



Forest Friends School

Nature. Nurture.

Parent Handbook

Contact: Laura Johnson 208-660-4813

What is Forest Friends?

Forest Friends is a small, private, part-time Pre-K program for 4 & 5 year olds. We believe in using the tools of nature and nurture to support young children's development. We build social and play skills, creativity, resiliency, and nature connection in a small, supportive environment. We spend a minimum of 50% of our school day outdoors in all weather.

Curriculum

Forest Friends focuses heavily on social and character development through play and interacting with peers, teachers, and nature. We use routines, real tools, animal care, songs, story times, nature journaling, crafts, a letter and creature of the week, math ideas, and open-ended creativity as regular tools in our curriculum "toolbox".

We believe these foundational skills build the gross motor, fine motor, memory and planning ability necessary for academic pursuits later in school. *Forest Friends is not an academic-focused program* and we can't spend as much time on traditional school readiness (like scissor skills) as other programs since we spend much of our time outdoors with mittens on.

Families with older children desiring more academic focus may choose to supplement our program with fine motor and reading work at home, and others may want to alternate days with an academic-focused preschool.

Is your child ready?

- 4 or 5 years of age on or before September 1, 2023
- 6th birthday no earlier than March 1, 2024
- No longer napping
- Can walk over varied terrain
- Is able to transition to different environments (home to store, leaving friends' house, etc.)
- Can communicate basic needs (thirsty, hungry, sad, etc.)
- Fully independent toileting

Spiritual aspects

We believe that spiritual formation of the child is the parent's right and responsibility. However, young children are inherently spiritual and ask many deep questions about the world!

All families, of all beliefs, are welcome at our school. We also want to be clear about what spiritual formation may take place at school. While we are not a Christian school per se, we are a school run by Christians and I do teach from a Judeo-Christian worldview. This looks like:

- A prayer of gratitude to start each day at first circle, acknowledging God as Creator, protector (including learning prayer etiquette).
- Monthly Biblical Proverb that connects to our character learning (including verse reference)
- Learning language of things being "created", "made", and "intended".
- Observation/naming of Christmas and Easter as winter and spring holidays.
- Deferring and communication with parents about sensitive subjects if questions come up from the child's perspective.

Observation and take-home work

We have a Fall conference once I've gotten to know your child and have made observations on their play, art, and other activities at school. We will meet and talk about your goals for the year and how we can best support your child for the rest of the school year. I'll repeat these observations again in the Spring so we will have a record of their growth areas during our time together.

Many of our art activities are choice and process-based, and we will move into a few more group participation "crafts" as the year progresses (with plenty of process art too!). The amount and type of work coming home will vary by child, and photos on Brightwheel (see below) are another place you may see more of your child's creative work at school.

Brightwheel

We use the Brightwheel platform for registration, tuition and fee payments, signing forms and releases, medical info, and photos/communications with you! This app is required for all families. **Make sure you install the app with notifications ON as well as set up your forms and payment preferences** on the desktop version. **Any regular pickup people will also need the app and notifications on their phone.**

Registration, Payment, and Refunds

Registration:

A supply fee of \$100 and a deposit of \$305 (which will be applied to your last month's tuition) is required for registration. This amount can be paid as an initial payment of \$100 and the balance (\$305) **due no later than August 1, 2023** to hold your spot for the fall.

Each Month's tuition is due in full by the 5th and paid in advance for that month. Tuition payment months are September through April; May tuition is covered by your initial deposit. For example, tuition paid by September 5th is for the month of September.

Month	Tuition/Fees Paid
Time of registration	\$100 supply fee
July 1	\$305 (for last month of 2024)
September 1	\$305
October 1	\$305
November 1	\$305
December 1	\$305
January 1	\$305
February 1	\$305
March 1	\$305
April 1	\$305
May 1	None (covered by deposit)

Payment:

After the 5th, two notices of unpaid tuition will be given. If that month's tuition is left unpaid by the 15th, the deposit paid at time of registration will be applied to your account to cover the unpaid balance, and the child will be excused from the program effective the last day of that month.

If your child needs to leave the school at any time during the month, for any reason, that month's tuition and all registration and supply fees are non-refundable.

Refunds:

Tuition is comprehensive and not the same as paying for hourly or daily child care. Tuition includes all breaks and holiday closures as well as 2 weather or teacher absence days for the school year; averaged across the 9 month school year as a whole.

There will be no discounts, partial credits, or volunteer credits this year. If your class has more than two weather or teacher absence closures I will schedule make up days at the end of the school year.

Supply fees are nonrefundable; they cover the start-up supplies for your child. If you leave the program before it starts and I can fill your spot, I will refund the supply fee.

2-Week Trial Period

If a child is inconsolable, unable to stay with the group when outdoors, or is otherwise not ready for preschool as determined by the teacher(s) after the first two weeks of school, the family will be asked to leave the school with no partial refunds given for that month. The last months' tuition paid as a deposit will be refunded once the empty roster spot is filled.

Behavior Policies

Respect is a top value for Forest Friends! We are respectful to one another, our classroom, and living things. Teachers respect children's thoughts, feelings, and interests. Behavior issues will be addressed using respect as our baseline.

When disputes arise between the children, they will be given tools to work collaboratively. Cues for talking things out and finding solutions will be given by the teachers.

Children will never be left alone or out of sight when working through behavior issues. The teachers/staff will never use abusive, neglectful, humiliating, or frightening punishment. Any major behavioral events will be witnessed and documented in our accident/incident log on Brightwheel by the lead teacher, with follow up communication immediately with all parents of involved children.

Physical or verbal aggression of a child towards peers or teachers will not be tolerated and will result in immediate removal from the program. Destructive or abusive behavior of a child towards animals, plants, my home, or classroom items will also result in removal from the program.

Should a child need to be dismissed from the school due to purposeful behavior that can't be resolved, there will be no refunds of that month's tuition, deposit, or supply fees.

Drop-off and Pick-up

Drop off: NO EARLIER than 8:50, school begins at 9 am.

Pick up: 1 pm, please be on time as we do not have after-care.

Forest Friends starts and ends each session at our fenced Forest Playground area. Please take your child to the restroom before coming to class and checking in with the teacher, either at home or upon arrival. Make sure your child has the appropriate clothes for the day.

If someone other than the parent dropping off will be picking up, let the instructor know ahead of time. If it is someone we haven't met before we will check their ID against your child's pick-up list given at registration.

We understand life happens, *but please make every effort to be on time* picking up your child. Children whose parents are habitually very late (15 minutes or more) may be excused from the program.

If you know your child will be out one day, please contact us via text or Brightwheel.

Illness and Injury Policy

Forest Friends is for well children only and *remember that we will be spending half of class outdoors*. Fever, any diarrhea, vomiting, profuse or thick nasal discharge, severe skin rash **within the last 48 hours** before class means that your child should **stay home that day even if they are currently symptom-free**. Feeling sick while you are outside playing in the rain is not fun. Additionally, we are a very high-touch environment and germs can spread quickly!

Bumps, scrapes, and tumbles are a part of normal outdoor play. If a child has a minor injury that can be addressed by the instructor (scrape, fall, etc.) an injury report will be sent Brightwheel. Head injuries always result in a phone call home. We do not administer medicine of any type (with the exception of epi-pen for life threatening allergy). Cuts and scrapes will be cleaned with antiseptic and treated with a non-antibiotic balm.

Children who become sick or injured to the point of needing medical attention during the program and need to go home will have the parent contacted immediately. The class will move to our indoor area until the child can be picked up.

Inclement Weather and Cancellation

We are rain, snow, or shine – outdoors every day, at least 1.5 hours, during our 3-hour school day.

However, if weather events are extreme - temperatures or windchill below 15 degrees Fahrenheit, gusty winds, hail, thunderstorms, air quality index in the “red” zone - class will be moved indoors for all or part of that day.

We may have to cancel class based on road conditions due to snow or ice or potential treefall. If we deem that our roads are not safe, we will contact that day’s classes by 8 am.

Our driveway is steep and I make every effort to clear it in a timely way, however, when I am teaching I cannot also remove snow or ice. Your vehicle will need, at a minimum, snow tires in the winter to guarantee safe access, or you may want to arrange carpool with another family.

Safety Policies

Children will be taught to stay together and given cues, games, and reminders so we are always moving about as a group. Children that consistently have trouble with escape behaviors (leaving the group or wandering) will need to be excused from the program. We have specific policies for outdoor activities such as tree climbing, sledding, hiking, etc. Please ask if you’d like to see them.

All instructors and assistants will follow the “rule of threes” so that they are never one-on-one alone with a child. All our assistants, teachers, and the property owner’s family over the age of 12 have current extended background checks through the state of Idaho on file.

Visitor and Volunteer Policies

Once school begins, parents and other adults bringing children to school are asked to leave. Teachers can assist in helping children transition if this becomes difficult. We can not allow parents or visitors to stay during school hours.

Occasionally we have parents lead a special story time or craft project – if this is something you’re interested in just let me know and we can plan it together.

There will be special events set up throughout the school year, as well as student conferences. These days will be special for your child as well - a chance to share their progress and growth with you!

Social Media

If you do not wish your child’s likeness in any form to be used on social media, please let us know by signing the opt-out form on Brightwheel at time of registration. We occasionally post to our website, Instagram, and Facebook.

Picture / Video sharing policy

Due to the nature of running a business at my home,

I ask that you not take or publicly share photos or videos that expressly show the school grounds, classroom, or my home. This includes all social media platforms.

This is different from photos of your child with school grounds in the background. Please ask if you need clarification.

Please do not tag “Forest Friends School” or myself, my family members, or employee names, in social media without my permission.

Do not publicly share photos that include other children without those parents’ expressed permission.

Parents will need to supply:

- Sunscreen - apply before class
- Insect repellent -apply before class (fall/spring)
- Labeled water bottle and warm drink thermos, filled for the day
- Snack for the class, once monthly (more information on this prior to school start)

- Handwarmers if your child likes them (we keep extras for emergencies)
- Extra snack if your child is unlikely to eat the group snack
- Classroom slippers with grip (Croc-style shoes work great), to be left at school
- Backup clothing: base layer, underwear in a ziploc left in cubby.
- Child dressed for the weather (see Dress for Success!)
- This year: NO BACKPACKS necessary, your child can bring one if they want to. We will use a caddy for our water bottles and bag for extra layers.

Dress for Success!

With the right layers, your child can be comfortable playing outdoors in almost any weather! The wrong layers can be uncomfortable or frustrating for your child; and result in the entire class needing to go indoors.

Our temperatures can run at least 5 degrees cooler than town, and we get more dew, frost, and precipitation as well. Your child will be running, crawling, and scooting on wet, cold ground for at least half of their day. These core recommendations typically apply October through April.

- LAYER 1 Base: non-cotton (polyester or wool) top and bottom.
- LAYER 2 Mid/Insulating: fleece (for cool weather) OR puffy (for cold weather)
- LAYER 3 Snow: **snow suit or bibs/jacket**
- LAYER 4 Rain or Mixed conditions: **Rain suit or rain pants/jacket**
- EXTREMITIES:
 - 2 pairs of magic gloves (the one-size polyester cheap ones) and 1-2 pairs of outer mittens. Mittens with large wrist gauntlets that the child can pull on/off themselves are my preference.
 - A hat (preferably no pom-pom so it fits under hoods and in backpacks)
 - **insulated** boots such as Bogs, Muds, or Kamik. Rain boots or sneakers without insulation only in temps of 50 or greater.
 - **WOOL or POLYESTER tall socks if we are below 50 degrees.** If you're not sure about the socks, check with me. Cotton play socks do not keep little toes warm.

Please contact me if you have questions about what to dress your child in or need help finding items.

Birthdays

We would love to recognize your child's birthday at Forest Friends! We also aim to keep our special celebrations simple so as not to overwhelm.

A few days before your child's birthday, I'll invite you to **send me one picture of your child for each year of life that has happened**, starting with newborn (for example, if your child is turning

5: newborn, 1, 2, 3, and 4). You can also include one fun fact about your child for each year of age (“when he was one, he loved avocados”, “when she was two, she liked to climb up on the dining table”, etc.).

At the end of our school day (around 11:40) we will have our special birthday time. We tell a story about their life while in our circle using the pictures and fun facts you provided. This is extra special for the birthday child and helps all the children understand the passage of time. After our ceremony, **we can share a special snack if you choose to send one in (totally optional)**.

How to Reach Me

You can reach me three ways:

1. Through the messaging function in the Brightwheel app, which is preferred over text messaging. It is more secure. This is the fastest way to reach me. I will get your message & respond **8:00 am -1:00pm Monday-Friday** this way.
2. Through email at info@forestfriendsschool.com or laura@forestfriendsschool.com . I check email once daily Monday – Friday.
3. By phone 208-660-4813, 2-4 pm, Monday – Thursday or 9-11 am Fridays. I also answer calls from parents during school hours, 9 am – 12 pm, for emergency communication related to children who are at school.

If you call, email, or message during the weekend I will get back to you the next business day during these times.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT OF PARENT HANDBOOK, PAYMENT POLICY,
ASSUMPTION OF INHERENT RISKS AND LIABILITY WAIVER

1. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Parent Handbook, have read the Handbook and am familiar with the contents therein. I agree to follow the guidelines and policies contained in the Handbook and any amendments thereto. I further understand that Forest Friends School has the right to revise the policies and procedures in this Handbook at any time and without notice to me. Any such revisions must be in writing. No statements, representations or actions of any employee or executive of Forest Friends School will modify these policies and procedures unless they are in writing and signed by the Director of Forest Friends School.

2. I acknowledge that Forest Friends may terminate services, without notice or an opportunity to be heard, or refund of fees or tuition previously paid, in accordance with and for the grounds stated in the Handbook.

3. I understand and acknowledge that the Forest Friends School is an immersive, outdoor based program in which the children are regularly outside engaged in physical activities. I acknowledge there are risks inherent with any outdoor activity and fully assume and accept those risks. As the legal parent/guardian of the minor child listed below, I release and waive any and all future claims, demands and causes of action which the undersigned may in the future have against Forest Friends, LLC d/b/a Forest Friends School, their members, agents, and employees, for any and all injury or damages arising or resulting from my child's participation in the outdoor recreation and educational programs offered by Forest Friends, LLC.

4. I agree to pay monthly tuition as outlined in the "Registration, Payment, and Refunds" section of the above document. If payment is not received on a tuition month by the 15th of that month, I understand that my deposit will be applied and my child will be dismissed from the program at the end of the month in which tuition was not paid. I understand and acknowledge that the fees and deposit paid at time of registration are non-refundable.

By Signing the Electronic Document attached, I verify that I have read the parent handbook and agree to the policies and statements contained therein.