

Parent & Guardian Handbook

2016-2017



the
Nature Preschool
at IRVINE



welcome to The Nature Preschool at Irvine!

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am thrilled that your child will be joining us this year to explore the wonders that nature provides! Our students develop a foundation of skills while forming deep connections with nature.

Your child will learn many new concepts in the coming months through exploration, experimentation, creative arts, animal encounters and outdoor play. Most importantly, they will develop positive relationships with each other and our learning community. What could be a more amazing way to begin school? We hope you will also feel a sense of joy as your child grows with us.

This handbook was created to help answer questions about our policies and procedures. Please feel free to contact me about your child's experience via MadiganK@ExploreNature.org or directly at 443-738-9223. Welcome to The Nature Preschool!

In Sunshine,

Karen Madigan
Director of The Nature Preschool

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Mission Statement



The mission of The Nature Preschool at Irvine is to provide hands-on opportunities for learning and skill development through nature-based inquiry, creative arts, and outdoor exploration to develop a lasting appreciation for the natural world.

Educational Philosophy

Childhood should be joyful and wholesome. We believe that the earliest, most memorable kind of learning includes climbing trees, catching frogs and making mud pies. We believe that empathy, love, curiosity and respect are the truest foundation of learning. When thoughtful nature-based curriculum is combined with direct experiences in nature, a transformative change takes place. This connection is both powerful and empowering. And this basic human connection need not be sacrificed when a child begins school.

We believe it is every child's right, as an integral part of the natural community, to develop a foundation of academic skills *through* encounters in the natural world.



Child-Centered Learning

Our educational philosophy underscores our commitment to child-centered learning. Educators guide students to new learning as children ask questions, express curiosity or concern, and show enthusiasm towards discoveries. Students experiment, problem-solve and explore with their senses. Students voice opinions and express ideas through language and the arts. Students develop friendships and learn from one another through cooperative play. In other words, students actively participate in all aspects of learning!

We integrate many approaches to support each child's learning path by:

- providing a supportive, safe learning environment to encourage discovery, questioning and experimentation;
- offering sensory opportunities with live animals, natural objects, artifacts, trail games, outdoor interpretation and creative arts activities;
- engaging cognitive growth and problem-solving skills through hands-on games and activities;
- developing physical motor skills through active learning and play;
- promoting social skills and positive self-image through group play and cooperative learning;
- cultivating emotional literacy and empathy to develop self-esteem;
- nurturing self-expression, creativity and reflection;
- encouraging family involvement to help students appreciate the wisdom of their first teachers — their families;
- celebrating diversity of all living things and the individuality of children and families;
- instilling respect and appreciation for the natural world.



Why Nature-based Curriculum?

There is a growing body of research that links nature-based learning with higher scores on standardized tests, improved physical fitness, a more developed understanding of science and math concepts, reduced effects of ADHD and better academic performance all around.*

Nature-based curriculum encourages healthy minds and bodies. Being connected to nature is wired in the essence of every human being. Busy modern lives have left many people, including children, disconnected from this core. Through nature-based curriculum, children learn with all of their senses and build a lasting connection with nature.

Our program provides a complete framework of academic skills children need to prepare for kindergarten. Physical, social, emotional, cognitive and creative skills blossom in these formative years. But we are always learning through the lens of nature.

*Sources: [The Last Child in the Woods](#) by Richard Louv and the Children & Nature Network www.childrenandnature.org.



About The Nature Preschool

In contrast to traditional preschool programs, at The Nature Preschool:

- Children have daily trail and garden experiences.
- Children interact with and care for live animals native to our local community.
- Children learn directly from biofacts and artifacts.
- Children develop earth-friendly habits such as recycling and composting.
- Children eat, grow and prepare healthy foods for snack.
- Children create and reflect on learning through a variety of expressive art forms using natural and recycled materials.

We develop language and literacy skills by:

- Exposing students to letters, letter combinations and words
- Modeling writing and offering writing opportunities each day
- Providing a print-rich classroom environment (i.e. magazines, books, field guides and poems)
- Storytelling, listening to and retelling stories
- Inviting students to dictate or imagine stories
- Encouraging dramatic play
- Singing, rhyming and experimenting with sounds
- Generating lists or reading to perform a task (i.e. recipe or game instructions)
- Identifying characters and storylines to promote comprehension
- Introducing new words, words from other languages, symbols and sign language

We explore math ideas by:

- Finding, following and repeating patterns
- Counting within context
- Figuring out what is missing among groups
- Estimating
- Songs, stories and games with counting
- Using number and time words
- Graphing and charting
- Grouping (i.e. dozen, pair, many)
- Shape recognition
- Classifying and grouping objects
- Sorting and matching objects
- Measuring and using of scales
- Tracking seasonal and time progressions
- Counting with one-to-one correspondence
- Examining series of objects



Curriculum is influenced by:

- Our original Nature Pedagogy which combines Reggio Emilia, Waldorf and Montessori philosophies of child-centered learning and emergent curriculum with nature-based learning
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards
- Guidelines for Excellence in Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs created by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE)
- MSDE standards for early learners

Enrollment Information

Enrollment is for the duration of the program: September 7 — May 24, 2017. Children must be three years old and be toilet-proficient by September 1st. Placement is first come, first served. To enroll, fill out an application form and submit it with the application fee. If space is available, we will send an enrollment contract. Within two weeks you must sign and return the contract, along with your non-refundable down payment of 10% of the annual tuition. If we do not receive the signed contract within two weeks, we will offer the slot to another student. No exceptions or adjustment to tuition will be made unless the student is enrolled after Sept. 7, 2016. In this case, a prorated tuition will be applied.

Priority Enrollment: Current students and families with siblings returning to The Nature Preschool, receive priority enrollment in January. Applications and contracts are processed in the order that they are received.

Siblings: If you enroll siblings in The Nature Preschool, we will apply a \$200 discount to one sibling's annual tuition fee.

Wait List: We do our best to place your child in the time slot you indicate. If we are unable to do so, we will contact you to offer alternate openings. If we are still unable to enroll your child, we will place him or her on a wait list. If an opening arises, we will notify you.

Confirmation: Once enrollment is confirmed, you will receive a copy of the signed contract along with health and emergency forms, and a general release agreement. **These items must be completed and returned by August 1.**

Payment: Each family is responsible for tuition regardless of their child's attendance. Tuition for our calendar year (September 7— May 24) can be paid annually, quarterly or monthly. Please note that you are billed on the first day of each month. This payment is automatically applied to your credit card unless you have indicated you wish to pay by check. Contact Beth Savitz, Early Childhood Program Coordinator, if you have questions about billing (443-738-9215 or SavitzB@ExploreNature.org).

NOTE: There is no reduction in tuition for missed days or for days classes are closed or canceled. There are no make-up classes.



Required Documents

The following documents must be submitted by Aug. 1st. No child is permitted to attend school without them, as they are required by the State of Maryland.

- ✓ **Health Inventory** containing record of immunizations, child's health assessment and/or vaccination waiver (part I completed and signed by parent, part II completed and signed by physician or nurse practitioner)
- ✓ **Emergency Form** that includes three (3) people besides the child's parents to contact in case of an emergency
- ✓ **Allergy Health Care Plan** *if* your child has severe allergies (signed by physician)
- ✓ **Asthma Action Plan** *if* your child has asthma (signed by physician)
- ✓ **Medication Authorization Form** *if* your child must take medicine while in our care (EX. EPI-pen use); this includes non-prescription medications (signed by physician)



Class Options 2016-17

Half Day Morning classes are offered from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. for either 2 or 3 mornings per week (Tues./Thurs. OR Mon./Wed./Fri.)

Half Day Afternoon classes are offered from 1 p.m.-3:30 p.m. for 2 afternoons (Mon./Wed. OR Tues./Thurs.).

Full Day classes are offered from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. for either 2 or 3 days per week (Tues./Thurs. OR Mon./Wed./Fri.).

NOTE: We do not offer the option to choose alternate days of the week for attendance or enroll more than three full days per week.

Arrival and Departure

ARRIVAL

Please use the restroom and wash hands when your child arrives. Hang belongings in cubby, take a few moments to help your child engage in an activity, and then say good-bye. Remember, preschool is a special time only for students and teachers. *Imagination Stations* will be waiting upon arrival. This self-directed learning time provides an opportunity for children to socialize with teachers and peers. These activities rotate and are informed by seasonal investigation.

DEPARTURE

Parents/guardians may gather by the cubbies until staff initiates sign out for the day. Class typically concludes with a final circle time and good-bye song. Muddy clothes or hands may need extra attention before going home!

If your child must go home with someone other than his or her regular guardian, please fill out a permission slip stating the person's name, contact information and your authorization. For your child's safety, we may ask to see a Driver's License to confirm that individual's identity.

***NOTE: Parents/guardians must initial the class roster to sign in and out.**

ABSENCE

If your child must miss class due to illness or another reason, please let us know so that we can keep an accurate record of attendance. You may call the main line at 443-738-9200 (Upstairs Classroom, ext. 264; Downstairs Classroom, ext. 265 or Karen Madigan at 443-738-9223)

LATE POLICY

Children must be picked up within 15 minutes of class ending. Families who have not picked up by this time will be charged \$15 plus and additional \$1 per minute after that.

SIBLINGS IN CLASS

While many siblings enjoy playing in our classroom during drop off or pick up, we ask that you never leave siblings unattended. Additionally, children should not play in the classroom when teachers are not present (with or without adults). Class time is reserved for enrolled participants only. Throughout the year we offer special events and activities which often include family members so that everyone can share in our learning adventures.

When It's Your Turn to Bring Snack...

Each family is responsible for bringing snack to class twice during the school year. Your child's teacher will post a snack schedule which includes the names of families who are responsible for snack each week. Dietary restrictions and food allergies are noted on the snack schedule. All snacks must strictly follow these guidelines. **We do not serve peanut products.**

We strive to offer natural, healthy snacks such as: fruits, vegetables, cheese, yogurt, beans, rice, whole grain cereals or breads. We try to avoid food that contains dyes and preservatives or highly sugary snacks. The Maryland State Department of Education requires that foods we serve are produced in a licensed facility (unless it's fresh produce which we can wash before serving). This means we cannot serve baked goods brought from home. However, please feel free to coordinate with your child's teacher to bring ingredients for the children to make a favorite recipe. Feel free to stay and help! We love cooking!

We cannot serve: **homemade products or peanut products to any child;** whole grapes, nuts, popcorn, raw peas, hard pretzels or chunks of raw carrots to children under four years old. We also do not serve products containing meat.

Allergies: Please disclose your child's dietary restrictions and allergies on the health inventory form prior to the start of class. We will accommodate your child's needs as best we can, however, in some cases we may request that you provide a supplemental snack.

Eating Together: Children learn a great deal by socializing with peers and adults during snack and meal times. We often serve snacks "family style" so children learn how to take appropriate portions, use table manners for passing food and practice motor skills necessary for pouring, scooping, using tongs, etc. Please keep this in mind when you select snack to bring in for the class.



***Do not bring peanut products. Some children have life threatening allergies to peanuts.**

A Day at The Nature Preschool...

Our days flow naturally with our flexible but routine schedule. We invite and embrace emergent curriculum as we follow students' interests. Our teachers are facilitators of learning, they are in tune with students' needs, skills and discoveries. The sample schedule provides a framework of our day.

SAMPLE CLASS SCHEDULE

9 a.m./1 p.m. Arrival, greetings and sign-in. Imagination Stations for self-directed play.

9:45 a.m./1:30 p.m. Circle time with greetings, songs and engagement with activities or investigations.

10 a.m. /1:45 p.m. Snack, restroom and outdoor learning

10:30 a.m./2:15 p.m. Outdoor learning with activities encompassing creative arts, writing, nature investigation and science experiments, as well as time for child-led exploration and unstructured play.

11:50-12 p.m./3:15-3:30 p.m. Circle time conclusion with review of the day and good-bye song. Departure and sign-out.

In severe cold, wind or rain, we will still go outdoors. It may be for a shorter period of time. In this case, we extend our time with *Imagination Stations* and incorporate a special project, experiment, or large motor activity.

NEW! Early Bird Care

What is Early Bird Care? It is a before-care option that takes place from 8:30-9 a.m., offered to students in our morning classes. Our loving staff invites children to engage in nature-based activities and outdoor play before regular class begins at 9 a.m. This is a great option for parents navigating tight work or child care schedules.

NOTE: We are not offering before-care for p.m. classes. After-care is not available at this time.

How do I enroll? Please contact Beth Savitz at SavitzB@ExploreNature.org or call 443-738-9215 to add Early Bird Care to your tuition agreement. If you are enrolling siblings, you will need to complete a separate addendum for *EACH* child. If you have programmatic questions, please contact Karen Madigan at: MadiganK@ExploreNature.org.

Full Day Class Information

Our full day classes take place from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. After a busy morning at The Nature Pre-school (see sample class schedule), children eat lunch, rest and play! Outdoor time, or an enriching activity and closing circle concludes our day. **There will be a “slow start” for the full day classes during the first week of school. Full days will begin on September 12.**

LUNCH

Please provide a boxed or bagged lunch for your child including a drink and ice pack. We encourage a zero-waste approach to food. Please pack lunch in reusable or recyclable containers. Composting is available in our classroom.

Do not bring peanut products. Some children have life threatening allergies to peanuts.

REST TIME

Your child will need the following: KidKraft or Wildkin Nap Mat or similar item with built in blanket and pillow

optional: item to snuggle with

NOTE: ALL nap items should roll up and have a strap for hanging, or fit into one bag or tote. Please label all items. Washable items must go home weekly to be laundered.



Clothing

Outdoor discovery requires freedom of movement in non-restrictive clothing. Tight clothing, fancy dresses and costumes can get in the way during active play. For independence in toileting children need clothing that is easy to take on and off.

Please dress your child in clothing that can be soiled so they will feel free to participate in messy projects and trail hikes. We provide smocks for art projects however we will not force any child to wear a smock. You should expect your child (and his/her clothing) to get dirty outdoors! If at any time your child's clothing becomes wet and uncomfortable, we will assist him/her in changing into their extra set of clothes. *Note: Masks are not permitted as they can be frightening.*

When we head outdoors, we will help your child change into boots (if necessary). Please provide appropriate **footwear for any weather** to ensure your child can freely explore. Children need comfortable, protective shoes with gripping soles for running, jumping and climbing. Sneakers or well-fitting hiking boots are best. When we return from wet or muddy trail walks, we will take our shoes off and leave them in the mud room. Please make sure your child has a spare pair of socks or slippers in case of wet feet.

CHANGE OF CLOTHES

Please provide an extra set of clothing to leave at school. The clothing can be stored in a shoebox in your child's cubby. Extra set of clothing should include: shirt, pants, underwear and socks. Be sure to label all items and remember to exchange this clothing as your child grows into new sizes and when the seasons change.

COLD WEATHER ATTIRE

We go outdoors every day! It may seem cold or rainy when your child arrives, but the weather may improve and your child will require appropriate clothing for outdoor exploration.

FALL

Rubber boots
Rain jacket
Rain pants OR
Rain suit (EX. Oakiwear)
Hat
Light gloves
Spare change of clothes

WINTER

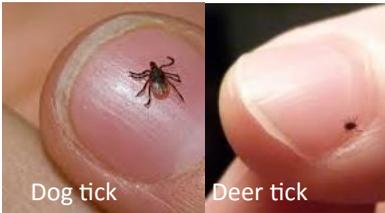
Snow boots
Snow jacket
Snow pants OR
Snow suit (EX. Oakiwear)
Scarf
Waterproof mittens
Hat/ear muffs
Second layer
Warm socks
Spare change of clothes

SPRING

Rubber boots
Rain jacket
Rain pants OR
Rain suit (EX. Oakiwear)
Hat
Closed-toed shoes
Spare change of clothes

***Please label all items!**

Ticks, Poison Ivy and Bees...



Yes, they are part of nature...sometimes, an unpleasant part! To keep an eye out for ticks, we do “spot checks” with the students when we come in from the trails. This helps children get in the habit of checking for ticks. Ticks are very tiny (see left).

Please do tick checks after class every day!



Our teachers identify poison ivy and steer clear of it on the trails (see left). Place a call to your physician if you are suspicious of any rash your child has.

Bees are celebrated at The Nature Preschool! They are the unsung heroes of the food chain. We encourage children to respect, but not touch, our buzzing friends. In the unlikely event of a sting, we will monitor the child’s condition and notify parents.

NOTE: If your child requires an EpiPen if stung, please give one to your child’s teacher at the start of the school year, along with

the required Medication Authorization Form signed by a physician.

...and Mud!

Our bodies and clothes get messy — and muddy! Shoes get muddy, pants may become grass-stained and shirts may drip with paint, clay or glue. Sometimes all this learning is even in our hair! Because we encourage this kind of whole-hearted, whole-bodied learning, we urge you to dress your child in clothes that are not restrictive and that can get dirty. Our classes exemplify what it means to learn by doing.



NOTE: Check the weather forecast daily and bring boots!

Adjustment to The Nature Preschool

Starting preschool is a big step for most kids. Some children are excited to participate and they easily acclimate to class. Other children are nervous at first but quickly ‘warm up’ as they get engaged in activities. Still others may have a longer adjustment period as they gradually become comfortable with a new environment and expectations.

Occasionally a child who is eager at first may have difficulty later when they realize the change is permanent. This adjustment is not necessarily related to a child’s maturity level; every child handles new situations in his or her own way. We acknowledge these differences and provide support and encouragement to help each child adjust to our program.

As a parent/guardian, you have unique insight as to how your child reacts to new settings. There are many ways to prepare your child for class, such as talking about it a few weeks before school starts. As your child asks questions, answer them honestly. “You’re going to explore outside, meet animals and new friends, sing, make art projects and learn lots of new things. It will be a fun adventure!”

You may want to set up a visit to Irvine with your child to get familiar with the trails. This may alleviate some trepidation about unfamiliar settings. Our Friday “Tales and Tails” program is a great (free!) reason to visit. You may also want to use our “potty” a few times prior to the start of the school year. We offer many Parent/Child classes as well as Summer Nature Camps if you are looking for more ways to acclimate your child before the school year.

When you drop off, assure your child that you will be excited to hear all about the day when it is time to be picked up. You might even give your child a challenge: “While you are in class today, pick something special to tell me about — I can’t wait to hear about your day!”

If your child is experiencing a very difficult transition, please share your concerns with the teacher so that she can help provide a happy, smooth transition.

ITEMS FROM HOME

Security objects from home are allowed, but help your child understand the risks of loss and damage. These objects will be stored in your child’s cubby during instruction and trail activities.

NOTE: Toys that encourage aggressive play, including weapons of any kind, are not permitted.

Special Occasions

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

Holidays are exciting for our little ones! At The Nature Preschool, we downplay commercial aspects of holidays and focus on seasonal aspects of holiday celebrations. We acknowledge holidays and cultural events through wholesome activities such as songs, stories and food tasting. Please let us know how we can celebrate a holiday that is special to you.

BIRTHDAYS

In honor of your child's birthday, we encourage you to donate a book to The Nature Preschool library. This book may be a new or used book donated anytime during the year. We will place a bookplate inside the cover with your child's name and date of birth. Each time we read your book, we will fondly remember your child. Thank you for helping our library grow!

NOTE: Since we promote healthy eating habits and try to alleviate potential allergy complications, we do not celebrate birthdays with sugary foods. You are welcome to bring in a special healthy treat!

Family Involvement

We encourage you to play an active role in our program! Your preschooler counts on you for support and encouragement outside of their new world of learning. Stay in the loop by reading *Your Weekly Email From The Nature Preschool* and see our students in action each week via the blog post at www.ExploreNature.org/preschool-blog.org which is designed to help you reinforce what your child learns each week. A monthly calendar is posted on the parent board designated for each classroom. Please check this board daily! Please also review *The Nature Preschool Calendar Of Events*. We hope these events will allow you to socialize with other families while enhancing your child's learning.



NATURE PRESCHOOL PARENT GROUP (NPPG)

We hope you will join The Nature Preschool Parent Group. This group provides support for family events and field trips. You may also want to join the NPPG FaceBook page.

Family Events

SPECIAL EVENTS AT IRVINE

To extend our learning we offer exclusive, seasonal events for The Nature Preschool participants and families. We hope you will join us for these fun events throughout the year!



Preschool Family Orientation

Thursday, Sept. 1, times vary according to class

Parents, make a date with your child to meet our teaching staff and other preschool families. This casual drop-in event allows you and your child to tour our classrooms and grounds by way of a scavenger hunt. Please remember to bring a shoe box with your child's spare change of clothes to leave in your child's cubby.

NPPG Sunset Social & Emotion Coaching Preview

Friday, Sept. 23 from 6-8 p.m.

It's our version of back-to-school night just for parents! This is the first meeting of the Nature Preschool Parent Group (NPPG) to kick off our year. Spend time with your child's teachers, ask questions, mingle with other parents. We will provide adult drinks around the campfire!

Fall Harvest Night Hike

Thursday, Nov. 10 from 6-7:30 p.m. (Rain date: 11/11)

The night glows in autumn magic. Join us for a nocturnal hike followed by warm cider and seasonal treats around the campfire.

Winter Art Workshop

Thursday, Dec. 8 from 5:30-7 p.m.

This crafty event is loved by all! Try your hand at sewing, stamping or making gifts for the birds.

Maple Magic Pancake Brunch

Sunday, Feb. 12 from 11-1 p.m.

Visit the snowy trails with the whole family to see how maple syrup is made. Then enjoy a tasty pancake breakfast complete with maple syrup. Don't forget to bring your favorite pancake topping for our toppings bar!

Spring Sing Campfire

Friday, April 21 from 6-7:30 p.m. (Rain date: 4/28)

Huddle around the campfire, listen to stories, and sing songs to celebrate spring! Delicious campfire treats will be served. Bring a blanket if it's chilly!

Flower Ceremony

Friday, May 26, see invitation for times

We will say our final good-byes during a special flower ceremony. All participants will receive a gift from The Nature Preschool Staff as thanks for a wonderful school year!

NOTE: Please bring canteens, mugs or sippy cups for your family when attending our events. This cuts down on waste and dish-washing!

Family Events

FIELD TRIPS

All field trips require a parent/guardian to attend. Field trips are for the whole school, therefore no classes are held on field trip days. We will provide details about these field trips through the weekly email or in the form of a letter home. Some field trips will be held on your child's class day but there may be times when the event is only offered on a specific date. In this case, the whole school will be invited on the same day. Please contact your child's teachers if you have additional questions. We hope you will join us!



2016-17 Field Trips

Farmer Stan's Farm Tour at The Maryland Ag.Center: Thursday and Friday, October 6-7

The Snowman at the BSO: Friday, Dec. 2

A winter wonderland comes to life in this timeless story of a young boy's magical friendship with a snowman by author Raymond Briggs. (whole school)

Signs of Spring at Ladew Gardens: Thursday and Friday, March 30-31

Observe the many signs of the season in the gardens. Encounter blooming flowers, tadpoles changing to frogs, and birds building nests.

Beach Picnic TBD: Friday, May 12 (whole school)



Family Traditions

Join us during class to share a special seasonal tradition that your family celebrates. This may be in the form of a story, cooking, creative arts project or other engaging activity. We welcome all traditions and hope you will consider what you can share with your child's class!

Trail/Book Buddies

Throughout the year, we also invite you to join us for a trail walk or visit to read or tell a story to the children. Please discuss your ideas with the teacher, as we love parent involvement during class!

Nature Preschool Parent Group (NPPG)

What is the Nature Preschool Parent Group?

The NPPG is a voluntary parent group that provides support for The Nature Preschool during the school year. The NPPG helps in many ways including:

- Preschool family events (planning, set-up, break-down)
- Parents only events such as social gatherings and informational meetings
- Support for special activities during the school day (EX. hearing/vision screening, photo days, yoga or music guests)
- Yearbook Committee
- Ark partnership support

Dues for the NPPG are \$10 annually. This is a voluntary donation that helps the NPPG! You can make your donation at the Family Orientation using the envelope provided in your welcome packet or place the envelope in the Parent Drop-box located in each cubby area at any time.

The first gathering of the NPPG is the Back to School night and Sunset Social on **Friday, Sept. 23 from 6-8 p.m.** (parents only!). Additional meetings will be scheduled throughout the year.

Stay tuned for more information including a class list and contact info for class parents.



The Nature Preschool Staff

Our teachers come from diverse backgrounds but they all share one thing in common: a love of nature and preschoolers! Teachers are knowledgeable about developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood learners and have a well of experience teaching. Read our staff bios at www.explorenature.org/nature-preschool/nature-preschool-staff/.

CLASS STAFFING

Two co-teachers staff each class. In addition, we partner with local universities to mentor new teachers. These wonderful interns assist and learn from us during class in exchange for college credit. At times there may be three or four teachers working with a group of students!

The Nature Preschool is licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education. Therefore, all staff and volunteers must comply with State guidelines. This includes fingerprinting, background checks and First Aid/CPR training as required.

we are NAEYC accredited!

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is internationally recognized as the gold standard for high quality early childhood programs. We are proud to have achieved accredited status in May 2014! Please visit their website www.naeyc.org for wonderful resources and to discover why accreditation matters!



Illness

The Nature Preschool takes precautions to prevent the spread of illness by maintaining a clean environment, providing substitutes for staff and setting clear limits on the health of children in attendance. Frequent hand washing is also an important habit that prevents the spread of illness. To keep all children and staff healthy, we need your cooperation! **This means keeping your child home if you suspect he/she is sick or if they are experiencing any of the symptoms below.**

Recovering children are more likely to pick up a new illness. Keep in mind that we spend time outdoors daily, so if your child is not well enough to go outside, please keep him/her at home. If students are exposed to a contagious illness such as chicken pox or strep, notices will be posted and sent home within 24 hours of us being notified. We maintain confidentiality as to the contagious student to protect your privacy.

We make annual contact with the Baltimore County Department of Health to keep abreast on the spread of illness or outbreaks of communicable disease.

Please keep your child home when any of the following conditions are present:

- Fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit OR when your child has had a fever the night before (fevers tend to rise as the day progresses);
- Significant respiratory distress (EX. chronic or continuous coughing/wheezing);
- Lice or other infestation;
- Cuts or wounds with bleeding or oozing;
- Diarrhea, vomiting or stomach complaints;
- Symptoms of unknown origin, such as a rash;
- Green or yellow runny nose (clear runny noses are okay);
- An illness during its contagious stage such as “pink eye”
- Your child requires one-on-one care OR more care than staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children in the class.

If any of these symptoms are present during drop off, or if your child is not feeling well, the teacher will request that the child go home to prevent the spread of illness.

If a child is absent for more than three days, licensing requires a doctor’s note stating the child is well enough to return to school. **Please give a courtesy call if your child is out sick.**

ILLNESS (CONTINUED)

GETTING SICK AT SCHOOL

If your child becomes ill during class and requires more care than the staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children; or if a child's condition is suspected to be contagious and requires exclusion, then s/he will be isolated from the group to rest comfortably with a familiar caregiver. You will be contacted immediately to pick him/her up. If we cannot reach you, we will call the other contacts listed with your emergency information.

ABSENCE DUE TO ILLNESS

If your child must miss a class due to illness, please call the main line at 443-738-9200, followed by your child's classroom extension (264 upstairs, 265 downstairs) to notify the teacher or preschool director. Teachers will not see an email until after class, so a call is best.

MEDICINE AT SCHOOL

Please be advised that staff will not administer medication to students unless a **Medication Authorization Form** has been provided by the parent and signed by the child's physician.

Special Accommodations

The Nature Preschool makes every effort to meet the dynamic needs of students. Information regarding your child's needs, interests and abilities is collected at the start of the school year.

If you believe your child may have needs which require additional planning or preparation on the staff's behalf, please let us know when you enroll.



Dietary restrictions and allergies are common. We do our best to accommodate each student's needs. If your child has a unique situation, please speak to the director or your child's teacher before the start of the school year.

NOTE: We are not equipped to accommodate certain acute health conditions or special needs so discuss any specific concerns with the Director in advance.

Emergencies

Key staff members are trained in First Aid and CPR. In the event of an accident that requires medical attention, we will do one of the following:

- Call parents/guardians and emergency contacts to collect the child immediately to seek medical attention; or
- If severe and immediate help is deemed necessary, we will call 9-1-1 and a staff member will accompany the child to the emergency room until parents/guardians arrive.

SAFETY DRILLS

We conduct regular safety drills to help prepare students in case of an emergency. Every effort will be made to keep these activities straightforward. We do not want to frighten the children, but we do want them to feel prepared and calm in case of an emergency



Our Approach to Discipline

The physical and emotional well-being of every child is of utmost importance. Every child will be made to feel safe and protected while in our care. We cultivate a calm, empathetic atmosphere with clear expectations for all participants. To maintain this atmosphere, a balance of structured learning and self-directed play means that children are engaged in positive activities. Adults are always available to model or facilitate appropriate strategies for children to solve social problems, such as sharing or including peers in group play.

Whenever a child is having a hard time controlling his or her behavior, adults assist in a calm, helpful manner. We practice conflict resolution that encourages children to identify and express what they are feeling to become more emotionally literate and empathetic. We help children understand the connection between their behavior and consequences.

Our discipline and behavior management is centered around positive reinforcement. Other methods of discipline include setting clear rules, redirection, reminders of expectations and encouragement.

Teachers routinely observe the children to become aware of triggers that may predict challenging behavior. These may include particular events, activities, interactions or other contextual factors unique to an individual child. Through close observation and assessment of the function of the child's behavior, teachers are better equipped to develop individualized plans for each child's success.

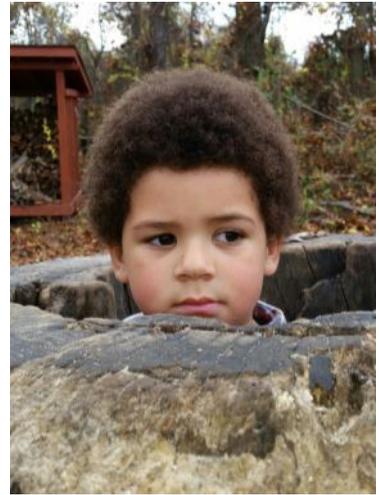
Techniques that are NOT used include physical punishments, withholding of snacks, bribery, psychological abuse, derogatory remarks, coercion, threats or any other methods that may frighten or humiliate children.

We communicate regularly with parents. If a student is not responding to disciplinary efforts, we work with parents/guardians and other professionals to address behavior and implement an education support plan that supports the child's unique needs. We balance the needs of the entire class with the supports necessary for individual children to be successful.



Student Assessment

Our student evaluation is rooted in authentic assessment. Differing learning styles, interests and skill levels become evident as teachers informally observe students daily. Assessment tools help us gain insight about children's cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical and self-help skills. Evaluations are varied (see below) and are sensitive to family culture, experience, abilities and home language to ensure they are meaningful and relevant to each child.



Teacher journals and written anecdotes track developmental milestones. Portfolios offer a collection of work that demonstrates how skills develop over time. Rating scales offer developmental snapshots of students as observed by parents and teachers. This kind of on-going authentic assessment, combined with frequent parent dialogue, helps provide insight about progress made over the course of a school year. Unlike tightly structured standardized evaluations, authentic assessment highlights a child's progress in a dynamic, holistic way. It provides a true vision of what skills a child has achieved and what s/he has yet to master (*NAEYC, 2003; revised in 2009*). The following strategies are used to help assess student performance:

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT is the documentation and analysis of a student's actual work collected over time in his or her real world environment.

AUTHENTIC TRACKING is a collection of informal observations based on teacher journals or anecdotal records. The teacher must therefore be an observer and researcher.

STUDENT PORTFOLIO is a collection of a child's work helps to illustrate the progress and skill development a child makes over the course of time. Work samples may include mark-making or writing; cutting; artwork that reflects patterns, sorting, counting or sequencing; evidence of fine motor skills such as weaving, lacing or beading; audio that demonstrates increased use of language; and photographs that illustrate skill development.

PARENT and TEACHER SCALES help assess skills on a scale with short and long-term validity. The criterion on these scales is relevant and specific to The Nature Preschool curriculum. Scales are developed with reference to the Maryland State Curriculum, Maryland Model for School Readiness and Common Core Standards (as applicable). These are a useful tool for comparison at the end of the school year, especially when parents and teachers use the same rating scales and then compare for discussion.

NOTE: All forms of student evaluation are transparent and accessible to parents. Student records are kept confidential.

Student Assessment (continued)

Because we utilize authentic assessment, it is informal and happens as a routine part of teacher observations. Student assessment is on-going as teachers plan curriculum tailored to each child's needs. We track student progress and gather materials for student portfolios throughout the year. The sole purpose of our assessment is to discover each child's educational needs. This information informs our curriculum and ensures that we are providing the right opportunities, specific to each child, for skill development. Teachers meet weekly and incorporate assessment information into lesson plans. Assessment also helps us make improvements to our preschool program overall.

You know your child best! We invite parents to share or suggest targeted areas for improvement for assessment. Please share your thoughts with staff to participate in the evaluation process. We strive to be sensitive to family values, culture, identity and home language in all forms of our assessment.

PROGRESS NOTES are provided twice per year to communicate your child's development.

CONFERENCES will be held November 21-22 and May 4-5. Please take advantage of these special times to dialogue about your child's progress. If you wish to conference at other times during the year, feel free to let your child's teacher know.

FORMAL ASSESSMENTS or standardized tests may be used to provide better services for your child (EX. developmental screening or diagnostic assessment referral). Staff works with families to achieve consensus about assessments that may be necessary. We share results with families and communicate how the results may affect future learning opportunities.



HEARING and VISION SCREENING

We offer free hearing and vision screening for students ages four and up through the Baltimore County Health Department. Parents are notified about



screening dates and must give written consent to participate. We notify families of the results following the screening. If results may affect your child's learning or require further attention, we provide resources so that you can decide how to proceed.

Communication

Communication between staff and parents/guardians enriches the educational experience of our students. We regularly touch base with parents to provide feedback. Staff will always make time to chat with you via phone, email or in person during non-instruction times if you have a concern or just want to share something with us. Please keep the lines of communication open with us and let us know of any significant events or changes in your child's life. Visitors, moving, new babies, divorce, illness or death can affect children in class. When we are informed about these changes we are better equipped to offer support and encouragement for your child. If you notice any unexplained change in your child's behavior, feel free to discuss it with our staff.

NOTE: The teachers' first priority is with students when they are present. If you have a concern that needs discussion, please request a meeting outside of class time.

PARENT AND TEACHER CONFERENCES

This is a great way to stay informed about your child's progress. We perform on-going assessments of physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. We would love to share our thoughts with you! Parents and teachers have the opportunity for scheduled conferences twice per year. There is no class on November 21-22 and May 4-5 so that teachers and parents can meet. We will send home progress notes beforehand as a starting point for discussion. We encourage families to help care for one another's children during conferences, as they are for adults only.

YOUR WEEKLY EMAIL FROM THE NATURE PRESCHOOL

At the end of each week, we send an email with reminders, important dates, flyers, etc. In the weekly email, you will also find a link to our **BLOG**, explorenature.org/preschool-blog. The blog posts are full of descriptions and photos that showcase what we're up to. (Grandparents love the blog, too!) **Please read the email and blog each week!**



PARENT BULLETIN BOARD AND CUBBIES

We often post flyers or sign-ups on the parent board or cubbies. Please check these spaces to stay in the loop. If you do not regularly drop off/pick up your child and don't have an opportunity to see these items, please contact your child's teacher.

PARENT DROP-BOX

The drop-boxes located near the cubbies in each classroom are a convenient way to return a form, make a payment, or leave a note for a staff member. Please make sure you are placing your item *in* the box and not *behind* it.

GRIEVANCES

If you would like to make a complaint regarding action taken by a staff member, please make direct, initial contact with that staff member to share your concern. If you are not comfortable speaking with that staff member or do not receive a satisfactory response, please contact the Director of The Nature Preschool, Karen Madigan or the Director of Early Childhood Education, Monica Wiedel-Lubinski. If you still do not receive a satisfactory response, please contact Executive Director of Irvine Nature Center, Brooks Paternotte.

All feedback and complaints will be addressed in verbal and/or written form within a two-week time frame (see contact info on the back cover).

Reporting Child Abuse

Some communications are subject to state laws regarding confidentiality. According to 2 Section 5-704 of the Family Law volume of the Annotated Code of the State of Maryland, any teacher or other professional employee of the school who has reason to believe that a child has been subject to abuse or neglect must immediately inform the Executive Director who will report to the appropriate authority. In complying with the mandate to report, the person so reporting is given immunity from criminal or civil penalties or liability when that person, in good faith, makes a report. Such reports are confidential.



Contact Information

Main Line to Irvine Nature Center
Upper Classroom
Lower Classroom

443-738-9200
Ext. 264
Ext. 265

Karen Madigan
Director of The Nature Preschool

MadiganK@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9223

Monica French
Assistant Director and Lead Teacher

FrenchM@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9216

Meghan deKozlowski
Preschool Lead Teacher

deKozlowskiM@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9218

Erin Goodloe
Preschool Lead Teacher

GoodloeE@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9200

Sophie Gerard
Preschool Lead Teacher

GerardS@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9236

Mepi Meyers
Preschool Lead Teacher

MeyersM@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9200

Callie Schwartz
Preschool Lead Teacher

SchwartzC@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9200

Beth Savitz
Early Childhood Programs Coordinator

SavitzB@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9215

Monica Wiedel-Lubinski
Early Childhood Education Director

Monica@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9213

Brooks Paternotte
Executive Director of Irvine Nature Center

PaternotteB@ExploreNature.org
443-738-9229

Please tear out this page and post!

What if it snows?

Weather related closings and delays are based on concern for safety of families and staff. If inclement conditions make driving dangerous, we will delay or cancel class. **The Baltimore County Public School system influences our decisions, however, Irvine Nature Center determines its own closings and delays. The Nature Preschool reserves the right to make adjustments to weather related closings as we see fit. Safety will always be first in guiding our decision. There will be no make up days, or refunds in tuition, due to closures.**

WEATHER POLICY DETAILS

If there is a one or two hour delay, we will hold morning half day class from 10:30-12 p.m. and full day class from 10:30-2p.m. Our afternoon schedule will take place as usual, unless otherwise notified. For afternoon class cancellation we will message families by 11:15 a.m. **There will be no Early Bird Care on days when there is a delayed opening.**

In the event of a delayed opening, please give your child a snack before class. We will not provide snack on short days. Please also dress your child in cold weather gear so that sign-in can take place in the Outdoor Classroom. By starting our day outside, we can utilize more of our time since children will be ready for outdoor learning right away.

Please check your email for a message from the preschool director regarding school delays or closures. As always, please do not come to school if your location is not yet safe for travel.

For any weather-related questions, call the main line 443-738-9200. Alternatively, visit www.ExploreNature.org or tune in to WMAR, WBAL, WJZ or WBFF for a weather update.

If you have further questions, feel free to contact Karen Madigan, at 443-738-9223 or via email at: MadiganK@ExploreNature.org. Thank you.



“We must give children a chance to love the earth
before we ask them to save it.”

-David Sobel

