



**Nature Preschool,
Nature Playschool &
Nature Playschool Plus**

**2021-2022 School Year
Parent Handbook**



Wildwood's nature-based preschool and playschool provides children with special opportunities to learn about themselves and the world. By connecting young children with the natural world, we hope to inspire a love of nature, foster environmental awareness and nurture a caring attitude that will follow them throughout their lives.

We offer experiences that are typically found in a child centered early childhood program with opportunities to:

- Make discoveries and learn through play
- Make choices and follow their interests
- Use their senses
- Work large and small muscles
- Express themselves creatively and use language in its many forms
- Make friends and learn about the social world
- Problem solve

Nature-based activities will happen both indoors and outdoors, in whole groups, small groups and individually. Children will have daily experiences with plants, animals, and the natural world by hiking, exploring, observing, and experimenting.



Important Contacts:

Wildwood Nature Center
529 Forestview Avenue
Park Ridge, IL 60068
847-692-3570

Jen Clauson
Wildwood Nature Center Supervisor
jclauson@prparks.org

Molly Kowalski
Program Naturalist – Nature Preschool Coordinator
Nature Preschool Lead Teacher (M/W/F AM & T/Th PM)
mkowalski@prparks.org

Haley Lippert, Karly Kokta
Nature Playschool Plus Co-Lead Teachers (M AM, W AM, F AM)
wildwooddragonfly@prparks.org

Robin Remer
Nature Preschool Lead Teacher (Tu/Th AM)
rremer@prparks.org

Ben Knitter
Nature Preschool Lead Teachers (M/W/F PM)
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Jen Gardner
Nature Playschool Lead Teacher (M AM, WAM, F AM, F PM)
wildwoodheron@Prparks.org

Nature Preschool and Playschool Classroom Locations:
Maine Park Leisure Center
2701 W. Sibley Street, Park Ridge, IL 60068

Ridge Room- Playschool Plus

Mon- AM Wed- AM
 Fri- AM

Walnut Room- Playschool

Mon- AM Wed - AM
 Fri- AM Fri- PM

Hickory Room- Preschool

M/W/F AM & PM
Tu/Th AM & PM



Clothing

Children should be dressed for a variety of potentially messy activities. Comfortable, non-restrictive clothing that the child is able to independently manage for toileting is best. Protective shoes with gripping soles and closed toes are best for climbing, jumping and hiking.

Expect that your child will go outside every day and keep in mind the weather for that day. Appropriate gear will allow your child to comfortably and fully explore all that nature has to offer.

- Rainy days or wet days after rain
 - Rubber boots with gripping soles
 - Rain pants
 - Rain jacket with a hood
- Colder weather and snow
 - Waterproof mittens or gloves
 - Hats and scarves
 - Snow boots
 - Snow pants (overall style or pant style is fine)
 - Winter coat
 - Layered clothing
- Indoors in inclement weather
 - Change of clothes just in case, which can stay in your child's backpack until needed
 - Indoor shoes (crocs, slippers, gym shoes, etc)

Face Coverings: Face Coverings: Both children and staff will be required to wear face coverings over their nose and mouth while indoors unless eating or drinking water. Face coverings will only be worn outdoors when participants are unable to social distance.

Nature Preschool and Nature Playschool will spend the majority of their class time outside. They will move to their indoor classroom space in the event of severe weather or real feel temperatures below 0 degrees.

To the best of our ability staff and children will practice social distancing indoors and outdoors.

Please label all of your child's items! We end up with lots of similar snow pants and mittens. Initials usually work great for keeping track of things, and we can easily get in contact with you if mix-ups occur.



Car Pool/Security

All people listed on your ePACT form under parent/guardian, emergency contact, and authorized pick up will be allowed to pick up a child during or after class. If carpooling, please make sure the adult is listed on the form. Please do not be offended if the teacher asks for photo ID, it is for the safety of the children. In the event that a new person must be added unexpectedly, please provide the teachers with a written note or email. If that email is sent during class hours, contact Wildwood staff at 847-692-3570 so they can relay that information to your child's teachers.

Special Occasions

Birthdays are very important to our students and they may want to share their special day here at school. Please do not bring goody bags or special treats to class. Our emphasis will be on the event.

Holidays can be very busy and exciting times for children, and at times over-stimulating. We downplay the commercial aspects of holidays. Please don't send costumes to class, as they can be difficult to move around in the daily activities. We will have more of a seasonal approach to the year, fall harvest, winter solstice, and growth in the spring.

Snacks

Students are responsible for providing their own snack in a disposable container. Staff are required to dispose of all food containers after snack time. Please label all snacks and keep them in their backpack.

Children are allowed to bring a refillable, labeled water bottle. Although we are not allowing group snacks, we encourage all families to provide healthy nut-free snack options.



Health

Symptom Screenings: Parents/Guardians are required to self-screen for symptoms prior to the program starting each day. Individuals who exhibit or self-report a temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit/38 degrees Celsius or currently have known symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, fatigue, muscle and body aches, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, vomiting, or diarrhea, may not attend the program. These individuals should be referred to a medical provider for evaluation, treatment, and information about when they can return to the program.

If your child is running a fever or has other symptoms of illness and will not be in class, please call and leave a message at (847) 692-3570 or send an email to your child's teacher.

- **ALWAYS** report any contagious disease (i.e. chicken pox, measles, roseola, mumps, strep or rubella) immediately to your child's teacher.
- Also report any cases of head lice, pink eye, Hand Foot and Mouth, impetigo, or other skin disorders. Children should be free of all symptoms for 24 hours (completely lice or nit free) before returning to school.

If a child becomes ill during the day, we will contact an adult for pick up. All staff are trained in CPR/AED/First Aid. First aid equipment is on hand at all times.

If your child requires medication to be dispensed by teachers on a regular or emergency basis, you need to complete the Park District Medicine Packet, and we ask that the medicine be supplied daily. When possible, your child's medication can be left with us for the duration of the program, or passed back and forth between teacher and parent each day.

COVID-19

* "Person" includes a student or staff member

Any child or staff member suspected of having COVID-19, diagnosed with COVID-19, or an unvaccinated individual having been in contact with someone suspected of or diagnosed with COVID-19 shall be dismissed from the preschool until written documentation is provided by the child's physician that they are no longer communicable and may return to preschool. CDC guidance, along the IDPH and

DCFS guidance will be followed in regards to a vaccinated person coming into contact with a suspected or positive case.

Families of children and staff must immediately notify the Park Ridge Park District Nature Preschool Coordinator's office by calling 847-692-3570 or emailing mkowalski@prparks.org and jclauson@prparks.org if someone in the home tests positive or if the child has been in close contact with a positive case. Parents of children who may have had contact or been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 will be notified through email. Close contact is defined as within 6 feet for 15 minutes or longer over a 24 hour period.

If a preschool family or a staff member notifies the preschool of a COVID case, the Park Ridge Park District Safety Committee has a plan that is based on recommendations from the CDC, the IDPH, and DCFS. See COVID-19 scenarios below.

If the notification of one of the following scenarios or a child or staff member exhibits symptom of COVID-19 during school hours and the child is present, staff (equipped with proper PPE) will immediately move the child away from his/her group to a designated space outdoors at Maine Park or indoors in a space that is ventilated and heated/air conditioned and equipped with a cot and materials that can easily be cleaned and sanitized. Staff will notify an authorized adult to pick up the child within 30 minutes. Staff will stay with the child to keep him/her comfortable. If a staff member shows symptoms, they will be asked to leave or wait in the designated area until they can be picked up.

COVID-19 SCENERIOS

Person has a CONFIRMED Case of COVID-19

If a person contracts COVID-19, they will need to remain isolated at home for a minimum of 10 days after symptom onset. After the 10 days, they can return to the preschool after feverless and symptomless (without fever-reducing medication) for at least 72 hours or has 2 negative COVID-19 test in a row with testing done at least 24 hours apart. Families must provide written documentation, provided by a physician that the person is no longer communicable before returning to school.

Person Exposed to a CONFIRMED Case of COVID-19

If a person has been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19, then according to the CDC guidelines, the person will need to stay home to monitor their health for 14 days after date of last exposure to see if they develop symptoms or become sick. Any family/household members within the Park District programs should also follow these same guidelines. Families must provide written documentation, provided by a physician that the person is no longer communicable before returning to school.

Person with POSSIBLE Exposure to COVID-19

Parents and staff will monitor person and any family members, including but not limited to siblings. They are allowed to return to preschool as long as they do not exhibit any COVID-19 symptoms.

Inclusion

The Park Ridge Park District welcomes participation in preschool for individuals with disabilities and special needs. The Park Ridge Park District is committed to inclusion and providing public recreation services in the most integrated setting, in which interaction between people with and without disabilities is provided to the maximum extent feasible.

Due to COVID-19, participants will be required to:

- Function and participate within set ratios
- Maintain social distancing
- Independently manage personal care including toileting, feeding, and personal hygiene
- Wear a face mask when it is appropriate to do so

The Park Ridge Park District works cooperatively with Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation (MNASR) to integrate preschoolers with disabilities into recreational programs. Inclusion aides may be present at Nature Preschool and PlaySchool to work one-on-one with a specific student. These aides only intervene in necessary circumstances. If you feel your student would benefit from additional assistance at Nature Preschool or PlaySchool, be sure to communicate the necessary information to the Nature Center Supervisor. The Park District will contact MNASR for consultation for mental or behavioral situations. To notify us if you believe your child could benefit from a trained inclusion specialist, please contact Molly Kowalski (847) 692- 3570 or mkowalski@prparks.org.



Communication

Communication between parents and teachers benefits the educational experience of children. Children's growth and discoveries as well as changes or extremes in behavior will be shared with parents.

- Arrival and departure times can be very busy, and we appreciate your understanding that these are not the best times to discuss your concerns properly.
- Due to the limitations on conversation during arrival and departure times, email, phone calls or pre-arranged conference times will be the primary means used to communicate with parents.
- Please keep the teachers notified of significant events (moving, new baby, etc) that might affect children's lives at home or school.
- A preview of curriculum themes and some of the daily activities will be sent by email monthly, and posted on our Shutterfly classroom site.
- The majority of communication will be by email. Please let us know if this does not work for you and we will provide a hard copy of the message.
- Please make sure that the teacher has the email address you would like to receive all school communications, and notify us if it changes during the year.

Conferences are also scheduled once each semester for children that attend Nature Preschool. You will be notified by email when conferences will be held and will be able to sign up a few weeks prior to conferences. These optional conferences will be virtual or via the phone and will last approximately 10-20 minutes.



Family Situations:

Staff understand and respect the differences in all families and will aim to do our best to work with each individual circumstance. Regarding divorce and separated situations, Park District staff will not act as an intermediary between parents. Parents must communicate with each other first, and then contact the Park District. Staff will not coordinate items such as payments, communication between parents, or who is picking up the child. We understand these situations can be difficult and emotional, but we ask to please refrain from taking out frustrations on staff. We can help by setting up separate accounts and, if requested, we can email both parents/guardians program information. To set up separate family accounts or to request an additional email for communication please contact Debbie Majchszak at dmajchszak@prparks.org or 847-692-5127.

In cases where the child is the subject of a court order (e.g., Custody Order, Restraining Order, or Protection from Abuse Order) a Certified Copy of the most recent order and all amendments thereto must be uploaded into ePact in the Shared Files section. The orders of the court will be strictly followed unless the parent or parents with legal custody requests a more liberal variation of the order in writing. In the case where both parents have joint legal custody by order of the court, both parents must sign the request for more liberal interpretation of the order.

In the absence of a court order on file, both parents will have equal access to their child as stipulated by law. Without a court order, the Park Ridge Park District cannot limit the access of one parent by request of the other parent, regardless of the reason. Staff will contact the police should a conflict arise.



Sample Schedule

We value spontaneity and take advantage of the “Teachable Moment.” We also know that many children, especially children experiencing regular activity away from home, benefit from knowing what will happen next. We maintain a loose but structured schedule, with predictable events throughout the day (such as snack, circle/rug time etc.) The following is an example of a classroom schedule.

Arrival

Drop off will be outside curbside at an assigned outdoor drop-off location. Park District staff will meet you at your car. After answering the health screening questions, you will unbuckle your child from the car and a staff member will walk your child to their class. Please make sure your child has recently used the toilet and washed. As with every new school year we expect some children to have a hard time adjusting. This year we understand this might be a harder change than normal. Please know we will comfort your child when needed.

Free Choice and Centers

Children will have the opportunity to explore with centers based around that month’s theme. We will prepare individual sensory bins, crafts, stations, and more.

Clean-Up

Children put away materials they have used and prepare for group/circle time.

Circle/Group Time

Children will take part in conversation about the topic of the day. This is a pre-knowledge/circle time.

Snack

Children will enjoy a community style snack together. During nice weather, snack is enjoyed outside.

Outdoor Exploration

Children will explore one or more of the outdoor areas at Wildwood Nature Center. We will take a hike on the grounds stopping to play in the forest, prairie or the pond area. We will use large motor skills for movement experiences such as, digging, climbing, gardening, turning over logs, fort building, water play, etc. While outside if weather permits we will have our snack and story time.

Journaling

Children will be given time to “write”, draw, and reflect in their Nature Journal each class. Journals will remain at school until the end of the semester.

Story Time

We will hear a story related to the theme of the class.

Dismissal

Dismissal will be outside at the same spot you dropped off at – we will deliver your child to your car. The teacher will call children to go home with the authorized person. The authorized person must sign out each child they are taking home. Please do not take your child from class without the teacher’s knowledge. Every effort will be made for prompt dismissal, as we know that many of you must pick up other children. People picking up students from class are required to show an ID until the teachers recognize the authorized pick-up person.



A Special Note Regarding Personal Information about Your Child

- Some parents hesitate to provide child care providers with personal information about their child's behavior or past experience. Some fear the information may be misused, while others are concerned about their child being labeled, singled out or treated differently. All parents want to see their child have a fresh start in a new program, unencumbered by past performance.
- As program providers, we appreciate these concerns. We also know how valuable such information can be in assisting us to help your child make a smooth and happy adjustment to our program, something we know all parents want! Remember, we only have a short time to get it right! We need your help!
- Having prior knowledge about a learning difficulty, ADHD, or a recent loss or major change in the family or child's life makes a tremendous difference in helping us be sensitive to your child's need for patience, understanding and reassurance, especially in the first few days of the program!
- This is especially true for children who have an attention problem or who are nervous about new situations. Many parents fear some programs will not accept their child if they are completely open. The truth is that children need us to be partners with you in order for them to have a safe and successful experience.
- Our commitment is to use such information only to help your child adjust to our program. As always, the information you provide will remain confidential.
- Remember, when faced with challenges, we can help your child have a great school year if you help us. We encourage you to make us a full partner in planning for your child's success.
- To assist us in providing the most positive environment for your child, please call or email Molly Kowalski at (847) 692-3570 or mkowalski@prparks.org to discuss any special needs your child may have.



Discipline Procedure

No participant shall on the basis of race, gender, creed, sexual orientation, national origin or disability be denied equal access to programs, activities, services or benefits or be limited in the exercise of any right, privilege, advantage or opportunity. In keeping with our program goals, we encourage fun for all of our participants; however certain rules are necessary to ensure everyone's safety and enjoyment.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

Our discipline policy is to first and foremost REDIRECT the child to stop the inappropriate behavior. By controlling the situation, there should not be a need for any additional discipline. However, sometimes a child needs to be removed from play to relax and calm down during a rest period. If a problem arises that needs to be addressed, the teacher will notify the Supervisor and then contact the parents to work out a plan to be reinforced at home as well as in school. Our primary objective is to avoid a situation wherein a specific child continues to disrupt the experiences of the other children in the classroom. The following outlines the form of discipline that will be used in cases of aggressive behavior.

BEHAVIOR

Participants are expected to exhibit appropriate behavior at all times. The staff will set limits from the start of the program and attempt to correct improper behavior. The following guidelines have been developed to help make Park District programs safe and enjoyable for all participants. Additional rules may be developed for particular activities as deemed necessary by staff.

Participants shall:

1. Show respect to all participants and staff
2. Show respect to nature and animals
2. Refrain from using foul language
3. Refrain from causing bodily harm to any participant or staff
4. Show respect for equipment, supplies, and facilities

DISCIPLINE

A positive approach will be used regarding discipline. The staff will set limits from the start of the program and attempt to correct inappropriate behavior. The Park Ridge Park District reserves the right to dismiss a participant whose behavior either

endangers the child or others or if grossly disruptive. Each situation will be evaluated on its own merit. Appropriate action will take place as soon as possible.

PROCEDURE

If a participant exhibits inappropriate actions the following guidelines will be followed.

1. The Nature Preschool Lead Teacher will determine the severity of the action and will immediately take the appropriate steps to correct it.

The steps to be followed:

- a. Positive verbal reminder of appropriate behavior
 - b. Redirection to another activity
 - c. Direction to a quiet time activity
 - d. Temporary removal from classroom
2. Repetitive or intentional violent behavior will result in the teacher completing a conduct report that will be given to the Nature Center Supervisor. A copy of the conduct report will also be given to the parents. Depending on the severity of the incident, the Supervisor may dismiss the child from the program.
3. If the action requires dismissal from the program, the Supervisor will contact the Recreation Program Division Manager after investigation of the incident.
4. If an action involves a person with a disability, staff will contact Maine Niles Association of Special Recreation for advice; however, final decisions will remain with the Park District.
5. The Superintendent of Recreation will be informed of all incidences and their outcomes as soon as possible.
6. Appeals may be made to the Superintendent of Recreation.



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