



Roberta
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Forest School Handbook



What is forest school?

Forest and Nature School (FNS) is an educational approach that began in the 1950's. In this type of nature-based education program, children are provided with opportunities to build an ongoing relationship with the land, to dedicated educators, to one another, and to themselves.

While all nature programs are different it is important to note that we adhere to the following two principles:

- regular and repeated access to a natural space
- child-directed, emergent and inquiry-based learning.

(Adapted from the 2018 Ottawa Forest and Nature School Parent Teacher Handbook)



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Who are we?

Donna, Amry, Keri, Erin and Kerralea have been alongside young children and families throughout their teaching careers. Between them, they have over 30 years of experience teaching in classrooms (Pre-K to Grade 2); travelling in and out of a variety of community settings to support the inclusion of children with special rights; as well as learning alongside multi-discipline teams in order to collaborate and creatively plan for all learners. Through their varied roles, they have discovered their passion for teaching and learning outdoors and designing environments that foster a sense of comfort, joy, and love for learning. Together, they travelled to Kortright Centre for Conservation to begin their journey to become certified Forest School Practitioners within Canada. With joy, anticipation and possibility for learning, they are currently engaging in a special project within Edmonton Public School Board to co-create a nature inspired Kindergarten.

Curious Minds Compassionate Hearts Courageous Spirits



Roberta MacAdams School is a place of belonging where every person has value.

Together we nurture safe, trusting and respectful spaces of community that support risk-taking, honour voice and celebrate diversity.

Shaping authentic, meaningful and interconnected learning and life experiences that empower children on their educational journey, inspires and guides our professional conversations, research and relational work.

The curiosity, creativity, compassion and courage in children holds promise for deepening our relationships with one another and with the earth.

A vital and healthy school community emerges when we provide the conditions in which play, laughter, joy, love and hope can take root and grow.

**EVERY CHILD,
EVERY DAY.**

What should my child wear?

Depending on the season, participants, including children, teachers, and accompanying volunteers, will need rain-suits, boots, extra warm clothing, waterproof/warm snowsuits, extra hats and mitts, hiking shoes, sneakers, wool socks, thermal underwear, pre-applied Sunblock/Bug Repellent, water thermos etc.

For all weather please consider the following factors when dressing for Forest School. We engage all participants in dialogue and conversation about having three possible layers of clothing:

- 1) **Insulation:** Natural fabrics such as wool or silk work well as an inner layer, as does fleece. Polyester pyjamas are another good option. The key for this layer is to wick moisture away from the skin and insulate it with a breathable layer.
- 2) **Middle Layer:** This is another insulation layer that creates 'dead-air space' between skin and the elements. This airspace helps in keeping warm. Wool sweaters (Merino wool is exceptionally warm and soft on sensitive skin) and fleece tend to work well.
- 3) **Outer Shell:** This layer should be waterproof and windproof, as well as breathable.

No matter the season, please ensure that your child has the following:

- small backpack
- reusable snack bag
- reusable water bottle

A note to parents/caregivers:

- It is not necessary to invest in expensive brand names to keep your child warm. Thrift stores are great places to look for children's wool clothing at cheaper prices. If you are looking to make a purchase of outdoor clothing, Mountain Equipment Coop (MEC) has excellent children's outdoor wear for all seasons.
- We recommend purchasing boots that are one size larger than your child's foot. This creates dead-air space to assist in insulation. Socks help to wick moisture away from the skin, (please note: cotton tends to sweat and does not wick away moisture). Two pairs of wool socks with waterproof boots that have wiggle room, provide good insulation for feet.
- For warmer weather we ask that your child have a light cotton/silk/hemp long sleeve shirt on for the day. Children are encouraged to wear a hat at all times. Our programs are altered slightly by following the position of the sun. It is amazing how cool it is when towering trees shade the walking paths.
- Children will be encouraged to stay hydrated for both cold and warm weather to regulate body temperature.



Seasonal Clothing

"There is no bad weather, only bad clothing."

Fall

Rain gear, closed toe shoes, sun hat, and layers for colder days (fleece).

Winter

Warm hat that covers ears, balaclava or neck warmer (no scarves), two pairs of warm, waterproof mittens, snowsuit, boots (one size bigger), wool socks, base layers.

Spring

Rain gear (boots, splash pants, jacket), sneakers, layers for colder days (wool socks, fleece), sunhat (for warmer days)

Summer

Rain gear, sun hat, lightweight clothing (silk/cotton ideal), and closed toe shoes



What about the weather?

As we know, we can experience all four seasons of weather in one day. In the event that the weather conditions make it unsafe for children to be outdoors for RMA forest school, children will then remain inside for the day engaging in learning experiences. Educators at RMA are regularly checking the Environment Canada website to ensure we have the most up to date information. EPSB policy states that children will remain indoors when:

- temperatures drop below -23 degrees Celsius
- heavy rain

In the case of extreme weather such as lightening strikes, extreme wind, high heat (including humidity), educators will closely monitor changing weather patterns and children's comfort and safety.



Sunscreen & Bugs

Covering skin with clothing (lightly coloured long sleeves and long pants, hats and hiking boots) helps to protect skin from sun exposure, bug bites, scrapes and bruises. For any exposed skin, please apply sunblock and bug/tick repellent at home, prior to school.



Health & Safety

Risk - the experience and management of it - is an inherent and integral part of Forest School, and indeed of healthy child development. As a program, we endeavour to co-assess and co-manage risk with all participants, including children and accompanying volunteers. We believe this to be an essential skill for children to acquire and for adults to support. Educators and volunteers conduct seasonal site risk assessments, as well as activity risk assessments and individual risk assessments on an ongoing basis, always considering the balance between risks and benefits when doing so.

Some of the risks inherent to Forest School and outdoor play include, but are not limited to:

- injuries from executing strenuous and demanding physical activities, possibly on uneven ground in the forest
- injuries from failing to properly use tools such as carving utensils
- being in contact with Stinging Nettle
- the presence of wild animals and ticks
- inclement weather

Adult:Child Ratios

Ratios of adults to children will be approximately 1:8. “Adults” include Certified Teachers, Educational Assistants and Forest School Practitioner. *There will be times when the ratio becomes smaller as we support and include all learners in a flexible, responsive approach as we adapt to the changing needs of learners.

Educators and Volunteer Responsibilities

- Educators ensure children’s families understand the importance of proper clothing, outerwear, and other supplies according to the season
- Adults are alongside children in their play and exploration of the natural world by both playing with and closely observing them, allowing that getting wet and dirty is part of healthy play, as is taking part in risky play
- All policies and procedures outlined in this handbook are followed



Food

Allergy Awareness

We ask that due to life-threatening nut allergies, we ask that participants refrain from bringing nuts to school. Soy and sunflower seed substitutes for nut butters are welcome.

Litter-less Snacks

To ensure that our impact to the natural spaces we visit, we ask that each family provide a reusable thermos and reusable snack bag daily.

Hand-washing

Children are asked to wash their hands with warm, soapy water prior to eating snack in the forest. All children wash their hands with warm, soapy water after using the toilet.



Safety

Boundaries

At the beginning of the year we start by creating a routine with the children of using a stop/call back mechanism. One whistle means freeze and drop everything in your hands. Two whistles mean stop what you are doing and go to the person who blew the whistle, immediately. Upon arrival to any natural space adults will set the boundaries at the tarp meeting with the children to begin the day. All adults wear reflective vests as a way to teach children to stay within the programming boundaries. Children learn to invite adults on adventures or play within view of forest school adults.

Procedures for Tool Use

Working with tools is a life skill requiring direct teaching and modeling and close by supervision. (For example, children will be taught to use a potato peeler first and be instructed to move the tool away from their bodies.) Children will always have an adult close by; be in a stable seated position; and be an arms length away from others.



Hiking to our Natural Spaces

We set up our forest school base camp at a variety of locations within and around our Roberta MacAdams community. Children are coached to take care of another child during our travel and adults are embedded in and around and alongside children for safe and engaged travel.

Rope/String Use

Children will have access to many different lengths of ropes in their play as we promote and encourage the collection, construction and transport of different objects/materials discovered in the forest. Children will not be permitted to tie rope onto any body part of any child. Prior to having access to ropes children will have had a discussion with an adult around how to use ropes in a safe way. Adults will help children as needed and will model appropriate knot tying as well as be alongside children to assist them with talking through ideas and decisions.

Stick Use

Children are encouraged to play with sticks in a variety of ways in the forest. To ensure we keep stick play safe and fun we have guidelines on stick length. We coach children to practice and remember a few safety phrases: “If the stick is shorter than your arm, then you can carry it.” “If it is longer than your arm, drag it behind.” and “If it’s bigger than you, it’s carried by two”.

Learning & Development

A Typical Day

We begin outside at a class designated meeting area. At this location we plan our adventure together and talk about our clothing needed for the day.

Next, children fill their water bottles and snack bags, visit the washroom and add to or take away clothing layers depending on the weather.

When ready, we gather at our indigenous healing circle for a story and setting of intention for the day.

With a walking friend and our wagons full of supplies, we then travel to our forest school destination.

At a defined home base we review boundaries, whistles, and safety guidelines, followed by a tour of the provocations in response and to honour our ongoing emergent programming.

Children engage in uninterrupted play, with adults alongside, for at least one hour.

At the end of our programming time, children and adults engage in a reflective process, which may include a talking circle, sit spot or story prior to returning to Roberta MacAdams School for dismissal.



Environmental Sustainability

Children are encouraged to investigate and engage with natural spaces using all of their senses. To lower our impact on our environment and location we follow a few guidelines;

- We respect the natural places we visit and all of its inhabitants, including plants, animals, and insects as we explore and learn.
- When an object in nature requires further investigation, we may briefly bring it inside and return it back to where we found it.
- When interacting with plants we leave green leaves on plants and bark/limbs on trees so that they will continue to grow.
- After forest digging, we refill holes in order to minimize the disturbance of natural spaces.

Emergent Curriculum

Our forest school approach is process related and socially constructed within our community of learners. We acknowledge that children and adults are naturally curious and learn through exploration and play. Development of the whole child involves physical, cognitive, social and emotional learning and can be engaged most effectively when experiences are open-ended, multimodal, multisensory and novel.

Through every day reflection and dialogue between educators, volunteers and children we honour all voices to be integrated into our programming. This process related approach demonstrates programming which emerges from the children with input from adults.

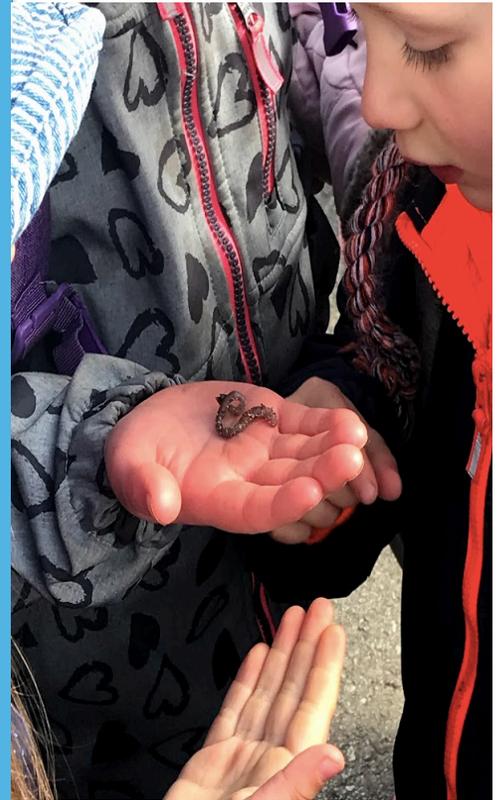
Together we design opportunities for both children and adults to marvel at the beauty of nature by looking more closely, listening more carefully and understanding that the natural world is rich and varied and responsive to our every move.

Communication

We use a free and secure app called *Seesaw: The Learning Journal* to communicate with families. This app keeps parents up to date with all of the exciting things happening in kindergarten. Through the use of Seesaw, we share videos and pictures to showcase the learning and special events in our class; as well as link copies of newsletters, notes, reminders about upcoming events and share links to educational websites that will help reinforce learning at home.

This app is a secure app and is only accessible to the families in the class. Only those children who are 'tagged' in the photo will have access to it. Please respect the privacy of this shared space by not saving and reposting any of the photos or videos to other social media accounts. The Seesaw app is a valuable tool for sharing the learning in the classroom with home.

Note: In case of an Emergency situation, families will be contacted immediately through a phone call from the educator or school office. If emergency personnel are required, educators will call 911.



Questions?

Our goal is for all children and families to feel comfortable and supported as together we learn about the natural world, through outdoor and risky play. Should you have any questions, please contact us.

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Ottawa and Nature School 2018 Parent Teacher Handbook

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