



Connections Nature Play

2025/2026 Parent Handbook

Updated August 2025 & Revised October 2025

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Connections Nature Play & Forest Schools in Canada

History of Forest and Nature Schools

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 the benefits, and joined together to form the first Forest Kindergarten.

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.



Photo Credit: Katie Bakken, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder

What is Forest 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.



Photo Credit: Kirsti Sarrazin, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder

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

1. Takes place in any outdoor space, including urban greenspace, playgrounds, forests, creeks, prairies, mountains, shoreline, and tundra.
2. Features regular and repeated sessions in the same outdoor spaces, supporting children in developing 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 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 preschool-aged children (ages 3 to 6) 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
- Supporting children to develop positive habits that foster emotional literacy
- 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 get involved
- Encouraging activities that help children feel connected with the Land and each other
- Cultivating gratitude and reflection through Talking Circles, cultural practice shared with us by Dave Rice, Oshkaabewis (Ceremonial Attendant) from Wasauksing First Nation

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



Photo Credit: Katie Bakken, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder

Our Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we operate on land that is the Traditional Territory of Treaty 7 Nations, including the Stoney Nakoda, made up of Goodstoney, Chiniki and Bearspaw 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 have been caring for these lands for millennia and continue to do so today, we strive to learn from Indigenous cultures so we can learn to be good stewards of the land, fostering gratitude and respect, both for the land and for the cultures who call Turtle Island home.



Photo Credit: Kirsti Sarrazin, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder

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 acknowledge that our program is founded and run by descendants of white settlers who not only see the world through a colonial worldview, but continue to benefit from Euro-centric views and practices which maintain an institutional stronghold across Turtle Island¹.

We have imposed a colonial-settler way of being with the land because Indigenous voices were not at the centre of our program creation process. This approach means we perpetuate and benefit from colonization in the ways that we operate, and this causes harm².

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 are open and would love to learn from Indigenous community members.

We invite Indigenous community members to share stories, knowledge and skills in the program, and we aim to support their involvement by respecting and following cultural protocol and by providing fair compensation.

We honour, preserve and support the sharing of Indigenous Knowledge. When permission has been granted, we incorporate Indigenous Teachings into day-to-day activities such as Acknowledgements of the Land and First Peoples, Talking Circles, Stories, and Indigenous Games, and respectfully credit the source of these teachings.

^{1, 2} - Adapted from Child Nature Alliance of Canada, 2024

Some of the ways Connections Nature Play Educators 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 various cultures
- Continually fostering greater understanding and appreciation through independent and group learning opportunities
- Respectfully introducing Indigenous worldview and acknowledging source of customs which we have been given permission to share with the children



Photo Credit: Kirsti Sarrazin, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder

*Humankind has not
woven the web of life.
We are but one thread within it.
Whatever we do to the web,
we do to ourselves.
All things are bound together.
All things connect.*

Chief Seattle, 1786-1866

Land-Based and Play-Based Learning

We acknowledge that land-based and play-based learning have always been at the core of family life in Indigenous cultures. At Connections Nature Play, we strive to co-create land-based and play-based learning opportunities for the children in our program. Here are some of the types of learning children encounter and in our program:

Play-Based Learning: A primary focus of our program, play-based learning is a holistic learning method during which children use their imaginations to interact with the world around them. There are many types of play-based learning including adventurous play, imaginative play, and creative play, all of which support intellectual, physical, social-emotional development. Children naturally do this, but life can be so busy that sometimes children do not get much time for it.

Emergent Curriculum, Inquiry-Based Learning: A curriculum that emerges throughout the day based on children's observations coupled with their curiosities, 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. Loose parts play allows the child to steer their own play and learning, which can reduce stress and fears, as the parts can be used in a myriad of ways and encourage hands-on, open-ended learning that supports holistic childhood development while stimulating curiosity and experimentation, 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.

Program Info for Parents

Our 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 on and with the land.

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. We follow the Child Nature Alliance of Canada's *Principles of Forest and Nature Schools*.

We offer:

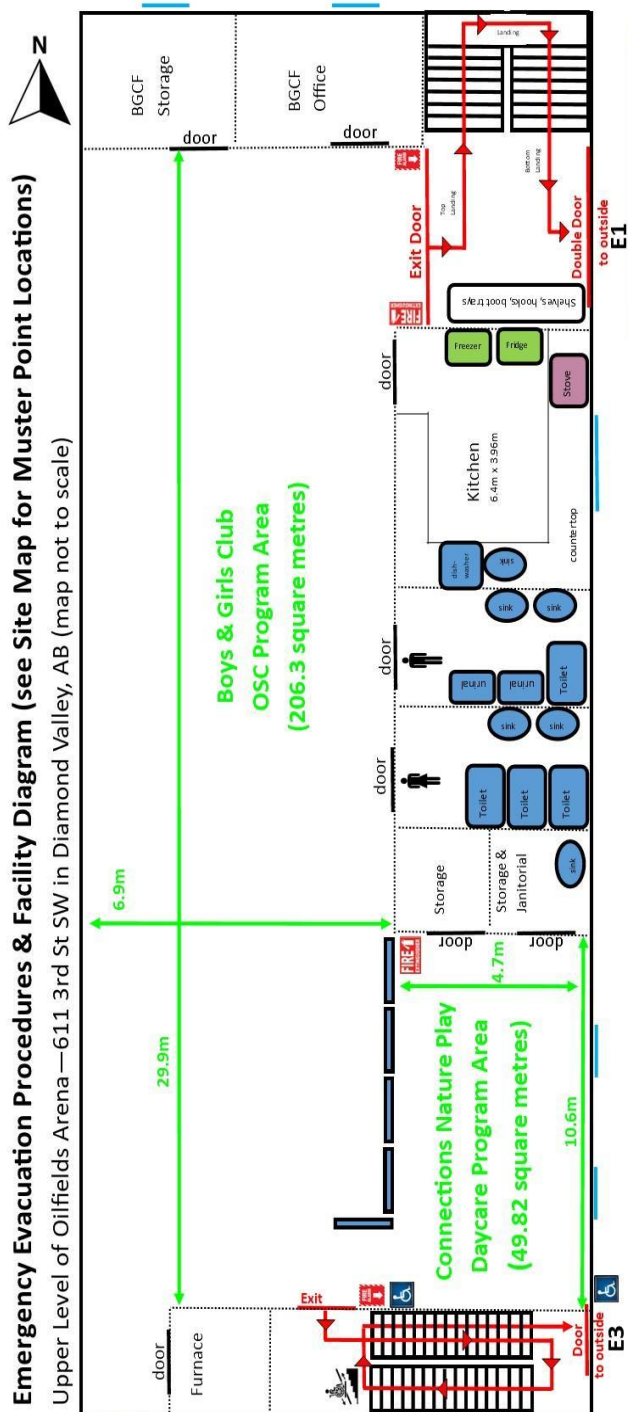
- Outdoor place-based, play-based and child-led & adult-supported opportunities
- Attentive and supportive guidance from certified Early Childhood Educators and trained Forest & Nature School Practitioners
- Ratios of 1 adult : 5 children and max group size of 10 children
- Core hours and extended hours attendance options
- Licensed child care program environment
- Governmental child care subsidies
- Community connections through parented workshops, public events and other opportunities for all ages

Program Location

With the support of the Town of Diamond Valley and the BGC Foothills Clubs, we operate out of the 2nd floor of the Oilfields Arena in the Town of Diamond Valley where we onto the Sheep River Valley, featuring a variety of wetland, grassland, forest, and riverine habitats where we play, learn and connect every day! ★ Oilfields Arena – 611 3 St SW, Diamond Valley, access via Door E3



Indoor Play Area Map



Legend:

- Exit Door
- Emergency Exits from indoor space
- Windows
- Washroom facilities, shared by all participants & staff (programs run at different times)
- Full walls separating kitchen, washrooms, storage/janitorial rooms and office
- Movable 5' partition separating BGCF OSC program area from CNP daycare area
- Fire Extinguisher
- Fire Alarm
- BGCF OSC Program runs 7-8:50am and 3:30-6pm school days and 7am to 6pm on PD days and school closures
- CNP Forest School Daycare Program runs 9:00am to 3:30pm school days and does not run PD days or school closures

**In case of emergency,
call 9-1-1**

then call 403-498-6321

Muster Point #1:

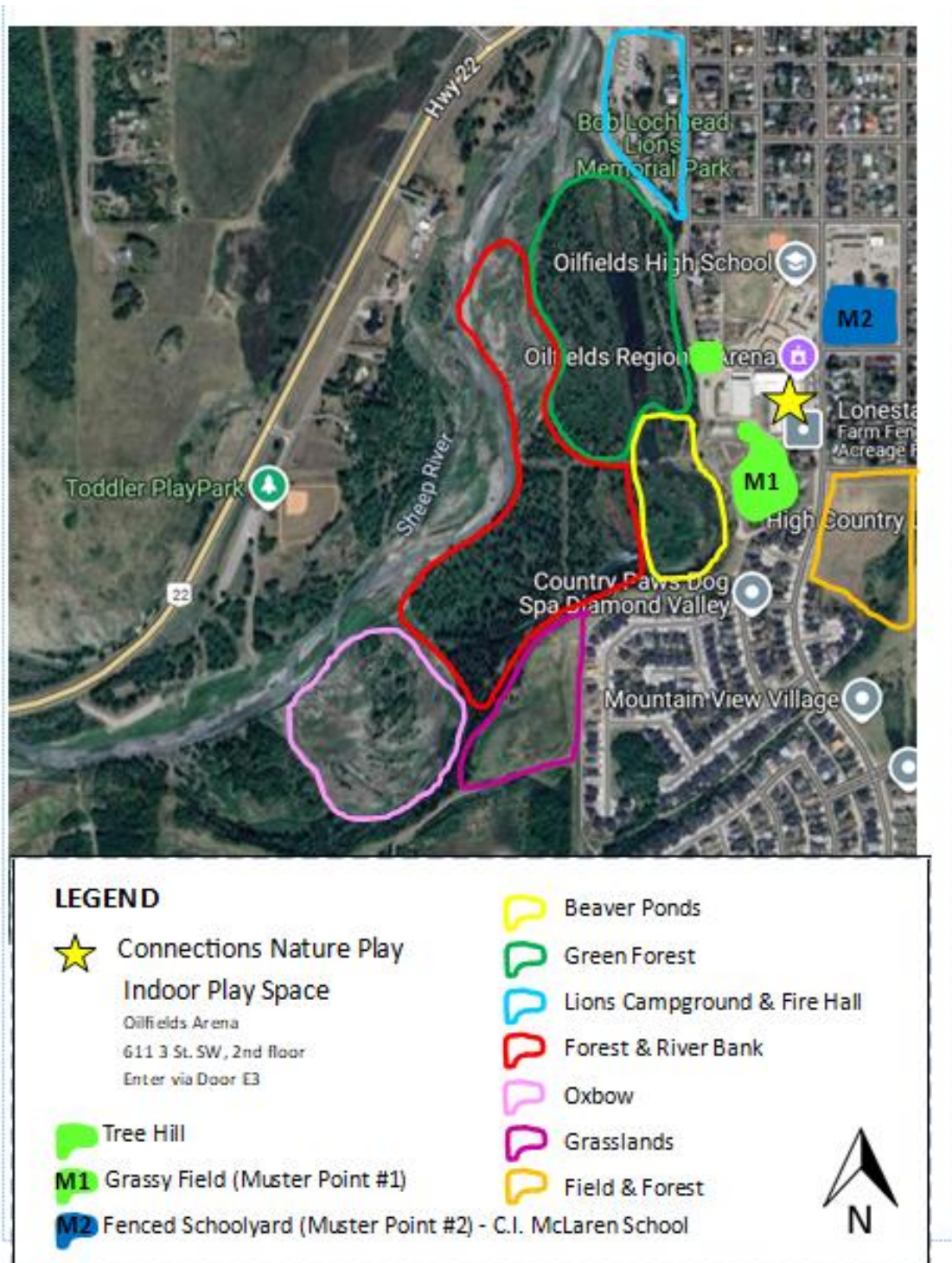
Grass field SW of Arena

Muster Point #2:

Fenced yard at C.I.M. School

Outdoor Play Areas and Muster Points 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 various play areas shown on the following map. The children are naming different areas as we get to know them. Forms will be required for any off-site field trips.



Program Calendar

Connections Nature Play runs September to June and follow the Foothills School Division School Calendar. [Click here to view the 2025/2026 Instructional Calendar which was updated in October 2025.](#)

We are closed on all Statutory Holidays, School Breaks (Fall, Winter, Spring and Teacher Convention) and Non-Instructional Days (PD Days).

Our program may also close at short notice due to weather (ie. if Foothills School Division closes our local schools, our program may also close for the day for safety reasons) and we would notify parents as soon as possible.

At the start of each month, parents will receive our digital Family Newsletter listing upcoming closures as well as special news and important reminders.

Our Educators

All staff at Connections Nature Play are certified Early Childhood Educators who hold current First Aid certification, and have completed a Police Check with Vulnerable Sector Search. Our lead staff are also certified Forest and Nature School Practitioners through the Child Nature Alliance of Canada, and we support everyone on our team to work towards this certification.

Please visit www.dvslc.ca/nature-school/ for photos and bios of our Educators.

Program Contact Information

We have a Program Cell and an Admin Cell, each to be used in different situations. **Please save these numbers and direct each inquiry to the appropriate number.**

- **Program Cell – 403-498-6321:** for inquiries regarding **late drop-offs, early pick-ups, absences** or **to reach the Educators** who are with your child during child care hours
- **Admin Cell – 403-498-4939:** for general **questions, concerns** or **administrative inquiries** (registration, billing, etc.)
- **Email** natureschool@dvslc.ca Please save to your contacts so our emails land in your inbox.

Pick-up and Drop-off

Please drive slowly and **do not idle vehicle** during drop-off and pick-up.

CORE HOURS	
Drop-Off & Pick-Up Times:	
Drop-off: 9:30am	Pick-up: 2:30pm

EXTENDED HOURS	
Drop-Off & Pick-Up Times:	
Drop-off: 9:00-9:30am	Pick-up: 3:00-3:30pm

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 10/10:30am 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. Nature Play is important work!

Occasional variations to established drop-off and pick-up times are permitted. **To make arrangements for early pick-ups, please call the program cell during the business day (8:30am to 4:00pm) or the prior business day.**

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.

A Few Moments of Your Time Can Really Help

We understand that sometimes parents need quick drop-offs. When possible, we encourage parents to spend a few minutes at drop-off so we can learn about any recent changes to their sleep, routine, behaviour, etc. so we can understand how they might be starting their day.

Late Pick-Ups

All children must be off-site by 3:30pm. If you will be late, please call/text the program cell.

A fee of \$1 per minute may be charged for habitually late pick-ups. These fees are paid the day of via e-transfer to dvs1c.treasurer@gmail.com with “late fees” in the e-transfer memo.

Emergency Contacts

Upon registration, **parents/guardians must share contact information for at least one individual whom we may contact in the event we are unable to reach the parent(s)/guardian(s).** Parent(s)/guardian(s) may indicate whether or not Emergency Contacts are authorized to pick up their child on their behalf. Parent(s)/guardian(s) may add or change their Emergency Contacts anytime.

If someone that was not previously listed is to pick up your child(ren), please text the first and last name of the person picking up your child to Connections Nature Play program cell so Educators can verify their identity by photo identification when they arrive.

A Typical Day at Forest School

- Free Play*
- Handwashing & Snack, Explore Weather
- Walk to the day’s outdoor play destination
- Gathering Circle & Safety Check
- Free Outdoor Play*
- Handwashing & Lunch
- Journaling/Stories
- Free Outdoor Play*
- Handwashing & Snack
- Walk back from the day’s outdoor destination

* Free Play involves child-led activities as well as activity invitations such as Kitchen, Scientific Inquiry, Gross Motor, Fine Motor, Creative, Quiet, Risky/Adventurous Play and more!



Daily Update to Parents

Each day, we send a Daily Update text with photos to parents. **Please do not share publicly any photos showing other children.**

The information shared in the Daily Update is meant to keep parents/guardians informed and also inspire family conversation about what your child is doing and learning at Connections.

Inclusion & Accessibility

We strive to be as inclusive as possible so that all children can experience the benefits of nature play. **Upon registration, please inform us 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.** We work with Max ECS and are open to working with other

organizations so that children can access support for their development and participation in our program.

Registration and Fees

2025/2026 Fees

The following chart shows the breakdown of hours per month, monthly parent fee and subsidy as well as the daily and hourly rate for each of our enrolment options.

Enrolment Options – Core Hours: 9:30am to 2:30pm Extended Hours: 9:00am to 3:30pm	Hours Per Month	Monthly Parent Fee * denotes flat rate set by GoA	Qualify for Affordability Grant? 50+ hours per month required to qualify for part-time rate 100+ hours per month required to qualify for full-time rate	Daily Rate (Hourly Rate)
CORE HOURS				
Core Hours 1 day per week	20	\$225	Does not qualify (less than 50hrs/month)	\$56.25/day (\$11.25/hour)
Core Hours 2 days per week	40	\$450	Does not qualify (less than 50hrs/month)	\$56.25/day (\$11.25/hour)
Core Hours 3 days per week	60	\$230*	Yes	\$19.17/day (\$3.83/hour)
Core Hours 4 days per week	80	230*	Yes	\$14.38/day (\$2.88/hour)
Core Hours 5 days per week	100	\$326.25*	Yes	\$16.31/day (\$3.26/hour)
EXTENDED HOURS				
Extended Hours 1 day per week	26	\$255	Does not qualify (less than 50hrs/month)	\$63.75/day (\$9.81/hour)
Extended Hours 2 days per week	52	\$230*	Yes	\$28.75/day (\$4.42/hour)
Extended Hours 3 days per week	78	\$230*	Yes	\$19.17/day (\$2.95/hour)
Extended Hours 4 days per week	104	\$326.25*	Yes	\$20.39/day (\$3.14/hour)
Extended Hours 5 days per week	130	\$326.25*	Yes	\$16.31/day (\$2.51/hour)

Fee Payment

Fee payments are accepted via e-transfer to dvs1c.treasurer@gmail.com, with “Name – Month fees” in the e-transfer memo or notes field. We are unable to accept payment via cheque or credit card.

Payment of monthly parent fee are due by the last day of the previous month of child care. For example, in the second half of August, parents are invoices for September fees (due Aug 31) and at the end of May parents are invoice for June fees (due May 31).

Annual Registration Fee

In order to secure your child’s spot, the annual registration fee must be paid in full. This fee is per family, regardless of the number of children being registered from a given family/household. See Fee Payment section below for payment instructions.

Government Subsidies & Monthly Parent Fees

As a licensed child care program, children who are registered to attend more than 50 hours per month are automatically enrolled for financial assistance under the Federal-Provincial Child Care Agreement through the Affordability Grant, which was updated on April 1, 2025. Under the new funding formula, subsidy is based solely on the hours a child is registered to attend a licensed child care program.

- >100 hours per month = flat monthly parent fee of \$326.25
- 50-99 hours per month = flat monthly parent fee of \$230.00
- Less than 50 hours per month does not qualify for financial assistance through the Federal-Provincial Child Care Agreement.

Licensed child care programs apply for child care subsidies on behalf of families, **and by registering with Connections Nature Play, you are consenting to your personal information being shared with the Government of Alberta** so that a Child Care Participant Number can be generated for your child, as this is required to administer child care subsidies.

If you still have questions about child care fees and subsidies, please call us at 403-498-4939.

Enrolment

Completing and submitting the online registration request communicates a family’s interest in registering in the Connections Nature Play program, but does not guarantee registration.

Be sure to set natureschool@dvs1c.ca as a ‘safe sender’ in your email account so that our emails don’t land in your spam/junkmail folder.

Once we receive your online registration request, we will follow up with you to confirm your child’s attendance details and share invoice for annual registration fee.

Drop-Ins

Drop-Ins are welcome when space is available, and drop-in fee must be paid upon receipt of invoice via e-transfer to dvs1c.treasurer@gmail.com, prior to drop-in care being provided. All forms must be submitted in advance of first drop-in day. Drop-ins are not eligible for the governmental child care subsidy programs as they fall below 50 hours.

Waitlist & Withdrawal

If your first choice of days are full, we will do our best to offer alternative days (if available) and offer you an opportunity to join the waitlist for your first choice days.

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

To withdraw a child from Connections Nature Play, we require one month's notice (ie. By Oct 31 for December 1 withdrawal).



Refunds

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 or holiday
- 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 participant withdrawal after fee payment and if we fill the spot, a pro-rated refund may be issued to the withdrawing family minus a 25% administration fee.
- Suspension or expulsion for unsafe behaviour would only be considered once staff and family have jointly followed conflict resolution process. See Unsafe and Inappropriate Behaviour and Conflict Resolution Process sections. A refund would be issued for remaining registered days in the month minus a 25% admin fee.

Health and Safety Policies

Child Protection Policy

Connections Nature Play Educators are actively committed to the protection of children and strive daily 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*, outlined 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.

In accordance with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, Educators are required to report any observations of possible abuse or neglect in any form to the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-5437 (KIDS).

Illness Policy

Children, staff, and volunteers are asked to **stay home while symptomatic** and for 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.

Text or phone the program cell (403-498-6321) if your child/children will not be attending that day, or has communicable symptoms, skin rash, 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, and a 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 phone.

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 positioned for optimal warmth and the child could be transported by wagon if needed.

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



Photo Credit: Katie Bakken, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder

Medication Policy & Procedures

- **Administration of Medication:** Medication is only administered to a child when medication is provided by parent(s) or guardian(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 & Transport of Medication:** All medication is kept accessible only to adults when indoors, and carried by Educators when in the field, with each child's medication in a separate labeled bag with their form.

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 “pack-in and pack-out” and encourage families to pack waste-free snacks and lunches.

Please consider including an ice pack to help keep your child’s food cool, especially on warmer days.

Connections Nature Play is a **nut-free program**. To help provide a safe environment for all children, including those with nut allergies, please do not send nuts or products containing nuts in your child’s lunch and snacks. 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 the sandwich soggy).

To keep the focus on healthy food choices, **please do not pack gum or candy.**



Photo Credit: Katie Bakken, Connections Nature Play

The Town of Diamond Valley is located in the rich and complex wildlife habitat provided by the Foothills of the Rocky Mountains. A wide array of living creatures, including plants, birds, mammals, reptiles and fish and insects and more, live in or travel through the river valley as well as the streets, parks and neighbours of our town.

As a nature-based program, we frequently see wildlife such as owls, deer and squirrels from a respectful distance. In these situations, we encourage the children to remain near educators so we can quietly observe their behaviour until the animal naturally moves on. This provides us with opportunities to expand participants' knowledge and comfort level with the concept of coexisting with wildlife and understanding of the fact that we are part of nature, not separate from it, as we eat, play and learn in the same habitat as our wild relations.

The Co-Founders of Connections Nature Play possess knowledge and experience working safely in wildlife territory in British Columbia, Alberta and northern Ontario, in areas known to provide habitat for species such as bear, cougar, coyote, deer, moose and more. We have incorporated this knowledge as well as current wildlife coexistence 'best practices' gleaned from credible sources¹ into the very design of the Connections Nature Play program so as to reduce the chance of a negative wildlife encounter. For example:

- We conduct annual site risk assessment and daily site safety checks
- We respect all trail and area closures
- We incorporate age-appropriate cues such as "Give Wildlife Space" into our Community Values exercise that we review regularly, especially when new children join
- We venture into nature only in daylight, avoiding dawn and dusk when many species of wildlife tend to be more active
- We travel and play in groups of at least two adults and up to 10 children
- When moving from one place to another, one adult is in the lead to ensure adult awareness of upcoming hazards and one adult is in the back to keep visual track of all children when in transit
- When moving through areas with reduced visibility, we make noise by singing/talking and do not discourage children from vocalizing when outdoors
- When we go on an 'explore' from our home base, we take all backpacks containing food along so we are not leaving a potential attractant unattended
- We eat and play in areas with good sight lines
- We check for tracks and sign of large mammals as part of our daily site safety check
- We practice pack-in-pack-out, and do not leave food-related waste in nature
- We require participants to pack away all food scraps, close and return lunch kits to their zippered backpack and place on the central tarp to keep all food together
- When we see any kind of wildlife, we give them space. Detailed Wildlife Encounter Protocols can be found in the Educator Handbook, which can be accessed upon request

Given how big and noisy our group is, the chance of our group unexpectedly surprising a wild animal is low, as wild animals tend to have very good hearing. Any wildlife in the area would be aware of our presence long before we would be aware of them, and would naturally avoid us.

Educators carry first aid kits, cellphones and whistle, and have wagons containing all kinds of resources such as blankets, extra clothing and play and learning materials. We do not carry bear spray, bear bangers or air horns as the likelihood of misuse resulting in participant injury is higher than the likelihood of needing to use it in a wildlife encounter.

In situations where we come upon wildlife unexpectedly, whether it be while walking through the habitat we cause a bird to 'flush' or an animal comes upon us while it is traveling through the habitat, our educators are trained to follow our Wildlife Encounter Protocol as outlined in our Educator Handbook and always prioritize human safety.

During our daily interactions with wild animals at a safe distance, we take these opportunities to educate the children on age-appropriate best practices and wildlife biology and behaviour.

We teach children to follow these simple steps each time we see wild animals:

1. tell a grown-up
2. get with the group
3. follow instructions

We also teach the children to never feed wild animals, approach or touch them or run away. Families are welcome to reinforce these messages at home.

In the event of a wildlife encounter that poses a perceived or real risk to human safety, the Educators' primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the children. Equipment can be left in the field in order to get children to safety, for later retrieval.

Once the situation has resolved and the group is in a safe location, parents/guardians will be notified by text. In the event of a wildlife encounter directly involving a child, that child's parents would be notified by telephone as soon as possible.

Depending on the situation, Educators report sighting or incident to the Government of Alberta Report A Poacher hotline and/or call 9-1-1 in the event of serious incidents involving wildlife that require emergency services.

In the event of a wildlife encounter that may incite fear or anxiety, we would take time and make space for all participants to share their thoughts and feelings about the experience to support the children in processing the experience and share what we learned from it. We are open to having conversations with families as well, so that all caregivers may support their child(ren) in processing the full range of feelings and emotions that may arise.

¹ Sources:

Alberta Parks *Bear Smart*: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpgclefindmkaj/https://www.albertaparks.ca/media/123478/bear-smart-brochure.pdf>

Biosphere Institute: <https://www.biosphereinstitute.org/living-with-wildlife-resources>

Government of Alberta Report A Poacher Hotline: 1-800-642-3800

Weather Policies

Inclement Weather and Closures

If the program is unable to run due to weather/road conditions we aim to contact parents as soon as possible 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 arrangements 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.

Weather Statements, Watches and Warnings

In the event of a Weather Statement, Watch or Warning, Educators will seek shelter and/or bring children back to the indoor play area.

Extreme Weather

Connections Nature Play Educators consult the forecast each morning, observe changing environmental conditions regularly, and consider weather-related safety in all decision-making (i.e. how far to venture from home base, how long to be outside, which activities to offer, etc.).

- 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.
- In the case of **high winds** (30km/hr and above), the group would play outside in open areas and avoid treed areas so as to decrease the chance of injury from falling objects from overhead.
- In the case of forecasted **thunder and lightning**, Educators will ensure participants are close to shelter so that it may be sought quickly should thunder, lightning or high winds occur.

Other Helpful Information

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 guidelines 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 ensure their outerwear contrasts with the season (ie. avoid white in winter, avoid camo always) so they are easy to keep an eye on when we are out on our adventure. Please send additional layers (extra dry socks, mitts, hats, etc.) in a resealable plastic bag each day.
- 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.
- Ensure your child's 'magic gloves' (they will receive two new pairs from us each fall) are laundered regularly and that a clean pair is in their lunch kit each day.
- 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 by the last day of the month prior.

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. It is okay to leave while they are crying. We will support them in experiencing their emotions then having fun when they are ready.

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.

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 grave 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 will 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.

If lunch or snack time 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 so we can all eat together.

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

James Russell Lowell

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 with the tool. Use of certain tools is reserved for older age groups.

Journaling and Creative Expression

We encourage the children to draw and express themselves in their journal each day. Their Nature journal will be sent home 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 respect and honour the diverse backgrounds and cultures represented by the children and the greater community, and demonstrate this respect and appreciation by getting to know each child and acknowledging each family as unique.

In an attempt to keep the program focused on cultivating connections with nature and with each other, **we acknowledge the holidays celebrated by the families whose children are in our program** and follow the children's lead in terms of incorporating games, stories and other activities that reflect these holidays.

Our Educators may initiate and incorporate activities to acknowledge and celebrate:

- **Nature-Based Milestones** (seasons, spring planting and fall harvest, Solstice/Equinox, Winter Walk Day, Take Me Outside Day and more)
- **Family-Centered Celebrations** (Family Day, National Caregivers Day, Random Acts of Kindness Day and more)
- **Reconciliation with Indigenous Communities** (National Indigenous Peoples Day, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation/Orange Shirt Day)

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

Birthdays

If you choose to bring food to celebrate your child's birthday, we ask that **any treats or baked goods brought in be nut-free**, that they be **edible without dishes and cutlery**, and brought in **small portions** and, such as **mini cupcakes or small cookies**. We also ask that no balloons be brought as there may be latex allergies in the group.

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 families agree to a number of "Agreements" in KinderLogix 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 (daily update to families, reflective activities with the children, photos of each child posted on their KinderLogix account, program reports to the DVSLC and our funders, etc.)
2. External/Public Use (for use on our webpage, social media, posters, brochures, as well as online and print media, such as Western Wheel, High Country News, etc.) We do not include identifying information, such as names, when posting photos online.

We do our very best to align our photo-documentation practices with your family's wishes.

Toileting and Handwashing

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 the toilet, retrieving toilet paper, wiping, flushing, pulling underwear and pants up, proper handwashing, etc. prior to attending our program.

Indoor washrooms are available at the program's 'home base' featuring flush toilets and sinks, soap and hand dryer. 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. If your child still benefits from an afternoon rest or nap, we recommend registering them for the Core Hours option which runs 9:00am to 2:30pm so they can rest after they are picked up.

Ticks

Ticks are prevalent in our area. To help deter them ensure your child wears long sleeves and long pant legs, and tuck pant legs into socks, and wears closed-toe footwear. Ticks are easier to spot on light coloured clothing. Send bug spray and check for ticks when you pick up your child.

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 tick removal will be 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>

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 or ignoring your body's needs
- 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, taking Educator out of ratio
- Behaviours that require formal conflict resolution process

Conflict Resolution Process

When inappropriate and/or unsafe behaviours (see previous section) occur at Connections Nature Play, Educators are committed to working with the child in a positive way to try to discourage or change the behaviour. We clearly communicate expectations and work with the child to learn positive behaviour and techniques to deal with various situations.

By working with the child, we aim to foster self-confidence, self-control, as well as positive decision-making and communication skills. When a pattern of unsafe and/or inappropriate behaviours emerges, parents or guardians are notified and engaged in dialogue so we can find solutions together, and are asked to support the resolution process at home as well.

If the issue is not readily solved, and the unsafe behaviour continues, then a three-strike system would be used, where a strike is applied each time the behaviour is exhibited. Notes will be kept in our confidential contact management system.

- 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.

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.

Minimizing Our Impact

To minimize impacts to the environment, we follow the 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, gravel.
- 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 waste from our lunches, human waste and the grey water from our portable handwashing station.
- 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.
- 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 ***take only memories and leave only footprints***. We talk with the children about why we leave natural objects in nature and, in the end, we let the child decide if they want to take a certain object home. We will offer them ways to explore and learn about the object and remind them that others will love to see that special object and the impacts to the environment if everyone took something home when they visit.
- We encourage children to take down the forts they build.
- We encourage families to pack waste-free lunches and snacks.

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.

Sustainable Practices

Connections Nature Play is an inquiry-driven program, meaning that children's natural curiosities inform 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.

Insurance

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

Dressing & Packing for Outdoor Adventures

How to Pack

Please send your child with a backpack so they can carry their lunch and snacks as well as their water bottle. A backpack with a chest strap is very helpful, too, so the straps don't fall off their shoulders while we walk.

Please send a labeled reusable shopping bag with extra clothing, extra footwear, sunscreen, bug spray and extra hats/mitts in winter.

Our Outdoor Clothing Lending Library

Connections Nature Play has a full 'library' of clothing and footwear for children, which families may sign out for the season or year and return when the child outgrows them or the child leaves the program. Our library includes:

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| - Rain coats | - Winter coats | - Indoor & outdoor |
| - Rain pants | - Snow pants | footwear |
| - Muddy buddies | - Winter boots | - Non-cotton socks |
| (1-piece rainsuit) | - Hats & Mitts | - Sunglasses |
| - Rain boots | - Base layers | - Sun hats |

Please consider donating your family's outdoor clothing items when your child outgrows them.

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 contrasts with the season (ie. avoid white outerwear in winter), suits the day's forecast *and* that can get 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 forest 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.

We do not recommend shorts and t-shirts for nature play, even in summer. Long pants and long sleeves can protect 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 fabrics are fleece, merino wool, polyester (and other synthetic materials). Fleece works well, and is less expensive than merino. In cooler weather, 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 or rainy days as these will readily absorb water and take a long time to dry.



Photo credit: Katie Bakken, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder

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.

We do not recommend jeans, as they are heavy cotton and do not dry easily when wet.

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.

Footwear:

Socks: Wool socks or heavier polyester are warmer. **We do not recommend cotton socks.**

For winter, please ensure winter boots are tall enough to keep snowpant cuff down over the top of the boots to prevent snow from entering boots. We recommend winter footwear have a little extra space in them. A pocket of airspace around the foot will help the foot feel warmer. If the boots allow without squishing the feet, two layers of socks in the wintertime can help regulate temperature better than one pair. If, however putting on two pairs of socks means squished feet, their feet will feel cold regardless of the insulative value of the socks.

For warmer seasons, running shoes and rainboots are ideal.

For indoors, please send a pair of indoor footwear for use inside the centre. 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 reused 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. See Parent Responsibilities section.

Plastic Bag: **Please 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 from entering the wrist,
 - a coat that is not warm enough,
 - a pair of boots that are too short or snowpants that are too short to keep elastic snow pant cuffs down around boot to prevent snow from 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 out

Summer

- Long pants and long sleeve shirt that fit loosely
- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Sun hat, sunglasses

- Raincoat and rain pants, rain boots for rainy/muddy days
- Running shoes

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



Photo credit: Kirsti Sarrazin, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder

What to not send to Nature School

Please do not send your child to Connections Nature Play with: open-toed shoes or sandals, shorts, 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

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.

Feedback

We welcome feedback, both positive and constructive, from families throughout the year and also through our annual Parent Survey which we send out in late winter each year.

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 admin cell phone (403-498-4939) requesting a call back from the particular Educator along with suggestions of convenient times 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!

***"It is our collective
and individual responsibility...
to preserve and tend to the world
in which we all live"***

~Dalai Lama



Photo credit: Kirsti Sarrazin, Connections Nature Play Co-Founder



CONNECTIONS NATURE PLAY FOREST SCHOOL

If you love our program, tell your friends!

If you have a concern, please tell us so we can do better!

The information in this Parent Handbook is reviewed and updated annually and shared with parents and guardians and posted to our website.

To view the most up-to-date version, please access it online at:

www.dvslc.ca/nature-school/

*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

References & Resources

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