



NBNC Afterschool Programs

We are excited that you and your family are going to be a part of our North Branch Afterschool Programs, Explorers and Trekkers! This handbook is designed for parents and guardians to provide you with information about the programs and our daily routines.

Program Philosophy

Our teaching style at NBNC encourages children to learn through direct experience in nature. During these programs, we adopt an off trail mentality, using our local landscape to create opportunities to push our limits and go beyond our comfort levels within an environment that is safe both physically and emotionally. We make it a point to venture away from the beaten path as we explore areas that many people have walked past but few have ventured into. Stretching our limits together as a group strengthens our bond and sense of community. It could be sledding down a 40 foot chute in the deepest recesses of Montpelier's forests, brushing past ancient hemlocks, or simply following a set of deer tracks as far as we can, leading us through frozen marsh and across steep ravines, post holing in snow up past our knees. These are experiences that test both our mental and physical boundaries, pushing us right up against our comfort levels and beyond. Sharing these experiences within the group strengthens our communal bond. Utilizing the outdoors in this way makes the landscape as much of a character in our adventures as each other. So why do we do all of this? What we are really doing is creating memories. These memories will be even stronger and longer lasting having been formed within a community of peers - friends growing up together, romping in the forest. The groundwork for nostalgia is being laid here. When these kids are grown and have children of their own, they will look back upon this time spent in the woods and want to recreate it for them; passing down a love for the outdoors from one generation to the next. And it all starts with a little goofing off in the woods.

Program

The North Branch Explorers program enrolls students in grades 1st through 3rd. Trekkers is for students in grades 4th through 8th. Both programs spend afternoons outside in the forests and fields at the North Branch Nature Center, Hubbard Park, and North Branch River Park. We employ a model of experiential education where children learn by doing through activating all of their senses. During our time together, we'll usually open with

some sort of cooperative game, explore various habitats, play stealth and awareness games in the forests and fields, and take on challenge projects such as shelter or fire building, all while staying on the lookout for animal sign and tracks. Activities at each age level will follow the interests of those enrolled and be developmentally appropriate. Each semester we have a celebratory feast. In the fall we have “Treksgiving” where everyone brings a contribution to cook over the fire. (Explorers is still working on a title for their feast!) When the sap flows in the spring, we have our annual Pancake Feast, where we boil sap from trees we’ve tapped and cook pancakes over the fire. Basically, we’re just a bunch of kids taking time to exhale while playing in the woods after a stressful day of school. Our primary goal is to have some fun in a natural, safe setting and if we happen to learn something along the way, even better.

NBNC Community Events & Programs

The North Branch Nature Center is a valuable resource to the central Vermont community. From monarch tagging, bird banding, summer camps, and school programs, to our naturalist lecture series and miles of trails to discover, NBNC has much to offer anyone who wants to learn about and enjoy the natural world. We hold many public events throughout the year, some at no cost to you at all. Please consider becoming a member of NBNC and enjoy the benefits of discounts on special programs! For membership information contact: info@northbranchnaturecenter.org.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Medications and Safety

At NBNC, the safety of each child is our highest priority. We take all reasonable precautions to ensure your child’s physical and emotional safety and to provide a quality after school experience.

**If your child needs to take medication while here at NBNC or has a life threatening allergy, please make sure that this is clearly stated on your registration form. We will then work with you to ensure that your child receives the care that they need.

All after school lead staff are certified in a minimum of Red Cross First Aid and CPR. Small bumps and scrapes will be treated by a staff member. In the event of a medical emergency, the after school staff will contact you or those listed as Emergency Contacts. If necessary, your child will be transported to the nearest appropriate medical facility. We have a series of safety measures that are in place for North Branch after school programming. In addition to our fire, edible wild plant, tool use and general safety procedures and protocols, every day, we:

- Attend to the social, emotional, physical, and mental needs of each child through holistic programming.

- Treat each child with compassion, respect, and dignity.
- Engage in supportive, open, non-violent communication with children and their families.
- Practice mindful awareness of our bodies, our actions and our communication.
- Follow seasonal and emergent curriculum that empowers students as leaders of their own learning.
- Assess the hazards and risks present in the setting and make decisions related to the risk/benefit analysis.
- Engage each child's love for the outdoors in fun and exciting ways.

Illness

Please, for the sake of your own child as well as other children in his/her presence, do not send your child to camp if they are ill. **If you find that your child is ill in the morning, please phone us to report your child absent.**

Discipline Policy and Procedures

NBNC is committed to providing each and every child with a productive and enjoyable outdoor experience. Our goal is to create a fun and nurturing environment that accommodates individual needs and learning styles. In order to maintain the safety and quality of the program, we will employ appropriate disciplinary measures (verbal warnings, coaching, taking a break, notifying parents). However, if a child exhibits chronic disruptive behavior and does not respond to disciplinary techniques, we reserve the right to send that child home from programming (for the day or for the remainder of the semester). Under these circumstances, refunds are not awarded. If a child causes physical or emotional harm to a fellow student (e.g., hitting, pushing, verbal threats, etc.) they will be asked to leave the program upon notification of their parent/guardian.

Drop-off and Pick-up Procedure

Drop-off is between 3 and 3:30 pm. Pick-up is at 5:30 pm. **Please do not drop off or pick up a child without signing in or out. Please remind anyone else who is on your authorized pick up list to sign in & out. Visual or verbal acknowledgement by a staff member is always required upon delivery of children.** Children can only go home with people who are listed on the "Identification and Emergency Information" form. In the event of an emergency, people will be contacted in the order in which you list them on the form. If you need to add someone to your pick up and drop authorization list, please amend it in writing.

Please be prompt in picking up your child each day. *If you arrive late to pick up your child from the program, we reserve the right to request a late pickup fee of \$5 for every 10 minutes after the designated*

pick-up time. If your child will be absent or arriving late for any reason, please notify us by phone in advance at 229-6206.

Clothing

This is an outdoor-based program. *It is absolutely imperative that you provide the proper clothing so that your child is protected from the elements.* We will spend our entire time, 3pm to 5:30pm, outside, rain or shine. In case of extreme cold or lightening, we will use the education barn for our activities. If your child is warm, they are happy and able to participate in the fun! There is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing!

The following list of clothing is necessary for your child to have.

- **Rain pants**
- **Rain jacket with a hood**
- **Long – underwear bottoms and top** (moisture wicking))
- **Wool sweater or fleece top**
- **Snow pants**
- **Snow jacket** (must be insulated and water resistant)
- **Socks** (wool or fleece, NO COTTON!!)
- **Boots** (rain boots for the wet seasons/ insulated boots for snow season)
- **Hat** (wool or fleece)
- **Gloves or mittens** (again, wool or fleece, please no cotton) 2 pairs
- **Neck warmer or scarf**

LAYERING is the key, as you will sometimes be very active outdoors and sometimes sitting. Whatever the children are not wearing, we can store away in a dry shelter until needed. On wet and cold days, pay close attention to the layers close to their skin. Choose a “wicking” material (i.e.; poly-propylene or capilene, fleece, or wool), this wicks moisture off of the body, rather than soaking through. Cotton is not the best choice because it will hold moisture close to the body and can make a person chill. Hats are essential on wet and cold days and required. When it comes to boots you should look at getting a boot that is one size larger than your child’s foot. This will allow for thicker winter socks to assist in insulating the foot. The best insulation for the feet would be two pairs of wool socks with water-proof boots that have a little wiggle room.

There are of course natural consequences to not wearing the proper clothing. You get wet, cold, tired, and very unhappy! **To ensure a positive experience at North Branch Afterschool Programs for everyone involved, all children are required to wear the proper clothing for the day’s conditions.** If you need help with some of the above items please ask. We sometimes have extras or can help you locate others.

Ticks

Of course, a program with a focus on nature is going to spend time in wild natural areas! Please check your child EVERY SINGLE DAY when your child returns home during tick season. Long pants with tick repellent on them can add protection. Deer ticks are extremely small and can be difficult to find. Ticks can be anywhere, including mown back yards or school playgrounds. As they become more prevalent throughout Vermont, routine tick checks should be built in to everyone's daily routine. Ask us for a "tick card" if you aren't positive how to ID them. During Trekkers we will do surface tick scans after exiting possible tick habitat, but we will not be doing a thorough check in the field. Checking of sensitive areas must be done at home.

Getting Dirty

We will send home muddy children often, especially during the spring mud season! There will be many times in which we will be down on all fours in the mud, examining animal tracks and sign along the riverbanks and through the forest. One part of being comfortable in nature is being comfortable with dirt. Please use old clothes that your children can get dirty and let them know that you don't mind! We will have plastic bags for bringing home muddy clothes. Please make sure that your child has a change of clothes with them each session. This will be especially important in late Fall or early Spring. Having wet clothes in freezing temperatures is not only uncomfortable, but can be extremely dangerous.

Water

Each child should have a water bottle with them every day. Water is precious and staying hydrated in all weather is important to regulating body temperature.

Healthy Meals

We ask that your child comes prepared to be outside by bringing a healthy snack for our post hike snack break. Snacks that contain some level of protein are helpful in restoring our energy levels. Soup in a thermos for cold days really helps keep a body going! In the event that any child has food allergies, all families will be notified as to what that food is so that we do not pack food that may cause harm to each other. We will bring our food and water into the forest or field to enjoy, so please try to send zero waste snacks (bulk put in washable containers instead of heavy packaging on individual items). We will be practicing Leave No Trace principles, so everything we pack in, we must pack out.

Cancellation

In the case of extreme weather, we may need to cancel a session. If local area public schools have canceled for the day, it is a good chance we will too. We will notify you in two ways: by email and by telephone. In the case of a canceled session, we will schedule a make-up day. If for some reason your child cannot attend a session, we cannot reimburse you for that missed day.

Contact Information

If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us. For Trekkers related questions, please contact Ken: ken@northbranchnaturecenter.org or (802) 229-6206 ext. 106. For Explorers related questions, please contact Carrie: carrie@northbranchnaturecenter.org (802) 229-6206 ext. 107. Thank you for becoming part of the North Branch after school programs and we look forward to getting to know you and your children!