

Oakview Farm Forest School Family Handbook

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Mission Statement

At Oakview Farm Forest School, we hold the belief that every child deserves the chance to experience the tranquility that arises from connecting with nature. We believe the natural world possesses a remarkable ability to strengthen relationships, cultivate compassion, and ignite creativity within us all.

Application & Enrollment Procedures

Enrollment for our first Forest School session begins January 6, 2025 for our first March through May session. Sibling groups are welcome. There are currently no discounts for sibling groups.

To apply, parents will need to read and understand the parent handbook. The handbook can be found at: www.oakviewfarmandforest.org/forestschoool. Then, parents fill out the application form and submit the application fee on our website: www.oakviewfarmandforest.org/farm-forest-school-application

There is a non-refundable \$10 application fee per child (waived for the Spring 2025 session), paid through our website at the time of application, that we use to cover administration costs. Once we receive your application and fee, we will contact you within two business days to discuss your application further and/or to schedule a tour of the Farm Forest School. In order to be accepted and enrolled in the Farm Forest School, parent(s) and child/children must take a physical tour of the farm and forest space(s). Once the tour is completed, we will contact you within two business days regarding enrollment, to place you on the waitlist for enrollment, or to discuss options for enrollment in the future. Currently, we keep only five children on our waitlist.

If your child has been accepted to our program, we will ask you to send in the first months tuition of \$215 and the annual \$50 enrollment fee, which will cover the cost of Forest School materials, such as the Creative Curriculum GOLD online student portfolios, “sit spot” mats, watercolor sets, and journals. These materials, except for the online student portfolio, are the child’s to keep upon leaving Forest School. You will be able to pay the tuition and enrollment fee on our website or by sending us a check, made out to “Oakview Farm”. At that time, you may also pay the remaining tuition for the year, either by check or online.

Parents who wish to withdraw their child from our program must give at least thirty days notice in writing. We will not prorate for partial months attendance,

nor will we provide refunds of tuition already paid.

If your child has been accepted to our program, their enrollment automatically carries over to the next year's session, provided that tuition and enrollment fees are up to date. Siblings who have not completed the enrollment process will not be automatically enrolled; they must go through the process on their own.

Curriculum

Our nature-based curriculum is largely guided by local seasonal changes, enabling children to form a lasting *connection* to the land, thus instilling a strong sense of place. This sense of place empowers them with the freedom to ask questions and further spark their curiosity about the land beneath their feet. Children in our program build on their curiosity about the natural world by observing the ever-present changes that occur daily and seasonally in the woods and fields of the farm. Teachers, as *compassionate* facilitators, guide children to find answers by thoughtfully curating the learning environment, through the use of natural materials and well-designed spaces. Learning thus emerges naturally as children explore, discover, and reflect upon their learning within safety of the natural world. Our curriculum is guided by:

- Questioning: Questioning is a crucial component of our Farm Forest School. Children have the freedom to observe, and then ask questions about what they observe. Teachers lead children to find answers by conducting investigations and experiments, doing research, and asking related questions, all while collaborating with their peers. Teachers use Socratic questioning techniques, or other similar techniques to guide student learning.
- Emergent Learning: Learning at Oakview Farm Forest School is inherently driven by children's interests, in combination with seasonal changes that occur in our woods and fields. Teachers set up a framework of learning, with specific standards that will be covered over the course of a time period. Children's learning "emerges" naturally as the forest and fields are explored and questions emerge. These questions lead the teacher to choose specific learning activities that seek to uncover answers, or even further questions.
- Interconnectedness of Living and Non-Living Things: Although we as a school do not subscribe to any one spiritual understanding of the world, we understand there is an inherent spiritual aspect to children's connectedness to themselves, other people, and the animals and things around them. Children and their families will bring their own spiritual understanding of the natural world to our community of learners. Through learning about the interconnectedness of the physical world, we hope that children will gain further understanding of the connection to their own spirituality.

Operating Schedule

Half Day Kindergarten (Ages 3-6)

We will begin our first Forest School March 3, 2025 and operate until May 21, 2025. Below are the dates Forest School will operate:

March 3, 5	April 7, 9	May 5, 7
March 10, 12	April 14, 16	May 12, 14
March 17, 19	April 21, 23	May 19, 21
March 24, 26	April 28, 30	

Half Day Daily Schedule

The Daily Schedule in Forest School is oftentimes called the Daily Flow, since the activities tend to ebb and flow throughout the day, from self directed activities to more teacher-led activities.

Half Day Kindergarten (Ages 3-6)

8:45-9:15 Parents may begin drop off and check in but MUST stay with their child until 9:00

9:00-9:15 Drop off, Morning Tea and Handwork Activities

9:20-10:00 Morning Meeting and Farm Chores

10:00-11:45 Hike to Forest Area, Forest Free Play, Snack & Storytime

11:45-12:30 Hike to Pick Up Area, Handwork Activities

Full Day Daily Schedule

Full Day Tutorial (Ages 7-10)

8:45-9:15 Parents may begin drop off and check in but MUST stay with their child until 9:00

9:00-9:15 Mindful Arrival

9:20-10:00 Language Arts Morning Literacy Flow

10:00-10:30 Morning Meeting

10:30-11:30 Forest Exploration, Creativity Challenge

11:30-12:30 Lunch, Games

12:30-1:30 Math All Around

1:30-3:00 Music, Movement, Dramatic Arts etc.

Weather Closings

We follow the Rutherford County School Weather closing schedule. There may be times our program may be open, even though Rutherford County Schools are closed. We will send out a text message during any inclement weather to indicate whether we are open or closed. If there is a closing, we will attempt to make up the date(s) at the end of May, or work with families to choose other days of the week to make up these days. No refunds will be given for inclement weather closing days.

Tuition and Costs

The cost for Half Day Kindergarten (Ages 3-6) is \$215 per month per child. The tuition is based off of the total number of weeks, not the number of days of school each month. Tuition is due by the first of the month, either on our website, handed directly to the the director (please don't hand checks to teachers or volunteers), or mailed to us. We do not currently accept Paypal, Venmo or credit cards onsite. We accept multiple credit cards and pay options online. We will not refund fees or tuition for any reason, including medical absences.

The cost for Full Day Tutorial (Ages 7-10) is currently (as of 2/12/25) \$300/month.

Drop Off and Pick Up Information

Drop off at the Half Day Kindergarten program is between 9:00-9:15. Please have your child dressed for the weather by 9:15 at the latest. Parents are always welcome between 8:45-9:15 at our Farm Shed building to help their child get ready for the day and to say goodbyes, discuss the upcoming day and to talk to the school director/teachers. Forest School staff is not available at this time to assist with dressing and getting children ready for Forest School.

Parents are also welcome to do a “quick drop off” between 9-9:15 AM. Parents can leave the car running, help your child get any gear as needed, and be on their way! Just follow the signs near the drop off/pick up area.

Pick up for the Half Day Kindergarten program is between 12:00-12:30. Parents are welcome to park their cars and come to the Farm Shed building to join their children, or they can do a “quick pick up” from their car. Please send a Remind message to your child’s teacher/school director if there is an emergency and must pick up after 12:30. After two incidences of late pick up, the school director will contact the family to discuss further options.

If you need to pick up your child early from our program for any reason, please send a text message to your child’s teacher and/or the school director to let us know what time you will be picking up. We will give you directions on where to pick up your child safely at that time.

Safety

Personal Safety

We believe that children in Oakview Farm Forest School have the right to feel personally safe in all spaces and throughout all activities. Personal safety includes being physically and emotionally safe. Physical safety includes safety from: illness; allergens; possible dangers from animals and/or equipment; potential nature-based dangers; inclement weather; and, children's own or others' dysregulated behaviors. Emotional safety includes being able to express values, beliefs, thoughts, and vulnerabilities without fear of punishment, judgement, or criticism.

Illnesses

In order to keep our community safe, a student will not be able to attend Forest School if they have any one of these: a fever of 100.4 or more; diarrhea; or, vomiting. The student may be able to attend if none of the above are present for at least twenty four hours after the last occurrence. There will be no tuition refunds given for illnesses.

Food and Allergies

Parents will need to provide any snack and/or lunch that they feel the child might need throughout her time at Forest School. Depending on the makeup of your child's class, we may ask parents to avoid sending in food with certain allergens (nuts, soy, dairy, etc). Oakview Farm Forest School may occasionally offer snacks that are related to what the children have harvested or have made. Please let us know if there are any food allergies your child might have so we can provide alternatives as needed. We currently will not administer any medication at the Forest School at this time, except in emergencies on an as-needed basis.

Farm Safety

Children, staff, and parents need to remember that our farm is a working farm with some inherent risks involved. There will be “No Go” areas on the farm that children will be taught to observe during our safety lessons. We will use colored flags to mark off these no-go areas. The farm is open for tours after our Forest School program ends at the discretion of the Forest School director. At that time, parents and family members are welcome to walk around the farm and interact with the animals, but please make note of the Tennessee Agritourism Liability Act signage around the property.

As part of our daily routine, children will be participating in “Farm Chores”. These chores are a wonderful way for the children to connect to the farm animals and to develop compassion for their daily care. The children will be taught how to interact safely with each of the animals at the farm. If there are any incidences that require first aid or further treatment, parents will be notified.

Forest Safety

For a large portion of their time, children will be in the designated forested areas. Eyes and ears will always be on children, and there will always be at least two adults with children at all times. Due to this safety rule, we ask parents tell us in advance if there will need to be an early pickup while children are in the forest. In the forest, children will be taught, among other things, to assess whether a tree is climbable, and how far up the tree they can safely climb, with adult supervision. Children will also be taught how to safely interact with natural materials (sticks, rocks, etc.) in a group setting. The children will also be taught to observe their environment for signs of stinging insects and spiders, as well as for plants that can be harmful when touched.

Weather Safety

In alignment with our Forest School philosophy, children will experience a range of weather conditions throughout the school year. We educate children on how to layer clothing effectively to stay warm or to reduce layers for comfort in hot weather. Additionally, we assist them in recognizing how their bodies react to various temperatures, ensuring their safety. In case of severe weather conditions, we will utilize the Farm Shed as a “base camp” and shelter and provide regular updates to parents.

Forest School Rules

Since we seek to be a cohesive community that functions on mutual understanding of each other and the natural world, we have devised a set of rules that all adults and children visiting and enrolled in our Forest School must adhere to:

- **Working Together as a Forest School Community** We are dedicated to creating meaningful and uplifting experiences for children and their families. These experiences rely on the honest collaboration of children, family members, staff, and volunteers, who all respect the rules and structures we've established. Together, we work towards the shared objective of honoring our core belief in the importance of children co-existing within the natural world. To that end, we have a zero tolerance policy for any behavior that undermines our shared, positive Forest School experiences.
- **Use of Electronics** Adult volunteers and staff may carry cell phones for emergencies only. They must remain put away at all times, and cannot be used for **any** reason other than in an emergency situation. No Apple Watches, iPods, etc are ever allowed by an adult volunteer or staff member. Students may not carry or use any electronic device at any time. If an adult or child requires an electronic device for accessibility, please let the Forest School director during the application process.
- **Build, Don't Destroy!** At Forest School, we take time building things and building relationships with our hands and our hearts. We use “gentle hands” and “gentle words” when working with materials and interacting with other people. We don't use materials to destroy our own or other people's creations. We don't use words to destroy our own sense of worth or other people's self worth.
- **Rule of Three** We teach and use the “Rule of Three” as an integral and necessary aspect of safety in the forest and on the farm. As stated in our Staff & Volunteer Information section, there will always be two adults with each group of children. If a child wants to explore on the periphery of the sightline of the group, we follow the Rule of Three. The child asks at least one other friend, and an adult to explore with them, staying with at least the edge of a

sightline of the other adult in the group. Individual exploration can occur within clear sightlines of the adults and children in the group.

- **Leave No Trace** We remain on marked paths in the woods. We collect materials only as needed and are always mindful of the effect that collection has on the micro-system of our forest. Whatever we bring into the forest, we bring out of the forest. We toilet in our composting toilets only.

Discipline Procedures

One of the fundamental principles of our Forest School philosophy is that children can learn inner discipline through effective adult modeling, peer support, and engaging with a naturally structured and organized environment. This aligns with the Montessori belief that the environment serves as the child's primary teacher. If a child becomes dysregulated during Forest School, we follow a positive guidance approach to help them regain self-regulation. This positive guidance approach involves:

- **Proactive Planning and Guidance** Throughout the day, adults will be physically and emotionally available to support the children. We will monitor them for any signs of outward or inward dysregulation or distress and strive to integrate emotional intelligence learning into our daily routine. Lessons will consistently include strategies to help re-regulate and maintain regulation throughout the day.
- **Assisting with Dysregulated Behaviors** Adults actively engage with children to assist with dysregulated behaviors. Children may experience dysregulated behaviors such as:
 - Disrespecting people by using inappropriate language
 - Acting destructively toward the natural world or other people
 - Consistently requiring attention from adults that distracts from learning or attention
 - Consistently not following the safety rules of the farm, forest, or school
- **Connection with the Child to Help Regulate Emotions** If dysregulated behaviors occur, the child's teacher may help the child through talking through the feelings, breathing exercises, mindfulness exercises, or other positive guidance techniques. If the behaviors continue to occur, the child's parent will be contacted through text and/or a phone call. If the behaviors disrupt the flow of the school or place the child or other children or adults in any danger, the child will need to be removed from Forest School for the remainder of the day. The director will follow up with the child's parent to make a plan for a safe return to Forest School.

Staff, Volunteers, and Visitors

Staff are trained in the Forest School philosophy, and may have other training in Montessori or other emergent learning philosophies. All of our staff are CPR/First Aid certified and are background checked (TSA/FBI) through IdentiGo services. Because we are a small program, if all of our staff members are sick and we cannot maintain our ratios, we will work with the families to reschedule that day's Forest School activities.

Parent volunteers are welcome at our program at any time, provided that they go through the necessary training. All children under the age of sixteen who are on the Farm Forest school grounds must be enrolled in one of our programs. Community volunteers over the age of eighteen are also welcome, but must undergo necessary training and background checks. Volunteers between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years old may be accepted in some circumstances, given parent permission, and at the director's discretion. Minor volunteers will always be within clear sightlines of at least one school staff member at all times. No compensation will be given to minor volunteers. Volunteers are never allowed to be alone with children, and will always be within eyeshot of Forest School staff. Volunteers are not allowed to help children with toileting needs, unless the children are their own. Volunteers will not receive any compensation for their service; there will be no reduction in the tuition for Forest School for volunteering.

Visitors to Forest School are welcome if they contact the school director and let them know the purpose and preferred time of their visit. Visitors who would like to tour the farm will need to do so after school hours. Visitors and volunteers will sign in and out with Forest School staff and will wear an identifiable lanyard when on school grounds.

Photography and Social Media

Photography by teachers, staff, volunteers, or community members of children is not allowed for any reason. Parents may photograph their own children during school, or during drop off and pick up times, so long as the photograph does not include other children. Teachers may use Forest School devices to record learning throughout the day to add to student portfolios of learning. Parents will sign a release form for pictures to be taken by the school director for promotional purposes. This release form is not required for enrollment into Forest School. Forest School staff will not post to the Forest School social media accounts during the school day.

Communication with Parents

We will use text messaging and phone calls to communicate with parents in non-emergency situations. In an emergency situation, staff will contact parents by calling the numbers listed on the application form. Staff members will also give verbal daily updates on student growth and share news with parents during drop off and pick up times.

Student Portfolios

Student portfolios are used to document progress on developmental standards and Forest School Key Features. These portfolios may be digital or paper-based, and will be reviewed near the end of each twelve-week session during parent teacher conferences.

Bathrooms and Toileting

Because we are an outdoor-only program with a focus on sustainability, children will be using composting toilets. These toilets are for one user at a time. Children will be taught the difference between a flush toilet and a composting toilet. Forest School staff will not instruct the children in personal toileting procedures; children must be fully potty trained in order to attend our program. After instruction and guidance in proper use of the composting toilets, if there is any damage to a toilet due to willful misuse, the child's parents will be contacted so that we can discuss the matter further. We will maintain privacy, safety and cleanliness of the toileting areas, but we will need parents to help reinforce any guidelines we set up about using the toilets. Handwashing stations are set up near toileting areas and around the farm as well to maintain hygienic practices.

Children who attend our program will need to be fully toilet proficient. Staff may help children with removing or putting on clothing layers as needed, making sure that the toilet door remains open (so long as privacy remains intact). Staff members will not help children wipe, but may narrate the steps so the child can do so as independently as possible. We will follow the "Rule of Three" and maintain ratios while children area utilizing the bathroom area. Toileting in the forested areas, as part of our "Leave No Trace" philosophy, will not be allowed.

Clothing and Supplies

Appropriate clothing is essential to safety at Oakview Farm Forest School. In the appendices, you will find a list of suggested clothing, gear, and supplies. Children will be monitoring their own comfort throughout the day, and will need to be able to tell staff members how their body feels in each kind of weather. If your child refuses to dress in accordance with what staff members feel would keep them safe, the parents will be contacted to have a discussion about how to best help the child understand this crucial safety measure.

Appendices

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