



Youth Programs Parent/Guardian Handbook

Our Shared Commitment...

Take care of yourself. Take care of others. Take care of the earth.

We strive to help people feel welcomed, oriented to the landscape, engaged, inspired, safe, and part of our community. We expect that all who enter this shared space do so in the spirit of welcoming kindness, inclusivity, respect, and curiosity. We ask that all visitors and participants share this commitment while at North Branch Nature Center.

Welcome!

We are excited that you and your family have chosen to be a part of North Branch Nature Center's youth programs. This handbook is designed to provide families, parents, and guardians with the information you'll need to have a wonderful, safe, and fun learning experience while at our outdoor youth programs (ECO Homeschool, Afterschool, & Out of School Camps).

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 at the start of the program for details specific to the program you are enrolled in.





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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.

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.

In addition to our general & activity based 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.





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COVID-19 Policies & 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. Our goal is to keep each other safe and healthy, and to remain open so your child can continue to be a part of our learning community.

Our safety committee evaluates and updates our policies and protocols regularly. **These protocols may be updated over the course of the school year** in accordance with the Vermont Agency of Education, the Vermont Department of Health, CDC, and City of Montpelier ordinances.

For the most recent protocols, requirements, and expectations, please visit: NorthBranchNatureCenter.org/COVID

Illness

Daily Health Screenings

We require that families perform a daily health screening before dropping their children off at NBNC. This includes **ensuring that they do not have any of the following symptoms:** Fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or chronic runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.

If Your Child is Sick

If your child has any of the symptoms listed above, do not bring them to the scheduled program. Please phone us to report your child absent. Children can return to an NBNC program once symptoms have improved and a negative COVID test is confirmed. Your child needs to be fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications before returning. Consult the following chart for guidance on masking, quarantining, and testing: [VT Agency of Education flow chart for schools](#). **If your child has tested positive for**





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COVID, notify NBNC immediately.

If a child becomes ill during a program, they will be required to wait in a designated 'infirmary' room at the nature center while a parent or guardian comes to pick them up. Parents or guardians must be available to pick their child up within one hour from the time of contact. In the event of an emergency, contacts will be called in the order in which you list them on the form.

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. If a child causes physical or emotional harm to a fellow student (e.g., hitting, pushing, verbal threats, etc.), depending upon the circumstances, they may be asked to leave the program upon notification of their parent/guardian. If a child is asked to not return to the program, a refund is not guaranteed.

Drop-off and Pick-up Procedure

Parents and guardians must sign children in upon arrival of the program and sign them out at pick-up.

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





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notify us by phone in advance at 229-6206.

Children may only leave with people who are listed as 'Authorized Pick Up/Drop Off' on our program registration form. If you need to add someone to your pick up/drop off authorization list, notify the program director and provide the addition in writing. ***Do not bring pets to pick-up/drop-off.***

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. The gear your student needs to feel comfortable and thrive off-trail is very different than what they would wear to the bus stop, or even a 40 minute outdoor recess. A waterproof outer layer, especially boots and rain pants, is essential to comfortably learn in damp vegetation and on soggy ground.

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 fully in all of the fun!

Clothing/Gear List: The following items are required for your child's participation in this program.

- Boots:** Waterproof boots/Rain Boots are great for most seasons, except for snow season when insulated & waterproof boots are necessary. *Rainboots are not snow boots.*
- Closed-toe captured-heel shoes**
- Rain pants** (*these are great for any season - it can be wet on the ground even on warm days*)
- Rain jacket with hood**
- Baselayer (bottoms and top):** - Insulative long underwear made of synthetic material or wool. Please, No Cotton.





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- Mid Layer:** Wool sweater, synthetic or fleece top/pants
- Snow pants:** Must be insulated and waterproof
- Winter Coat-** Must be insulated and water resistant
- Socks (2 pair):** Wool or synthetic, No Cotton Socks. (*If it is less than 40 degrees, it is very difficult to stay warm with cotton socks*)
- Hat:** wool or synthetic
- Gloves or Mittens (2 Pair):** Insulated & waterproof
- Neck Warmer or Scarf**

*** If you need help with sourcing any of the above items, please ask. We can help you locate the appropriate clothing if necessary and often have extras to loan out!**

Clothing Tips:

Footwear is an important consideration. It is often the case that toes get cold even when the rest of the body is warm. It is important to have *waterproof boots* that fit a little loosely so as not to constrict circulation. Consider getting a boot that is one half to one size larger than your child's foot. This will allow for thicker winter socks to be worn while not constricting movement & blood flow.

Layering is the key to dressing for the outdoors. We will at times be very active and at other times be stationary or sitting still. On wet and cold days, pay close attention to the layers close to the skin. Choose a "wicking" material (i.e.; poly-propylene, capilene, synthetic fleece, or wool). These materials wick moisture away from the body while still insulating. Cotton is **not** a good choice of outdoor clothing material because it holds moisture close to the body and chills core body temperature.

Hats are essential and on wet and cold days required. A hood is not a substitute for a warm, insulative hat. **To ensure a safe and positive experience for everyone involved, all children are required to wear the proper clothing for the day's conditions.**





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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 (anytime above 40 degrees Fahrenheit). 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 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! *Your child will need 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 dangerous. Consider keeping a supply of plastic bags handy in your car for transporting muddy and wet clothes home. Please refer to the clothing/gear list.

Food as Fuel in the Outdoors

We ask that your child comes prepared to be outside by bringing both a snack and lunch that will feed them for the duration of the time they are here. Foods that contain protein and healthy carbohydrates will restore energy levels and help fuel children through chilly days. Snack and lunch times are great opportunities to practice Leave No Trace and to learn how certain foods can provide energy and warmth. Consider packing snacks in sealable containers to avoid spills of leftovers inside





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backpacks (for example, pre-packaged yogurt can be substituted for slices of cheese and crackers).

Staying Hydrated

Each child should have at least one full 12-16 oz 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. Water bottles that have tight seals are important to avoid leaks and water is preferable to juice boxes. Warm tea or soup in a thermos on a cold day helps keep a body warm!

Food Allergies

Our youth programs are **Nut Free**. Please respect this policy for the consideration and safety of families and children attending.

Due to allergy and hygienic precautions we do not allow sharing of foods between participants. Should a group snack or treat be shared, instructors carefully review food allergy and sensitivities of participants included in the registration forms.

In the event that a child has additional food allergies, families may be notified so as not to inadvertently cause harm to such participants. 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 including wind chill. We will notify you by email the morning of the program if we've not





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received a response from the ‘cancellation email’. In the event we do cancel for weather, we will attempt to schedule a make-up day. If a student cannot attend a makeup day or if a make up day is not possible, refunds are not guaranteed. 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 & Program Schedule

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!

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 discounts on special programs!

For membership information contact: info@northbranchnaturecenter.org.
For information about our programs visit [North Branch Nature Center](http://NorthBranchNatureCenter.org).

