

Calgary Nature Kindergarten

Parent Handbook 2023-2024





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The Children's Commons Ecological Society

The Children's Commons Ecological Society was formed by the founders of Common Digs Inc., parents from the Common Digs Forest School preschool-aged program and local educators working with the Forest School and Reggio Emilia philosophies. The society's mission is to create learning environments that foster the connection between children and the natural world by providing repeated and regular access to a nature space, hands on collaborative learning, playful inquiry, reflection, and use of materials as a means for all learners to extend their understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world around them. This non-profit society's first goal was to create the Nature Kindergarten, a continuation of Forest School that extends the benefits that this type of learning environment has on children throughout their early years of learning. This is CCES' ninth year running the Nature Kindergarten program.

Our Kindergarten program operates out of two locations; the first is located at the Red Deer Lake United Church and the other is located at the Rosemont Community Centre:

Red Deer Lake United Church
96187 Spruce Meadows Green SW
Foothills, Alberta
T1S 2R9

Rosemont Community Centre
2807 10th Street NW
Calgary Alberta
T2K 1H2

We also have park days once a week (weather depending) at both locations:

Red Deer Lake Community Association and Lloyd Park
178136 112 Street West
Foothills No. 31
AB T1S 0V8

Confederation Park (located at the back of the Rosemont Community Hall)
2807 10th Street NW
Calgary Alberta
T2K 1H2



Nature Kindergarten Practice

Forest Schools and Nature Kindergartens are relatively new to Canada but have been in practice in Europe for decades. Canadian Forest School practitioners are being trained based on practice in the UK, but it will take time to develop and understand what Forest School practice will look like in the Canadian context. For example, in the UK, many elementary school children will spend one day per week at Forest School throughout their elementary school life, revisiting the same woodland area over seasons and years. In Canada, some of the Kindergarten Forest Schools that have emerged in British Columbia hold a part of each day in Forest School. Forest School and elementary school are the same.

Best Practice

CCES Nature Kindergarten is based on two philosophies, the Reggio Emilia approach and the Forest School ethos. We strive to maintain an environment that aligns and speaks to the best practice and core principles of each approach.

- **Reggio Emilia approach**

The Image of the Child - All children are competent, and capable. They all have preparedness, potential and curiosity, and interest in engaging in social interaction, establishing relationships, constructing their learning, and negotiating with everything the environment brings to them.

The Hundred Languages of Children - The hundred “languages” are the many modes of expression, such as speech, writing, movement, drawing, painting, sculpture, shadow play, collage and music, through which children communicate and learn about their world.

The Role of the Educator - Facilitate children’s ability to represent what they know and imagine. Teachers mediate between children’s current understanding and what they are investigating by: reviewing and helping children tell the story of their own learning, through different materials, experiences and provocations and reflecting.





The Role of the Environment - The environment serves as an invitation to enter and participate and is seen as the third educator. Children can best create meaning and make sense of their world through environments which support complex, varied, sustained, and changing relationships between people, the world of experience, ideas and the many ways of expressing ideas.

Observation and Documentation - transcriptions of children's remarks and discussions, photographs of their activity, and representations of their thinking and learning are carefully studied. These documents have several functions. Most importantly, they help to determine the direction in which the project work and experiences with the children will develop based on their developing interests and understandings. Once these documents are organized and displayed, they help to make parents and children aware of their children's experience and learning and support their involvement.

- **Forest School Principles**

One of the main concepts for forest school is that children return to the same natural play space for the duration of the program and learning as well as following an emergent, inquiry based and child lead curriculum. In 2011, the UK Forest School Community created 6 principles for guiding educators and expectations for great practice. (Forest School Association, n.d.)

Principle 1 - Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, observations, adaptations and reviewing are integral elements of forest school.

Principle 2 - Forest school takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

Principle 3 - Forest school aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved. Fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

Principle 4 - Forest school offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and themselves.

Principle 5 - Forest school is run by qualified forest school practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

Principle 6 - Forest school uses a range of learner-centered processes to create a community for development and learning. (Forest School Association, n.d.)



Mission and Vision of CCES

To create learning environments that foster the connection between children and the natural world by providing repeated and regular access to a nature space, hands on collaborative learning, playful inquiry, and reflection and use of materials as a means for all learners to extend their understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world around them.

We strive for a community that: (not necessarily in this order)

- sees children as strong and capable creators of their own learning
- believes in the rights of children- values diversity and works to understand and respect the differences and multiple perspectives of others
- encourages creativity and the arts as a means of personal expression and deepening of understanding
- provokes critical thinking to develop one's own empathy, ethics and sustainable ways of living and learning in the world together
- honours the natural world as a teacher, offering us life lessons that help us understand our shared interconnectedness

Our Nature Kindergarten Practice Involves



We believe the greatest benefits come when children spend regular visits to a woodland area with great lengths of uninterrupted time to play, to explore and to develop. Our Program focuses on offering the Alberta Kindergarten Curriculum through learner-led exploration of the natural world. We maintain a ratio of 9:1 students to adult when in park areas. We go outside as often as we can for as long as we can except in very severe weather, such as thunderstorms, high winds and weather of approximately -28 degrees Celsius (with wind chill). We also believe that time indoors after being outdoors has



value, as it provides different opportunities to reflect on the outdoor experiences. Most days we will spend a period of time in the indoor classroom, depending on the needs of students and our project work. There will also be days where we spend a full day in the park space.

Hands on Learning and Use of Materials

Meaning develops and deepens from hands-on learning. The natural world provides endless materials for play and building. Confidence and competence develops from creating and building useful items from the surrounding environment. We believe that children should be exposed to a variety of different materials, natural and artistic. By interacting with a variety of materials, children are able to explore different perspectives and properties of materials. These allow children to develop different viewpoints and means to express their thinking and ideas.

Safety & Supported Risk Taking

Children learn to assess risk when given the opportunity to take risks in a supported environment. Benefits to risk taking include self-confidence, perseverance and problem solving skills. Baseline risk-benefit assessments are completed for every activity and with every child. Relationship building, graduated risk and flexibility in design of activities are strategies used to help each learner take risk at an age, skill and developmentally appropriate level. Risky play might include such activities as tree climbing and water play. The use of tools (such as peelers, mallets, knives, loppers, saws, ropes, clippers, etc.) and fire are used when it is appropriate for the age and skill level of the children at Nature Kindergarten.

Emergent Curriculum

Our practice of learning together alongside children begins with observation and documentation. We try to observe the children's learning preferences, skills, strengths and interests as they engage in playful inquiry. Through dialogue and questioning strategies we gauge knowledge and further our understanding of the children's interests. From there we plan the work collaboratively with the children for the group and individuals, allowing space for learner preferences and choice. Our inquiry projects are developed with children and are the starting point for our curriculum planning. We provide provocations to create longevity, to provide further stimulation and support to deepen the learning and stay with a topic for a longer period of time. Documentation of the group process and individual thinking is a key component in developing our emergent curriculum model and for long term planning. As educators, we use many documentation tools such as observations, recording conversations, photography and video. We use the online program Storypark as our main tool to collect and synthesize our documentation into learning stories and reflections that are used for planning with educators and students and also as an assessment tool.



Storytelling

Storytelling, myth and metaphor are wonderful ways to develop learning and understanding of ourselves and of our relationship to others and the world around us. In Nature Kindergarten we practice the tradition of oral storytelling as a way to teach, share and to provoke thinking. It develops meaning-making, provides opportunity for reflection and for honing wisdom. We see storytelling coming out in children's own stories, in their play, language and in their interactions with one another. Storytelling also gives us an entry into sharing parts of our lives outside of school which helps us to build relationships and connect home to school, truly working to build ecological consciousness and important early language skills.

Reflection and Mindfulness

As practitioners, we work to be reflective in our practice with one another. Our documentation work is a large part of our reflective practice as educators and with children. We do this by reviewing with the children the work that we do together every day. We also work to inspire reflectiveness through daily journal writing, different art forms, creative expression and through independent time with sit spots. In our sit spots we encourage quiet time for reflection and thoughtful time on the day's experiences or lived activities. We also begin everyday with exercises such as yoga and stretching or songs and rhythms that help connect us with our own bodies, minds and with the environment.

Planning and Observation

Storypark Online Documentation and Learning:

Our goals with Storypark are to assist in the planning of our days, projects and to document our observations of the learning that is taking place with the children. It also aids in helping streamline communication with parents.

A couple of things to note:

1. We ask that you do not share images that include children other than your own child on social media. Although families have agreed to participate in Storypark they do not all want their children in social media such as Facebook and Instagram. We ask that any people you invite to Storypark also respect this request.
2. We encourage you to use the stories on Storypark as a way to share what you are hearing at home in relation to what is happening at Nature Kindergarten. If you have questions or concerns, please know that we are always happy to speak in person. Our educators may not always have the opportunity to respond to comments posted on



Storypark. We recommend that families start using Storypark in the fall so that they can become familiar with the platform. It is a great way to connect grandparents and family members to your child's learning.

3. A note about timing. We value Storypark as a way to share about the learning that we see going on in the groups - to make it more "visible" to families but also to ourselves, giving us an opportunity to reflect on their interpretation of the meaning of that documentation and on what is happening with the children. The times that educators post will vary and will be based on when they have gathered enough documentation (photos, transcripts, videos etc) to make a meaningful observation and assessment of your child's progress.
4. Learning Tags - In each posting you will see "Learning Tags" that the educators have selected as most relevant to the post. These Learning Tags derive from the learning outcomes from the Alberta Kindergarten Curriculum. They allow you to see what curriculum outcomes are being covered with each project or provocation.

Registration

Students who are of Kindergarten age in Alberta are eligible for registration. There is a \$75 non-refundable registration fee to be submitted with applications. School fees for the year are \$380 to cover the cost of materials. Once you have accepted your spot for the year the \$380 school fees are non-refundable.

**All students attending the Red Deer Lake location must have a membership to the Red Deer Lake Community Association. The cost of the annual membership is \$75 and payment information will be provided by the CCES Registrar. The membership allows for the use of Lloyd Park for one calendar year and for Kindergarten you will need to purchase a 2023 and 2024 pass. If you decide to use Lloyd Park as a family, please display your pass in your vehicle.*

Liability

Children's Commons Ecological Society holds current liability insurance. All parents must read and sign all risk and liability forms and waivers. It is parents' responsibility to understand the risks associated with our unique program as outlined in liability forms and waivers and in this handbook.



Health and Illness

All families must complete the health information forms sent home via email and return to school on the first day. These forms will also be available on the first day at the parent orientatio if needed. If any information changes during the school year, the school must be notified at once. Please keep your child home if, in the last 24 hours they have:

- Had a temperature over 101 degrees F or 38.3 degrees
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (watery, profuse stools)

Alberta Health Services continues to recommend isolation for those with symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test.

Should the above symptoms occur while at Nature Kindergarten, parents will be contacted to pick up their child. In the case of communicable diseases such as measles, chickenpox, mumps, flu, strep throat, viral pneumonia, etc., a sick child may return to Nature Kindergarten once their health care provider has communicated that it is safe for them to do so. If your child is physically weakened from an illness please consider allowing them an extra day's rest before joining school again so that they can be sure to be physically strong enough to withstand the day.

- Any outbreak of communicable disease will be communicated to parents/caregivers via email.
- If your child has not been immunized and there is an outbreak out in Calgary, we will follow all advisories and guidelines issued by Alberta Health.
- If your child or family member is being treated for lice please let us know so that we can pass on any relevant information to other families.

Specific health measures are discussed in length later in this document.

First Day at Nature Kindergarten

On the first days of Nature Kindergarten we will spend time learning about the experiences your children will have in the outdoors and in the natural environment. We will talk about their ideas about safety and spend some time together developing safety rules and responsibilities for our group. We will spend time outside, close to the school playing games and developing safety habits including proper dress. We will introduce some of the daily activities such as a morning meeting, storytelling together, sit spots, group work and reflection time as well as sharing a meal together and hygiene habits. Much of the time will



be spent with the educators observing the children's interests, conversations and learning preference for developing plans for the following weeks.

On the first full day it can be beneficial to make a plan with your child in advance as to how and when you will be saying goodbye to them. You may wish to leave after they take off their backpacks and receive their name tags, or maybe you want to linger a bit longer to help your child settle and say goodbye after our opening morning activity. We ask that each family make a small wishing rock for their child to bring on the first day of school. The rock should be small enough to fit in the palm of their hand, and should include their name and a wish you have for your child for kindergarten. We will be sharing these on the first day and keep them in the classroom as a reminder of home to comfort children.

Times

Our classes are full days running on alternating schedules of Monday/ Wednesday and alternating Fridays, and Tuesday/ Thursday and alternating Fridays. Please refer to the school calendar for your child's school days. School days are from 9:00am-3:00pm. Nature Kindergarten begins at 9:00 am.

For Red Deer Lake United Church, please enter on the east side of the building from the parking lot. You will be greeted by a staff member to check in with. On park days you will drop your child off at the main shelter located by the parking lot. Please check in with a staff member upon arrival at the shelter.

At Rosemont, staff will meet families outside the Rosemont Community Hall for the first weeks and then advise families of any future meeting spots in Confederation Park.

Absences and Late Arrivals

All parents must notify the school if their child will be absent for the day. If your child will be absent for the day, please send an email to calgarynaturekindergarten@gmail.com. Please indicate the reason for the absence, so that it can be recorded.

You can also text the school phones with absences and late arrivals. The school cell numbers are:

RDLUC: **587-576-8733**

Rosemont: **403-988-9329**



For late arrivals, if you plan to be more than 20 minutes late for the start of the day please notify the teacher directly by calling or texting the school. If you need to pick up your child early, please notify the teacher in the morning so that we can arrange a pick up time and place.

Location Drop Offs and Pickups

Every Sunday families will be sent an electronic weekly update. This update will contain the drop off/pick up locations for the week for each class based on the long range forecast. Please read these carefully to know if it is an indoor or outdoor classroom (park) drop off. If the location needs to be changed due to inclement weather, parents will be notified through email, an announcement on Storypark or through text. Always check Storypark for the most up-to-date information.

Website & Communication

Communication with parents is important to us. We have announcements and postings through Storypark to inform parents about their child's learning and important information. Parents also receive a weekly update each Sunday with important information they need to know about the upcoming week. On our main Kindergarten Page www.calgarynaturekindergarten.com you can find general information about our program, media clips, forms, monthly newsletters, and upcoming events. For changes in drop off or school closures due to weather, parents will be notified by email and by an announcement through Storypark.

Clothing

"There is no poor weather, only poor clothing" is a commonly heard phrase in Forest Schools and Nature Kindergarten! When people are dressed properly, the barrier of discomfort is removed, allowing everyone to freely enjoy the outdoor experience. Part of the learning experience of Nature Kindergarten is assessing weather and properly dressing for it.

Labeling:

It is **important** that all items of clothing, bags, water bottles, tupperware and backpacks **are clearly labeled with your child's name**. This helps support children's items not being confused with others' and helps to keep our lost and found to a bare minimum.

You can purchase labels for your child online or mark their name on the tags in sharpie. Any left-over items will always be on display at the end of the day for parents to look at. A helpful



tip, if someone else is picking up your child, tuck a list of their items in the backpack so that they can be double checked at pick up time.

Winter Clothing:

To participate safely in winter weather, it is especially important that children are dressed properly. Layering clothing is the best way to stay warm and comfortable.

Base layer (the layer closest to the body)

- Thermal underwear and shirt – Wool or silk fibers are best for staying warm and keeping moisture away from the body but they can be uncomfortable and expensive. Synthetics are readily available and more affordable and work well too. Avoid cotton as it retains moisture and makes us feel cold.
- Wool or wool-blend socks, fairly thick, but comfortable in the boot.

Middle layer

- Fleece pants (fleece is so cozy, comfortable and warm)
- Fleece or wool top, hoodie or pull-over

Outer layer

- Water-resistant snowsuit for younger children. Water-resistant snow pants with a bib work nicely to keep the upper body insulated for older children along with a snow jacket.
- Snow/winter boots (Bog type boots are NOT insulated enough to keep feet warm on the coldest winter days)
- Wool toque or hat that fits snugly and covers the ears
- Insulated gloves or mittens with waterproof outer layer We recommend longer winter mittens such as Kombi, MEC or Stonz brands, so that snow can't get in around the wrist. These keep children the warmest and driest. Most children struggle to get gloves on by themselves when outdoors, so mitts are preferable.
- Reusable hand warmers are great if your child suffers from cold hands and feet.
- Neck warmer (much safer than scarves) or balaclava.
- Sunblock and sunglasses (optional though recommended). Sunscreen sticks are easy for children to use themselves.

Early Spring/Fall (cooler weather)

- Thermal underwear and shirt (see winter wear)
- Fleece pants (fleece is so cozy, comfortable and warm)
- Fleece or wool top, hoodie or pullover



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- **Waterproof** rain pants and jacket (bib pants or one-piece muddy buddies are more effective for staying dry)
 - Waterproof mittens
 - Closed toe hiking shoe (preferably no laces) and/or rubber boots
 - Thinner toque or hat and light knitted gloves
 - Wool or wool-blend socks (can be thinner)
 - Sunblock and sunglasses (optional)

Late Spring/Summer (warmer weather)

- Closed-toe supportive shoes (no laces)
- Light colored long pants and long-sleeved shirt (this will help protect from scratches and insect bites)
- Waterproof pants & jacket (bib pants or one-piece muddy buddies are more effective for staying dry)
- Rubber boots
- Sun hat
- Sunblock and sunglasses (optional though recommended). Sunscreen sticks are easy for children to use themselves.
- Bug spray (optional)

Indoor Shoes and Extra Set of Clothing

Please send an extra set of clothing (pants, top, underwear, socks, mittens) to stay at Nature Kindergarten, labeled with your child's name in a plastic bag.

Please also send a pair of non-skid running shoes to wear indoors. (These shoes are to remain at school for the year.) These shoes should be velcro or slip-on (ie. crocks) so that children are able to put them on independently (please no lace ups). Also keep in mind that their indoor shoes will need to fit comfortably while wearing thicker wool socks when the weather is cooler.

Backpacks

Please send your child with a backpack that can carry their lunch bag, water bottle and have room for an extra item of clothing. Each child will be responsible to carry their own backpack so it should be one that is comfortable for them to wear for extended periods of time. We have found that a backpack with a clip across the chest makes it easier for your child to carry on park days.

Additional Items



We are asking that all families provide a reusable shopping bag clearly labeled with your child's name. This bag will be kept on their hook as an additional space to keep their personal belongings. This is especially important in winter months when they are removing many items when they come inside.

There are additional items that you may wish to send with your child so that they have their own personal use of them. For the park, you can pack your child with their own individual hand sanitizer, kleenex, binoculars (for the spring), and a pencil. Individual bug catchers may be useful for the early autumn and spring.

Health Measures:

For the 2023-24 school year there are currently no COVID-19 public health measures that impact schools. CCES will follow the guidance and direction from Alberta Learning and Alberta Health Services should anything change during the course of the school year. If new measures are announced, they will be communicated with all staff and families. We continue to follow general health measures for all staff and students to reduce the risk of transmission of illness such as:

Hand washing:

- Hand washing is encouraged when we have access to running water, but hand sanitizer will be provided if water is unavailable. Hand washing stations will be set up outdoors at the classroom and in the park.
- Proper hand washing techniques will be reviewed with students on a daily basis.
- Students and staff will be required to wash hands or use hand sanitizer:
 - After using the toilet.
 - After sneezing or coughing into their hands.
 - Before and after eating any food, including snacks.
 - Whenever hands are visibly dirty

Stay Home if Sick: This has always been school policy as it is hard for children to be outdoors all day when they are sick. All students and staff need to stay home if they are ill with any common cold, influenza, and/or COVID-19-like symptoms.

Masking: A staff member, child or parent attending Nature Kindergarten can wear a mask at their discretion. Personal masking choices will be respected. If you wish your child to be masked please make your child's teacher aware of this choice. Children will be expected to put on and take off their masks independently.



Illness at School: If a child is exhibiting signs of illness, parents/caregivers will be notified and advised to pick up their child. Parents/guardians must designate an emergency contact (on school medical forms) for pick up if they are unable to pick up their child.

Hallways and Bathrooms: We will continue to have small groups only in the hall when dressing for the outdoors. Students will be using the washrooms in small groups under the supervision of an adult. In Lloyd Park, we have our own porta-potties in winter months just for our school use. Again students are supervised by staff.

Cleaning Schedules: Our staff continue to do a thorough cleaning of high touch surfaces at the end of each day.

Ways you can help as Parents:

- Please do not send any toys/ stuffies to school. Please talk to your child about this so that they understand toys are for home.
- Practice good hand hygiene at home with your child, especially with washing hands for 20 seconds and properly scrubbing parts of your hands. Teach your child songs to help them wash for a proper length of time.
- Teach your child how to properly cover their sneezes and coughs with their elbow or a tissue
- Attach a small bottle of hand sanitizer to the outside of your child's backpack for them to use.
- Talk to your child about the importance of not putting things in their mouths. Talk to them about asking for help opening containers and not using their mouth to try and open them.
- **Label** all your child's gear, lunch items and water bottles. We are trying to avoid items being left out that could be mistaken for someone else's. Lost and found will be displayed at the end of each day. Items will not be kept beyond a week.
- Teach your child to be independent with putting on their own gear such as shoes and mitts, doing up their own coats (zippers) and recognizing their own items to put back into their backpacks - provide them with clothing and gear that they are able to easily use themselves.
- Make sure your child has their own **labeled** water bottle and cutlery each day. We have our own water tank in the classroom to refill and extra water on park days.



POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Weather

Weather is monitored regularly, and always before heading outside. At Nature Kindergarten we go out in all conditions except in extreme weather conditions of very high winds, lightning storms and very cold weather (-28C). On days and times of extreme weather Nature Kindergarten operates in the indoor facility. On occasion, when a winter storm creates extreme driving conditions, parents will be notified if there is a school closure. It is important to check Storypark and your email for important weather announcements.

Inclement Weather Policy

A lot of time is spent working with parents and children to understand how to properly dress for the outdoors in all seasons. A thorough review of clothing expectations and understanding of weather policies will be reviewed at the Parent Orientation at the beginning of the school year. Children will work towards independence in knowing what clothing is appropriate for the day's weather and in making good clothing choices. Parents will be informed of the weather forecast each week in weekly reminder emails to ensure children are adequately prepared for the outdoors.

On the occasion that a parent neglects to dress their child appropriately a resource of extra clothing is kept onsite. If there is still insufficient clothing for a child to be safe outdoors, the parent will be contacted and asked to bring clothing or to pick up their child.

Weather forecasts are monitored each morning and throughout the day when deemed appropriate using both Environment Canada and at the site location for temperature. When the weather forecast calls for lightning, extreme winds, hail, temperatures below -20C or above 30C at the site location staff will ensure that the outdoor activities take place close to the indoor facility to allow for timely and safe access to shelter. For temperatures -28C at the site or below, children will remain indoors.

Closures Due to Weather

The facility may close in the event of no power, flooding, no access to water, no heat, snow plows/public transit cease to operate. Parents are advised to listen to radio and media.



Parents will also be advised via the school's emergency contact fan out. Families will be encouraged to avoid driving in unsafe driving conditions.

Meals

Please send a lunch, two snacks (morning and afternoon) and at least one fresh water bottle with your child every day. **Please label all food containers and water bottles.** On some days we will also cook a snack together over the fire. Please try to pack food in containers that are reusable and to limit the amount of garbage as we often eat in the outdoors - a garbage free lunch is best. Please also consider your child's ability to open and close food containers and packaging independently. Please note that we do not have access to a fridge or microwave for lunches so please pack your child with their own ice packs and insulated thermoses. We encourage all children to carry their own lunches and water bottles with them, especially on our park days. Please consider this when choosing the right backpack and lunch kit for your child. **We are a nut-free zone**, we ask you to please refrain from bringing nuts to Nature Kindergarten. Soy and seed butter substitutes are welcome. We also do not allow sharing of any food at school. Please make sure your child is aware of this.



Hand Washing and Toilet Procedures

Children will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water before snacks and lunch as well as after using the bathroom. At Nature Kindergarten children are able to use our indoor bathroom facilities during our non-park days. During Park days, Lloyd Park offers seasonal bathrooms for our use from March/April -October/November. Once the bathroom closes there is a temporary bathroom (porta potty) in the park that children are able to use. They are also welcome to go somewhere in nature as long as it is somewhere private. We always carry our luggable loo in case children have a hard time going in the forest.

Safety Teachings

There are a few basic practices that we will teach to help ensure safety within our outdoor site:



Work Area

With the children we will determine a “work” area for each day. Markers will be used as visual cues to remind and encourage everyone to stay within the boundaries of the work area. If a child wishes to go outside the work area, they will discuss it with an adult and determine if it is safe to do so, within the range of sight of the group.

Dogs

The park is a popular spot for people to walk with their dogs. Our teaching for children around dogs is that dogs are usually friendly, but that we never know the dog’s personality or its mood that day, so if a dog approaches you to be safe we always: Keep still, keep quiet and keep together. It is likely that over time we will get to know the owners and their dogs, but it is always important to ask the owner first if it is ok to pet their dog.



Water

Lloyd Park has Red Deer Lake, a natural wetland and large body of water. It also has small creeks that develop with large amounts of precipitation. Confederation Park has a small stream and stormwater ponds. Before ever approaching a body of water, children are engaged in a safety talk about the dangers associated with water and the shoreline. If the water is deemed safe, and we feel the children are ready, then children may approach the shoreline in small groups under the supervision of an adult. During each season and as the waterways change, new safety dialogs are discussed and our level of activity around the water will also change based on what is safe.

Strangers

Lloyd Park and Confederation Park are public spaces. Children are taught to stay with the group and within eyesight at all times. If a park user approaches a child, a teacher will approach the child and park user to join in the conversation, ensuring the child feels safe and confident.

Lost Child

If a child goes missing, the Lead Educator is immediately notified and told where and when the child was last seen. All remaining children are assembled together in one area (always



indoors if possible), the Teaching Assistant is to supervise remaining children in a seated calm activity. The Lead Educator will then enlist all available adult volunteers to search the area where the child was last seen, calling the child's name and looking through all layers of the canopy or school yard. At the 10-15 minute mark of searching (maximum 20 minutes), we will notify the police / emergency officials of the missing Child, their age, physical description, and possible whereabouts in the park/ school yard where the child went missing. Then the Parents / Guardians will be immediately notified after the notification to the police / emergency officials.

Child Running off premises

As a general rule staff should not pursue a child beyond the school or park boundary. Instead they should report to the Lead Educator where they last saw the child and the direction the child was heading so that this information can be communicated to the parents or police as appropriate. The member of staff should try and maintain eye contact with a child that has run off. Staff are expected to use their professional discretion in deciding whether or not it is appropriate to go beyond the school boundary in pursuance of such children. **They must not leave other children unattended in the pursuit of the child who has wandered off.**

Food

Sometimes there are foods that we can forage and identify as safe. But even the best foragers sometimes make mistakes. Our teaching is that we only eat food that we bring into the forest. Nothing from the forest goes into the mouth. Due to food allergies and sensitivities, we do not allow children to share food at school and we are a nut-free school.

Safety for Outdoor Classroom and Field Trips

The essence of the Nature Kindergarten program is to be exploring and learning through the outdoor environment of a designated nature space every day. Every effort will be made to ensure that students have access to safe outdoor spaces.

- All parents will attend an orientation meeting prior to classes beginning to ensure they have been informed of the associated risk of Nature Kindergarten and to be able to ask questions;
- Prior to classes beginning, all parents will sign an Informed Consent and Acknowledgement of Risk form;
- Site staff will ensure emergency documentation for each child is available both at the indoor facility and carried with site staff which includes key contact information and health and medical issues for each child;



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- Site staff will make volunteers aware of health and medical issues for students when appropriate to do so, while maintaining a student's right to privacy;
 - Cell phones are carried by each site staff for ongoing and emergency communication;
 - At a minimum one site staff will be first aid trained and an onsite first aid kit is available and carried with staff at all times when outdoors;
 - Risk/benefit assessments are completed and reviewed with site staff for the site and for each activity including tool use;
 - The site area is walked by a staff member prior to children entering the area to assess for changes to site and if any additional risk measures need to be put in place for the day;
 - Head counts are taken frequently throughout the day along with a class list that is carried with staff;
 - A minimum 1:9 ratio for supervisor to children is maintained when at Lloyd Park and Confederation Park (Outdoor classroom) in the Kindergarten Program.
 - Safety is discussed regularly with the children and prior to any outdoor activity, including basic safety practices related to Defined Work Space, Dogs, Strangers, Staying with the Group and Food Gathering/Sharing.

Early Pickups and Late Drop Offs

The duration and specific location within the site is determined each day by the site staff. Parents who need to pick up their children earlier than usual will advise staff prior to dropping off their child and an arrangement will be made for the parent to meet the group. Parents who are late on arrival will be able to contact the staff using telephone communication. The parent is required to wait with their child and to bring the child to the location of the group, ensuring proper dress for the child.

Child Arrival and Release Policy

At the beginning of the school year we ask parents to provide the Children's Commons Ecological Society written authorization for the people allowed to pick up their children from school, as well as a contact list in case of emergencies. If there is a change to this and someone new is picking up your child we ask parents to notify your child's teacher with either a phone call, text or email.

Unauthorized Pick-up Procedure

If someone other than a designated person attempts to pick-up a child that we have not met or been notified about in advance we will:



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1. Call parent for verbal authorization
 2. If the parent gives the person attempting to pick up authorization our staff will verify their name with the parent and ask the person picking up to show his/her ID to ensure their identity
 3. If the parent cannot be contacted the child is not allowed to leave NK until a parent has been located and staff will remain with the child until an authorized pick-up person arrives.

Student Discipline Policy

At CCES Nature Kindergarten we believe that every child is capable and competent and we treat every child with respect and dignity through a dialogic approach when it comes to managing behaviour. We believe in strengthening the relationship between the child, teachers and peers in order to provide a safe and comfortable environment. Educators will guide children by engaging in conversation, redirecting behaviours and providing a nurturing and safe environment for all children. Our child guidance policies may include the following:

- Consider the child's developmental level and needs
- Make expectations clear and provide scaffolding to help students participate positively
- Be implemented in a positive and consistent manner
- Be designed to help the child to learn appropriate behaviour and techniques
- Involve consulting with parents/guardians/teachers to include their input of successful approaches with a child, as well as to keep them informed of issues/concerns as they arise
- Help children to develop self-control, self-confidence, decision making skills, the ability to communicate effectively and sensitively in their interactions with others.

At CCES Nature Kindergarten **inappropriate behaviour** is defined as using actions or words that make other students or staff members feel uncomfortable or unsafe. **Unsafe behaviour** is defined as any behaviour that puts a child or staff member at risk. This includes not responding when called, running, hiding, taking risk without consulting teachers and staff, and not following safety guidelines and expectations so that behaviour becomes potentially dangerous to the child or others.

In the case of inappropriate/unsafe behaviour the following steps will be taken:

- Teacher and child will move from proximity of the group and the two will work together to define the inappropriate/unsafe behaviour and create a plan to modify it, together. If the child continues to engage in the inappropriate/unsafe behaviour then parents/guardians will be asked to come pick up the child and they will be sent home for the remainder of the day.



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- Parents/guardians/will be informed of the behaviour and consulted to discover the cause.
 - Teachers and staff will discuss and develop a plan to be consistent with expectations and to agree on the best approach for the student. Parents/guardians and teachers will, together develop strategies to improve and eliminate the inappropriate or unsafe behaviour.
 - If needed, a behaviour contract will be created that will be used as a daily check-in between child, parent/guardian and teacher to evaluate the child's progress with regard to the behaviour in question.
 - Teachers and staff will follow up with the child to be consistent with expectations and approach as well as to offer feedback and positive reinforcement.

In the extreme case that a child's behaviour is consistently inappropriate or unsafe for the child or others, and after the above process has been implemented, the child may be asked to leave the program for a short term suspension or permanent expulsion.

Volunteering and Donations

We are a small school and rely on the support of families through volunteering to make our program successful. On your registration list you indicated ways you would be interested in helping to volunteer for Nature Kindergarten. All families are required to volunteer for a minimum of 12 hours for the school year. There is a volunteer coordinator for each class to help track volunteer hours for each family. At the beginning of the year parents will be given a volunteer agreement form to complete and sign. A volunteer deposit of \$150 is collected from each family at the start of the year, if the 12 hours are completed then the \$150 will be refunded to parents at the end of June.

Main areas of support that are needed throughout the school year are:

Parent Fundraising Committees

Assist the board of directors and other committee members in organizing details regarding fundraising initiatives and events. This year we are looking for help in organizing in person community events and online fundraising opportunities for the school.

Outdoor Classroom Support

Assist the teachers on days when additional support with students is needed to maintain the ratio outdoors or assist us with fire safety.



Indoor Classroom Support

Assist the teachers with preparation of materials, assisting with art projects, supervision and helping with building projects in outdoor space.

Building projects

This could be assisting with projects at school or helping us build items at home.

Please note: If you are going to be a volunteer in the classroom (indoor or outdoor) you must provide the school with a copy of a valid police check for volunteering (completed within the last 3 months). Once you have completed a police check for our organization it is valid for 3 years.

A volunteer letter will be provided for parents, if needed, to receive the discount through Calgary Police Services. Information on how to apply for a police check will be sent home by email to families before school begins.

Wish List Donation

Another way to help support your child is to make a donation for one of the items on our wish list. Our main list for the year can be found below. If more specific items are needed or items for a particular event, a note will go home in the weekly update or on Storypark.

Classroom items:

- Kleenex (large boxes and travel packs)
- Baby wipes
- Large tarps
- 10Gal rubbermaid totes
- Paper towels

Technology:

- Ipads
- LCD Projector

Seasonal items:

- Blankets
- Firewood
- Plastic snow shovels (child size)
- Sleds
- Nets
- Binoculars
- Bug catchers
- Tools such as loppers, hammers, hand drill
- Mud kitchen utensils and pots and pans
- **Large shade tent for Rosemont**



Outdoor loose part items:

- Heavy duty plastic buckets
- Wood off-cuts of various sizes
(no treated wood please)
- Wood cookies of various sizes
- PVC pipes/parts of various sizes