**NARROW WAY NATURE SCHOOL PARENT HANDBOOK**

***Forest Kindergarten History and Philosophy***

Friedrich Frobel, a German educator, opened the world’s first outdoor “kindergartens” (German for “children’s gardens”) more than 150 years ago. He believed young children should spend their time playing in nature and away from so much emphasis on learning letters and numbers. Today, across Europe, thousands of these “forest kindergartens” have been established where children spend their entire class time outdoors year-round. Narrow Way Nature School (NWNS) is play-based and allows children to develop their skills and habits over time and at their own pace. Children learn naturally to be self-motivated, cooperative, respectful, grateful, and aware of their impact on the earth. Children experience outdoor adventures in all weather conditions. NWNS is made as safe as is reasonably possible, to facilitate children’s risk-taking. It provides a complete immersion in nature helping to build a child’s sense of place in the world. Research strongly supports the idea that young children, particularly ages 2-6, learn best through direct experiences with the world around them. Being outdoors provides them with not only fresh air, but it also encourages imaginative play, creativity, hand-eye coordination and balance, physical strength, and mental clarity. By tapping into their innate sense of wonder about nature, we can help children learn basic environmental and natural science principles, as well as respect for all living beings. Lessons flow organically from the natural rhythms of the seasons and from the children’s daily discoveries. There are no set lesson plans: each day is shaped by the animals, insects, birds, amphibians, weather and foraging that is encountered, providing spontaneous teachable moments.

***NWNS Objectives***

● Provide young children the time, space and play to develop their fullest potential

 ● Provide opportunities for all activities to be child-initiated and child-led, with adults acting as facilitators

 ● Provide individual attention with the following teacher to child ratios: 1:5 teacher-to-child for nature preschool, 1:8 for ages 7-12

● Build children’s on-going relationship with the land, to one another, and to themselves

● Provide opportunities to work collaboratively to create, problem solve, support one another, dream of a bigger and better world

● Encourage healthy habits and lifestyles

● Facilitate children’s risk-taking, made as safe as is reasonably possible

 ● Increase motivation, self-esteem, and concentration

 ● Develop respect for the natural world and respect for its dangers

 ● Stimulate children’s innate curiosity by being close to nature

● Teach children to become well informed and caring stewards of the natural world

 ● Encourage family involvement in nature-related learning on site and at their homes

***Illness:*** To control the spread of illness, children with vomiting, diarrhea, and/or fever should not be sent to NWNS until the child has been symptom free, without medication, for 24 hours. Should a child become ill while at school, parents will be contacted to pick up the sick child promptly. If a parent cannot be reached immediately teaching staff will call the next emergency contact to arrange pick-up.

 ***Dispensing medication:*** You will need to provide a signed authorization that allows teachers to administer medication, even non-prescription. Specific instructions regarding dosage, frequency, and symptoms of the condition for which the medication is administered should be listed on the authorization form signed by a parent. The medication should be labeled with the child’s name. The NWNS staff member who administers the medication will document the time, the dosage, and any noticeable side effects.

***Academic Calendar***: NWNS follows Darlington County Department of Education Academic Calendar for start and end dates and all holidays.

***Severe Weather Closings:***  In the event of inclement weather, NWNS will make every effort to open as usual. This means that we will NOT follow Darlington County weather delays and closings. We strive for the children to experience all types of weather in order to embrace the values of a forest school. However, to preserve the safety of our children and staff, we will carefully assess the weather forecasts and current conditions, and close if conditions warrant such actions. If warnings are issued during school hours, or heavy downpours and lightning occur, all children will be moved indoors until the threat is over. It is at the discretion of the NWNS Director to make the decision to dismiss early, open late, or close. In the event of delays or cancellations, a decision will be made by 7:30 a.m. and broadcast via the following outlets: ● NWNS Facebook page ● Text message

***Food at School***: NWNS strives to incorporate sustainable practices in all we do and encourage our parents to support those efforts. Please send foods in reusable containers or minimally and/or compostable pack. Children will eat outside on most days. Teachers are aware of any allergies present in their class from the information provided on the emergency form.

***Clothing and Gear List*** Because NWNS embraces all seasons and aims to remain outside during many types of weather, it is CRITICAL that your child has clothes and gear that allows him or her to play comfortably. We adhere to the motto: There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing choices. Below you will find a list of NECESSARY items as well as helpful tips and suggestions regarding clothing and gear. We have provided a checklist of required Items. This list of required gear is subject to change. As the school year progresses and children’s engagement with natural elements are monitored, teachers may add or change necessary items and gear that are optimal for children’s activities.

***Everyday Basic Gear***

• Water bottle (filled.) Children must be able to independently operate water bottle.

 • Waterproof, not water resistant, rain pants

 • Waterproof, not water resistant, rain jacket. It is best to go with a non-insulated rain jacket. You can always add base layers.

• Rain boots. Warm months: any kind of rubber rain boot. Cold months: insulated rain boots

• Labeled extra change of clothing in zip lock bag that includes: Warm months: short sleeve, quick dry shirt; quick dry shorts; socks; underwear. Cold months: base layer long sleeve shirt and pants, additional thick sweater or fleece jacket and fleece pants, wool socks, waterproof mittens, hat, underwear

**Winter**

• Insulated rain boots (Bogs, Oakiwear. No insulated snow “duck” boots please.)

• Full rain gear: Waterproof rain jacket and Waterproof rain pants. If you choose to wear snow pants or thick coats, they must fit under rain pants and rain jacket. Snow gear is only water resistant and not an acceptable outer layer. The outer layer must keep the wetness out!

• Two-piece long underwear: Silk or wool is best, but polyester is also a good choice. Layers! We strongly recommend that your child wear several layers of these materials!

 • Thick wool sweaters or fleece jacket

• Thick fleece pants

 • Wool socks (multiple pairs)

• Waterproof Mittens: Mittens are warmer than five-finger gloves and easier to pull on and off (side-zip are ideal). Wool or fleece mittens for a base layer if you choose

 • Wool or fleece hat

**Helpful Hints**

• Layering: Layering is key! Some days are 1-layer clothing days, some 2-layer days, some 3-layers. It is much easier to take layers off as needed than to warm a child that has already gotten chilled. The children’s needs throughout the day are often unpredictable and will depend not only on the weather conditions but also the child’s body temperature and activity level. We layer to adjust to the variety of conditions we encounter!

 In the winter: Wearing 2 layers of wool long underwear underneath a thick wool sweater and fleece pants is the most effective way to layer children under their rain gear in order to keep them warm without feeling too bulky.

 • We are going to get dirty! Please make sure you dress your children in clothes they can get messy.

 • Comfortability: All clothing and footwear should be loose fitting and roomy to allow the body’s own insulating layer to surround the skin. This is more comfortable and keeps the children warmer! Pants are more comfortable for children when they have elastic waists instead of buttons or snaps. Please stay away from one- piece clothing such as snow bibs, as they can be problematic when using the bathroom.

 • VERY IMPORTANT: Please label everything with your child’s name

**Child Safety Guidelines General Forest Rules**

● No Toys: Nature provides all the materials necessary for playing in the outdoors, so toys from home are not necessary. Art supplies and other learning materials will be provided.

 ● Boundaries: Children are expected to stay within the boundaries that have been established by teachers.

● Climbing trees: Children may climb trees at school while under adult supervision. They may not climb higher than twice their height and only after they have demonstrated competence.

● Sticks: The children may not play with sticks that are longer than their arm, unless it is clearly and responsibly being used as a walking stick, a tool (digging, for example), or for building, under the supervision of the teachers. Running is not permitted while holding a stick.

● Ingestion: Children will not eat or drink any substance found in nature without teacher permission. We are committed to keeping our children safe. We adhere to the following guidelines to provide consistent boundaries in the name of safety. We ask that parents uphold these same standards while onsite as well as at school events outside of regular school hours. It is also helpful to reinforce many of these practices at home. Physical Safety: The children are always within eyesight and earshot of an approved adult and maintains appropriate teacher to child ratio. The only people that interact with the school children during the day are preapproved by the faculty and are never alone with the children There are always two or more adults onsite at all times.

 ● Site Assessment: The sites and structures are checked for safety each morning before the children arrive at school.

 ● Fire Safety: Children are only in the presence of fire while under supervision of their teacher(s). Although a child may be invited by a teacher to help tend a fire, they are given very specific instructions based on their age and ability to discern a safe distance. They will help to collect and haul firewood, but the teachers are always in charge of adding fuel to the fire. There is always direct adult supervision when children are in the vicinity of fire or hot coals.

● Water Safety: All visits to the pond are under full supervision of the teachers. Children will be allowed to wade in water that is less than knee deep while wearing boots or barefoot if weather permits.

**Social & Emotional Safety**

We are committed to inspiring and teaching respect for the earth and all its creatures and this always includes modeling and fostering respect for self and for others . Outdoor learning provides many opportunities for cooperative play and teachers are there to guide children into co-creative adventures. There is a zero-tolerance policy for hitting, grabbing, pushing, name-calling, aggressiveness, or any other demeaning behavior. If these behaviors occur, the teacher will separate the instigating child from the group to a calm place for a one-on-one discussion. Should the behavior in question not shift in a timely manner, the child will be removed from the group and be taken into the school office until the child is ready to return to his class. Recurring instances of disruptive behavior will result in a parent-teacher conference to implement a behavior plan. We will work as a team to support each child to ensure a successful experience at NWNS.

Although we wish to be able to serve all children that come to our school, we will not allow the health and safety of the class to be compromised. We do take any intimidating behavior seriously and recognize that it makes a deep impact upon others. Our teaching philosophy holds the dignity of each child at its very core. Our curriculum inherently supports empowerment, teaches judgment, honors boundaries, values intuition, increases awareness, models clear communication, and encourages healthy expression of all feelings. Thank you for contributing to the safety of our children and our community by modeling the types of behavior that we want to encourage in the children.

 **First Aid at School:** In the case of a minor injury, the teachers may administer basic first aid—wash the injury with soap and water and cover with band-aids—as they see fit. The parents will be notified of any significant injuries at pickup (or after school via phone call if the child is picked up by another adult). In the case of a major injury, the teachers will call 911 and the parents/emergency contact and apply basic first aid until medical help arrives. All teachers always have easy access to First Aid kits. Children will always be sent to the nearest hospital if such extreme measure is needed.

 **Bathroom Safety**: The bathroom area consists of an outdoor port-a-potty. The teachers are located so that they can hear the children and are available to help when needed. If a child needs assistance using the bathroom, the teacher that helps is close enough to the other children and teachers that they are not “alone” with the child since they are in proximity to and within earshot of others. The bathroom door is not closed while a teacher is physically assisting a child in that space but may be closed for privacy when the child is in there alone while the teacher waits outside the door.

 **Emergency Evacuation**: In the unlikely case that we would need to evacuate the property all parents would be called.

**NWNS Behavior Plan:** An important part of the preschool and kindergarten experience is helping children learn how to get along in the world, enjoy being with other children, and follow the direction of an adult other than their parent. A caring and positive approach will be taken regarding behavior management and discipline. The teachers will focus on the positive behaviors of the children and reinforce those behaviors as often as possible. Our goal is to help the children develop self-control and responsibility for their actions. Discipline Strategies

1. Encouraging children to use their words when having a disagreement with another child.

2. Facilitating children in their attempts to settle their own disputes.

3. Redirecting behavior when this seems potentially effective.

4. Separating a child from the group

 5. Counseling children individually about their behaviors.

6. Making parents aware of the situation.

**Parent Handbook Agreement Form**

The NWNS Parent Handbook lists the values, policies, rules, and regulations of NWNS. Its purpose is to assure the smooth operation of our program. Reading and understanding this handbook are imperative to the operations of NWNS. By signing this form, you are agreeing to abide by these written provisions of NWNS.

I understand that my signature on this form binds me to observe the policies, rules, and regulations as set forth by NWNS.

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