



## **Welcome to Forest GnomeSchool!**

This handbook is a brief introduction to Forest GnomeSchool as well as more “nuts and bolts” information. Throughout the course of the year we will be communicating additional relevant information as it applies to this program.

The Forest Gnomeschool Program curriculum is not predetermined, instead our day flows organically based on the conditions of our natural environment.

At Forest GnomeSchool, teachers do not lead play, rather they facilitate it. The role of the Forest Teacher, as David Sobel states, is not that of “sage on the stage” but “guide on the side.”

Cedarsong founder Erin Kenny writes, “close contact with nature contributes to young children’s motor, sensory, social, emotional, moral and cognitive development...a child’s experience during this formative period determines their view of the world, how they will interact with others and their own feelings of self-confidence.”

Our daily and weekly rhythms will be consistent, and have the nurturing rhythm of breath: Big, joyous out-breaths followed by quiet individual or collective in-breaths. This rhythm naturally allows for the children’s interest to lead the day while the teachers are mindfully setting and holding the tone and pace of the day.

Seasonal changes will be honored in our rhythm with varied circle songs, verses as well as stories. With annual seasonal changes also comes the rhythm of annual festivals. The festival life of Forest GnomeSchool will be intertwined with that of The Playgarden. Families and children of Forest GnomeSchool will participate in seasonal festivals with the larger Playgarden community throughout the year.

Blessings on our days in the Forest!

Forest GnomeSchool is sponsored by The Playgarden, Inc. 501c3 whose mission is

*“To Support, Strengthen, and Inspire the growing child, family, and community.”*

## Dressing Appropriately

Dressing your child appropriately is critical to your child's enjoyment and comfort while playing and learning in the Forest. Appropriate gear is non-negotiable and essential to your child's participation for the day. Remember, this is an all outdoor program. Make sure you and your child understand and are comfortable with that.

### Clothing and Gear Requirements:

- A media-free, child sized backpack that they can carry and open on their own (we really like this backpack from REI: <https://www.rei.com/product/102016/rei-co-op-tarn-12-pack-kids>)
- A media-free, insulated water bottle; preferably 12 oz.
- A media-free lunch box with cold pack
- Label all of your child's clothing
- Dress your child in clothes that can get dirty
- Dress your child in clothes and close-toed shoes (without laces) that they can easily take on and off by themselves. Elastic waistbands are preferred and easier for the child.
- Do not dress your child in one piece overalls; they are difficult to remove when children need to potty
- Your child will need a full set of weather appropriate change into clothes in a labeled Ziploc bag or waterproof reusable zip-bag that will be kept in their backpack
- No jewelry or headbands, which can easily catch on limbs, vines and play structures

## Beach Day Gear

- On beach days girls may wear their 2-piece swimsuits under their clothes. Shorts or skorts only please, *no skirts or dresses*.
- Boys may wear their swim suit into the Forest, and change into dry shorts after the beach if they so choose. If your child is uncomfortable with the swim suit lining, please feel free to cut it out.
- Shoes, not sandals, will protect their feet. However, your child may bring a pair of flip-flops with a backstrap, Natives, Crocs or similar to slip on after the beach.
- A comfortable sun hat similar to [www.rei.com/rei-garage/product/114321/sunday-afternoons-explorer-cap-sun-hat-infantstoddlerskids](http://www.rei.com/rei-garage/product/114321/sunday-afternoons-explorer-cap-sun-hat-infantstoddlerskids)
- Medium or large pack light towel similar to Wise Owl Outfitters Camping Towel - Camping Accessories, Quick Dry Microfiber Towel for Travel, Hiking, Yoga, Workout, and Backpacking <https://a.co/d/7bxGdcV>

## Wet Weather Gear

- Your child is required to have this gear if it is raining or if there is a threat of rain
- Bogs Boots or similar waterproof, non leaking, **snug around the calf boots**.

- Rain pants similar to Lands' End, or REI brand.
- A light-weight rain coat with adjustable velcro closures at the wrist and a snug collar (similar to Columbia or REI). This article of clothing is intended to keep your child dry, not warm. We will use layers for warmth.
- Smart Wool socks or similar
- Rain hat similar to REI or Outdoor Research brand

### **Cold Weather Gear**

- *Layering is key to comfort during our cold weather days and provides more warmth than one large coat.*
- Warm jacket and fleece layers
- A base layer of 2-piece silk long underwear
- Waterproof mittens or gloves
- A warm, snug hat or beanie
- Smart Wool socks or similar

### **Pottying in the Forest**

We understand that there will be occasional accidents, but we prefer that all children be toilet proficient in the Forest, and be comfortable with “going” outside. We will make the potty place as private as can be. We have a portable potty chair, biodegradable waste bags and wipes. We always strive to leave no trace in the Forest.

## **Your Child's Physical Safety and Emotional Well-being**

Our forest discipline guidelines are set in place to protect your child's physical safety, the safety of others as well as the feelings of emotional safety and well-being.

Age appropriate discipline for the young child can be approached on several levels. The teachers work to create a positive, emotionally calm atmosphere where the teacher sets consistent boundaries. Teachers work with the young child's innate tendency to imitate the adult in the environment and strive to be worthy of the children's imitation. Warmth, humor, song and predictable weekly rhythms are just a few tools that help create an environment where children can learn and thrive. Teachers consistently and carefully observe the interactions and play of the children so that they will know when it is time to redirect a child to prevent a difficult situation before it begins. Teachers assist the children to right a hurtful situation and care for a child whom they might have harmed. Teachers strive to set a tone of respect and empathy and to strengthen the social instincts and cohesiveness of the class. Teachers also work with parents to help create a home life that has a healthy discipline, sense of calm and connection. We know this can be a challenging task and are here to work alongside families and offer our input and resources. Teachers strive to work in partnership with caregivers and parents to help children grow and develop self-regulation. If a child displays ongoing aggressive or negative behavior, his/her teacher will arrange for a meeting to discuss this behavior. Parents are asked to share with their child's teacher any circumstances that might affect the child's behavior at school, such as family issues, visitors at home, illnesses, etc. This information will always be held in confidence and is essential to a teacher's work with the children. Sharing such information will assist the teacher and a child's family to better understand a child's difficulties and develop a consistent plan to address issues at home and in school. At times a teacher may recommend additional services or request medical attention be provided to help better address and understand a child's particular needs. This will be done in the spirit of working in partnership with families to help find resources to assist the child to thrive physically, intellectually, and developmentally.

We will discourage competitiveness and encourage cooperation in all our activities and games. We will have a no tolerance policy for hitting, grabbing, pinching, name calling and aggressive, or exclusive behavior. Children will sometimes become physically aggressive in an effort to communicate frustration or anger before the child has learned to communicate these feelings with words. In such an event, the teachers will work to maintain a sense of emotional safety for the child who has been harmed as well as help to mediate between all of the children involved. In severe cases, the child who has harmed another child will be sent home and teachers and parents will discuss the situation via phone in more detail at the end of the school day.

The safety of every child is of utmost importance to your forest teachers.

**If your child hides or runs away from the teachers, putting the entire class at risk, your child will be sent home for the remainder of the day.**

For the health of your child and the safety of all of the children, if after working with you to help your child to participate harmoniously in class activities, help your child in the process of separation from his or her home environment, and/or use kind hands with their friends, it may be necessary to ask that your child be withdrawn from Forest GnomeSchool. Such a decision would be made by the teachers after substantial discussion and deliberation with all parties

involved. In such an event the school will return any prepaid tuition, but not the enrollment fee, supply fee, deposit or any tuition applicable to the time the child was enrolled in the school. The school will return any prepaid tuition that exceeds the time that the child was enrolled.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

- Punctuality is extremely important for arrival and dismissal
- If you are going to be late for either arrival or dismissal, please contact your child's teacher
- If your child is going to be absent, please contact your child's teacher before the school day begins
- If you will be going on a planned vacation, please let your child's teacher know at least a week in advance

**Discipline for the Child**

Age appropriate discipline for the young child can be approached on several levels. Forest GnomeSchool teachers strive to lead by example and to be worthy of imitation by the children. The teachers work to create a positive, emotionally calm atmosphere where the teacher sets consistent boundaries. Warmth, humor, song and predictable weekly rhythms are just a few tools that help create an environment where children can learn and thrive. Our teachers carefully observe the interactions and play of the children so that they will know when it is time to redirect a child to prevent a difficult situation before it begins or to help children to mitigate a tricky situation. The teachers assist the children to right a wrong situation and care for a child whom they might have harmed.

Teachers strive to set a tone of respect and empathy and to strengthen the social instincts of the classes. Teachers also work with parents to help create a home life that has a healthy discipline and a sense of calm and connection. We know this can be a challenging task and are here to work alongside the families and offer our input and resources. Forest GnomeSchool teachers strive to work in partnership to help your child grow and develop self-regulation. If a child displays ongoing aggressive or negative behavior, his/her teacher will arrange for a meeting to discuss this behavior. Parents are asked to share with their child's teacher any circumstances that might affect the child's behavior at school, such as family issues, visitors at home, illnesses, etc. This information will always be held in confidence and is essential to a teacher's work with the children. Sharing such information will assist in the process of better understanding a child's difficulties and develop a consistent plan to address issues at home and in school. At times a teacher may recommend additional services or request medical attention be provided to help better address and understand a child's particular needs. This will be done in the spirit of working in partnership with families to help find resources to assist the child to thrive physically, intellectually, and developmentally.

Hitting, biting, or otherwise hurting other children, can happen on occasion. Children will sometimes bite in an effort to communicate frustration or anger before the child has learned to communicate these feelings with words. However, it is necessary that a child be sent home immediately when repeated biting (or other harmful behavior) occurs. This helps to impress upon the child and the other children that this behavior is not tolerated in school.

For the health of your child and the safety of all of the children, if after working with you to help your child to participate harmoniously in class activities, help your child in the process of separation from his or her home environment, and/or use kind hands with their friends, it may be necessary to ask that your child be withdrawn from the school. Such a decision would be made by the teacher and administration after substantial discussion and deliberation with all parties involved. In such an event, it is the school's policy to return any prepaid tuition, but not the enrollment fee, supply fee, deposit or any tuition applicable to the time the child attended the school.

## **Sleep and Nutrition**

Bedtime routines can provide a wonderful opportunity to slow down the pace of the day and be together with your child in a quiet, warm setting. Children should be in bed early (by 8:00 or 8:30 pm). This will enable your child to get a good rest and give parents time for themselves as well. After the evening meal and clean-up activities, a child can wash up with his/her parent, brush teeth and get into bed. Parents can then choose a bedtime routine that is repeated the same every bedtime. When a routine is established every day at the same time, the child becomes accustomed to the rhythm and feels secure, looking forward to this special time each day.

Children require 10-12 hours of sleep each night. Early, consistent bedtimes provide the children with sufficient rest for a cheerful awakening and a happy day at school. If your child has been up late at night for special reasons, we ask that you keep her/him home from school. It is very difficult for a young child to self-regulate when they are tired.

Teachers will be happy to work with families to give suggestions on how to make bedtime smoother for your family.

Please ensure that your child has a nutritious **sugar free** breakfast at home. It is very important for your child to come to school with a belly full of nutritious foods. A warm protein-rich meal served with fruit and whole grains is both filling and sustaining.

Please provide healthy, low (no) sugar options with a balance of protein and carbohydrates. Please do not include any candy treats. We request that you allow your child to participate in packing her/his own lunches. Water bottles and lunch boxes should be media free.

We discourage sharing lunches because some children have food allergies.

## **What not to Bring to School**

A child's personal toys should remain at home.

Clothing displaying Cartoon characters and TV or movie stars, including Disney princesses and SuperHeroes are not to be worn as they interrupt deep imaginative play based on a company's creation versus a child's personal creation and imagination..

Please see our school media policy below.

## **Communication between Home and School**

The lines of communication between the parent and teacher are always open. You may call at any time to leave a message for the teacher to return your call and/or to request a parent-teacher conference or appointment. If the teacher ever feels that a conference is necessary, she or he will contact the parent to schedule a convenient time.

Please take classroom concerns to the teacher first. If the teacher and parents are unable to resolve the issue, the issue may then be brought to the Administrator for a joint meeting. School concerns, not child or curriculum related, may be brought directly to the Administration.

## **Attendance List**

At all times, the teachers will have an attendance list with them with full names of the children and their parents, an emergency contact number for caregivers and parents, notations of children with any known allergies, known reactions to insect bites or stings and any other medical conditions, and a full first aid kit and authorized medication a child may need.

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

Our school relies on volunteers. Each family is requested to volunteer 10 hours annually to give back to the community as part of our mission. However, we understand that this may not be possible for all families. For those unable to contribute their time and talent, we offer a buyout option. At the end of the school year, families who have not donated service hours or pledged to buy-out service hours will be charged \$40 per hour. Volunteers will be required to fill out a Volunteer Affidavit.

## **Media Policy**

Forest GnomeSchool follows a “no media” policy. We are dedicated to nurturing the children’s capacities for imagination, healthy emotional development, independent thinking and positive action. More and more research is showing the detrimental effects of screen time on the young child. This ranges from rising levels of obesity to low reading levels and hyperactivity. Childhood is the time for learning through activity. We encourage children to play energetically and imaginatively, to spend lots of time outdoors in nature, to run, climb, draw, paint, create and play games as healthy alternatives to media-based entertainment.

Although every family must decide this issue for itself, the Forest GnomeSchool adheres to the LifeWays and Waldorf principle of encouraging families to eliminate media or limit it as much as possible. Our emphasis is on loving human interaction with warm speech, live singing, verses, and stories rather than technology. LifeWays and Waldorf Early Childhood Centers are television and video-free environments except for use in administration and adult education.

**We firmly ask that children not engage in any media prior to school day.** This will help the children benefit the most out of imaginative play and story, which are directly linked to intellectual development. If you would like more information about this, please ask your teacher or the school administration and we would be glad to discuss this with you.

**Any child who disturbs the healthy classroom and play environment due to not adhering to our school's media policy at home may be asked to leave the school.**



## **Forest GnomeSchool**

### **Weather and Emergency Action Plan**

Date last reviewed: August 2023

#### **Introduction**

The Northeast Florida weather can pose a threat to safety, and because of that the teachers at Forest GnomeSchool have made a strong commitment to our student's physical safety and emotional well-being while under our direction and care. This Weather and Emergency Action Plan was written in order to maintain our student's safety to the best of our ability at all times. We will review this plan semi- annually to ensure its adherence and effectiveness.

#### **Weather Appropriate Clothing**

Forest classes take place outside in nature in all kinds of weather including light or heavy rain and intense heat and cold. Teachers, volunteers and students are required to wear weather appropriate clothing. This allows the children to fully immerse themselves in nature and be content and comfortable. As the old saying goes: "There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing choices." Parents should review the outdoor clothing guidelines that are both stated in this handbook as well as discussed with parents prior to the beginning of the school year. Please make sure that your child is dressed appropriately.

#### **Reasonable Safety Rules**

Teachers will address important and reasonable safety rules to students for all activities that could be potentially harmful such as tree climbing, wandering from the group, sharp sticks, and coming into contact with plants, snakes and other animals, and insects.

#### **Severe Weather**

Teachers recognize that there are dangers in the outdoors and severe weather is one of them. Severe weather constitutes high winds that pose a threat of falling branches and the presence of lightning. Severe weather also includes the threat of hurricanes, tornadoes, and severe thunderstorms.

#### **Severe Weather determination prior to the start of school**

Each day before school begins, teachers will consult the local weather forecast and determine whether the class will be able to meet that day. If not, school will be canceled for the day. This missed day will be made up on a future Friday and a week's advance notice will be provided for that date.

### **Severe Weather determination during program hours**

Teachers will be continuously monitoring weather conditions visually and via cell phone during class time. In the event that weather conditions change during class time, the school group will immediately walk to the nearest covered shelter to await pick up by the parents. If it is before 11:00 a.m. a makeup class will be arranged for a Friday. We have a procedure in place for sending a group text message out to parents in the event that weather conditions change during the program hours and the decision is made to cancel class. Parents need to ensure that teachers have a current and active cell phone number to use in case of emergency alert.

### **Lightning Policy**

The school's lightning policy will mirror that of the Atlantic Beach Lifeguard station and calls for evacuation when there is visible lightning.

### **Extreme Weather Closures**

Forest GnomeSchool will usually follow the Duval County School District's lead. If class will be canceled for the day, parents will be notified via text no later than 7:15 the morning of.

**Forest GnomeSchool**

**Medical Emergency Plan and Procedures**

Date last reviewed: August 2023

## **Introduction**

Accidents happen, whether at school or in our own backyard. This Medical and Emergency Plan was written to ensure students' safety to the best of our ability at all times. We also want parents and caregivers to be aware of Forest GnomeSchool's Medical Emergency Protocol. We will review this plan throughout the year to ensure its adherence and effectiveness.

## **CPR and First Aid Training**

Every Forest GnomeSchool staff member holds current training certificates in CPR and First Aid. The Forest GnomeSchool teachers also hold current Red Cross LifeGuard certifications.

## **First Aid Kits**

The teachers and assistants will both carry stocked First Aid kits in their backpacks while in the field. The First Aid kits will be replenished regularly.

## **Standard Medical Emergency Procedure**

In the event that a medical emergency occurs, teachers are trained to follow this standard medical emergency procedure:

- 1) The teacher will stay with the injured child to assess the injury and administer basic first aid.
- 2) The assistant will stay with the rest of the class to keep them calm. She will re-engage the children into an activity and take them to a safe area if necessary. For example, the assistant would walk the children a safe distance from a wasp nest.
- 3) The teacher will administer First Aid to the injured child.
- 4) The teacher will call the injured child's parents to notify them of the injury and the first aid treatment she administered. The teacher and the parents will then make a verbal decision as to whether the child will stay for the remainder of the school day, or if the parents or an approved caregiver will pick them up at the location.
- 5) If the child's discomfort prevents their ability to participate in class activities, the parents will be required to make arrangements to come and get their child.

## **Standard Medical Emergency Procedure for Serious and Life Threatening Injuries**

- 1) **Snake Bite.** The teacher will immediately transport the injured child to Baptist Beaches Medical Center on 13<sup>th</sup> Street in Jacksonville Beach. Baptist Beaches Medical Center is the closest ER with anti-venom. Estimated 18 minutes via A1A to Penman. The teacher will notify the hospital by phone that she is on the way, and then notify the parents. There will be a car seat in the teacher's car at all times.

- 2) **Severe Bleeding or Head, Neck, or Back Trauma.** The teacher will stabilize the injury. The assistant will immediately call 911 and the child's parents. Emergency Medical Services will take the child to Baptist Beaches Medical Center. There are two fire stations less than two miles from Hanna Park.
- 3) **Broken Bones, Sprains, and Bruises of the Leg, Foot, Hand, Collar Bone, Arm, and Finger.** Teachers will administer First Aid, stabilize the injury, and call the child's parents to notify them of the injury. The parents will come to the location to retrieve their child. If necessary, 911 will be called for hospital transport.
- 4) **Sudden Illness.** Sudden illness such as vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and severe headaches will require the parent or an approved caregiver to come to the location and retrieve their child.

### **Cell phones**

All teachers will have a working, fully charged cell phone with them at all times. In the event that a 911 call is necessary, one teacher will remain with the children while the other teacher steps aside to make the call.

### **CPR and First Aid**

All teachers have current CPR and First Aid, and Red Cross LifeGuard certifications.

### **Children with known Medical Needs**

Teachers must be trained by the parents of children with known medical needs in specific emergency procedures for enrolled children, including but not limited to those that require the use of an asthma inhaler or EPIPEN.

### **Arrivals and Departures**

The school day will begin promptly at the designated time of your child's class. We request that your child arrive on time. The child who is late is at a considerable disadvantage entering into play. This is especially true for a child who has a tendency toward shyness and/or difficulty with transitions. We ask that you say goodbye to your child before they cross into the school. The teacher will greet both of you and then direct your child to put away his/her belongings with the help of the teacher's assistant. If you have some questions or want to share some pertinent information about your child with the teacher, please present it in a note, text or email so that the teacher is able to maintain her focus on the welcoming of all the children.

Punctuality plays an important role in the rhythm of the opening and closing of the school day. Please arrive on time to pick up your child. If you run into an emergency and are running late, contact your child's teacher or please call the office at 904-241-3259.

Your child will be released only to the custodial parent or legal guardian and the persons listed on the Childcare Application form. When someone other than the custodial parent or legal guardian is picking up your child, please inform that person of the departure procedures and provide the office with the change in writing, via email or note. This pick up person must show identification to the teacher at dismissal.

## **Absences and Illness**

**The health of the children and caregivers is of utmost importance.** Any child who is ill with an infectious or contagious condition must not be brought to school until the end of the infectious phase. If your child is ill and will not be attending that morning, please contact your teacher and then call the office, 904-241-3259. If there is some question concerning your child's state of health, it is often better to keep your child at home.

If fever, vomiting and/or diarrhea have occurred, parents must keep their child home to rest for at least 24 hours after the last occurrence.

The teachers will not be able to administer any daily medications other than an Epipen or an asthma inhaler. Please see the section titled "Children with Known Medical Needs" in this handbook.

If a child receives a minor injury during school hours, he or she may be offered a homeopathic dose of arnica, calendula for bug bites, antibacterial ointment, or a band-aid as needed.

## **Communicable Diseases**

Parents will be contacted for early pick-up if a child develops any symptoms that suggest illness such as:

- Unusual listlessness
- Excessively red, yellow, crusty or draining eyes
- Yellow or green nasal drainage or severe cough
- Skin rash
- Persistent nausea, with or without vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Persistent headache, stomachache, or sore throat
- Elevated temperature

## **Forest Gnomeschool Parent Handbook Agreement and Authorizations**

Year \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please read our Exemption Letter and site notes on how we are meeting these requirements:

[Exemption Letter](#)

[Exemption Letter with Notes](#)

Please initial one:

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to my child's photo being used in the Forest GnomeSchool's media

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give consent to my child's photo being used in the Forest GnomeSchool's media

*Please initial:*

**Sunscreen and Bug Spray Reapplication Authorization:** \_\_\_\_\_

*\*\*Teachers will reapply bug spray and sunscreen as needed.*

*\*\*Non aerosols and reef safe are requested*

**Campfire Authorization:** \_\_\_\_\_

*\*\*Children may enjoy a safe and secure campfire during class or field trip.*

I/We have read completely the provided Parent Handbook. \_\_\_\_\_

I/We understand that we must bring this signed form on the first day of school in order for our child to begin her/his program. \_\_\_\_\_

I/We have read the Exemption Letter and notes in this document and understand that Forest GnomeSchool is a Kindergarten Enrichment program License # E04DU00333 and meets the criteria to be exempt from Early Childhood Licensure pursuant to 65C-22.008(3)(b), Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C). \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature(s) \_\_\_\_\_