wednesdays, the first monthly payment would be \$450 + \$60 annual registration fee = \$510, then \$450 monthly each month.

Drop-Ins

Drop-Ins are welcome while capacity allows, and drop -in fee must be paid same day via e-transfer to dvs1c.treasurer@gmail.com. All forms must be submitted by first drop-in day.

Drop-Ins are not eligible for either of the governmental child care subsidy programs.

Check [our webpage](#) to find out whether or not our program is full. Drop-In Rates:

- **SPECIAL 'FIRST DAY' PROMOTION:** Trial Drop-In Day \$30 per child (9:30am to 2:30pm or 8:30 to 4:00pm, whichever best suits child and family) – this rate applies only to each child's first drop-in day, after which the following rates would apply.
- **Core Hours Drop-In Rate:** \$60/day
- **Extended Hours Drop-In Rate:** \$70/day

Payment

Registration fees are to be paid via e-transfer to dvslc.treasurer@gmail.com, with “CNP – Month fees” in the e-transfer memo field (ex. “CNP – Oct fees”) for internal record keeping and organizational purposes.

Fees are to be paid at the start of the prior month (ex. payment for September fees is due on August 1st) unless prior arrangements have been made with CNP staff. If payment is not received by the 1st of the previous month, we reserve the right to offer the spot to the next child on the waitlist.

Waitlist

If the days and hours you would like to register your child to attend are full, you will be given an opportunity to be added to the waitlist.

If you are on the waitlist, you will receive an email when a spot opens up for your child. You will have two business days to respond before the spot is offered to the next child on the list.

If you are to withdraw a child from the Connections Nature Play, we require one month’s notice.



Refund Policy

Refunds will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and will not be issued when:

- Participants miss program days due to illness or injury
- The program closes temporarily due to unforeseen circumstances (ex. Inclement weather such as a snow storm prohibiting safe transportation to the program location)
- If a child withdraws, is suspended (short-term) or is expelled from the program

In the case where the child’s inability take part in the program for an extended period of time is supported by a doctor’s note, then a partial refund may be granted after their case has been reviewed.

- In the case of initial registration, payment for both the first and second months is required by the 1st of the first month the child is starting. If this causes a financial hardship, please contact us and we can discuss alternate arrangements.

- In the case of ongoing program participation, we require payment for a given month by the 1st of the month prior (ex. Payment for March must be received by February 1st). This allows us time to fill a spot should a family withdraw from the program.
- In the case of participant withdrawal after having paid fees and if we are able to fill the spot, a pro-rated refund may be issued to the withdrawing family minus a 25% administration fee.
- In the case of a child being expelled* from the program, the family would be given ample notice through the Unsafe and Inappropriate Behaviour and Conflict Resolution Process on page 21. A refund would be issued for any remaining days in the month that they would have otherwise attended minus a 25% admin fee.

Governmental Child Care Subsidies

Because Connections Nature Play is Licensed under the Province of Alberta's Early Learning and Child Care Act, families whose children are registered may be eligible for provincial child care subsidy programs. These programs are dependent on the family's income as well as the hours a child attends the program in a month.

Click here to:

☆ [See how the subsidies reduce fees for the different enrolment options](#)

☆ [Find a link to the Child Care Subsidy Calculator](#)

☆ [Find a link to the Child Care Subsidy Application Portal](#)

If you still have questions about the child care subsidy programs after reading the above document and visiting the associated government webpages, please call us!

Health and Safety Policies

Child Protection Policy

Connections Nature Play is actively committed to the protection of children and strives to create an environment in which children are protected from all forms of physical punishment, physical and verbal abuse and emotional deprivation. Policies and procedures at all stages of the program, from staff and volunteer recruitment and training to program delivery and evaluation, are intended to protect children from harm while providing supportive guidance so children can learn from each difficult situation.

Our stringent staff and volunteer recruitment process goes beyond Police Checks. Connections Nature Play expects and requires all Educators, whether staff or volunteer, to adhere to our Code of Conduct, included in our Educator Handbook, that clearly establishes boundaries and expectations for acceptable and appropriate interactions with children, as well as disciplinary actions, reporting and enforcement structure if expectations are not met and/or boundaries are not respected and maintained.

If Educators observe anything that may indicate possible abuse or neglect in any form, Educators will report their observations directly to the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-5437 (KIDS), in accordance with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

Illness Policy

Children, staff, and volunteers are asked to stay home 24 hours after the last symptom has subsided if a any of the following symptoms have been present:

- Fever over 38°C (100.4°F)
- Two or more watery bowel movements (diarrhea) in a 24-hour period
- Vomiting
- Weeping rash
- Lice or nits
- Scabies
- Coughing, sneezing, runny nose or congestion requiring an adult's support

For all other illnesses including pink eye (conjunctivitis), mumps, measles, flu, chicken pox, viral pneumonia, please contact a doctor, naturopath, a nurse practitioner, etc., for advice regarding when it is safe to return. A doctor's note may be required to return to the program, depending on the case.

Connections Nature Play follows the Alberta Health Services' COVID policies, which can be found here <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-public-health-actions.aspx>

Text or phone the morning of (403-498-6321) if your child/children will not be attending that day, or has communicable symptoms, lice or scabies.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid Policy

All Connections Nature Play Educators hold current Standard First Aid certification and are willing and ready to act in the event of an accident or illness.

During program hours, Educators carry Portable Records, which include forms detailing each participant's Emergency Contacts, Alternate Pick Up Persons, Medical Conditions and Medication, Media Consent and Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk forms. Each

Educators also carry a cellphone, two-way radio, and a full No. 2 First Aid kit as well as blank copies of Incident Report Forms.

Depending on the nature of the emergency, Emergency Medical Services may be contacted. Once needed emergency care has been provided, parents or guardians (or child's emergency contact if parents unavailable) will be notified by telephone.

Connections Nature Play will not be responsible for any medical bills or fees for Emergency Medical Services (such as ambulance) that may be incurred. The parents or guardians of the child involved will be responsible for such fees.

All serious incidents that occur during the program hours are documented and reported to Alberta Child Care Licensing Office as per licensing requirements.

In the event of a child experiencing an allergic reaction, the child's Medical Conditions and Medication (MCM) Form would be referred to, as well as any 'as needed' or emergency medications provided and follow the instructions on the child's Medical Conditions and Medication form.

In the event of a child falling ill on-site, the child would be brought indoors (or away from the other children if we are already in the indoor play area), encouraged to rest comfortably, then parents would be contacted to arrange for pick up.

In the event of child falling ill at an off-site play destination, the child would be invited to sit or lie down on the picnic blanket and given a pillow and blanket. In warm/hot weather, we would ensure they are in the shade and in cold/cool weather we would ensure they are layered up and insulated from the ground, and in the sun if they would like. The child could be transported by wagon if needed.

Whether at off-site play area or on-site indoors or out, one Educator would remain with the child until pick-up, while the other Educator(s) continues engaging the rest of the group.



Medication Policy

- Administration of Medication:

Medication is only administered to a child when medication is provided by parent(s) and written consent as well as instructions for timing, etc. have been provided on the Medical Conditions and Medication (MCM) form.

All parents/guardians are required to complete a Medical Conditions and Medications form prior to their child's first day. This form needs to be completed whether or not a given child has any medical conditions and/or medications. For children who have medical condition(s) and medication, this form details the name, dosage and timing of any medication to be given to the child either regularly or on as needed basis, as well as a log to record administration times.

Copies of MCM forms are kept in each Educator's Portable Records binder, and a copy of the form is kept with the medication in a sealed, labeled bag and kept in the locked container (which is kept out of children's reach when indoors and in an Educator backpack when outdoors). Original copies of forms are kept in the locked filing cabinet in the office.

Medication must be provided by parents in original, labeled containers with child's name and dosage and must be replaced upon expiration. If an 'as needed' or emergency medication is given, parents will be notified.

- Storage of Medication:

All medication is kept together in one combination-locked portable container, in a separate bag containing the medication and form for each child and labeled with the child's name. This container is kept in an Educator backpack when the group is off-site or in the outdoor play area. When indoors, the locked container will be kept in the storage room which is directly adjacent to the indoor play area, but to which children do not have access.

- Transport of Medication:

When outdoors or at off-site play areas, a backpack is worn by a staff member containing all of the medication and medical consent forms (including info such as time of administration, dosage, a log to document administration).

Food and Food Allergies Policy

Like appropriate clothing for the weather, food and water are requirements to take part in the program. Children must bring their own lunch, snacks and water bottle each day. If forgotten, the parent/guardian will need to bring the needed item or take the child home.

We support the children in properly washing their hands before eating, whether indoors or out, and have a portable hand washing station approved by public health.

We encourage parents and guardians to consider the size, weight and safety of the containers as the children carry their backpacks when walking to off-site play destinations. Please do not

send glass. We practice a pack in and pack out policy and encourage families to pack waste-free snacks and lunches.

Although we do our best to ensure lunch kits and backpacks are kept off the ground and in shade, please include an ice pack to help keep food cold.

To help provide a safe environment for all children, including those with nut allergies, Connections Nature Play is a nut-free program. If other severe food allergies are identified among participants, we may ask parents to avoid including these foods in snacks and lunches.

Generally, the sharing of food is discouraged due to allergies and other potential health and safety concerns. Educators carry extra nut-free granola bars to share with children in the event they are still hungry after having eaten all of their food and/or if the food they brought is spoiled (ex. leaky water bottle makes sandwich soggy).

Please do not pack gum or candy to keep the focus on healthy food choices.



[Child Protection Policy](#)

Connections Nature Play Educators are actively committed to the protection of children.

Our stringent staff and volunteer recruitment process goes beyond Police Checks. Connections Nature Play requires all Educators, whether staff or volunteer, to adhere to our *Code of Conduct* included in our Educator Handbook, that establishes clear boundaries and expectations for acceptable and appropriate interactions with children, as well as disciplinary actions and reporting structure if boundaries are not respected and maintained.

If Educators observe anything that may indicate possible abuse or neglect in any form, Educators will report their observations directly to Child and Family Services Authority in accordance to Alberta's Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

[Inclement Weather and Closures](#)

If the program is unable to run due to weather/road conditions we aim to contact parents at least one hour before opening time by telephone, text or email. If due to weather we need to close earlier than normal, parents will be contacted by phone so they can make the necessary arrangement to have their child picked up early. If you receive a text with time-sensitive information such as this, please write back to confirm that you received the message.

Air Quality

If there is Air Quality Index (AQI) is 6 or higher, the group will play indoors. If the AQI of 4 or 5 the group may play outdoors periodically throughout the day but will not likely spend the whole day outdoors. If your child has asthma or any other respiratory issues, please indicate this on our Medical Conditions and Medications form.

Tornado Warnings and Watches

In the event of a Tornado Watch, Educators will bring children back to the Legion and we will continue the program indoors. In the event of a Tornado Warning, Educators will bring children to the basement of the Legion. We do not advise picking up your child during a Tornado Warning and late fees will not be charged in the event of Tornado Warnings.

Extreme Weather

Connections Nature Play Educators consult the forecast regularly, and weather-related safety is considered in all decision-making (i.e. how far to venture away from home base, how long to be outside, etc.). In the case of predicted thunder and lightning or high winds, Educators will ensure participants are close to shelter so that it may be sought quickly should thunder, lightning or high-winds occur.

During thunder, lightning and high winds, the group would seek shelter. In the case of extreme cold (-25°C or below) or extreme heat (+30°C or above), CNP Educators engage the children in meaningful play experiences indoors. Between -25°C and +30°C, time outdoors will be limited based on age/outerwear, and Educators will assess participants' comfort and safety throughout the day, watching for signs of frostbite, hypothermia, heat exhaustion, etc.

Other Helpful Information

Toileting and Hand Washing

Children in this program are required to be able to use washroom facilities independently. Please ensure your child practices all of the skills necessary, such as unzipping/unbuttoning pants, getting onto toilet (we have potty seats that fit on the toilet seat) retrieving toilet paper, wiping, flushing, pulling underwear and pants up, etc prior to attending our program.

Indoor washrooms are available at the program's 'home base' featuring flush toilets and sinks, soap and paper towel for proper hand washing. When we are on outdoor excursions, a pop-up privacy tent and a portable toilet is provided and hand washing is accomplished using clean warm water and biodegradable soap. In an effort to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, all participants wash and dry hands after using toilets and before eating.

Napping

Although our program does not include a designated naptime, we do have the ability to let children rest when they need to, whether indoors or outdoors, but not likely sleep. If your child still benefits from an afternoon nap, we recommend registering them for the Core Hours option which runs 9:30am to 2:30pm so they can rest after they are picked up.

Educator to Child Ratios

At Connections Nature Play, we strive to cultivate meaningful relationships with each child built on trust, care and respect. In order to foster these true connections, we aim to keep our Educator to Child Ratio at 1:5, with a maximum of 1:8. For perspective, 1:8 is the legislated provincial standard for 3-year-olds and 1:10 is the legislated provincial standard for age 4 to 6. When working with real tools, the ratio will change to 1:1 (or 1:2 with one child observing) so that Educators can focus their attention on the child and the tool. Use of certain tools is reserved for older age groups.

Ticks

Ticks are prevalent in our area. Here are a few tips to help deter them from our bodies.

- Wear clothing with long sleeve and long pant legs, and tuck pant legs into socks
- Spray bug spray on cuffs of shirts and pants
- Wear light coloured clothing so ticks can easily be spotted
- Wear closed-toe footwear
- Check for ticks before heading indoors or into vehicles

Ticks will be brushed off if seen on a child by a Connections Nature Play Educator. If the tick has already embedded itself into the skin, the parent or guardian will be contacted by a phone call and text before removal is attempted using tweezers. The tick will be kept in a plastic bag and given to the parent so they can send them to a lab to be tested if desired. For more information, please go to <https://www.alberta.ca/lyme-disease-tick-surveillance.aspx>

Educator Responsibilities

Educators are responsible for:

- Nurturing and supporting the emotional and physical health and well-being of every child and educator every day
- Modelling respect and care for ourselves, each other and the natural world
- Modelling best practices when using tools and/or engaging in adventurous play

- Keeping safety in mind and supporting children to develop their ability to assess situations for safety
- Ensuing that the program is child-led and that the children's interests are genuinely respected and taken into account in program planning
- Behaving in ways that help the children and educators feel supported and that their needs are met
- Involving children in problem solving and conflict resolution to foster these important interpersonal life skills
- Communicating with parents during drop-off and pick-up

Parent and Guardian Responsibilities

It is parents' and guardians' responsibility to:

- Read and follow the information in the Parent Handbook.
- Complete and submit all the necessary paperwork prior to your child's first day.
- Ensure children are appropriately dressed in suitable layers each morning. Play is the child's work at nature school, and just as a roofer needs work gloves, your child needs proper outdoor clothing to stay safe outdoors all day. Please send additional layers (extra dry socks, mitts, hats, etc.) in a resealable plastic bag each day.
- Please send indoor footwear for your child to wear when we are in the indoor play space inside the Legion's Veterans Hall. These can be left in the child's drawer.
- In the cooler months, please include a clean pair of thin gloves that your child can wear to keep their hands and fingers warm when we eat lunch and/or snacks outdoors.
- Let us know how your child is doing when bringing your child to the program each day. It is helpful for Educators to be made aware of any significant changes in the child's life or routine, as well as minor changes that can affect their behaviour, such as changes to sleep, meals, being hungrier than usual, etc. so we can better support your child.
- Pay fees on time.

Volunteer Responsibilities

We invite community members to become Volunteer Educators to join us in sharing their love and interest in our natural world. All we ask is that Volunteers love and respect nature, be attentive with children, and be comfortable outdoors despite the weather. Sharing your enthusiasm and curiosity and modelling safe and respectful behaviour makes it more fun - and more safe - for everyone.

All Volunteers must complete and submit a current Police Check with Vulnerable Sector Check and read our Educator Handbook to ensure understanding of Connections Nature Play's values, expectations and adherence to our policies, procedures and best practices.

A few other responsibilities for all Volunteers to keep in mind are:

- Be respectful to all children, educators and nature and all living things
- Create a positive space where everyone feels safe and welcome
- Must support adventurous play and not say vague unhelpful statements such as “Be careful!” Rather, we ask Volunteers to focus on asking questions such as “What do you think could happen if you keep doing that in that manner?” or “Do you feel safe where you are?” We don’t want instill fear in the children, we want them to learn how to assess situations for safety and develop their own ability to solve problems.
- Instead of giving answers or directions try to give invitations or ask guiding questions. For example, if a child asks “What is this?” pointing to a flower, try asking “What do you think it is?” as well as other, related questions such as “Which bugs do you think like that plant?” and “Why do you think it’s growing right where it is?”
- Be enthusiastic for all natural, unstructured and active play. Getting involved without taking over shows the children what they are doing is important, and can present opportunities for you to support the play by offering enhancements. Remember that nature play is meant to be child-led and adult-supported.

Inappropriate and Unsafe Behaviour

Inappropriate behaviour as defined by Connections Nature Play includes any actions or behaviors that make children or educators feel uncomfortable, unsafe or disrespected.

Unsafe behaviour can include:

- Running away, hiding from and/or not responding to the group and/or Educators
- Any type of physical abuse toward others or self
- Repeatedly not following rules, such as asking an Educator before engaging in risky activities that require extra supervision, such as tree climbing
- Repeatedly not following safety guidelines causing unsafe environment for themselves, other children and staff
- Needing constant one-on-one attention that takes Educators out of ratio
- Ignoring your body’s needs

Conflict Resolution Process

When inappropriate and/or unsafe behaviours occur at Connections Nature Play, Educators are committed to working with the child in a positive way to try to focus on the behaviour, not the child. We clearly communicate expectations and work with the child to learn positive behaviour and techniques to deal with various situations.

Working with the child, we aim to foster self-confidence, self-control, as well as decision-making and communication skills. When unsafe and/or inappropriate behaviours are regularly displayed by a child, parents or guardians are engaged in dialogue so we can work together to

resolve any issues and behaviours and be asked to support their child in learning new behaviours or strategies.

If we are unable to resolve the issue(s) and the unsafe or unacceptable behaviour continues, then a three-strike system would be used, where a strike is applied each time the behaviour is exhibited.

- Strike 1: Parents will be contacted and may be asked to pick their child up early.
- Strike 2: The child may be asked to take a short break from Connections Nature Play.
- Strike 3: In extremely rare cases, a child may be asked to leave the program permanently for safety reasons.

Outcomes are determined on a case-by-case basis and the child's needs and developmental level will be considered.

Children's Body Awareness and Knowledge

At Connections Nature Play we encourage children make their own of personal decisions throughout the day, as long as they are not in danger doing so. Natural consequences aid in learning and let children gain the knowledge and skills so they can be in control of their own bodies, emotions and actions.

For example, if a child is resistant to wearing their coat on a cold day, we will encourage, but do not force, and will require them to carry or tie it around their waist so they can put it on if they get cold.

We actively encourage children to listen to their body's cues, such as when to use the washroom and when to eat and drink.

The exception to this is if lunchtime is soon and they are hungry, we ask them to wait and if they cannot wait, we invite them to have something small, such as fruit or vegetables from their lunch to tide them over until lunchtime.

***One thorn of
experience is
worth a whole
wilderness of
warning.***

James Russell Lowell

Supporting Your Child's Transition to Nature School

Some children experience big emotions during transition times such as drop-off. We encourage you to talk with your child in advance to assure them you will see them at the end of the day. Tell your child you love them and that you'll see them later. Consider agreeing on a short goodbye routine that will help your child to know what to expect at drop-off (for example: a hug, then a kiss, then some loving words such as 'I love you' or 'I will see you this afternoon'). If a child is having a hard time saying goodbye, an Educator will approach and try to engage the child in a caring way, encouraging them to say goodbye and come and play. Please do not sneak away, as this can interfere with the building of trust between the Educators and the child.

We ask that you not send any toys to nature school with your child, as these can become a distraction from the real work of playing in and with nature. If your child is experiencing rough transitions at drop-off and you think providing them with an item with which they have a strong attachment might help them to feel more comfortable, please talk with an Educator about this. Sometimes it makes sense to let a child be comforted by their stuffy or blanket for the first part of the day, then put it away when the child is ready to start playing.

Please consider including a photo of your family for your child to keep in their backpack. This way, they can 'see' their family photo during the day if they are missing you.

Smoking and Vaping

There is no smoking or vaping of any substance by staff, volunteers or parents on or around the premises when the program is in session.

How to Dress for the Weather

Dressing for Each Day's Forecast

One of the most important things you can do for your child is to provide them with appropriate clothing so they will have a comfortable day outside no matter the conditions. With proper clothing, they can focus their energy on playing and exploring what's around them, rather than focusing on being too hot or too cold.

Outdoor clothing is all about function, not fashion. Name brand clothing is not necessary. Suitable clothing for your child's participation in the program, such as fleece long johns and shirts and non-cotton socks, can be picked up at thrift stores, clothing swaps and second-hand websites at very affordable prices.

Make sure that your child wears clothing that suits the day's forecast *and* that you do not mind getting soiled or potentially damaged. Connections Nature Play Educators are not responsible for soiled or damaged clothing. The children will get dirty. This is part of the joy of nature school. Children are encouraged to follow their curiosity and play freely, even if it means getting muddy. If you are a parent that cringes at the thought of your child getting muddy, rest assured, there is important learning and development happening there. Let us manage the messy situations. All you have to do is wash the clothing for the next outing.

Please note that we do not recommend shorts and t-shirts for nature play, even in summer. Long pants and long sleeves help to protect the skin from scratches, scrapes and sunburns as well as insects such as ticks.

Tips to Ensure Your Child's Comfort

Dressing in layers is very important for this program. But what is a base layer? What is the best kind of socks? Here are some ideas to keep in mind so you can help your child stay comfortable.

Base Layer: A base layer is the layer closest to the skin so it needs to wick moisture away and be breathable. The best fabric choices are fleece, merino wool, polyester (or other synthetic materials). Fleece leggings and shirts work well, and are much cheaper than merino. In cooler months, it is important that base layers fit close to the child's skin (not baggy). Baggy clothes let wind in, which is nice on hot days, but not good on cold days. Do not send your child wearing any cotton (especially jeans and/or socks) on cold and/or rainy days as these will readily absorb water and take a long time to dry.

Insulation Layer: This layer can be made from a number of materials, here are some recommendations: sweatpants and sweatshirt, fleece, down, puffy insulation, wool sweater.

Outer layer: This layer is the one that will keep them dry and protected from the wind. This could be jacket, raincoat, windbreaker for the top and snowpants or rain pants for the bottom. A one-piece rain suit (Muddy Buddy, Newt Suit, etc.) are good choices as well.

Socks: If the boots allow without squishing the feet, two layers of socks in the wintertime will help regulate their temperature better than one pair. But if putting on two pairs of socks means their feet feel squished in their boots, their feet will feel cold regardless of the insulative value of the socks. Wool socks and a heavier polyester are good for warmth. Do not send your child in cotton socks.

Footwear: We recommend that you buy boots that have a little extra space in them. This way, thick socks or layers of socks can be worn and the boot will not be too tight. If there is a pocket of airspace in the boot it will make it warmer than a tight boot. Please ensure winter boots are tall and snowpants are long enough to keep the elastic cuff of the snowpants down over the top of the boots while the child plays as pants and/or boots that are too short will allow snow into the boot. Please send indoor footwear for them to wear when we play indoors. You may leave them at the centre or take them home each day, whichever works best for you.

Sunglasses: Sunglasses protect children's eyes from the sun's UV rays and may also provide protection from twigs when moving through forests, bushes and tall grasses.

Pants: The outside layer of pants should be made of a material that does not easily pick up seeds (ex. Nylon is better than fleece or sweatshirt material which readily pick up seeds).

Water Bottle: In the interest of minimizing our impact on the planet, we encourage families



to send water for their child in water bottles designed to be washed and refilled rather than single-use recyclable water bottles. If your family would like a reusable water bottle, please talk with staff.

Hands: Sometimes a child’s outdoor play is more like manual labour, such as is the case when they are building forts and such. Although not required, we encourage parents to pack a pair of gardening gloves that fit your child’s hands to help protect their hands from splinters and cuts when they are working hard with their hands outdoors.

In winter, each child will likely go through at least two pairs of mittens each day, especially when snow is moist. Please also ensure that their “magic gloves” are clean and in their lunch kit so they can keep their fingers and hands warm when eating outside on cold days.

Plastic Bag: It’s a good idea to pack a plastic bag for your child’s wet or muddy clothes.

Communications about Clothing:

We will aim to maintain open communications with parents and guardians regarding their child’s clothing, such as:

- If a child has outgrown a piece of outdoor wear
- If an item of clothing is simply ‘not working’, such as:
 - a pair of mitts with cuffs that are too short to keep them tucked under/over coat sleeves to prevent snow form entering the wrist,
 - a coat is not warm enough,
 - a pair of boots are too short or snowpants are too tall to keep snowpant elastic cuffs down around boot to prevent snow form entering boot,
 - a hat, due to size/shape, prevents use of the child’s hood when it’s windy
 - a raincoat has lost its waterproof quality

Additional Gear Based on the Season

Spring and Fall

- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Raincoat, rain pants and rain boots with thick socks on cooler days
- Mittens or gloves
- Warm hat and sun hat
- Extra clothing layers
- Magic Gloves (clean and in lunch kit) for eating outdoors

Summer

- Long and long sleeve shirt that fit loosely and is breathable
- Sunscreen and bug repellent
- Sun hat, sunglasses
- Raincoat and rain pants, rain boots for rainy/muddy days
- Running shoes



Magic Gloves keep fingers warm when eating outdoors. Each child will receive two pairs upon registration.

Winter

- Waterproof mitts (2 pairs)
- Magic Gloves (clean and in lunch kit) for eating outdoors
- Balaclava or a neck warmer (scarves can pose a strangulation hazard)
- Extra toque that covers the ears
- Waterproof snowsuit or snowsuit with a waterproof layer over top



Things to not send to Nature School

Please do not send your child to Connections Nature Play with: open-toed shoes or sandals, shorts and short sleeve t-shirt or tank tops, long scarves, toys, pets, jewellery, cameras, ear buds/headphones, binoculars, iPads, cell phones, MP3 players/iPods or any other technology, screens and/or valuables.

We are not responsible for lost, broken or stolen items.

Communications Strategy

General Communication

To support our efforts to maintain regular and open communication with parents and guardians, we send a Daily Update to parents via text each afternoon that includes a bit about our day and an “Ask Me About” suggestion. It is our hope that this information will inspire family conversation about the child’s day and what they are learning and doing at Connections.

We encourage parents and guardians to connect with us during drop-off to share any information about your child to set them up for a positive day at nature school.

If you have general questions or concerns, we would love to hear them! We strive to learn and improve our program continually. We value your suggestions and feedback! Please feel free to contact us anytime via text, phone, email or in-person at drop-off or pick-up.

Emergency Communication

In the case of emergency, parents will be contacted. If parents are not available, Educators will contact Emergency Contacts as outlined in child's forms. Connections Nature Play Educators are always in cell phone range with ringer on during program hours.

Grievances, Questions and Concerns

If you have a concern with a particular Educator, please send a text to our central cell phone (403-498-6321) requesting a call back from the particular Educator along with a good time for this call to take place. We will do our best to forward the message on so that you get a call back as soon as possible.

If the issue was not solved through this conversation, please text the same number asking for a Lead Educator to call you back so we can discuss the issue further. Your satisfaction with your child's experience is very important to us!

Insurance

Connections Nature Play carries property, business and liability insurance. Insurance information can be shared upon request.

Environmental Sustainability

“It is our collective and individual responsibility.....
to preserve and tend to the world in which we all live” ~Dalai Lama

Minimizing Impact

To minimize impacts to the environment we follow the seven principles of Leave No Trace. The following are some examples of ways we aim to minimize our impact:

- When travelling, we stick to walking paths or durable surfaces such as rock, snow and dry grass.
- We are respectful to wildlife by watching from a distance, giving wildlife lots of space and an escape route.
- Avoiding areas where we know there is sensitive wildlife activity happening, such as nesting, rearing or hibernation.
- Packing out what we pack in, including human waste.

- Building fires in established firepits and use only proper firewood, not ‘forest deadfall’ which the forest needs for nutrients, always putting fires out completely before leaving an area.
- Avoiding areas where noxious plants are growing so as to prevent further spread.
- We rotate the areas visited to minimize our impact on the land.
- We aim to ‘take away only memories and leave only footprints’. We talk with the children about why we leave natural objects in nature but, in the end, let the child decide if they want to take a certain object home. We will offer them a magnifying glass or a book on that particular object and remind them that others will love to see that special object and the impacts to the environment if everyone took something.
- We encourage children to take down the forts they build so they can be rebuilt by other children on future outings.

Humans are part of nature, not separate from it. We acknowledge that we have an impact on the natural areas where we play. Regular Environmental Impact Assessments are conducted to ensure that we are minimizing our impact on the earth.

Sustainability

Connections Nature Play is an inquiry-driven program, meaning that children’s natural curiosities informs program planning. When there is interest and when the season allows, we teach sustainable practices such as rainwater collection, organic gardening and solar energy. We actively incorporate personal responsibility into the program every day with actions such as recycling, picking up litter, and washing hands, as well as talking about ways we can reduce waste, such as composting.

Journaling and Creative Expression

We encourage the children to draw and express themselves in their journal each day. Their Nature journal will be sent with them at the end of a season or when it’s full.

This program is not designed for children to bring home a craft every day. At Nature School, the emphasis is on the process, not the product. The children have many opportunities throughout the day to express themselves creatively, but creations will typically be returned to nature. When we have indoor days due to weather, in addition to providing a wide variety of gross motor and imaginative play materials, we provide creative supplies for the children to create what they would like and these may be brought home.

Holidays

At Connections Nature Play we value diversity in terms of cultural, social, linguistic, and spiritual heritage. We strive to honour the diverse backgrounds and cultures represented by the children and community members, and aim to demonstrate this respect and appreciation by getting to know each child and acknowledging each family as unique.

In an attempt to keep the program focus on cultivating connections with nature and with each other, we aiming to acknowledge the holidays celebrated by the families whose children are in our program, however often our activities do not often include planned holiday activities, crafts or celebrations.

By not actively celebrating the dominant holidays, we are holding space to:

- engage with each other in more meaningful ways that uphold sustainability ethics,
- create opportunities for flexible, open-ended programming,
- be sensitive to families experiencing financial challenges,
- reduce conflict between the organization and families who either do not celebrate the dominant holidays or do not want their religious holidays trivialized,
- respect and appreciate all cultures' similarities, rather than focusing on the differences, and
- acknowledge and celebrate other kinds of milestones, natural cycles or events or successes that are meaningful for children in the context of a nature-based program

If you would like to discuss or have questions about our approach, please contact us.

Photos

Photos are taken throughout the day to record our activities and work and we do our best to take photographs that do not show children's faces. At the point of registration, we ask that you please complete a *Media Consent* form where you can indicate your preference in terms of allowing us to photograph your child and/or their work for various kinds of uses such as:

1. Internal/Private Use (reflective activities with the children, photos of each child posted on their Timesavr account, program reports to the DVSLC and our funders, etc.)
2. External/Public Use (for use on our webpage, social media, posters, brochures, etc.)

The *Media Consent* form also allows you to communicate how you would like images of your child and/or of their work to be used by Connections Nature Play and the Diamond Valley Sustainable Living Centre.

We do our very best to align our photo-documentation practices with your family's wishes as laid out in the *Media Consent* form. You may update your preferences anytime by amending and initialling your form.

Have questions or suggestions of topics to include in the Parent Handbook?

Please email natureschool@dvslc.ca

The information in this Parent Handbook is subject to change.

When changes are made, the updated copy will be shared with enrolled families and posted online.

References & Resources

<https://www.theforestschoolfoundation.org/background-information-history>

<https://westcoastforestschool.ca/2018/04/27/a-brief-history-of-forest-school/>

https://kingstonforestandnatureschool.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2021/06/KFNS_Parent_Handbook.pdf

<https://fsforestschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/FSFNS-Handbook-2021-22.pdf>

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/b84e0bda-59d8-4c07-8139-6851df4cf9c5/resource/8aaa5fca-6518-4bc4-8bbf-02b91d929b48/download/2005-responding-to-child-abuse-handbook-2006.pdf>

<https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/age-appropriate-pedagogies/approaches/play-based-learning>

<https://elc.utoronto.ca/about-us/emergent-curriculum/>

<https://www.nvrc.ca/notices-events-blog/active-living-blog/importance-adventurous-play>

<https://leavenotrace.ca/the-seven-principles-of-leave-no-trace/>

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/How+to+turn+kids+green.-a013665292>

<https://childnature.ca/about-forest-and-nature-school/>