



**Coyote Nature School**  
2022/23 Parent Handbook



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## WHAT & WHY - FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL

The movement to connect children and youth with nature has been and is a fundamental way of being, knowing, and learning for many Indigenous communities and cultures. Forest and Nature School (FNS) is a deliberate educational approach which has existed worldwide since the late 1950s. It made its way to Canada in 2012 with the establishment of Forest and Nature School Canada. The primary goal is to provide children with regular and repeated access to a natural space, to explore, grow and learn. At FNS, children are understood as competent learners who help forge their own program. Participants spend the majority of the day immersed in various outdoor settings where things are unhurried and there is space for independent reflection, collaborative creation and risky play. They enjoy the freedom to explore, build, play and engage with one another. They return to the same natural spaces across the seasons, creating a familiarity and deep connection with change in the intricate web of life. FNS uses what is happening in nature to prompt problem-solving, thinking critically, cooperating with others, and building nature literacy. Loose parts such as pine cones, sticks, rocks or leaves are materials for creative play or expression of understanding. (Adapted from Forest and Nature School Canada).



The disconnect from nature has grown with the strong embrace of technology that envelopes the lives of children, keeping them focused on screens rather than being wide lens observers of the natural cycles of life. There is an abundance of research in support of outdoor learning with some less commonly known benefits being perseverance, independence, confidence, social competence, and engagement in learning. All students are drawn to the natural world. It is a beautiful transformation as kids peel away fears and gradually clear mental and physical barriers to reconnect with nature; the local flora and fauna, seasonal cycles, weather systems, and environmental issues in their home communities. Walk with your child through new territory and listen to them proudly share their knowledge as they call out the names of trees, plants and animals as if they were treasured friends.



## FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL RESOURCES

If you are interested in learning more about the Forest School movement and nature education, take a look at the following books, websites and organizations for more information:

- Last Child in the Woods by Richard Louv
- Coyote's Guide to Connecting With Nature by Jon Young, Evan McGown, Ellen Haas
- Forest and Nature School in Canada: A Head, Heart, Hands Approach to Outdoor Learning by Forest School Canada  
Available as PDF at <http://childnature.ca/about-forest-and-nature-school/>
- Forest School and Outdoor Learning in the Early Years by Sara Knight
- Children and Nature Network - <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>

Additional guidance can be found in these excellent links:

- [Outdoor Learning Tips](#)
- [Resources for Administrator from Learning for a Sustainable Future](#)
- [Resources for Educators from Learning for a Sustainable Future](#)
- [Five Reasons to Take your Class Outside](#)
- [Outdoor Classroom Management Tips](#)
- [Outdoor Learning for Reopening: 5 Tips of Educators](#)
- [Benefits to Using the School Grounds for Learning](#)
- [Into Nature: A Guide to Teaching in Nearby Nature](#)
- [Nature as a Classroom: How to Start Teaching Students Outdoors](#)
- [Connecting with Nature to Care for Ourselves and the Earth: Recommendations for Decision Makers](#)
- [Environmental and Outdoor Education: Key to Equitably Reopening Schools](#)



## Our Story

### The Daily Pledge

*We join together, In a circle of peace  
With grateful hearts, Faces to the wind  
Eyes to sky and ground, Keen watchers and listeners  
Ready to discover the mysteries of mother earth*

Coyote Nature School is a place where we nurture connection with and love for the natural world. Sharing the beauty of learning in nature, opening minds through discovery, embracing wonder and curiosity are our guiding principles. Coyote Nature School was the inspiration of Kendra Martin, experienced teacher and mentor, with the vision of expanding opportunities for children to be immersed in nature.



At Coyote Nature School children will know that they are ‘nature kids’ and that we value their stories and wonderings about the natural world around them. They will recognize the distinct leaf shape of the Burr Oak, know the habits of the wintering white-tailed deer, tie knots, erect shelters, and identify the local birds across the seasons. Young minds brim with questions about the creatures they hold in their hands, the tracks under their boots, bones and scat uncovered on the pathways which whisper a story they are now able to hear. These same children may have passed through a local park or walked a forest path without noticing the diverse life happening around them. The nature school experience will awaken children to their natural surroundings and grow a special connection which comes from direct “hands dirty” experience. Nature can be counted to enliven each day with the adventure of an ever-unfolding story.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe peoples. We wish to recognize their long history on these lands and show our respect to them today. We recognize their stewardship of the land. May we all live with respect on this land and live in peace and friendship.

### *A Letter of Gratitude*

*The water, the land, and air belong to us all. We share them. We have learned so much from Indigenous people because they were the first people to live on this land. They learned to share with the plants and animals, never taking more than they need. They treated mother nature kindly and taught future generations to do it too.*

*We need to have gratitude for the water and land we share and keep it healthy for everyone to enjoy and for future generations. Every part of nature matters because the water helps trees, the trees help us, and the animals help the plants. It's a cycle of life that should be like that and should not be changed. By Robbie (Little Falls, Grade 5)*



## LOCATIONS & DIRECTIONS

### **Location: Harrington**

539 Victoria St, Harrington, Ontario  
Phone: (519) 852-1842  
Email: coyotenatureschool@gmail.com  
Website: www.coyotenatureschool.ca

Coyote Nature School in the village of Harrington, is a community-based program run in partnership with the Harrington & Area Community Association. Our meeting place is at Harrington Hall, a historic church which provides an ideal indoor program area, accessible washroom, and inclement weather warm-up space. Our outdoor program areas are around the village and Harrington Conservation Area which encompasses forested areas, meadows, creek bed, and marsh. We are lucky to have access to the heritage Grist Mill for historic learning, quiet reflection, or art activities.



**DIRECTIONS FROM STRATFORD:** Travel west on Hwy. 7 to Road 133 (Emburo Road). Turn left and continue south through Fairview until Road 28 (Harrington clearly signed). Turn right and travel into Harrington. Turn left at Albert St. The hall is located on the corner of Albert and Victoria Sts.

### **Location: Stoneridge Farm**

2337 Perth Rd 163 St Marys, Ontario  
Phone: (519) 852-1842  
Email: coyotenatureschool@gmail.com  
Website: www.coyotenatureschool.ca

Coyote Nature School at Stoneridge Farm offers a beautiful setting with a wealth of natural diversity. Our winding trail along the creek is home to many species of animals, plants and trees. There is so much to explore just over the bridge and through the whispering pines. On those wintry days we can eat lunch around the campfire and bird watch at the backyard feeders. For quieter reflection, journaling or art we may sneak into the heritage barn, a perfect place to gather and chat about our day.



**DIRECTIONS FROM STRATFORD:** Travel west on Hwy. 7 to the roundabout at Wildwood Conservation Area. Take the first exit to St. Marys. Continue through town until you reach Rannoch (approx. 3km). Turn right on Rd. 163 and head north. The farm with a stone home, is located 5km on the east side of the road. Drop-off is in front of the barn.



## **Kendra K. Martin - Biography**

A teacher, mentor, facilitator and mother - Kendra Martin envisions a world where children are free to express their curiosity as they connect deeply with the natural world.

*“Children must know and appreciate what’s in their own backyard to recognize the value of nature in a world they will have a hand in shaping”*

Kendra is an Ontario certified teacher holding a Masters of Education Degree in Educational Leadership with over 30 years experience working within classrooms, environmental education centres and therapeutic recreation settings.

Kendra's unique approach to education has earned local recognition through Avon Maitland District School Board, and national awards for outstanding teaching through such organizations as the Canadian Network For Environmental Education. A strong advocate for nature education in public schools, Kendra created the Little Falls Forest School in 2013 creating a unique program model and offering mentorship to teachers wanting to take student lessons outdoors. Using a heart, head, hands approach (Child and Nature Alliance) in her work with children, she values the individual experience as well as understanding the critical value of building strong group ties to the land and sense of community belonging.

Kendra brings together a diverse professional background including youth support worker, therapeutic riding centre director, and international youth exchange program director. Most recently, Kendra designed workshops providing school and nature education leaders with a framework for nature programming and support to get started. Further to this, she has been invited to speak at webinars and share her Forest School leadership experience in educational magazines such as Green Teacher (see links below).

In 2021, Kendra began a year long Forest School Practitioner program to obtain certification through Forest School Canada. With a vision to reconnect children in nature, and foster a commitment to caring and stewardship of the natural world, Kendra opened Coyote Nature School in 2022.

[Green Teacher Magazine Article - Little Falls Forest School](#)

[Little Falls Forest School - Where Kids Get Plugged-In To Nature](#)

[Teacher Feature by Leigh Cassell](#)

[Little Falls Forest School - A Look Back](#)

# TERMS AND CONDITIONS

## Communications

Coyote Nature School staff welcome feedback, questions, and concerns from families and participants. We are happy to connect briefly during drop-off or pick-up to address any questions or concerns. Should questions arise that cannot be fully answered during this time, please email or call Kendra Martin directly using contact information below. If your child will be late or absent, please text prior to the program start time. We encourage parents to share any relevant new information which might affect their child's learning at nature school.

In the event of an emergency that involves your child the emergency contact provided on the registration form will be called at the earliest reasonable time. In the event that weather/road conditions make travel to/from CNS dangerous and the program needs to be canceled or closed early, parents/guardians will be notified by 7:30 am. See 'Weather Cancellation'.

Contact Information: Kendra Martin  
Phone: (519) 852-1842  
Email: [coyotenatureschool@gmail.com](mailto:coyotenatureschool@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.coyotenatureschool.ca](http://www.coyotenatureschool.ca)



## Registration and Payment

- In order to participate, registration must be completed in full before attending the program ([www.coyotenatureschool.ca](http://www.coyotenatureschool.ca)).
- A non-refundable \$100 deposit is required to hold your child's spot in the program (up to 48 hours). You may receive a refund, however, a \$30 administration fee will be retained.
- Payments can be made by e-transfer to [coyotenatureschool@gmail.com](mailto:coyotenatureschool@gmail.com). Cheques are accepted. Please make them out to Kendra Martin. Any cheques or e-transfers that are returned are subject to a \$50 administrative fee. If this does not fit the needs of your family please contact us to discuss a payment plan.
- Parents and/or Guardians must sign a release of liability waiver and must submit a Covid Screening form each program day in order for their children to participate.



### Refunds Policy

Refunds will be determined on a case by case basis and will not be issued unless there are extreme circumstances that prevent a child from participating in the program.

- Refunds will not be issued if a day's program is canceled due to inclement weather.
- A child who is absent or leaves for a portion of the day due to illness, injury, or any other reason will not be refunded any portion of that day's fees. If the child is unable to return for the remainder of the session, a refund may be granted for the remaining days.
- If a refund is issued, it may be subject to a \$50 administrative fee. In some cases, refunds can be used toward a future session.
- Two weeks' notice is required if you decide to leave the program. You may be refunded the remaining balance (less than two weeks), minus any administrative fees.
- Coyote Nature School reserves the right at any time during the program to terminate a contract (with a refund for days not attended) if it is deemed that the program is not a good fit for the child. See 'Behaviour Policy'.
- Programs may be cancelled due to insufficient enrollment. In this event a full refund will be issued.

### COVID-19 Precautions

We will stay informed of current health regulations and inform you of ongoing changes which affect participation at CNS. At this time, children will be asked to wear masks at all times while indoors or in close proximity to others for extended periods of time outdoors. We ask that you take your child's temperature before coming to Nature School and monitor for a fever. Please alert us immediately if your child is a close contact to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Covid-19 screening self-assessment must be completed before attending each day.

### Illness Policy

Prevention is key and we want to keep our community healthy. If any of the following cases occur, we ask that parents/guardians keep their child at home and only allow them back at Coyote Nature School a minimum of 24 hours after their last symptom has subsided (this applies to staff and volunteers as well):

- Temperature over 101°F (38.3°C);
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (watery, profuse stools)

If a participant becomes ill during the day, parents/guardians or emergency contacts will be contacted and they will be sent home. Participants who are affected by a communicable disease (measles, mumps, flu, strep throat, viral pneumonia, etc.) must receive healthcare provider consent prior to returning to Coyote Nature School.

In the case of an outbreak of a communicable disease, parents/guardians will be informed via email. If your child is sick, will be absent or late, please let us know asap via text or phone call. We do not receive emails the morning of nature school. If we don't hear from you, and your child is absent, we will call you around 9:30am. See our Refund Policy for more information.

### Food Policy

At CNS, participants are required to bring their own lunch, snacks and (labelled) full water bottle. Please provide an easily accessible morning snack and ensure your child is able to independently open containers. We encourage families to consider packing a garbage-less lunch that is easy to carry in a backpack. During winter months, consider thermoses for hot snacks and beverages. Sharing of food is not allowed for safety reasons. Participants will be asked to wash with soap and water or sanitize hands before eating and after using the bathroom. They will also be able to refill their water bottles on site.

### Allergies

Coyote Nature School is not able to safely accommodate participants with severe or life-threatening environmental or food allergies. This includes allergies to nuts and nut products, insect stings or poison ivy. We will work with families to accommodate less serious allergies.

### Child Privacy Policy

All steps will be taken to protect your child's privacy. Any personal data you provide will only be used for the purpose agreed upon. We will not share your child's health information with third parties, unless legally required to do so. Upon registration, you will be asked to sign a media release consent form. Photos will only be shared once consent has been given and for the purposes agreed upon, such as program promotion (website, social media, local newspaper, promotional videos and parent updates) or the blog. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

### Tick Safety Policy

To limit exposure parents may wish to send their child in long pants, long socks, and closed toed shoes, during all seasons, while taking part in our programs. We suggest that participants tuck their pant legs into their socks and shirts into their pants to also limit possible tick exposure. We recommend using insect repellent to deter ticks. Staff always carry insect repellent that contains DEET, as well as natural alternatives, to offer to families at drop off and to re-apply as required throughout the day. If a tick is seen on a participant it is brushed off. If a tick is attached we will remove it using tweezers or a tick key and save it in a baggie. Parents/guardians will be informed at pick-up, and given the opportunity to take the tick to the health unit for testing.

### Poison Ivy Policy

Although not identified at our sites poison ivy may be present in the woodland areas. To limit exposure we suggest that all participants wear long pants, long socks, and closed toed shoes, while taking part in our programs. Washing affected skin within 15-60 minutes of exposure is likely to remove the oil that can lead to a reaction, so staff carry potable water and soap at all times. In the event of a participant coming in contact with poison ivy, we are able to wash the affected area immediately.

### Hazardous Weather / Emergency Closing Procedures

Cancellation of programs will be communicated to parents/guardians at least an hour before program start time by email. If the local schools are closed, we may need to cancel the Nature School session for the day. If a decision is made to end a day early due to extreme weather, every effort will be made to communicate with families so as to provide adequate time to pick up children early.

### Extreme Weather Policy

The weather forecast is consulted regularly, and weather related safety is always a priority. In the case of predicted thunder and lightning or high winds, we will ensure participants are close to shelter so that it may be sought quickly should thunder and lightning or high winds occur. In the case of extreme cold (-20c or below) or extreme heat (30c or higher) the staff will limit participants' length of exposure (taking into consideration age and outerwear) and will continuously assess the participants' safety and comfort, watching for signs of frostbite, heat exhaustion, etc. If the weather is -25C or below, the session may be cancelled; a make-up date may be scheduled only if possible soon after cancellation.

### Risk Management

Some of the risks of outdoor activity include, but are not limited to:

- Injuries from executing strenuous and demanding physical activities
- Injuries from failing to properly use tools such as whittling knives
- Injuries from accidents around the campfire
- Injuries related to streams and the pond
- Contracting poison ivy or stinging nettle
- Being bitten by a tick or stung by a wasp/bee
- The presence of wild animals
- Inclement weather

We work to create an environment that is as safe as possible by being proactive and by using simple guidelines that children and adults can remember. Our safety guidelines include: setting up a safe space with boundaries and guidelines; carefully observing the children's interaction with each other and their physical environment; constantly assessing the risk as location of play/conditions change (dynamic risk assessment); spotting the children during more challenging physical activities (ex: climbing); and gently redirecting the children to safer or modified activities

If the staff observe that the play is becoming dangerous, we will redirect the children and remind them that it is important to stay safe. Some common phrases used by our staff team:

“What's your next move?”

“Do you feel safe there?”

“I'm here if you need me.”

“What's your plan with that stick/rock?”



“Should we move this game to a more open area?”  
“Sticks need space, where can you find more space?”

The experience and management of risk is a fundamental part of Nature School and essential for healthy child development. Our goal is not to keep children from all types of risky situations, but is instead to teach children how to safely navigate the risks that they encounter. We hope they will learn how to identify and navigate risk which is an important life skill. We do require that children are able to respond to our voices (or coyote howl/crow call) at all times.

### Hand Tool Safety Policy

We are committed to providing children with access to a wide range of equipment that stimulates enjoyment, learning and development. Using small hand tools is an important part of Nature School as it gives children the chance to develop new, practical skills, which will empower them and help develop self-confidence. To enable this, safety is carried out in this way: Hand tools will be maintained in good order by staff. Tools will be inspected before each session to ensure safety. Children and adults will be taught how to handle tools properly and to treat them with respect as well as use them in the designated safe area. Tools will be kept in the tool bag and only removed by staff (staff to child ratios when using hand tools will vary from 1:1 to 1:2 depending on tool in use). Proper protective equipment will be used when necessary. Running with tools is prohibited. Pointing with tools is prohibited. If guidelines are not followed, children will lose permission to use hand tools.

### Campfires

Children may have the opportunity to participate in fire making and campfire cooking. Their level of participation will be determined based upon their readiness, as decided by mentors through ongoing observation.

## **PROGRAM**

### A Day At Coyote Nature School

A day at nature school is filled with fascinating opportunities to explore living things and to participate in core routines that root children in the natural world. Using animal calls replaces commands to gather, circle, listen or focus on an object of interest, and sets a positive guiding tone. A coyote call tells the students to ‘run to the pack’, the owl hoot signals ‘listen up’, and a crow’s call makes all eyes turn to a passing osprey or muddy track. Each child has a tree friend on the property chosen early in the year as a sit spot (reflection space) for journaling and to observe and record seasonal changes. To create connection to the natural features of the land, learning ‘pockets’ are established, each with its own unique name; *Willow Way*, *Spruce Shelter*, *Wonder Woods*. Every child adopts the name of a local animal with qualities which match their own. These animal names are spoken throughout each day so they become embedded in the language and spark interest and a deeper understanding about the critters in our world. Thankfulness is part of our daily practice and we model giving thanks for wellness, nature, our elders, family and friends.



With child passions at the forefront, we plan our next visit around what nature brings, and the inquiries of the children. We strive to accomplish core routines and reflections every day, but otherwise we will be found outdoors constructing animal homes, watching new visitors along the waterway, uncovering bugs, or roleplaying our local critters as we build nature literacy. Whether it's sticky tree sap, squishy moss, or new plant arrivals that capture our attention and invite us in – our day follows child-led interests. Get ready to watch your child grow in confidence, cooperation, and curiosity as we embark on this nature journey together!

### Full Day

- 9:00 Arrival at site and welcome (Covid screening)
- 9:15 Opening circle, check in, story of the day
- 9:45 Walk to the trail - snack time & morning discovery learning program
- 11:30 Lunch at an outdoor picnic site or the barn (weather dependent)
- 12:30 Wonder-wander time & sit spot reflection
- 1:00 Afternoon discovery learning program
- 2:30 Story of the day \*children share and plan for next visit
- 2:45 Closing song and saying
- 3:00 Pick up



### Preparing for Nature School: Supply List

Depending on the season, participants will need rainsuits, boots, extra warm clothing, waterproof/warm snowsuits, extra hats and mitts, hiking shoes, sneakers, wool socks, thermal underwear, etc.

For cold weather please consider the following factors when dressing for a day at nature school:

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

Winter:

- Two winter hats (must cover ears and stay on the head)
- Balaclava or neck warmer (no scarves please due to risk of strangulation)
- Two pairs of warm, waterproof mitts
- One set of warm, waterproof boots
- Wool socks
- Three base layers: thermal shirt and pants, middle layer, wool/fleece sweater (cotton is not recommended for cold weather conditions)

#### Spring:

- Rain gear (waterproof boots, pants, jacket), with extra insulation on colder days)
- Wool socks on colder days (they insulate even when wet)
- Sneakers or running shoes (please no open toe shoes even in summer)
- Sun Hat (for warmer days)
- Warmer sweater or jacket for colder days
- Bug Jacket (optional)

#### Summer:

- Rain gear (waterproof boots, pants, jacket)
- Sneakers for running (please no open toe shoes even in summer)
- Sun Hat
- Lightweight clothing (silk/cotton ideal, synthetic fibre does not breathe well)
- Bug Jacket (optional)

#### Fall:

- Rain gear (waterproof boots, pants, jacket)
- Sneakers for running (please no open toe shoes even in summer)
- Sun Hat (for warmer months)
- Warm Jacket (fleece or other breathable fabric ideal)
- Bug Jacket (optional)

#### All Seasons:

- Small backpack
- Lunch and snacks
- Water bottle
- Two extra changes of clothes (including underwear and socks)

#### A note to parents/caregivers:

It is not necessary to invest in expensive brand names to keep your child warm. Thrift stores are great places to look for children's wool clothing at cheaper prices. If you are looking for a regular store to purchase outdoor clothing, Mountain Equipment Coop (MEC) has excellent children's outdoor wear for all seasons and has an online clothing swap. We recommend purchasing boots that are one size larger than your child's foot. Again, this creates dead air space to assist in insulation. Socks help to wick moisture away from the skin. Please note: cotton tends to sweat and doesn't do a great job at wicking moisture. The best foot insulator would be two pairs of wool socks with waterproof boots that have wiggle room.

For warmer weather we ask that your child has a light cotton/silk/hemp long sleeve shirt on for the day. Children are encouraged to wear a hat at all times.



### Behaviour Management Policy

We believe in using modeling and careful observation of children's behaviour to avoid discipline. Keeping children engaged in age appropriate activities, offering choices, and having them lead their own learning often brings out the best in them. We will allow children to practice solving their own problems as long as it is safe. If a child needs assistance, we will help and problem solve with them.

Coyote Nature School staff intervenes (depending on circumstances) when a child is exhibiting behaviour that:

1. Interferes with another child's play
2. Is disruptive to the group as a whole
3. Is unsafe to himself/herself or another child or staff

The goal of all behavioural interventions are to help children develop self-control, self-confidence, decision-making skills, and communication skills. An example of a behaviour management sequence is as follows:

- a. Provide age appropriate, gentle, verbal clarification to explain that the behaviour is not acceptable and the reasons why. Focus will be on the behaviour rather than the child.
- b. Model appropriate behaviours to set an example as to how to manage conflict and stress.
- c. Give a second warning, implemented in a positive and consistent manner.
- d. Redirect the child to another activity and method of dealing with the situation, or away from the original area.
- e. Give a 'calm break' off to the side and clarification about why the child needs a moment to calm down. Allow them to have space for a few minutes to think about/clarify why the behaviour is not acceptable.
- f. If the behaviour is too extreme for an extended period of time, then a parent would be contacted to take the child home for the day.
- g. If the behaviour is exhibited consistently through multiple sessions then the staff will approach the parent to discuss a plan. We want all children to thrive at Coyote Nature School.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

One of the many special features of nature school is that sessions are held in the same area over a period of time, allowing participants to become comfortable and knowledgeable about the area. We believe that it is only through a deep 'connection to place' that children grow to be stewards of the land. Although this is positive for learning, it can have an adverse effect on the land due to overuse. We strive to meet a delicate balance, promoting children's connection to nature through exposure and meaningful experience, while fostering an ethic of care and sustainable use of the land. We minimize our ecological impact by rotating sites for play, and staying on trails as much as possible.

