



Forest Friends School

Nature. Nurture.

Parent Handbook

Contact: Laura Johnson 208-660-4813

What is Forest Friends?

Forest Friends is a private, part-time Pre-K and Kindergarten program for children ages 4-6. We believe in using the tools of nature and nurture to support young children's development. Our curriculum is unique to our school, and embodies a blend of Forest Kindergarten, Montessori method, and other research-backed methods of early childhood education. We spend a minimum of 50% of our school day outdoors in all weather.

Curriculum

Nature play, nature study, and nurturing small classes are the **tools** of our curriculum. This toolbox includes:

- Routines
- free play and exploration with teacher support and guidance
- use of real tools to do real things (gardening, woodworking, food preparation, etc.)
- read-aloud story times
- creature studies
- nature journaling
- Art and Craft projects
- A structured phonics introduction
- Montessori-inspired, playful work

What are we building with these tools? Handwriting, literacy, and math concepts, yes, but – our **core building focus** is the *social and organizational habits* of the child. This is the powerful, 'hidden' curriculum! A foundation of communicating with and helping others, taking direction from a trusted adult, becoming independent from home, and caring for one's own belongings are skills better introduced at this age than any other and set the child up with confidence for the next phase.

Kindergarten-age students (5 and 6 year olds) have an increased capacity for academic skills and our **Kinder Enrichment add-on class** focuses on an individualized approach to handwriting, math, and reading skills. We will be using a structured multi-sensory handwriting and reading curriculum delivered in a playful, hands-on, Forest Friends way. Math curriculum will be delivered using the Montessori scope and sequence.

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.

Is your child ready?

- 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! We do not want to miss this important aspect of their early education.

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 and welcome any questions you may have. While we are not a Christian school per se, we are a school run by Christians and we 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.
- Occasional sharing of a Proverb (biblical or folk) or Psalm (considered "wisdom literature") that connect to our character learning.
- 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 Tracking

Children's growth throughout the year will be tracked and shared two ways.

Observation notes are completed weekly by the teacher and a condensed version are shared during conferences (twice yearly), along with an interview with your child. These are a record of forward progress over our 9 months together and the child's strengths.

"I Can" books are completed by the child and shared during the two conferences and at the end of the school year. These important works are put together using photos taken by the teacher during that semester and collected student work. They have become treasured keepsakes in our family and we hope they do in yours as well.

Brightwheel

We use the Brightwheel platform for registration, tuition and fee payments, signing forms and releases, medical info, and photos/communications with you! **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.

Drop-off and Pick-up Policy

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) 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 24 hours* before class means that your child should stay home that day even if they are currently feeling better or are symptom-free. Feeling sick while you are outside playing in the rain is not fun.

COVID-19: If your child is showing symptoms of COVID-19 we ask that you complete a test or wait for the current CDC recommendation time for isolation before returning to school. Please check in with me to make a plan together as the recommendations are constantly changing. We will continue with our plan of ventilation of our indoor space, class sizes no larger than 6, *no mandatory masking* indoors or out, and careful adherence to our handwashing and cleaning routines*. If I or one of my immediate family members have COVID-19, we will follow isolation guidelines and may have to shut down school for the required days. A partial tuition refund of \$25/day for a closure on my end will be given. No other circumstances will result in a tuition refund.

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.

****Please consider carefully if our plan/policies are sufficient for you, your risk tolerance, and your family's needs before enrolling. We maintain that young children need to both see faces and use their entire face for social and emotional well-being and speech development, and that proper hygienic mask use by young children is unlikely.***

Inclement Weather and Cancellation

We are rain, snow, or shine – outdoors every day, at least 2 hours, usually more, during our 4-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. We cannot offer refunds or make-up days for inclement weather cancellations.

Our driveway is steep and we make every effort to clear it in a timely way, however, when I am teaching I cannot also remove snow or ice during school hours. Your vehicle will need, at a minimum, snow tires in the winter to guarantee safe access, or I can help arrange carpool situations with another family during weather events.

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 all 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.

We are hoping to add a volunteer program in 2022, with opportunities for tuition credits, for both on-site help at pick up and off-site help with activity preparation. Please let me know if that would be of interest to you.

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

Payment and Refund Policy

Each Month's tuition is due in full by the 5th and paid in advance for that month. Tuition months are September through May. For example, tuition paid by September 5th is for the month of September. Consistent late or missing tuition will be discussed between the lead teacher and parents.

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.

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.

In the rare case that a child is aggressive or destructive, teachers will communicate directly with the parents to create a plan going forward, however, we may need to remove the child from the program for safety reasons.

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

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. We occasionally post to our website, Instagram, and Facebook.

Parents will need to supply:

- Sunscreen - please apply sunscreen before class and leave some for re-application if desired.
- Insect repellent – please apply before class (usually in September and again March-May)
- Right-sized backpack with extra socks, extra mittens and magic gloves, water bottle, tea bags or other hot drink mix, and snack. Check and make sure your snack containers are not too heavy for your child (large stainless/bento style boxes we find to be too much for 4 year olds).
- Lunch
- Handwarmers if your child likes them (we keep extras for emergencies but not everyday use)
- Classroom slippers with grip (Croc-style shoes work great), to be left at school
- Backup clothing: base layer, underwear in a ziploc left in the classroom.
- Child dressed for the weather (see Dress for Success!)

Dress for Success!

“There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.”

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, we will let you know!

- LAYER 1 Base: non-cotton (polyester or wool) top and bottom. Wool is pricey but can be worn all week before washing and there is no better base layer. Poly (32 degrees, Cuddl Duds) makes a great backup.
- LAYER 2 Mid/Insulating: fleece, puffy, thicker wool sweater, or other insulating layer
- LAYER 3 Snow: **snow suit or bibs/jacket**

- LAYER 4 Rain or Mixed conditions: **Rain suit or rain pants/jacket**
- EXTREMITIES:
 - this year we would like *both* 2 pairs of magic gloves (the one-size polyester cheap ones) and 2 pairs of outer mittens. Mittens with large wrist gauntlets like DaKine. Polar N. Pyret, or Reima make good first pairs and the Head Costco mittens make good backups for the backpack.
 - A hat (preferably no pom-pom so it fits under hoods and in backpacks)
 - *insulated* boots such as Bogs, Muck, or Kamik. Rain boots or sneakers without insulation ok in temps of 45 or greater.
 - *WOOL or POLYESTER tall socks if we are below 45 degrees*. If you're not sure about the socks, check with me. Cotton play socks bunch up and do not keep little toes warm.

Please contact Laura 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 12:40) 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)**. I do ask that you keep the snack small (i.e. mini muffins instead of full-size) and avoid artificial dyes if possible.