



# ECO Homeschool Parent/Guardian Handbook

**\*Special Notice: Please carefully review the new COVID-19 required screening and protocols.**

**We are a nut free program. Please respect this policy for the consideration and safety of all families attending.**

We are excited that you and your family are going to be a part of our North Branch Nature Center ECO Homeschool program! This handbook is designed for parents and guardians to provide you with information about the program and our daily routines.

## **Program**

The NBNC ECO Homeschool program enrolls students in grades 1st through 3rd (Ages 6yrs - 9yrs). This program will spend Monday mornings outside in the forests and fields at the North Branch Nature Center, Hubbard Park, and North Branch River Park.

For more than a decade, our ECO program has helped thousands of public school students throughout Central Vermont immerse themselves in nature by using the outdoors as an extension of their indoor classroom. Knowing that more students will be learning from home this school year, we are glad to launch our new ECO Homeschool program. Each Monday, the woods and fields of NBNC will be our classroom, where students will learn by doing, using all five senses to engage with the landscape through standards-based lessons led by our ECO Teacher-Naturalist. Each session will consist of games, songs, stories, and activities that are designed to help students directly engage with the land and the life that lives on it.

Our time together will be spent fully immersed in the natural world. We'll explore natural habitats and the organisms that live there, play cooperative and challenging games to develop our awareness and observational skills, we'll sing songs and share stories, as well as practice the time-tested skills of living with the land. Above all, we'll have fun together amongst friends!

## **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. Please consider becoming a member of NBNC and enjoy the benefits of discounts on special programs! For membership information contact: [info@northbranchnaturecenter.org](mailto: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 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 educational staff are certified in a minimum of 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.

## COVID-19 Screening and Protocols

In order to keep you, our staff, and our community safe, NBNC is adhering to strict safety protocols based on CDC and VT Department of Health guidelines. We're in this together, so here's what you can expect from us, and what we ask of you as a participant of an in-person NBNC program:

### What you can expect of us:

- **Breathing Room:** We've capped all our programs at 10 participants or fewer, and designed them to take place outdoors, with the exceptions of bathroom access and thunderstorm contingencies.
- **Cleanliness:** All potential shared surfaces will have been sanitized before and after each program. No two programs will share the same indoor space (including bathrooms) on any given day. We'll start each program with a briefing to ensure everyone is on the same page regarding behavior, expectations, masks, distancing, etc.
- **Professionalism:** We have completed state-mandated safety training, established a staff/board safety committee and a COVID-19 Task Force, and are adhering to strict workplace guidelines to make sure we are taking appropriate measures to make NBNC a safe place to work, learn, and play.
- **Honesty:** Our instructors will be following state safety guidelines, and complete health screenings prior to each program to ensure a healthy staff and a safe space for each program.
- **Respect:** Our staff and instructors will wear a mask at all times (inside and outside), and maintain at least 6' distance from all other people throughout all programs.
- **Transparency:** We want to make sure you are comfortable. If you have questions or concerns about our programs and policies, please reach out to us at [info@northbranchnaturecenter.org](mailto:info@northbranchnaturecenter.org).

### What we ask of you:

- **Honesty:** Do not send your child to the program if they are feeling ill in any way. You'll be asked to sign a waiver and health screening document every day upon drop off acknowledging that your child is symptom-free and hasn't been at high risk of exposure to the coronavirus recently. If your child develops COVID-like symptoms during the 6-week span of the program or within 14 days after the program, notify NBNC immediately so that contact tracing can be initiated.
- **Respect:** Participants will be required to wear a mask at all times (inside and outside), whenever social distancing is not an option. Children will be spaced 6 feet apart during snack time. **Please send your child with at least two masks** (the second will serve as a replacement in the event the first becomes wet or dirty).
- **Cleanliness:** Bathrooms will be sanitized by staff between each use. Children will be

required to wash hands after snack. Hand sanitizer will be provided by the instructors for sanitizing when away from the building.

- **Flexibility:** Please understand that programs may be cancelled on very short notice, and that our protocols are continually adapting to best available science and expert recommendations.

Thank you for your support in keeping our community safe.

### **Illness**

Please, for the sake of your own child as well as other children in their presence, do not send your child to camp if they are ill in any way. **If you find that your child is ill in the morning, please phone us to report your child absent. Please view our [COVID-19 Screening](#).**

### **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 8:15am and 8:30am. Pick-up is at 11:30 am.

**Please do not drop off or pick up a child without signing in or out. All families must complete the COVID screening prior to drop off.** A parent or guardian will be required to sign the screening form at every drop off. **If a parent or guardian will not be present at drop off, the online screening form must be checked and signed by said parent or guardian the morning of the program.** NBNC staff will conduct temperature checks with a non-contact thermometer upon a child's arrival. If a child does not successfully complete the screening, that child will not be able to participate in that day's program and must return home. If a child becomes ill during a program, they will be required to wait in a designated infirmary room while a parent or guardian comes to pick them up. Parents or guardians must pick their child up within one hour from the time of contact.

At pickup, we ask that adults remain socially distant while waiting to pick up their children. Children can only go home with people who are listed on the registration form. In the event of an emergency, contacts will be called 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 the entire 3 hours of program time outside, rain or shine. In case of extreme cold or lightning, we will use a separate inside space for each program's 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 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 backyards or school playgrounds. As they become more prevalent throughout Vermont, routine tick checks should be built into everyone's daily routine. Ask us for a "tick card" if you aren't positive how to ID them. During this program 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 and 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, especially in the cold.

### 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 are a **NUT FREE program!** 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.

If a program participant or instructor contracts COVID-19, shows symptoms of COVID-19, or has been exposed to someone with COVID-19, NBNC reserves the right to cancel the program until contact tracing and all other safety measures can be completed.

### **Contact Information**

If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact

**Dave Muska** at **dave@northbranchnaturecenter.org** or **(802) 229-6206 ext. 111**.

Thank you for becoming part of the North Branch ECO Homeschool program and we look forward to getting to know you and your children!