



Family Handbook 2025-2026

www.saplingsnatureschool.ca

Saplings acknowledges with deep respect and gratitude that we explore and learn on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations.

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Welcome To Saplings

A Letter from the Head of School

Dear Families,

Welcome to Saplings Nature School! We are so excited to embark on another year of outdoor learning, discovery, and connection with your child and family. At Saplings, we believe that nature is our classroom, and every season brings new opportunities for growth, resilience, and wonder.

Before we begin, we would like to take a moment to acknowledge that our programs take place on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Skw̱wú7mesh (Squamish), səlilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn, play, and connect with the land and waters that have been stewarded by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. As part of our commitment to reconciliation, we strive to foster respect, reciprocity, and stewardship of the natural world in all that we do.

At Saplings Nature School, children engage in play-based, experiential learning in the outdoors, developing confidence, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Through storytelling, exploration, and meaningful relationships, we aim to nurture a sense of belonging—to nature, to community, and to self.

This Family Handbook will serve as a guide to our school's policies, procedures, and expectations. Within it, you will find information about daily routines, safety protocols, communication methods, and how we work together to support your child's learning and well-being. We encourage you to read it carefully and reach out with any questions.

We look forward to sharing this journey with you and your child. Thank you for trusting us to be a part of their learning and growth.

With warmth and gratitude,



Cecily Heras
Head of School
Saplings Nature School

Contact Information

<p>Cecily Heras Head of School School Safety Coordinator</p>	<p>cecily@saplingsoutdoorprogram.ca 236-992-4111</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-related inquiries • Student-related inquiries • Staff-related inquiries • Taking days off • Questions and concerns • Curricular & Planning inquiries
<p>Nature School Enrollment & General Pemberton Heights Administration Manager</p>	<p>nature_school@saplingsoutdoorprogram.ca</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General school-related inquiries • Field Trips • Fundraising • Registration inquiries
<p>Heather Fraser Saplings Program Director SAP Board Director</p>	<p>saplingsinfo@gmail.com 778-838-0335</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program inquiries • Questions and concerns • SAP Association Board inquiries
<p>Odessa Anderson Accounts & Finance Manager</p>	<p>saplings.acct@gmail.com</p>
<p>Lillio Spruce: Kyra, Mako, Cecily, Phillip, Morgan Cedar: Megan, Ishwar, Trevor, Parisa Pinecones: Jessica, Mahi, Ylene, Edgar</p>	<p>Parent to Staff communications platform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacting teachers regarding late drop off &/or early pick up • Attendance- including reason for being away • Check ins & updates • Classroom inquiries • Student-related inquiries

Pick up & Drop Off Locations

<p>Sowden Park North side along 22nd Street near George St</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pinecones: drop off at baseball diamond near alley • Cedars: drop off at seating nearer McKay Ave *Wednesday drop off at Nature School • Spruce pick up here 	<p>Nature School 1390 W 22nd St Watch parking restrictions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spruce drop off at front of building • Pinecones pick up downstairs • Cedars pick up upstairs *Wednesdays pick up at Sowden Park
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School Calendar

Saplings Nature School								
2025 - 2026 School Calendar								
August '25							September '25	
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S	Su	M
					1	2	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	7	8
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	14	15
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	21	22
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29
31							30	
October '25							November '25	
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S	Su	M
					1	2	1	2
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
26	27	28	29	30	31			
December '25							January '26	
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S	Su	M
					1	2	1	2
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	4	5
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	11	12
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19
28	29	30	31				25	26
February '26							March '26	
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S	Su	M
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23
							29	30
April '26							May '26	
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S	Su	M
					1	2	1	2
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
26	27	28	29	30				
June '26							July '26	
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S	Su	M
					1	2	1	2
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	5	6
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	12	13
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	19	20
28	29	30					26	27



Winter/Spring Holidays &
Non-instructional days



Staff Training -no school for students



Goal Setting Conferences
- Half Day for students



Statutory Holiday - Office Closed,
no school for students



First & Last Days of School



Family Picnics

Important Dates

September 2	First day of School Term One begins	September 5	Family Picnic
September 29 No classes in session	Professional Development Day Curriculum Development & Collaboration	September 30 No classes in session	National Day of Truth & Reconciliation
October 8 & 9 Early Dismissal Care provided until 3pm	Goal Setting Conferences Pick up at noon	October 13 No classes in session	Thanksgiving Day
October 24 No classes in session	Professional Development Provincial Conferences	November 10 No classes in session	Non Instructional Day
November 11 No classes in session	Remembrance Day	December 5 No classes in session	Professional Development Day Documentating & Recording of Learning Journeys
December 19 to January 5 Winter Break	Winter vacation period No classes in session	December 19 Camp Offered	Day camp with Nature School staff offered for those who require child care
January 5 Camp Offered	Professional Development Day No classes in session	January 6	First Day of School Term Two begins
January 23 No classes in session	Professional Development Day Curriculum Development & Collaboration	February 13 No classes in session	Professional Development Day Full Program Training
February 16 No classes in session	BC Family Day	February 25 & 26 Early Dismissal Care provided until 3pm	Parent Teacher Conferences Pick up at noon
March 16 to 27 Spring Break	Spring vacation period No classes in session	March 30	First Day of School Term Three begins
April 3 No classes in session	Good Friday	April 6 No classes in session	Easter Monday
May 4 No classes in session	Non Instructional Day	May 13 & 14 Early Dismissal Care provided until 3pm	Parent Teacher Conferences Pick up at noon
May 18 No classes in session	Victoria Day	June 5 No classes in session	Professional Development Day Documentating & Recording of Learning Journeys
June 19	Last Day of Classes for Students	June 19	Family Picnic
June 22 - 26 No classes in session	Professional Development & Training		

Daily Schedules

 <p>Pinecones Kindergarten Jessica, Mahi & Ylene Megan on Wednesdays</p>	<p>8:45-9 Drop Off @ Sowden Park 10:30 Snack & Story 12:30 Lunch 1:00 Indoor Learning 2:20 Afternoon Snack - provided 2:45-3 Pick up @ Nature School</p>
 <p>Cedar Grades 1-3 Megan, Ishwar, Trevor, Parisa & Ylene</p>	<p>8:45-9 Drop Off @ Sowden Park 10:30 Snack & Story 12:30 Lunch 1:00 Indoor Learning 2:20 Afternoon Snack - provided 2:45-3 Pick up @ Nature School</p>
 <p>Spruce Grades 3-6 Kyra, Mako, Phillip & Cecily</p>	<p>8:45-9 Drop Off @ Nature School 10:30 Snack & Story 12:30 Lunch* 1:00 Outdoor Learning 2:45-3 Pick up @ Sowden Park</p> <p>*Community lunch Terms 2 & 3</p>
 <p>Field School Wednesday Cedars & Spruce Grades 1-6 Cecily, Jessica, Parisa, Mako & Morgan</p>	<p>8:45-9 Drop Off @ Nature School 10:00 Public bus to Stanley Park 11:00 Outdoor Learning 12:30 Lunch 2:45-3 Pick up @ Nature School</p>

Saplings Board at a Glance

The Board places the highest priority on the professional competence of the teaching personnel. The Board is dedicated to the goal of attracting and retaining the best-qualified, suitably-experienced, and highly skilled educators and professionals. The Board will strive to provide a working environment conducive to the best performance of educators.

Recruitment, selection, appointment, and placement of the qualified educators as staff for the independent school is the role of the Head of School, the Program Director and/or the Chair of the Board.

Each year, the Head of School and/or the Program Director shall recommend to the Board the number of educators to be employed and the allocation of these educators within the program.

Appointment of new educators shall be reviewed by the Board.

Our Philosophy

Saplings believes that nature is one of a child's best educators. Fostering a student's sense of wonder for the great outdoors through inspirational, stimulating, and hands-on experiences, promotes lifelong learning and interest. The Saplings educator is a resource to help students become aware of the important role nature plays in our lives. Being outdoors develops an appreciation for the natural world and our responsibilities related to its preservation. At Saplings we adapt to the natural pace of the children while exploring the BC Curriculum which has been designed to respond to the demanding world our students are

entering. Like the BC curriculum, Saplings aims to be learner-centered, flexible, and focused on literacy and numeracy while supporting deeper learning through concept-based and competency-driven approaches. Key content, concepts, competencies, skills, and big ideas that foster higher-order thinking will also be addressed. In order to prepare students to be aware, thoughtful, engaged, creative, flexible, self-motivated, principled, respectful, and informed citizens who can think critically, communicate effectively, and make independent decisions, Saplings, encompasses personalized and place-based learning, where learning experiences are adapted to the individual and the local environment. In addition, Saplings strives to enhance student engagement and choice, leading to lifelong, self-directed learning. Our program is designed to:

- Encourage **child-led exploration** and hands-on learning in natural settings.
- Support **risky play** as a means of building confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills.
- Promote **environmental stewardship** through sustainable practices and Indigenous teachings.
- Nurture **social-emotional development** by fostering cooperation, empathy, and self-regulation.
- Honor **diversity, equity, and inclusion**, ensuring all children feel seen, heard, and valued.

We follow an **emergent curriculum** that adapts to children's interests and the changing seasons. Educators serve as facilitators, guiding children in their discoveries while maintaining a safe and respectful environment.

Our Values

- Excellence: We pursue excellence in everything we do.
- Inclusiveness: We treat everyone fairly. We respect, reflect and appreciate the diversity in our community.
- Accountability: We strive to be approachable, and to make our processes and decisions as open and transparent as possible.
- Authenticity: We provide meaningful and relevant learning experiences.
- Innovation: We pursue innovation by encouraging curiosity and a spirit of inquiry.
- Community Engagement: We forge connections with our community and welcome their input.
- Outdoors: The importance of learning within our outdoor environment.
- Multiple ways of being: We value the many symbolic languages of students.
- Documentation: We understand the importance of making learning visible.

Program Overview

Guiding Principles

Saplings Nature School sets guiding principles and practices for both educators and students. These principles are intended as an “open framework” that teams of students and staff are free to adapt to the constantly evolving situational needs and conditions of their class and working environment.

Saplings’ students will practice “Active Learning” based on the belief that students learn best through active experiences with people, materials from the natural world, events, and emerging ideas. Through making choices about their materials, activities, and learning throughout their days by pursuing their personal interests and goals within a framework of skills and thinking strategies, students engage in their educational process. Throughout this process, students explore, ask and answer questions, solve problems, and interact with other classmates and community members. In this type of environment students naturally engage in “key experiences” which foster developmentally important skills and abilities.

Highlights of Saplings Nature School

- The learning process is highlighted to encourage students' competencies
- Implement the most natural way to promote each student's holistic growth by following the BC Ministry of Education curriculum
- Pursuing how to learn effectively through asking quality questions, learning and using simple thinking routines, and practicing self assessment techniques
- Using the outdoor environment to showcase our curriculum
- Environment is one of the key elements in a student's learning
- Stimulate every student's inner learning motivation
- Interdisciplinary and emergent learning
- Play is integral to learning
- The outdoors is a student's best classroom
- Advocate for cooperation rather than competition
- Nurtures students to develop core competencies such as creativity, problem solving, communication, well-being, grit, self-regulation.

Curriculum & Learning Approach

Saplings Nature School fosters deep connections to place, community, and self while encouraging students to be active, inquisitive, and critical thinkers. Learning in, with, and from nature enhances motivation, mental health, and engagement. We challenge the notion that traditional classrooms are the only effective learning environments, embracing nature as a powerful teacher. Students develop resilience, adaptability, and social-emotional growth through daily interactions with an ever-changing outdoor classroom.

By nurturing children's fundamental need to explore, discover, and create, we help them take meaningful risks, develop empathy, and build a lifelong relationship with the natural world. Learning at Saplings is shaped by inquiry, hands-on experiences, and deep connections to self, others, and place. These experiences cultivate an understanding of sustainability and our responsibility to care for the earth.

Our approach aligns with the BC Curriculum, providing a learner-centered, flexible, and competency-driven education. Through place-based, project-based, and inquiry-led learning, students engage in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Applied Design, Skills and Technology, Arts Education, Career Education, and Physical and Health Education. We incorporate proven methods such as Singapore Math, Project Zero's Thinking Routines, and a Whole Language approach combined with Phonics.

Educators provide provocations that encourage curiosity and exploration, supporting students in asking broad questions, noticing details, and thinking critically. Learning opportunities range from inquiry-based projects to targeted skill-building sessions, fostering both academic achievement and social-emotional development.

A Dynamic and Inclusive Learning Community

Saplings values diversity and actively affirms each child's cultural heritage alongside Indigenous ways of knowing and being. We believe that all peoples contribute to the richness of human experience, and education should be cyclical, regenerative, holistic, experiential, and communal.

We emphasize cooperation over competition, creating a collaborative learning environment where students of all ages work together, strengthening creativity, problem-solving, communication, and self-regulation.

Multi-Age Classrooms

Our multi-age classrooms offer numerous benefits:

- Stronger educator-student relationships through multi-year connections, supporting individualized learning.
- A growth-focused mindset, where students learn at their own pace without ability-based labels.
- A sense of community, fostering patience, empathy, and cooperative learning.
- Peer mentorship, where older students take leadership roles while younger students gain support and confidence.
- Student agency, empowering children to make choices in their learning, fostering independence and lifelong learning skills.

Our Mission

At Saplings, we cultivate wonder, curiosity, vitality, and joy in learning. Our goal is to enable students to become literate, develop their potential, and acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for a democratic, sustainable, and prosperous society.

As the North Shore's only nature-based elementary school, we integrate the BC Curriculum with hands-on outdoor experiences, ensuring deep, meaningful learning through concept-based and competency-driven approaches.

Teaching Literacy, Language, Science, and Math

Our curriculum is project-based, and so is aimed to teach students a variety of skills and content relevant to their lives and interests. Projects aim to integrate components of literacy, math, science and the arts into each topic, thereby drawing the connections between the content and the core competencies as outlined in the BC curriculum. As student interests help guide project inquiries, teachers provide explicit instruction in processing information and interacting intellectually through research, analysis, and thinking skills. Students are encouraged and supported to delve deeply into their learning through dialogue and experience.

Literacy

Our literacy program is designed to engage students in and aid their understanding and use of a variety of communication skills to understand and convey meaning including writing, reading, image reading, and oral language.

Our teachers use [UFLI](#), a specific program that focuses on teaching foundational reading skills in a systematic and explicit way. This phonics system which supports students' understanding and memory of letter recognition, associated sounds, and sound pairings is complemented and informed by Orton Gillingham practices of learning about the meaningful relationships between words, including how they sound, how they're spelled, and what their morphological structure is. All of these practices contribute to vocabulary knowledge as well as reading comprehension.

In addition, our educators use [Play Roly](#), an early reading activity recommended by experts and founded on the Science of Reading research as a critical tool to determine just what our youngest students already know. This can be used also as a tool to highlight where extra support and intervention may be needed.

Complementing these, we incorporate ideas from the [Whole Language Approach](#) which seeks to make writing and reading relevant to the children by embedding literacy in everyday acts and across all subjects in the curriculum. The aim is to help students understand that language is a system whose parts work together.

Supported by a variety of activities including, but not limited to: literacy component of inquiry projects, daily quiet reading, differentiated reading and writing groups, oral storytelling practice, student read-alouds, letters/sounds of the day/week for early learners, literacy centers, book and novel studies for more ready learners, and journal writing.

Language

A language requirement becomes part of the curriculum in Grade 5 for which students are expected to learn basic vocabulary and communications skills. Many of our younger students will also have language instruction depending on their classroom pod. Our language program follows the tenets of translingualism which holds the view that difference in languages, particularly our students' and staff member's home and/or first languages, are valuable resources to be honoured, preserved, developed, and utilized to produce meaning when writing, speaking, reading, and listening. Translanguaging allows learners to connect the information they already know to new information while celebrating each student's and staff member's family and cultural heritage.

The translingual orientation in language acquisition suggests that students bring with them the awareness of intercultural communication and the competence of translanguaging between different discourse communities. Therefore, we will freely explore our classroom's various languages so students become adept at translanguaging between codes and repertoires by showing their linguistic creativity and linguistic playfulness. We will encourage our community members to bring in and share important words and phrases with everyone so that all may enjoy many forms of expressing common ideas or needs.

Science

Our science curriculum is designed to support our students' growing connection to the world around them, specifically our outdoor classroom areas. With an abundance of natural processes apparent and available to the students during the 3-4+ hours they spend outside daily, science is approached live in action.

Inquiries surround what is going on at the time combined with the students' observations and interests. Our outdoor classroom space contains forest, stream, and more urban areas and so provides a rich diversity of experience. Students discuss conservation, sustainability, responsibility, and reciprocity, and gain awareness that we are all part of one large system. Supported through daily free and guided inquiry sessions, experiments, and frequent discussions.

Math

Our math curriculum seeks to prepare students to apply their skills in a variety of real-life, approachable situations. Embedded within our project inquiries, students learn the connections between mathematical concepts and the real world. In stand alone skill-building sessions, students learn math skills including, but not limited to, graphing, measurement, arrays, functions, comparison, and patterning through interaction with physical and visual representations and introductions to more complex mathematical concepts as students become ready. Math is supported by many different activities and student-lead class initiatives (class economy, fundraisers, and design projects etc.) such as math centres, complex reasoning games, differentiated math groups based on readiness and ability, and skills development lessons. Students practice math skills daily during various indoor and outdoor activities.

Our overall math curriculum is supplemented by the Singapore Math system which is a method of learning that uses three distinct approaches to understanding mathematical concepts and problem-solving. It uses the concrete to pictorial to abstract approach and encourages students to actively think, understand, and communicate to solve math problems. In addition to this, teachers use the SNAP solution assessment tool which is a practical approach to help classroom teachers evaluate number sense.

Teaching and Learning Outside

Outdoor learning is a year-round commitment, and proper clothing is essential for children to fully participate. Families are responsible for ensuring their child arrives prepared for the day's conditions. Educators will notify families of any schedule modifications due to extreme weather.

Outdoor education supports cognitive, emotional, and physical development in ways that a traditional classroom cannot. By immersing children in nature, we ensure that literacy, science, and math are not just academic subjects, but lived experiences that shape how they understand the world.

- **Experiential & Multi-Sensory Learning** – Through direct experience at a variety of outdoor classrooms, students see, hear, touch, and move, strengthening comprehension and retention. Open-ended, inquiry-based experiences promote problem-solving and independent thinking. Students can learn practical skills like navigation, survival, and shelter building. Core competencies come into play when students are engaged in “doing” in any area of learning. This includes activities where students use thinking, collaboration, and communication to solve problems, address issues, or make decisions.
- **Engagement, Motivation & Curricular Connections** – Learning is more meaningful and memorable when connected to real experiences rather than solely through textbooks or lectures. Activities are designed to complement classroom learning and align with specific subject areas. The ultimate goal is for students to employ their gained skills in every day learning environments and in their daily lives.
- **Community, Competency, Critical Thinking & Creativity** - Through communal meals, group work and design thinking, students learn the skills of teamwork and collaboration while building upon the Core Competencies. Core competencies are sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep and life-long learning: Communication, Thinking, and Personal & Social.
- **Emotional & Social Growth through Connection to Nature** – Working in nature fosters collaboration, resilience, and self-regulation and aims to foster a sense of respect and appreciation for the natural world. By embracing seasonal changes, Saplings students develop resilience, adaptability, and a deep connection to nature—learning that extends beyond the classroom and into lifelong appreciation for the environment.

Philosophy of Risky Play

At Saplings Nature School, we believe that risky play is an essential part of childhood development. Allowing children to explore their limits, assess risks, and make independent decisions helps them develop confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills.

What is Risky Play?

Risky play includes activities that provide a sense of excitement and challenge, such

- as:
- Climbing trees and balancing on logs.
- Running, jumping, and rough-and-tumble play.
- Exploring natural spaces with uneven terrain.
- Using tools (under supervision).

While these activities carry some level of risk, they are essential for learning. Minor scrapes, bumps, or falls are a natural part of play and help children understand their own capabilities and boundaries.

Why Do We Encourage Risky Play?

Children who engage in risky play:

- Develop risk-assessment skills – Learning to recognize hazards and make decisions about their safety.
- Build confidence and resilience – Taking risks teaches children how to overcome challenges and

cope with failure.

- Improve physical coordination and strength – Climbing, balancing, and running develop motor skills and body awareness.
- Enhance problem-solving skills – Encouraging children to think critically about risks fosters independence and decision-making.
- Learn to trust themselves – Making their own choices, rather than relying on constant adult intervention, builds self-trust and autonomy.

The Role of Parents & Educators in Risky Play

It can be challenging for adults to let go of control and allow children to take risks. However, overprotecting children may limit their ability to develop essential life skills.

- Instead of saying "Be careful," try asking:
 - "What's your plan to get up there?"
 - "Do you feel stable?"
 - "What's your next step?"
 - "What will you do if you slip?"
- Observe before intervening – Sometimes, the best approach is to step back and watch. Children often self-correct and learn from experience.
- Model dynamic risk assessment – Point out potential hazards without discouraging play:
 - "I see that the log is a little wobbly. What do you think will happen if you step on it?"

Balancing Risk & Safety

At Saplings, we take a balanced approach - ensuring children can explore and take risks while maintaining a safe environment. Our educators:

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- Conduct site risk assessments to identify potential hazards.
- Supervise children's play while allowing freedom to explore.
- Teach children how to assess and manage risks themselves.

Encouraging risky play means trusting children to make choices, allowing them to fall and get back up, and celebrating their growing confidence and independence. Children are far more capable and resilient than we often give them credit for—let's give them the space to show us just how much they can do.

Plant and Wildlife Awareness

At Saplings Nature School, we believe in fostering a deep respect for the natural world. Our programs encourage children to engage with local plant life and small wildlife, while following sustainable practices and Leave No Trace principles.

Our approach ensures that children learn how to interact responsibly with nature, helping to preserve the ecosystem while developing a lifelong appreciation for the environment. A full version of our Sustainability Policies can be found on our website.

Berry Picking & Sustainable Harvesting

Berry picking is a wonderful way for children to engage with seasonal changes, plant identification, and local food sources. However, responsible foraging is essential to protect plant populations and ensure wildlife has access to food.

To ensure safe and sustainable berry harvesting, the following guidelines must be observed:

- Permission First – Children must ask a staff member before picking berries.

- Identification & Safety – Staff will verify berry types to ensure they are safe to eat.
- Moderation is Key – Children are encouraged to pick only a small amount and must eat them under adult supervision after washing.
- Honourable Harvest Practices – We harvest mindfully, taking only what we need and leaving plenty for wildlife.
- Parental Consent – Staff will confirm allergies and parental consent before allowing children to eat berries during the program.

Even if a child has experience picking berries with their family, these guidelines ensure safety, sustainability, and respect for our local environment.

Respecting Local Flora & Fauna

Beyond berry picking, we encourage children to observe and interact with plants, insects, and small forest animals in a way that promotes respect and ecological balance.

- Look, Don't Disturb – Children are taught to observe plants and wildlife without picking, removing, or harming them.
- Avoid Damaging Plants – Climbing trees, breaking branches, or pulling up plants can harm ecosystems and disrupt habitats.
- Respect Animal Homes – Logs, fallen trees, and forest debris often serve as shelters for insects and small animals; they should be left undisturbed.
- Minimize Human Impact – We stick to designated trails to prevent soil erosion and protect sensitive plant life.

Leave No Trace Practices

As part of our commitment to sustainability, we teach and follow Leave No Trace principles to protect the natural spaces where we learn and play:

1. Take Only Memories – No collecting rocks, flowers, or plants unless part of a guided learning activity.
2. Leave What You Find – Wildlife, nests, and insect habitats should not be disturbed.
3. Dispose of Waste Properly – All trash, including food scraps, must be packed out to avoid harming wildlife.
4. Be Considerate of Wildlife & Others – We move through the forest quietly and respectfully, avoiding disruption to animals and fellow nature-goers.

By following these practices, children develop a strong environmental ethic, ensuring that future generations can enjoy and learn from nature just as we do today.

For more details on our Sustainability Policies, please visit our website.

Health & Safety in an Outdoor School Environment

At Saplings Nature School, children spend extended time outdoors in all seasons, which means awareness and prevention of common outdoor health concerns is essential. Our educators are trained to monitor, manage, and respond to environmental risks such as lice, insect bites, stings, ticks, and cold-related conditions like hypothermia. Families play an important role in helping to prevent and address these concerns.

At Saplings Nature School, students spend the majority of their time outdoors in all weather conditions. Proper clothing and gear are essential for ensuring comfort, safety, and full participation. Below is a seasonal gear list to help families prepare their child for a successful outdoor learning experience.

General Weather Preparedness

- Layering is essential to help children adjust to changing temperatures throughout the day.
- Waterproof and insulated clothing is required during colder months to keep children warm and dry.
- Proper footwear (rain boots, winter boots, sturdy hiking shoes) ensures safety and comfort.
- Extra clothing (socks, gloves, mittens, base layers) should always be packed in case of wet conditions.
- Educators monitor weather conditions and advisories and adapt plans accordingly.
- Families will be notified of extreme weather modifications via Lillio.

Essential Year-Round Gear

- Backpack – Comfortable, waterproof, and large enough to hold extra layers, snacks, and a water bottle.
- Water Bottle – Durable and insulated for both cold and hot weather.
- Lunchbox/Snack Container – Leak-proof and easy to open for independent eating.
- Extra Clothing Set – A full change of clothes (shirt, pants, underwear, socks) in a waterproof bag.
- Weather-Appropriate Footwear – See seasonal recommendations below.
- Small First Aid Kit (Optional) – Includes personal medications if needed.

LAYERING BASICS FOR COLD WEATHER

Following the OMFS Layering System will help children and adults stay warm in the chilliest and wettest of conditions!

There's no such thing as bad weather - if you're dressed for it!

BASE LAYER

Base layers are the most important part of any layering system. Long underwear and socks can vary in weight depending on the weather. Choose synthetic or wool material - **never cotton**.



MID LAYER

Mid layers help to create a pocket of warm air around the body. Material should always be based on the temperature, thicker mid layers for colder days. Again, cotton is not a good choice for a mid layer, think wool or fleece with nylon pants for warmer days. *Multiple mid layers can be used when the conditions are cold.



OUTER LAYER

The Outer layer is responsible for keeping the elements out and warmth in! At Forest School it is essential that this layer is waterproof on both the top and bottom, even when dry outside. If in a rain coat, on colder days, add another jacket for warmth.



HEAD, HANDS & FEET

Head - always wear or bring a winter toque, lighter weight toques can be used for warmer days.

Hands - while mini mitts are nice to have on hand for dexterity, winter mittens (not gloves) are needed for all days when temps below 5°C.

Feet - insulated rain boots are needed when temps are below 5°C. Winter boots should be used when the temp will stay below 0°C for the day.



EXTRAS

An extra sweater, pair of wool socks (suitable for the temperature), and up to 3 extra pairs of mittens should be in the pack at all times!



STAY WARM, LAYER UP!

Additional Recommended Items

- Dry Bag or Waterproof Pouch – For notebooks, or extra clothes.
- Small Notebook & Pencil – For nature journaling.
- Compact Emergency Blanket – Useful for unexpected cold.
- Sunglasses (for UV protection)

Gear Tips & Best Practices

- ✓ Label Everything – To prevent mix-ups and lost items.
- ✓ Check Gear Seasonally – Make sure clothing still fits and is in good condition.
- ✓ Avoid Cotton for Cold Weather – It absorbs moisture and does not insulate well.
- ✓ Prioritize Breathable & Waterproof Materials – Keeps children dry and comfortable.
- ✓ Pack Smart – Encourage children to help pack their own bag so they know where everything is.

Lost and Found

Lost items will be kept at the school building for the term before being donated. Families are welcome to check our lost and found bins at any time to claim lost items. There are times when items have been left behind at an outdoor classroom or trail. While staff will do their best to find and collect these items, it may be necessary for families to go to find them after school hours.

What to Expect in the Fall (September – November)

Fall is a season of transition, bringing cooler temperatures, rain, and shorter daylight hours.

- Variable temperatures: Mornings and late afternoons can be chilly, while midday remains mild.
- Rainy conditions: The West Coast rainy season begins, making waterproof gear essential.
- Slippery surfaces: Wet leaves and muddy trails require sturdy, slip-resistant footwear.
- Wildlife activity: Animals prepare for winter, offering unique opportunities for observation.

How We Adapt

- Activities emphasize exploring seasonal changes, including falling leaves, migrating birds, and plant cycles.
- Educators incorporate fire-building and shelter-building skills in preparation for winter.
- Adjusted pickup and drop-off locations may be used to avoid waterlogged areas.

What to Expect in the Spring (March – May)

Spring is unpredictable, with a mix of warm, rainy, and muddy days.

- Cool mornings, warm afternoons: Layers remain important.
- Heavy rains and muddy trails: Waterproof gear is still needed.
- Increased wildlife activity: Birds, insects, and plants begin emerging.

How We Adapt

- Gardening, foraging, and seasonal observation activities become a focus.
- Sensory play and water-based learning are integrated.

- Educators emphasize wildlife awareness, including safe encounters with insects and small animals.

What to Pack

- Waterproof Rain Jacket – Breathable, with a hood and sealed seams.
- Waterproof Rain Pants – Full-coverage to keep clothes dry.
- Rain Boots – Insulated for chilly days; non-insulated for mild weather.
- Layers for Temperature Changes:
 - Base layer: Merino wool or synthetic moisture-wicking top and bottoms (avoid cotton).
 - Mid-layer: Fleece or wool sweater.
 - Outer layer: Waterproof shell or insulated jacket.
- Hat and Gloves – Lightweight for warmth but breathable for active play.
- Wool or Synthetic Socks – Extra pairs recommended for wet days.
- Neck Gaiter or Buff – Helps retain warmth without the hazard of a long scarf.

What to Expect in the Winter (December – February)

Winter at Saplings is cold and unpredictable, with rain, snow, ice, and short daylight hours.

- Freezing temperatures: Dressing in warm, insulating layers is critical.
- Snow and ice: Can create slippery conditions but also provide rich sensory experiences.
- Limited daylight: Visibility precautions are taken, including reflective gear.
- Extreme cold weather policies: Programs may be adjusted or relocated in cases of:
 - Severe wind chills below -10°C
 - Heavy snowfall affecting accessibility
 - Frozen ground preventing safe play

How We Adapt

- Survival skills, and winter shelter-building are integrated into learning.
- More movement-based activities to keep children warm.
- Regular warm-up breaks (hot drinks, small shelters, increased physical activity).
- If conditions are too cold, sessions may be shortened, modified, or relocated indoors.

What to Pack

- Insulated Winter Jacket – Waterproof and windproof.
- Snow Pants – Insulated, waterproof, and durable.
- Winter Boots – Waterproof, insulated, and rated for cold temperatures.
- Base Layers (Thermal Underwear) – Wool or synthetic to wick moisture away.
- Mid-Layer (Fleece or Wool Sweater & Pants) – Adds insulation.
- Wool or Fleece Hat – Covers ears and stays secure.
- Waterproof Gloves/Mittens – Two pairs recommended (one extra in case of wetness).
- Thick Wool or Thermal Socks – Extra pair in backpack for emergencies.
- Neck Warmer/Gaiter – Provides warmth while being safer than scarves.
- Hand & Foot Warmers (Optional) – Useful for especially cold days.

What to Expect in the Summer (June – August)

Summer brings heat, sun exposure, and increased insect activity.

- Hot temperatures: Hydration and sun protection are critical.
- High UV exposure: Shade-seeking and regular sunscreen application are prioritized.
- Increased insect activity: Mosquitoes, wasps, and ticks require extra precautions.
- Wildfire season: Air quality is monitored, and fire bans are respected.

How We Adapt

- Cooling breaks in shaded areas; activities near water where safe.
- Hydration reminders and designated water breaks.
- Wildfire safety education and adherence to fire bans.
- Monitoring air quality: Sessions may be relocated or modified on smoky days.

What to pack

- Wide-Brim Sun Hat – Covers face, ears, and neck for sun protection.
- Lightweight, Breathable Long-Sleeved Shirt & Pants – Protects from sun and insects.
- Sunscreen – Applied before arrival, with extra packed if needed.
- Bug Repellent – Preferably natural, DEET-free if possible.
- Closed-Toe Hiking Shoes or Sandals – Sturdy and secure.
- Extra Water Bottle – Hydration is critical in warm weather.

Weather Policy

At Saplings Nature School, children learn and play outdoors year-round in all weather conditions, except when deemed unsafe. Each season presents unique learning opportunities and requires specific preparation to ensure children's comfort, safety, and engagement. This guide will help families understand what to expect and how to prepare for each season.

Saplings will advise parents and caregivers if programs are cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. Saplings will follow what the local school board decides in regards to snow day etc. If program staff decide that the weather becomes adverse and too dangerous for children to be outside during a program, they will attempt to seek shelter if their location permits and/or will contact parents to pick up their children as soon as possible.

Please refer to the below website for further information regarding our policies on cancellations, late fees and air quality policy. www.saplingsoutdoorprogram.ca/policies

It is at the discretion of staff to alter activities and location of programs if they feel the temperatures are becoming too extreme. Parents and families are also allowed to pick up early if they feel the weather is too extreme. **Please note that no reimbursements will be made to parents and families if they decide to keep their child home due to adverse weather, nor if Saplings decides to close programs due to adverse weather conditions.**

Cold-Weather Risks: Hypothermia & Frostbite

Outdoor play in colder months requires proper preparation to prevent hypothermia and frostbite. Educators monitor children closely in cold weather and ensure they are dressed appropriately. By working together, we can ensure that children stay safe, comfortable, and prepared for outdoor learning in all conditions!

Signs of Cold Stress: Shivering, pale or cold skin, lack of energy, slow speech, or clumsiness.

Prevention:

- Dressing in layers, including a waterproof outer layer, gloves, hats, and warm socks.
- Bringing extra mittens and socks to change if they become wet.
- Keeping children active and moving to generate body heat.
- Warm-up breaks indoors or in a sheltered area when needed.

Response:

- If a child shows signs of hypothermia, they will be brought to a warm location, given warm fluids, and monitored closely.
- Families will be notified if additional care is needed.

Lice Prevention & Management

Lice are common in group settings and can spread quickly through direct head-to-head contact. While they are not harmful, they can be disruptive and uncomfortable.

- Regular head checks at home can help catch lice early before they spread.
- Parents will be notified discreetly if lice are found in a group, and children should be treated before returning to school.
- Children should avoid sharing hats, scarves, and hair accessories.

If lice are detected, families should follow treatment recommendations and notify staff so we can take appropriate precautions.

Insect Bites & Stings

Children may encounter mosquitoes, bees, wasps, and other insects while playing outdoors. Most bites and stings are harmless, but some children may have allergic reactions that require medical attention.

Prevention:

- Use insect repellent (natural or DEET-based, as per family preference).
- Dress children in light-colored, long-sleeved clothing to deter mosquitoes.
- Encourage children to stay calm around bees and wasps rather than swatting.

Response to Stings & Bites:

- Affected areas will be cleaned and monitored for swelling or allergic reactions.
- Families will be notified if a significant reaction occurs.
- For students with severe allergies, EpiPens and allergy action plans will be followed as necessary.

Ticks & Lyme Disease Prevention

Ticks are present in grassy and wooded areas, and while most tick bites are harmless, some species can carry Lyme disease. Prevention is key.

Preventative Measures:

- Children should wear light-colored clothing (to easily spot ticks) and tuck pants into socks when in grassy or wooded areas.
- Conduct tick checks at home after school, especially around the scalp, ears, armpits, and behind the knees.
- Use tick-repellent sprays if preferred by the family.

If a Tick is Found:

- Staff will notify parents and recommend removal at home using fine-tipped tweezers.
- Parents should monitor for symptoms of Lyme disease, such as a bullseye rash, fever, or fatigue and consult a doctor if needed.

Family Responsibility & Communication

- Pack appropriate clothing daily to match the weather and environment.
- Perform regular lice and tick checks at home.
- Notify staff of any insect allergies or special medical considerations.
- Monitor children for any delayed reactions after bites, stings, or cold exposure.

Behavior Guidance & Support

Child Guidance Policy

At Saplings Nature School, we are committed to fostering a safe, respectful, and supportive environment where children can grow, explore, and develop essential life skills. Our child guidance approach is based on positive behavior strategies, focusing on prevention, independence, and problem-solving while avoiding punitive discipline.

Our goal is to ensure that every child feels safe, valued, and supported at Saplings Nature School. Through clear communication, positive role modeling, and collaboration with families, we strive to create an environment where children can thrive emotionally, socially, and developmentally.

For a full copy of our Child Guidance and Suspension Policies and Procedures, please visit our website.

Our Approach to Child Guidance

- Educators use age-appropriate strategies to support emotional regulation, independence, and responsibility.
- Clear expectations and boundaries are developed with children and posted in each program space.
- Problem-solving skills are encouraged to help children cope with frustration and challenges.
- Risky play is supported in a safe and intentional way, allowing children to build confidence in their abilities.
- Families are encouraged to share any relevant information (e.g., changes at home, emotional upsets) to help educators better support their child's experience.

How We Support Positive Behavior

Our educators focus on prevention by:

- Offering engaging, child-led activities to support curiosity and autonomy.
- Planning smooth transitions and providing reminders before changes in activities.
- Using clear communication and speaking at the child's eye level.

- Encouraging problem-solving and emotional expression in moments of frustration.
- Redirecting behavior when necessary while maintaining respect and empathy.

When needed, educators intervene appropriately by:

- Offering safe choices and guiding children to reflect on their actions.
- Supporting children in cooling off if they need space before rejoining the group.
- Providing comfort through physical touch, but only with the child's consent.
- Working with families to create consistent strategies between home and school if ongoing behavior challenges arise.

Family Involvement & Communication

We value open communication and collaboration with families when it comes to child guidance. If persistent challenges arise, additional support strategies may be considered, including referrals to external specialists or modifications to the child's participation in the program.

- Educators will regularly share positive observations as well as any challenges.
- Families may be asked to meet with educators to discuss ongoing behavioral concerns.
- If needed, a behavior support plan will be developed with input from educators and parents/guardians.

Guidelines for Addressing Severe Behaviors

While rare, severe behaviors may require additional intervention. These include:

- Physical harm toward other children or staff.
- Persistent defiance or major disruptions that impact the safety of the program.
- Verbal abuse including inappropriate language or threats.
- Leaving the program boundaries without permission.

In such cases, educators will:

1. Remove the child from the situation to ensure safety.
2. Help the child regulate their emotions before rejoining the group.
3. Communicate with families regarding the incident.
4. Document the incident and determine if a formal intervention plan is needed.

If behaviors persist and pose a significant risk, a temporary suspension from the program may be considered while a plan is developed with the family.

Staying at home

There are times when it is best for a student to stay at home to re-regulate in their familiar environment with their most treasured loved one(s). This time is not meant to penalize a student nor gain compliance, but rather to attend to the students' needs, give them individual support, and help them participate successfully. These situations include, but are not limited to:

- A child has a serious medical or emotional need.
- A child's behavior poses an ongoing safety risk to themselves or others.
- Repeated incidents occur despite intervention and support.

- A severe incident (e.g., violence, unsafe actions) requires immediate action.

Leading up to this, families will be involved in decision-making and kept informed throughout the process. Staff and parents will communicate in order to assess when the student is ready to return to the program:

- Meetings will be held with parents/guardians.
- A plan will be put in place to support successful participation moving forward.

Transitioning to/from Nature School

Preparing for Nature School

At Saplings Nature School, we believe that preparation is key to ensuring a positive and enriching experience for children in an outdoor learning environment. Nature-based education fosters resilience, independence, and curiosity, and setting children up for success starts with proper preparation at home. By fostering a sense of curiosity, adaptability, and independence, families can help ensure their child thrives in Saplings' nature-based learning environment.

What to Expect

- Children spend most of their day outdoors, experiencing all types of weather. Expect them to get wet sometimes.
- Learning is hands-on and play-based, incorporating loose parts, natural materials, and real-world problem-solving. Expect them to be dirty everyday.
- Outdoor play fosters physical development, social-emotional learning, and critical thinking skills. Expect them to be tired at first.

How to Prepare Your Child

- Encourage independence by practicing dressing in layers, putting on boots, and managing backpacks.
- Talk about the weather and how it affects clothing choices and outdoor activities.
- Read books about nature and outdoor adventures to build excitement and familiarity.
- Practice problem-solving skills by allowing your child to take small risks, such as balancing on logs or navigating uneven terrain.
- Introduce self-help skills, like opening lunch containers, putting on mittens, and using the washroom independently.

What Families Can Expect

- Daily outdoor adventures that build confidence, resilience, and a deep connection to nature.
- Regular communication from educators about activities, learning experiences, and important updates.
- A welcoming community that values family involvement and collaboration.

Preparing for Kindergarten

Getting ready for kindergarten at Saplings Nature School or transitioning to other educational settings is a big milestone for children and families. Our play-based, inquiry-driven approach ensures that children develop the social-emotional, cognitive, and self-regulation skills necessary for a smooth and confident transition.

Building Kindergarten Readiness

At Saplings, we naturally integrate early literacy, numeracy, and executive function skills into our daily activities. This includes:

- Emergent literacy and numeracy through storytelling, songs, recognizing letters and numbers, and nature-based provocations.
- Developing problem-solving and independence through outdoor play, turn-taking, and self-help skills.
- Encouraging curiosity and resilience, which align with the BC Early Learning Framework and local school district expectations.
- We provide opportunities for children to visit kindergarten classrooms, school libraries, and outdoor areas to help them become familiar with new environments.
- Educators support relationship-building by introducing children to teachers, staff, and peers in their future schools.
- Parents receive updates on kindergarten readiness events, school visits, and community engagement opportunities.

How Can Parents and Families Help

There are numerous things parents and families can do to help support and prepare their children for kindergarten at Saplings. By gradually introducing children to kindergarten routines, expectations, and environments, Saplings ensures that they enter their next stage of learning feeling confident, secure, and excited. Families are supported every step of the way, making this transition a positive and empowering experience for both children and caregivers.

→ *Outdoor Readiness & Comfort*

- Encourage daily outdoor play in all weather conditions (rain, cold, heat).
- Teach children how to dress appropriately for different weather (layering, waterproof gear, sun protection).
- Practice putting on/taking off outdoor gear independently (boots, rain suits, gloves).
- Familiarize them with using a backpack and carrying their own belongings.

→ *Social & Emotional Readiness*

- Encourage independence in tasks like opening lunch containers, using the toilet, and dressing.
- Teach simple conflict resolution skills (using words, asking for help).
- Support turn-taking, sharing, and cooperative play.
- Read books about emotions and practice naming feelings.
- Encourage resilience by allowing safe risk-taking and problem-solving.

→ *Physical Readiness & Safety*

- Provide opportunities for climbing, balancing, and walking on uneven terrain.

- Teach basic outdoor safety (staying within boundaries, being aware of surroundings).
- Practice following simple instructions and transitioning between activities.
- Encourage proper handwashing and hygiene, especially after outdoor play.

→ *Curiosity & Learning Readiness*

- Foster a love for nature by exploring local parks, forests, or gardens.
- Encourage curiosity by asking open-ended questions about nature.
- Read books about wildlife, seasons, and outdoor adventures.
- Practice storytelling and imaginative play outdoors.
- Teach simple responsibility, like tidying up after meals or helping with small tasks.

→ *Nutrition & Energy Management*

- Pack nutritious, easy-to-eat lunches and snacks that children can open themselves.
- Ensure they drink enough water, especially when playing outdoors.
- Maintain a consistent sleep schedule to support energy levels.

Supporting Children with Separation Anxiety

If a child is experiencing separation anxiety, our staff follows a structured approach to help them self-regulate and transition successfully into the program. By maintaining a calm and reassuring approach, we aim to help children develop confidence and independence, ensuring they feel safe and ready to explore their outdoor learning environment:

- Warm Welcome – Staff greet each child warmly, using their name and engaging them in a familiar or favorite activity to help them feel comfortable.
- Consistent Routine – Predictability helps children feel safe. We encourage parents to establish a consistent drop-off routine (e.g., a quick hug, a reassuring goodbye, and an exit without prolonged hesitation).
- Comfort Objects – If needed, children may bring a small comfort item from home to help ease the transition.
- Gentle Redirection – Staff gently guide children toward an engaging activity, nature exploration, or interaction with peers to shift their focus away from separation distress.
- Self-Regulation Techniques – Educators support children in using breathing exercises, grounding techniques (e.g., feeling different textures in nature), or movement-based activities to help them manage emotions.
- Positive Reinforcement – Staff offer praise and encouragement when children show resilience and adaptability during drop-off.
- Communication with Parents – If a child continues to struggle with separation anxiety, staff will provide updates and collaborate with parents to develop supportive strategies tailored to the child's needs.

Bridging the Transition to Other Educational Settings

The Nature School Team is committed to supporting students and families who graduate or leave our school. We understand parents and families may have concerns around transitioning to a new educational setting. Please reach out to our educators who will be more than happy to facilitate a discussion and describe how we can best help with this process.

Family Engagement

Saplings requests that families share with educators any relevant information to better care and understand their child(ren). Information such as:

- Changes in the home
- Physical or emotional upsets
- Tired from a busy weekend
- New experiences
- Custody issues
- Family celebrations

Lilio

Communication between staff and families will exist through our Parent App Lilio. The messaging feature will allow parents and families to privately contact staff in their program and provide updates about their child's well being and view important messages regarding drop off and pick up locations. Families will also be able to view the program calendar via Lilio to see details of any planned closures for STAT holidays or Professional Development and staff wide training days. Reminders of these will also be communicated by program staff.

In Person

Parents and families are encouraged to connect with the staff in the form of informal check-ins during drop off and pick up times to discuss the progress of their child and any issues and behaviours that might be arising. Staff may request (and families may also request) to conduct a more formal meeting with parents and families, either in person or by phone or zoom, to discuss ongoing needs and development of their child.

Classroom Visits

There is also space within our programming to include parents and families to come along and engage children in a planned activity (nature walk, story reading, sharing cultural traditions, field trips etc.). Staff may reach out to families and parents asking to arrange this and parents and families are encouraged to approach staff and offer suggestions for these planned events. Many Saplings programs run regular forest family picnics, parties, winter and end of year celebrations/graduations. The location and times of these will be communicated to families via Lilio.

Volunteering & Community Involvement

Nature School staff may, on occasion, ask parents for support to help facilitate school activities such as field trips and events. There is also space within our programming to include parents and families to come along and engage children in planned activities (nature walk, story reading, sharing cultural traditions etc.) Staff may reach out to families and parents asking to arrange this and parents and families are encouraged to approach staff and offer suggestions for these planned events. The Nature School runs regular events such as community lunches, garage sales as well as school parties, open houses and end of year celebrations/graduations. The location and times of these will be communicated to families via Lilio.

Saplings Parent Association

Upon student enrollment, all parents and guardians will be part of the Saplings Parent Association (SPA). Members will be able to communicate with each other via a WhatsApp group. Members will be expected to attend regular meetings throughout the school year and communicate with school board members.

For a detailed account of the SPA and its purpose and goals, please visit the website:

sites.google.com/view/saplings-parents-association/home

Photo Permissions

When enrolled in a Saplings program, families will be asked to provide a photo of their child that will be kept private on file, in line with our licensing procedures. Families will also be asked if they give permission for their children to have a photo taken of them and shared in private and public spaces. Photos shared on Lilio are available to be seen only by parents and families that are enrolled within the Saplings program the child is attending. Saplings is not liable for any screenshots/photos that parents share onwards from the Lilio app. Photos shared via our social media and websites are public and may be seen by anyone. Parents and families should clearly state their preferences for photo permissions and should promptly update staff should these preferences change at any time.

Field Trips & Special Events

At Saplings Nature School, special events and field trips provide meaningful hands-on learning experiences that enrich our curriculum. These experiences help children connect with their environment, apply classroom learning in real-world contexts, and develop social and problem-solving skills.

Parents will be informed in advance about all field trips and special events. Detailed information, including locations, timing, transportation, and required materials, will be provided. Written parental consent is required for all off-site trips.

Authorized Pick-Up & Emergency Contacts for Special Events & Field Trips

- If someone other than a parent or usual guardian will be picking up a child after a field trip or event, staff must be notified in advance.
- Unfamiliar individuals will be required to show photo ID before a child is released.
- In case of an emergency, staff will refer to emergency contact information provided by families.

Field Trips

Saplings welcomes parent involvement during off site field trips, and may reach out to parents to ask for volunteers who can accompany the class. If parents are volunteering, they are deemed to be responsible for their own child's welfare and behaviour, and as such, are encouraged and expected to step in should an issue arise with their child. Attending volunteer parents may be asked to accompany or oversee other children during the time they are volunteering, and so are deemed responsible for the welfare and behaviour of these children placed in their care temporarily. Staff will always be onsite during field trips, and should a parent have a concern or difficulty with another child, they should ask an educator to step in and take over. Should a parent bring a sibling to accompany the class on the field trip, it is the sole responsibility of that parent to watch, accompany, and, if necessary, redirect their child during the course of the day. Staff are not available to attend to siblings/ additional children during field trips as their responsibility lies in ensuring the care and safety of our students.

- Field trips are designed to supplement classroom learning and are aligned with Saplings' educational philosophy.
- Parents will receive a detailed itinerary outlining:
 - The purpose of the trip and how it connects to learning.
 - Departure and return times.
 - Location, transportation details, and supervision.
 - Any special preparations needed (e.g., appropriate clothing, packed lunch).
- Student safety is our top priority:
 - Staff will carry a first aid kit and emergency contacts.
 - At least one supervising adult will have a cell phone or communication device.
 - Students with life-threatening allergies will have a safety plan in place.

Supervision:

- Saplings maintains appropriate adult-to-student ratios for each trip.
- Parent volunteers may be needed for additional supervision.

Parent Consent & Participation:

- A signed consent form is required for all field trips.
- Parents are responsible for reviewing trip details and ensuring their child is prepared.

Cancellations & Changes

- If a field trip or special event is canceled or rescheduled, parents will be informed as soon as possible.
- The school is not responsible for financial losses due to changes in supplementary or optional field trips.

A note on early pickups:

If parents and families are wanting to pick their child up early whilst they are attending a field trip, this MUST be discussed with staff at least 1 day (24 hours) in advance. Any parents who have not discussed an early pick up with staff in advance will be expected to come and collect their child from the location of the event or field trip. Staff will not be able to accompany children to another pick up location.

Special Events

- Special events, including seasonal celebrations, cultural events, and themed learning days, will be communicated in advance.
- While food is often part of celebrations, we prioritize student safety, particularly for those with allergies.
- Treats brought from home must be nut-free and allergy-friendly. Parents will be notified if any dietary restrictions apply to a specific event.

Off site Social Parties held under Saplings' name

It is our expectation that social parties held under Saplings' name may involve the moderate consumption of alcohol and will not involve the consumption of cannabis, cannabis related or other mood and behaviour altering drugs. Should this occur Saplings staff will withdraw from the event indicating to the hosts and organisers why they are doing so.

Off site social parties hosted by the Saplings Parent's Association (SPA) but not as an official school event

It is our expectation that all social events hosted by the SPA which are not designated as official school events and are run offsite and outside of school hours will adhere to the expectations regarding off site parties held under Saplings' name, as well as follow the rules and regulations of the North Vancouver District's Board of Parks and Recreation. This may include the obligation on the SPA to reserve and rent park facilities, including grass and gravel fields or under cover seating areas which belong to the District of North Vancouver. The District may also require that insurance be held by the SPA to cover any injuries or damage should these occur. Staff are not expected to attend these events, but may do so as private individuals rather than in their official capacity of educator at Saplings. All permits (and other), preparation, and clean up is the sole responsibility of the SPA. Students who are attending After School Care are not able to attend these events unless their own parent has arranged for an alternate adult ahead of time to care for their child during these events.

Arrival & Departure for Special Events

- Some special events may require adjusted drop-off and pick-up times. Parents will receive detailed instructions ahead of time.
- Families are encouraged to participate in certain community events and will be notified of opportunities to get involved.

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

Parents and guardians play a vital role in ensuring a safe, positive, and enriching experience for their child at Saplings Nature School. By fulfilling these responsibilities, parents and guardians contribute to a strong, supportive, and thriving learning community at Saplings Nature School. Below are key responsibilities to support their child's success and well-being:

Attendance & Punctuality

Regular attendance is essential for student success. Absences, whether excused or unexcused, impact learning and progress. Families are encouraged to schedule appointments, vacations, and other activities outside of school hours whenever possible. A detailed Attendance Policy is available on our website.

Authorized Absences apply to school-approved events where students are off-site but participating in Saplings programs. Families may approach staff to suggest a special project to be completed during their absence from school which could count as an excused absence. This must be discussed in advance with staff at least one week before the absence. The project may or may not be approved at the discretion of the Nature School Staff.

- Ensure on-time drop-off and pick-up according to the schedule.
- Notify the school in advance if your child will be absent or late.
- Follow school policies for illness-related absences (e.g., fever, contagious conditions).

- Please refer to the health and illness, drop off and pick up and lateness and absences policies outlined below.
- Parents must inform the school of all those who have permission to pick up their child. If necessary, staff may call parents to confirm authorization before allowing the child to leave with someone different.
- Parents must inform the teacher if their child will be dropped off late or picked up early. Those arriving after 9:00 AM must escort their child to the forest or the designated location, ensuring they join the group quietly with minimal disruption.
- If a pattern of absences is concerning, the Head of School will work with families to create an attendance support plan.
- If a student is absent without excuse for 30 consecutive school days, they may be withdrawn from enrollment.

Proper Gear & Daily Preparation

- Ensure your child arrives appropriately dressed for the weather (see Seasonal Considerations & Gear List).
- Pack all required gear, including a water bottle, snacks, lunch, and extra clothing.
- Label all personal items to prevent loss and mix-ups.

Communication & Engagement

- Stay informed by reading newsletters, emails, and updates from the school.
- Use designated communication platforms (e.g., messaging app, emails) for updates and inquiries.
- Inform the school of any changes in contact details, family circumstances, or emergency contacts.

Health & Safety

- Keep your child home if they show signs of illness (e.g., fever, vomiting, contagious conditions).
- Inform the school about any allergies, medical needs, or medications.
- Ensure up-to-date emergency contact information is on file.

Behavior & School Policies

- Reinforce the school's positive behavior expectations and respect for nature, peers, and educators.
- Support conflict resolution strategies used at Saplings (e.g., respectful communication, problem-solving).
- Partner with educators if behavior concerns arise, working together to support your child's growth.

Participation & Community Involvement

- Attend parent meetings, orientation sessions, and school events when possible.
- Support your child's learning by encouraging outdoor play and curiosity at home.
- Volunteer opportunities are available for parents who wish to be more involved.

Financial & Administrative Responsibilities

- Submit tuition payments on time as per the school's payment schedule.
- Complete and update all required forms and documentation (e.g., emergency contacts, medical forms).
- Adhere to withdrawal and refund policies if making enrollment changes.

Parking Guidelines

Parking around Saplings Nature School and Sowden Park is shared and limited, so extra caution is required.

Quick Drop-Off & Pick-Up (Max. 5 Minutes)

- The area in front of the school on 22nd St is designated for brief stops only (under 5 minutes).
- If parking is full, use alternative locations such as 24th St (north of the playground) or side streets like Philip Ave or 23rd St and walk your child to/from class.

Where NOT TO PARK & What to AVOID

- Sunflower Preschool Parking Lot (behind our building)
- In front of neighbors' driveways
- Blocking the street, fire hydrants, or stop signs
- Backing into the forest entry area
- Making U-turns (please drive around the block instead)
- Speeding – Children are unpredictable; safety comes first!

By following these guidelines, we ensure a smooth, safe, and respectful experience for all families and our surrounding community.

Parent Code of Conduct

At Saplings Nature School, we strive to create a respectful, positive, and collaborative learning environment for all children, families, and staff. Parents and guardians play a critical role in shaping the school community through role modeling, communication, and support of our educational values.

A detailed Parent Code of Conduct is available on our website, but the key expectations are outlined below.

Expectations for Parents & Guardians

We ask all parents and guardians to:

- Communicate respectfully with staff, students, and other families in all interactions, including in person, by email, and on social media.
- Support school policies and procedures, including attendance, safety, and student behavior expectations.
- Model positive behavior by treating others with kindness, patience, and understanding.
- Address concerns constructively, first speaking directly with staff and following the outlined feedback process.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality by refraining from discussing sensitive matters in public forums.
- Ensure a smooth drop-off and pick-up by respecting schedules and minimizing disruptions.

Unacceptable Behavior

The following behaviors are not tolerated and may result in consequences:

- Disrespectful or aggressive communication toward staff, students, or other parents.
- Spreading rumors, gossip, or engaging in negative discourse about school staff or community members.
- Threatening, intimidating, or harassing any member of the school community.
- Violating school policies, including safety guidelines and event protocols.

Addressing Concerns & Providing Feedback

Saplings values parent input and encourages open dialogue through a structured process:

1. Speak directly with the relevant staff member via a pre-arranged meeting.
2. If unresolved, request a meeting with the Head of School.
3. Further concerns can be addressed with the Program Director.
4. As a last step, parents may request to escalate concerns to the SAP Board.

This approach ensures transparency and resolution while maintaining a respectful and supportive school environment.

Consequences for Violations

Failure to adhere to the Parent Code of Conduct may result in the issue being brought to the SAP Board.

Sanctions may include but are not limited to:

- Restricted access to school events or facilities.
- Formal written warnings.
- In severe cases, termination of a child's enrollment.

Parents are expected to engage in resolution meetings with school administrators to address concerns and restore positive relationships.

Parent Appeals Process

Parents who believe they have been treated unfairly may follow the Saplings Complaints & Appeals Policy, available on our website.

By following these guidelines, we foster a respectful, inclusive, and thriving learning community for all. Thank you for your partnership!

Health & Safety

At Saplings Nature School, student safety is our top priority. We are committed to providing a secure, caring, and inclusive environment where children feel safe both physically and emotionally, allowing them to learn and explore without fear of harm, harassment, or unsafe conditions.

A detailed Student Safety Policy can be found on our website.

Commitment to Student Safety

Our safety policies work in conjunction with our Child Protection, Emergency, Student Supervision, Field Trip, Student Code of Conduct, and Harassment & Bullying Prevention Policies to ensure that all students are:

- Supervised at all times during indoor and outdoor activities, school events, and trips.
- Learning in emotionally and physically safe environments.
- Encouraged to engage in respectful, positive interactions with peers and staff.
- Provided with age-appropriate safety education on risk assessment, safe play, and emergency preparedness.
- Supported through regular safety drills in both indoor and outdoor settings.

Safety Procedures & Preventative Measures

Staff take proactive steps to ensure:

- Safe physical conditions in classrooms, outdoor learning areas, and school properties.
- Regular observation and assessment of student interactions and behaviors.
- Upholding the Code of Conduct to maintain a culture of respect and inclusion.
- Partnerships with parents to ensure a shared approach to student safety.

Incident Response & Communication

In the event of a serious safety incident (such as violence, threats, or other risks to students), Saplings follows a clear incident response protocol to ensure swift action and appropriate support.

- For immediate safety concerns, staff will respond according to emergency procedures and notify families as needed.
- If a critical incident occurs, Saplings may coordinate with external safety organizations to provide trauma support, incident management, or media communication.
- Parents will be notified promptly if their child is involved in a safety-related situation.

For further details on incident reporting and response procedures, please visit our website or contact school administration.

By working together, we ensure a safe, supportive, and enriching environment for all children at Saplings Nature School.

Illness & Wellness (When to Keep a Child Home)

Parents will be required to advise Saplings if their student will not be attending the Saplings Nature School due to illness. Parents will agree that a student who is ill (e.g. fever, infection, diarrhea, communicable disease, or any other type of illness that may be passed on to others, with the exception of the common cold) will be kept at home to protect the well-being of other students and staff. Parents will further agree that should a student become ill while at school, immediate arrangements will be made to remove the student from Saplings for the time being.

Please note that a convalescing student should not return until the doctor advises that they are ready to do so. This is because the program is full and active and may be too tiring. Students may be unaware of their limitations, so we ask parents to refrain from asking them if they feel well enough to attend school. Keep them home to speed their recovery.

Please keep your child home if:

- They have a suspected, or known, communicable disease (Chicken Pox, Conjunctivitis, Measles, Mumps, Rubella, etc.)
- They have a fever above 38°C
- They are too sick to participate in all normal activities including outdoor play
- They have symptoms such as: persistent cough, constant runny nose, etc.
- They have vomited or had diarrhea during the previous 24 hours
- They are experiencing Chills, Cough, Difficulty breathing Loss of sense of smell or taste

If yes to 1 symptom: Stay home until you feel better.

If yes to 2 or more of these symptoms: Stay home for 24 hours.

If symptoms don't get better or get worse: Get a health assessment; contact a health care provider or 8-1-1 about your symptoms and next steps.

Daily Health Check available here: In an effort to keep all of you and our staff safe, Daily Health Checks are required before coming to school. You will find a very easy tool [here](#).

We will also post this Daily Health list of symptoms and appropriate action on our front door for easy reference.

We make these requests for the following reasons:

- **The protection of others:** Germs spread more quickly through younger students – we want to maintain a healthy environment for everyone.
- **A student's recovery could be delayed:** They are more likely to acquire other illnesses when the immune resistance is reduced.
- **The inability to focus and function** in large group situations.
- **A sick student requires one educator's full attention:** Educators can not look after a child one on one.

Allergies & Food Restrictions

SAPLINGS NATURE SCHOOL WILL INFORM THE COMMUNITY OF ALL LIFE-THREATENING ALLERGIES IN THE STUDENT OR STAFF POPULATION

At Saplings Nature School, we take allergies seriously and implement measures to reduce risks and ensure student safety. This policy ensures a safe and inclusive environment for all students. Please contact staff with any allergy-related concerns.

Food Sharing & Allergy Awareness

Saplings always wants to reduce and ideally eliminate the risk of an anaphylactic response in a student or staff member. All food or treats handed out to students by staff MUST be allergy aware and adhere to the safety precautions laid out in the Life Threatening Allergy Form provided by parents and posted within easy sight.

To prevent allergic reactions and accommodate dietary needs:

- Food sharing is strictly prohibited between members of the community including students and staff.
- Families will receive an allergy list before their child's start date to ensure all packed lunches/snacks are safe for the group.

Snack & Lunch Guidelines

Although we do follow the idea that all food is good food, in general, Saplings prefers to provide healthy, low-sugar snacks to students during program times.

- We encourage healthy, waste-free lunches that are easy to eat outdoors.
- Due to outdoor activities and physical play, parents should pack extra snacks in case their child needs more food.
- Children must bring a full water bottle each day.

Insect Venom Allergies

To minimize exposure for students with life-threatening insect venom allergies, the following precautions are in place:

- Bee and wasp nests will be identified and removed where practicable.
- Canned beverages will not be served outdoors unless poured into cups, and used cans will be disposed of in covered containers.
- Students will be instructed not to tamper with insect nests, and staff will monitor known areas of concern.

- Students with severe allergies may remain indoors during peak bee/wasp season.
- If a bee or wasp enters the classroom, the allergic student will be removed immediately.

Emergency Response Protocol

Since complete prevention is impossible, an emergency action plan will be developed for each at-risk student in collaboration with parents, the student's physician, and (if requested) a Community Health Nurse.

- The plan will include emergency contact details and will be stored in an accessible location.
- Students are encouraged to carry an auto-injector in a fanny pack at all times.
- An up-to-date epinephrine auto-injector must be provided by parents and stored in an easily accessible but secure location.
- All staff and students will be informed of the auto-injector location.
- Parents are responsible for checking expiry dates and replacing auto-injectors as needed.
- After treatment for an anaphylactic response, staff will debrief and review the school's response, with the Head of School reporting to the Program Director.

Medication Administration

At Saplings Nature School, the health and safety of our students are our top priorities. To ensure proper medication administration, we follow these guidelines:

Prescription Medications Only

- Medication will only be administered if prescribed by a doctor.
- Over-the-counter (OTC) medications, including pain relievers and allergy medication, will not be given unless accompanied by a doctor's note.
- There are no exceptions to this policy.

Parental Authorization

- Parents/guardians must complete and sign a Medication Authorization Form before any medication is administered.
- The form must include:
 - Child's full name
 - Name of medication
 - Dosage and time of administration
 - Duration of medication use
 - Any special instructions, such as taking the medication with food
 - Signature of prescribing doctor

Medication Storage

- All medication is kept out of reach of children.
- If refrigeration is required, the medication will be stored in a secured area of the fridge.
- Emergency medications, such as EpiPens and asthma inhalers, will be readily accessible and stored in the children's backpacks.

Administration & Documentation

- Only designated staff members will administer medication.
- Staff will record the date, time, and dosage and initial the Medication Form each time medication is given.
- Parents will be notified if their child refuses medication or if there are any concerns.

Emergency Medications & Severe Reactions

- Parents must provide up-to-date emergency medication, such as EpiPens or inhalers, along with a doctor-approved action plan for severe allergies or medical conditions.
- Staff are trained in emergency response and will follow the child's medical action plan as needed.
- In a medical emergency, staff will call 911 and notify the parent/guardian immediately.

End of Medication Period

- Parents must collect any unused medication once the prescribed course is complete.
- Expired medications will be disposed of properly if not retrieved.

This policy ensures the safe handling, storage, and administration of medications while keeping parents informed and involved in their child's health care.

Injuries, First Aid, Medical Alerts & Emergency Response Procedures

At Saplings Nature School, we prioritize the safety and well-being of all students and staff. In the event of a medical emergency, we follow a clear and immediate response protocol to provide appropriate care and ensure effective communication with families.

Medical Alert Situations

- A student or staff member experiencing a medical emergency will be attended to immediately by an Educator trained in First Aid.
- Another adult, or if necessary, an older student given direct and explicit instructions, will:
 - Call 911 and provide details of the emergency.
 - Meet paramedics at the nearest road or entrance to guide them to the emergency location.
 - Share essential medical information (e.g., allergies, known medical conditions) with emergency responders.
- The Program Director will be informed after emergency services have been called.
- Staff responsible for students with severe allergies, anaphylaxis, or other serious medical conditions receive training on recognizing symptoms and administering an epinephrine auto-injector.

Students Needing Emergency Care

- If a student requires hospital care, they will be accompanied by a staff member while emergency services transport them.
- The First Aid attendant will remain with the student until emergency responders arrive.
- The class educator or teaching assistant will oversee the remaining students and prepare for their safe return to the indoor classroom site.
- The Program Director will assist as needed to ensure smooth coordination.
- The staff member accompanying the student will remain at the hospital until the child is in the care of their parent or guardian, then return to school.

In a medical emergency, staff will:

- Call 911 and provide first aid until emergency services arrive.
- Accompany the child to the hospital if transport is required.
- Notify parents immediately.
- Ensure the remaining students are safely supervised.
- The accompanying staff member will return to school once the child is in the care of a parent or guardian.

Communication in an Emergency

- Staff will contact parents directly as a group or individually as the situation dictates via Lillio, phone call, or text.
- Families must keep emergency contact details up to date in the school records.
- Emergency contacts include:
 - Primary and alternate family contacts.
 - Allergy and medical information.
 - Family doctor and medical insurance details.

This policy ensures preparedness, quick response, and clear communication to keep students and staff safe in any emergency situation.

Major Emergencies

- In the event of a major emergency, parents will be contacted immediately and asked to pick up their child from the school or a designated meeting area.
- School administration will be informed as soon as possible.

Minor Injuries

- Minor injuries, such as light bruises and abrasions, will be treated on-site and documented.
- Parents will be notified in accordance with school policy.

This protocol ensures efficient emergency response, clear communication with families, and the safety of all students and staff.

Emergency Preparedness & Response

Fire, Earthquake, Lockdowns, and Wildlife Encounters

At Saplings Nature School, we prioritize the safety and well-being of all students and staff. Our Emergency Preparedness Plan ensures we are ready to respond to various emergency situations, including fires, earthquakes, lockdowns, and wildlife encounters.

Emergency Action Plan

- Parents must ensure the school has up-to-date contact information, including home, work, and emergency contacts.
- In a widespread emergency, parents will receive alerts via our online messaging service.
- In emergencies involving individual students, parents will be contacted directly via phone or text.

Emergency Drills & Training

- Students and staff participate in regular emergency drills, including:
 - Fire Drills – Three per year.
 - Earthquake Drills – Three per year.
 - Lockdown Drills – Three per year.
 - Outdoor Drills - Three per year
- Staff receive in-service training on emergency response, including first aid and risk assessment.
- Students are taught emergency procedures to foster confidence and preparedness.

Emergency Procedures

Fire Response

In case of a small, contained fire, staff will clear the area and use the nearest fire extinguisher to put out the flames. If the fire is large or uncontained, staff will:

- Pull the fire alarm to alert the school and fire department.
- Instruct students to evacuate using the nearest emergency exit, proceeding in pairs to a designated meeting area.
- Conduct a final sweep to ensure no students remain inside.
- If safe, retrieve the first aid kit and any student emergency medications (e.g., EpiPens).

Earthquake Response

During an earthquake, staff will direct students to:

- Take cover under tables or other sturdy structures.
- Remain in place until the shaking stops, then count to 60 seconds before moving.
- Evacuate the building if necessary, meeting at the designated gathering spot.

If students and staff must remain at school beyond regular dismissal hours, earthquake supplies will be accessed.

Evacuation Procedures

If the building must be evacuated, staff will:

- Sweep the school to ensure all students are accounted for.
- Ensure at least one staff member has the school phone to maintain contact with parents.
- Retrieve the first aid kit and emergency medications, if safe to do so.
- Gather at one of our designated meeting spots:
 - Sidewalk east of the school, near the preschool playground (if safe).
 - Corner across the street to the south, near the bus stop (if closer areas are unsafe).
 - Sowden Park playground (if necessary to move farther away).

Lockdown Procedures

In the event of a lockdown due to an external or internal threat, staff will:

- Direct students to move away from windows and doors.
- Lock all entry points and maintain silence until given an all-clear.
- Communicate with emergency responders as needed.
- Contact parents once the situation is resolved.

Wildlife Encounters

At Saplings Nature School, we prioritize wildlife awareness and safety as part of our outdoor education approach. Children are taught to respect wildlife and understand how to respond appropriately to encounters with local animals. Staff are trained in risk assessment and emergency response to ensure student safety at all times. In all instances related to dangerous wildlife encounters and other safety concerns, staff will utilize the Saplings call: "Saplings to me!" to quickly group students together.

At Saplings, we teach children to coexist safely with nature by fostering awareness and respect for the wildlife that shares our environment. For more information on our safety policies, please refer to our full Wildlife Safety Policy available on our website.

General Wildlife Safety Measures

- Regular risk assessments are conducted to identify potential hazards in the outdoor environment.
- Children receive age-appropriate education on wildlife safety and respectful outdoor practices.
- In an emergency, staff will blow three sharp blasts on a whistle to signal students to gather immediately.
- Whistle blasts are NOT used in bear encounters to avoid startling the animal.

Bear Safety Protocol

Bears are occasionally spotted in the areas where we explore. Staff take precautionary measures to minimize risks, including staying alert near running water, berry bushes, and dense foliage.

If a bear is encountered, staff will:

- Quietly signal students to gather behind the teacher.
- Leave all belongings behind.
- Use the Saplings call: "Saplings to me!" to quickly group students together.
- One staff member monitors the bear, while the other leads students away.
- Avoid running or making sudden movements.
- Use bear spray only if necessary (i.e., if the bear approaches aggressively).

Understanding Bear Behavior:

- Standing upright = The bear is curious, not necessarily aggressive.
- Ears back, low stance, approaching = Signs of potential aggression.
- Stress signals = Drooling, jaw popping, swatting, vocalizations (huffing, moaning).
- Response: Staff will remain calm, speak firmly, and back away slowly with the group.

Cougar Safety Protocol

Cougars are highly elusive, but if spotted:

- Children will be kept close and grouped together.
- No one will run, as sudden movements can trigger a chase response.
- Staff will make themselves appear larger by raising arms and standing tall.
- Eye contact will be maintained while speaking calmly and firmly.
- The group will slowly back away while facing the cougar.
- If the cougar continues approaching, objects will be thrown to deter it.

Coyote Safety Protocol

Coyotes are common in urban and forested areas but typically avoid people. If a coyote is encountered:

- Students will be gathered and kept close.
- No one will run; instead, the group will move away slowly while facing the coyote.
- Staff will make noise by clapping, speaking loudly, or using a firm voice to deter it.
- If necessary, small objects (sticks, rocks) may be thrown near the coyote to encourage it to leave.
- Children are taught never to feed or approach a coyote.

Supervision of Students

At Saplings Nature School, student safety and supervision are our top priorities. We ensure that all students are appropriately supervised during school hours, outdoor learning, field trips, and extracurricular activities. Only trained staff members hold supervisory roles, ensuring all students receive consistent, safe, and responsible care.

A detailed Student Supervision Policy can be found on our website.

Staff are responsible for student supervision:

- During school hours, transitions, and recess
- At all outdoor learning sites
- During extracurricular activities and field trips
- Until all students are picked up by an authorized adult

No student will be left unsupervised, sent home alone without prior written permission, or removed from view as a form of discipline.

By following these guidelines, we ensure a safe, supportive, and well-supervised environment where students can thrive.

Supervision Responsibilities

- Staff members are responsible for student safety before, during, and after school activities.
- Students are never left unsupervised on school grounds or in outdoor classroom areas.
- Regular headcounts are conducted to ensure all students are accounted for.
- Parents must notify staff in advance if their child will be arriving late or leaving early.
- All staff are trained in First Aid, and encouraged to pursue additional training in conflict resolution and supporting diverse needs.

Safe Arrival & Departure

- Students must be signed in and out by a staff member.
- Students will only be released to a parent/guardian or an authorized emergency contact listed on the registration form.
- Photo identification is required if the pick-up person is unknown to staff.
- Students will not be released to anyone under the age of 12.
- Parents must inform staff in writing if their child is permitted to walk home or take the bus.

Late Pick-Up Procedures

If a child is not picked up within 5 minutes of the end of the school day, staff will:

1. Check Lillio, email, and text messages for any updates from the parent.
2. After 15 minutes, attempt to call the parent/guardian.
3. If no response, call alternate emergency contacts listed on the child's registration form.
4. If no contact is made, notify the Head of School or Program Director.
5. If all attempts fail, the Ministry of Children and Families may be contacted.
6. Late pick up fees may apply

Enrollment & Admissions

Our admissions team is happy to answer your questions and guide you through the admissions process. Below are the steps to enroll at Saplings Nature School.

1. Book a School Visit

Explore Saplings through a personalized tour or attend one of our information sessions which may be conducted in person at the school or via Zoom. This will give your family the chance to meet students and educators, and learn about our philosophy. An admission application is not required to book a visit.

2. Apply for Admission

- Submit a completed application: we will continue to accept applications until our student spots are full. Any applications after this will join a waitlist.
- A non-refundable registration fee of \$500 is required. This fee is counted as a tuition deposit and will go towards the overall tuition price. Please note that \$100 of the \$500 registration fee is a resource fee which will help offset school costs of resources and materials.
- Home learners: We are not accepting home learner registrations at this time.

Mid-Year Admissions: Applications are considered **case-by-case** based on availability and may be limited to specific entry points. Please contact the admissions office for details.

3. Welcome to Saplings!

After accepting your offer of admission, families will have opportunities to connect with educators, classmates, and other families before the first day of school. A tuition agreement must be signed before the start of the school year.

Contact Us

For any questions about admissions, reach out to us at: nature_school@saplingsoutdoorprogram.ca

Additional Programs Offered

In addition to our Nature School, Saplings Outdoor Program offers several other programs including Before and After School Care, Preschool and Winter, Spring, and Summer Camps at varying locations. If you are interested in any of these programs please contact our administrator at saplingsreg@gmail.com.

Day Camps for professional development days	Camp with Nature School staff offered for those who need child care	Winter, Spring and Summer Breaks	Weekly outdoor camps available https://www.saplingsoutdoorprogram.ca/
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Waitlists

At Saplings Nature School, we strive to accommodate as many families as possible, but due to the popularity of our programs, spaces are often limited.

Waitlist Process

- Families will be placed on the waitlist in the order applications are received.
- Returning students receive priority placement before new admissions are considered.
- Admission is based on program capacity and suitability to ensure the best fit for each child.
- Families on the waitlist will be notified of their position and updated as spaces become available.
- We will do our best to offer suitable placements when openings arise.

For more details or to check your waitlist status, please contact our admissions team.

Fees, Tuition, & Payment Policies

At Saplings Nature School, tuition and fees are structured to support the high-quality programming we provide. By enrolling in our school, families commit to fulfilling their financial obligations as outlined below.

Registration & Tuition Fees

- A non-refundable registration deposit of \$500 per student is required to secure a spot.
- \$100 of the registration deposit is applied to school supplies and the remaining \$400 will go towards tuition costs.
- Tuition for the full 10-month academic year (September – June) is \$9,950.

Payment Options

Families may choose from the following payment plans:

- Annual Payment (Discounted):
 - \$9,308.25 if paid before July 15 (1.5% discount).
 - \$9,450 if paid on or before August 15.
- Three Installments:
 - August 15 – \$3,780 (40%)
 - October 1 – \$2,835 (30%)
 - December 1 – \$2,835 (30%)
- Monthly Installments:
 - \$955 per month from August 1 – May 1 (10 payments).

Payment Methods

- Preferred methods:
 - Annual & 3-installment payments – Cheque or e-transfer.
 - Monthly payments – Pre-authorized debit.
- To set up or modify payment arrangements, please email nature_school@saplingsoutdoorprogram.ca

Additional Fees

Families are responsible for prompt payment of any additional charges, including:

- Additional 1to1 Educator fees
- NSF (Non-Sufficient Funds) Fees
- Late Pick-Up Fees
- Field Trip & Additional Resource Fees
- A 2% monthly charge will be applied to overdue accounts.

For more details, please visit our website or contact school administration.

Refund & Withdrawal Policies

Refund Policy

If a student is withdrawn (voluntarily or by request), tuition refunds are processed as follows:

- Before June 1 – 100% refund (net of financial aid).
- June 1 – July 4 – 90% refund.
- July 5 – October 31 – 50% refund.
- November 1 – December 31 – 35% refund.
- January 1 – February 28 – 15% refund.
- March 1 – June 30 – No refund provided.

Delinquent Accounts & Non-Payment

- Families must fulfill their financial obligations as stated in the tuition agreement.
- If payments fall behind, Saplings will work with families to find a resolution.
- If your account is in arrears for 60 days or more, the student(s) will be withdrawn from the program and their spot will be offered to the next applicant on the waitlist.

Exceptions & Emergency Considerations

- One-time waivers may be granted for emergencies or unavoidable situations. These are decided at the discretion of the Nature School Staff.
- We encourage parents and families to contact alternate emergency contacts in case of delays.

Saplings Nature School Policies

Documentation and information relating to all of our school policies can be found via our website at: www.saplingsnatureschool.ca/policies

Withdrawal or Termination

Enrollment may be terminated for the following reasons:

- Non-compliance with school policies and procedures
- Late or non-payment of tuition
- Failure to collaborate with staff to support a student's needs
- Inappropriate program placement
- Parent request for withdrawal

Process for Withdrawal or Termination

1. Non-Compliance with School Policies, Procedures or Codes of Conduct

- Educators will discuss concerns with parents.
- If issues persist, a meeting will be arranged with the parents, educators, and school administration.
- Continued non-compliance will result in withdrawal from the program.

2. Late or Non-Payment of Tuition

- Parents will be contacted by an educator or administrator.
- Immediate payment will be requested via cash or credit card.
- A written warning will be issued, stating that further late payments may result in the child being removed from the class list and their spot being given to a waitlisted student.

3. Failure to Work with Staff to Support a Student's Needs

- Steps 1 and 2 outlined in the non-compliance section will be followed.
- If issues remain unresolved and the student is determined to be at risk, the Ministry of Students and Family Development may be notified.

4. Inappropriate Program Placement

- Parents will be contacted to discuss concerns regarding their child's placement.
- Staff will provide recommendations for better meeting the student's needs.

5. Parent-Initiated Withdrawal

- Parents must provide written notice one month in advance (by the first of the month).
- Failure to provide proper notice will result in an additional month's tuition charge.
- In the case of medical withdrawal, notice may be given with less than one month's notice if accompanied by a doctor's note (evaluated on a case-by-case basis).

Conflict Resolution & Grievances

At Saplings Nature School, we expect all students, staff, and families to be treated with respect and courtesy. We value open communication and fair decision-making, ensuring all members of our community have an equal voice.

Decisions affecting students, parents/caregivers, or staff will follow a fair and transparent process. If disagreements arise, we encourage resolution at the school level first. If needed, a formal appeal process is available.

Principles of Procedural Fairness

When making decisions that affect a member of our community, Saplings follows these principles:

- Notification – Inform the individual of the decision being considered.
- Opportunity to Respond – Allow the individual to present their case (written or oral).
- Witnesses – Permit relevant information or testimony to be shared.
- Transparency – Ensure decisions are unbiased and open-minded.
- Explanation – Communicate the reasons for the final decision.
- No Retaliation – Assure that seeking a review or appeal will not result in negative consequences.

Conflict Resolution Procedure

1. Informal Discussion

- The complainant (student, parent, or staff) should first discuss concerns directly with the decision-maker to seek resolution.
- Open conversations often lead to clarity and mutual understanding.

2. Formal Appeal

- If an issue remains unresolved, the next level of authority (e.g., Head of School or Program Director) should be contacted.
- The Head of School will document names, dates, and communication methods for transparency.
- If still unresolved, two paths apply:

A. Student-Based Complaints

- If appropriate, a town hall meeting (whole-school discussion) may be held to explore solutions.

- If needed, the Head of School may inform the Board of Directors.

B. Parent/Teacher/Community-Based Complaints

- The complainant and Head of School may agree to involve a mediator, external educators, or a specialist to provide an unbiased review.
- A formal resolution plan will be documented.
- If unresolved, the matter can be escalated to the Board of Directors, whose decision is final.

All written submissions and documentation will be retained in administrative files.

Raising Concerns About an Employee

1. Parents should first speak directly with the employee involved.
2. If unresolved, escalate to the employee's immediate supervisor.
3. If reluctant to address the employee, parents may contact the Head of School or Program Director for assistance.
4. Employees will be notified of concerns raised against them.
5. Investigations will be disclosed only on a need-to-know basis.
6. Anonymous complaints will not be considered, except in cases involving child welfare or criminal allegations.

Admissions Appeals

How to Appeal: Families may appeal an admission decision if they believe the process was unfair or incorrect.

- Submit an appeal within 20 school days of receiving the admission decision.
- Clearly outline the reasons for appeal in the form of a separate letter.
- An appeals hearing will be scheduled within 40 school days of the appeal deadline. Families will receive at least 10 days' notice before the hearing.

Appeals Hearing Process: If the panel finds the criteria unfair or misapplied, the appeal will be upheld. Otherwise, the original decision stands.

- The admissions team will explain the reasons for denial.
- Parents will present their case for admission.
- The appeals panel will determine if:
 - Admission criteria were legally sound.
 - The criteria were applied fairly.
 - The family's reasons for appeal outweigh the school's reasons for denial.

Child Abuse Reporting & Duty to Report Policy

At Saplings Nature School, we are committed to protecting the well-being and safety of all students. Our staff have a legal duty to report suspected or disclosed child abuse or neglect.

Duty to Report

- Under Section 14 of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA), any person who suspects that a child is being abused or neglected must report it to a child welfare worker.
- It is not the responsibility of school staff to determine if abuse has occurred—their role is to report concerns.
- Reporting is mandatory, even if someone else is also making a report or if a child welfare worker is already involved with the child.
- The duty to report overrides confidentiality except in cases protected by solicitor-client privilege or the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Failure to Report

- Failing to report suspected child abuse or neglect is a serious offense under the CFCSA, carrying a maximum penalty of \$10,000 in fines, six months in jail, or both.
- Knowingly making a false report is also an offense.

Reporting Process at Saplings

1. If a child is in immediate danger, staff will call 911.
2. If there is a suspicion of abuse or neglect, staff will report the concern to a child welfare worker and inform the Appointed School Official (ASO).
3. Staff will document the incident in a secure file but will not contact the parents unless directed to do so by authorities.
4. The ASO will cooperate fully with child protection agencies and law enforcement.

Protection of Students & Confidentiality

- Personal information regarding child abuse investigations, including the identity of the reporter, is kept confidential.
- The school environment will be monitored to ensure student safety during any investigation.
- School personnel cannot share information about an abuse investigation with outside agencies, especially if police are involved.

Child Abuse Allegations in the School Setting

If a staff member, volunteer, or contract worker is suspected of abuse:

- The Head of School or Appointed School Official (ASO) will investigate.
- If there is reason to believe a child is at risk, the ASO will report the case to child welfare authorities and police.
- The School Authority may issue a "No Trespass Order", preventing the individual from being on school grounds.
- If a certified teacher is involved, the case must be reported to the Commission for Teacher Regulation.

Types of Child Abuse & Neglect

1. Physical Abuse

The deliberate use of force causing injury or harm, including unreasonable punishment.

Indicators:

- Unexplained bruises, burns, or fractures.
- Injuries in unusual places (ears, trunk, neck, buttocks).
- Child flinches, is afraid to go home, or shows aggression.

2. Sexual Abuse

The use of a child for sexual purposes by someone in a position of power.

Indicators:

- Unexplained pain, bleeding, or sexually transmitted infections.
- Age-inappropriate sexual knowledge or behavior.
- Secretive behavior, unexplained gifts, or fear of certain individuals.

3. Emotional Abuse

A pattern of verbal attacks, rejection, humiliation, or threats that harm a child's self-worth.

Indicators:

- Extreme withdrawal or aggression.
- Low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, or difficulty concentrating.
- Unexplained developmental setbacks.

4. Neglect

Failure to provide a child's basic needs, including food, shelter, medical care, and supervision.

Indicators:

- Chronic hunger, poor hygiene, or inadequate clothing.
- Frequent school absences or fatigue.
- Injuries due to lack of supervision.

5. Sexual Exploitation

Encouraging or coercing a child into sexual activity in exchange for money, food, or shelter.

Indicators:

- Involvement in sexually explicit activities.
- Unexplained new possessions, cash, or hotel stays.
- Associating with older individuals who provide them with gifts.

How Families Can Help

Parents and caregivers play a vital role in recognizing and preventing abuse. If you suspect a child is being harmed, you are encouraged to contact a child welfare worker directly. If you need guidance, speak with the Head of School or Program Director for support.

This policy ensures that Saplings Nature School remains a safe and supportive environment for all children.