



Youth Programs Parent/Guardian Handbook

We are excited that you and your family are going to be a part of one of our North Branch Nature Center's youth programs. This handbook is designed to provide parents and guardians enrolled in Afterschool & ECO Homeschool programs with information you need to know regarding our youth programs.

Youth Programs

All of our Youth Programs take place 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 being fully immersed in the natural world and a supportive community of peers & instructors. Please review the 'Welcome Letter' shared with you for details specific to the program you are enrolled in.

North Branch Nature Center Community Events & Programs

At North Branch Nature Center, we envision a world where people learn, teach, and play together in nature, supporting healthy resilient communities and ecosystems. From monarch tagging, bird banding, summer camps, and school programs, to our naturalist lecture series and miles of trails to discover, NBNC has a wide variety of options for anyone who wants to learn about and enjoy the natural world. We hold many public events throughout the year, some at no cost. Please consider becoming a member of NBNC and enjoy the benefits of discount on special programs! For membership information contact: info@northbranchnaturecenter.org. For information about our programs visit [North Branch Nature Center](http://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, 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 NBNC Youth Programming. In addition to our fire, edible wild plant, tool use and general safety procedures and protocols 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

At NBNC we believe that being outdoors in nature provides significant social, emotional, physical, and intellectual benefits for our children. Our educational programming practices a nature-based approach to learning that builds health, happiness, and resilience. During this pandemic, we provide a safe and nurturing environment where children can engage with their peers and the natural world. For more about our philosophy around nature-based teaching and learning during COVID times, please see our position statements:

[Outdoor Learning for Healthy Students During COVID-19](#)

[Outdoor Learning in Cold Weather During COVID-19](#)

Our COVID protocols and expectations follow the most up-to-date guidance from the Vermont Department of Health and the Vermont Agency of Education, [available here](#). Our protocols are subject to change as these guidelines evolve.

For the most recent protocols, requirements, and expectations on masking, distancing, and all else at NBNC, please visit:

NorthBranchNatureCenter.org/COVID

For more information, please see the resource upon which we base our protocols:

[VT DOH & VT AOE - A Strong and Healthy Start - Revised Nov. 2020](#)

[VT DOH & VT AOE - Safety & Health Guidance for VT Schools - Physical Distancing FAQ](#)

[VT DOH & VT AOE - Health Guidance for Childcare & Out-of-School-Time Care](#)

[VT DOH & VT AOE - Prekindergarten Health Guidance Clarifications](#)

Illness

Please, do not send your child to a program if they or a member of your household are ill in any way. Should this occur your child will be admitted back into the program once a negative COVID-19 test result is presented for all household members or 14 days after the last known symptoms of illness in the household. If your child develops COVID-19 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. **If you find that your child is ill in the morning of the program, please phone us to report your child absent.** Please view our [COVID-19 Warning & Disclaimer](#).

Discipline Policy

NBNC is committed to providing each and every child with a safe, 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) when necessary. 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 the program, 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

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. If a child does not successfully complete the screening, that child will not be able to participate in that day's program. 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. 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 do not bring pets to pick-up/drop-off.

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 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**
- **Baselayer (bottoms and top)** - Insulative long underwear made of synthetic material or wool. Please, No Cotton.
- **Wool sweater or fleece top**
- **Snow pants**
- **Snow jacket** - must be insulated and water resistant
- **Socks (pair)**-wool or synthetic, No Cotton Socks
- **Boots** -rain boots for the wet seasons/insulated boots for snow season
- **Hat** -wool or synthetic
- **Gloves or Mittens (2 Pair)** - wool or fleece, please No Cotton.
- **Neck Warmer or Scarf**

When dressing for the outdoors LAYERING is the key as we will sometimes be very active and at other times be sitting or stationary. Whatever 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 safe and 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!

Tick Safety

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 throughout the day together, 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 signs 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 full 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 also a **NUT FREE program**. Please respect this policy for the consideration and safety of all families attending.

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.

Program 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. As we are fully an outdoor based program, special considerations will be made in regards to foul weather including wind and thunderstorms. Cold temperatures are generally fine if we are dressed well, but we will cancel the day if the temperatures are 10°F or below per Vermont State standards. We will notify you in two ways: first by email and then by telephone if we've not received a response from our cancellation email. In the case of a canceled session due to unsafe weather conditions, we will make efforts to schedule a make-up day. If for some reason your child cannot attend a particular day, 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 the program coordinator listed in the program's 'Welcome Letter'. We thank you for becoming part of North Branch Nature's Youth Programming and look forward to getting to know you and your children!