



Louisville  
Nature Center

Swallowtail Forest School  
Parent Handbook

*Compiled August 2020, rev. February 2024*

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## ***Forest School History and Philosophy***

Friedrich Froebel, a German educator, opened the world's first outdoor "kindergartens" (German for "children's gardens") more than 150 years ago. He believed young children should spend their time playing in nature and away from so much emphasis on learning letters and numbers. Today, across Europe, thousands of these "forest kindergartens" have been established where children spend their entire class time outdoors year-round.

Swallowtail Forest School is play-based and allows children to develop their skills and habits over time and at their own pace. Children learn naturally to be self-motivated, cooperative, respectful, grateful, and aware of their impact on the Earth. Children experience outdoor adventures in all weather conditions. The Forest School is made as safe as is reasonably possible in order to facilitate children's risk-taking. It provides a complete immersion in nature, helping to build a child's sense of place in the world.

Research strongly supports the idea that young children learn best through direct experiences with the world around them. Being outdoors not only provides them with fresh air, but also encourages imaginative play, creativity, hand-eye coordination and balance, physical strength, and mental clarity. By tapping into their innate sense of wonder about nature, we can help children learn basic environmental and natural science principles, as well as respect for all living beings. Lessons will flow organically from the natural rhythms of the seasons and from the children's daily discoveries. There are no set lesson plans because each day is shaped by the animals, insects, birds, amphibians, weather, and foraging that is encountered, providing spontaneous teachable moments.

## ***Swallowtail Forest School Objectives***

- Provide young children the time, space and play to develop their fullest potential
- Provide opportunities for all activities to be child-initiated and child-led, with adults acting as facilitators
- Provide individual attention with a 1:5 teacher-to-child ratio
- Build children's on-going relationships with nature, one another, and themselves
- Provide opportunities to work collaboratively to create, problem solve, support one another, and dream of a bigger and better world
- Facilitate children's assessment of risk and risk-taking, made as safe as is reasonably possible
- Increase motivation, self-esteem and concentration
- Develop respect for the natural world
- Stimulate children's innate curiosity through proximity to nature
- Teach children to become caring stewards of the natural world
- Encourage family involvement in nature-related learning on site and at home

## ***Staff Information and Curriculum Overview***

### **Teacher Qualifications**

All teachers and substitutes have current First Aid and CPR certification, experience working with young children, and have completed an interview process and background check and come with strong references from their previous employers.

### **Forest School Curriculum Overview**

Forest Preschool is play-based and allows children to develop essential skills such as self-motivation, cooperation, problem-solving, and creativity. There are no set lesson plans: each day is shaped by the animals, insects, birds, amphibians, weather and foraging that are encountered, providing spontaneous teachable moments.

### **Assessment**

Two assessments will be completed for each preschool student—at the beginning and at the end of the school year. Parents may request to schedule parent-teacher conferences at any time to address concerns or questions.

## ***General Information***

### **Louisville Nature Center Contact Information**

Address

3745 Illinois Ave  
Louisville, KY 40213

Phone

(502) 458-1328

Web

[www.louisvillenaturecenter.org](http://www.louisvillenaturecenter.org)

### **Staff Contact**

Olivia Kaiser, Swallowtail Forest School Director

[olivia@louisvillenaturecenter.org](mailto:olivia@louisvillenaturecenter.org)

### **Communication**

Parents can communicate with teachers and admin using the Band app. Instructions to download the app will be provided prior to the school year.

## **Enrollment**

- After completing the online application, you will receive an email to schedule a tour. The purpose of the tour is to ensure that both parties feel confident that Swallowtail Forest School is the right fit for your child and family.
- Following the tour, if it is decided by both parties to enroll, an enrollment form will be emailed to you. Enrollment forms, with a \$150 (annual) enrollment fee (in the form of a check), should be completed as soon as possible and mailed to Louisville Nature Center (3745 Illinois Ave, Louisville, KY 40213). Once this is completed, your child's space in the class will be reserved.
- An immunization record is required upon enrollment. If your child has not received immunizations, you must submit an exemption form.

## **Withdrawal**

Parents who wish to withdraw their child from Forest School, at any time during the school year, must communicate their plan with the Director (email, phone or in person). The \$150 enrollment fee is nonrefundable.

## **Tuition Payment and Refunds**

Swallowtail Forest School offers three payment plans: annual, bi-annual/semester, or monthly. If a student is withdrawn prior to the first day of school for the academic year, 100% of tuition will be refunded. For withdrawals made after the school year begins, prorated refunds will be applied according to the time of withdrawal and chosen payment plan:

### **Payment Plan: Annual**

- On or before October 4: 75% refund
- October 5- December 18: 50% refund
- December 19-March 13: 25% refund
- After March 13: No refund

### **Payment Plan: Bi-annual/Semester**

#### **Fall Semester**

- On or before October 4: 50% refund
- After October 4: No refund

#### **Spring Semester**

- On or before March 13: 50% refund
- After March 14: No refund

**Payment Plan: Monthly**

Before the 15th of the month: 50% refund for current month

The 15th of the month and on: No refund

**Tuition Payment Due Dates**

<b>Payment Plan</b>	<b>Payment Due</b>
Annual and Semester	Before or on the first day of school
Monthly	Before or on the 1st of the month

**Illness**

To control the spread of illness, children who are experiencing vomiting, diarrhea, and/or fever should not be sent to Swallowtail Forest School until the child has been symptom free, without medication, for 24 hours. Should a child become ill while at school, parents will be contacted to pick up the sick child promptly. If a parent cannot be reached immediately, teaching staff will call the next emergency contact to arrange pick-up.

**Dispensing medication**

You will need to provide a signed authorization that allows teachers to administer medication, even non-prescription. Specific instructions regarding dosage, frequency, and symptoms of the condition for which the medication is administered should be listed on the authorization form signed by a parent. The medication should be labeled with the child's name. The Swallowtail Forest School staff member who administers the medication will document the time, the dosage, and any noticeable side effects.

**Academic Calendar**

Unless announced otherwise, Swallowtail Forest School will follow the Jefferson County Public School System (JCPS) Academic Schedule for all holidays. Start and end dates may vary.

**Severe Weather Closings**

In the event of inclement weather, Swallowtail Forest School will make every effort to open as usual. This means that we will NOT always follow JCPS weather delays and closings. We strive for the children to experience all types of weather in order to embrace the values of a forest school. However, to preserve the safety of our children and staff, we will carefully assess the weather forecasts and current conditions, and close if conditions warrant such actions. If warnings are issued during school hours, or heavy downpours and lightning occur, all children will be moved indoors until the threat is over. It is at

the discretion of the Swallowtail Forest School Director to make the decision to dismiss early, open late, or close.

In the event of delays or cancellations, a decision will be made by 7:30 a.m. and broadcast via:

- Band App
- If the Director decides to dismiss early, families will be notified by the Band app.

**Please make sure Band Notifications are turned on.**

When warnings are issued for Jefferson County and the Louisville area for tornadoes, all morning programs will be canceled if warnings are issued before 7:30 a.m.

### **Food at School**

Swallowtail Forest School strives to incorporate sustainable practices in all we do and encourage our parents to support those efforts. Please send foods in reusable containers or minimally and/or compostable packaging.

Parents will need to send a snack in a separate container for their child to carry in their backpack each day. Children will eat outside on most days. Teachers are aware of any allergies present in their class from the information provided on the emergency form.

Parents should supply snacks appropriate to the season and weather for their children. In cold weather we recommend more substantial snacks such as cheese, nuts and other filling items that will help to provide extra energy.

## ***Swallowtail Forest School Daily and Procedures***

### **Arrival**

An adult will accompany each child on their walk from their car in the morning. No child may be left at school in the morning until the teacher is aware of their presence.

Parents will not be able to drop off before 9:00 am or 1:00 pm. Should a parent arrive before that time, they may wait in their car or the Nature Play Area until the class officially begins.

### **Late Arrival**

Parents who will arrive late should communicate with the child's teacher via Band App, so the teachers can communicate where you can drop off your child. Periodically, the teachers will start the children's day with a hike or a trip in the garden and it would be your responsibility to drop them off with the class. Teachers will check the Band app occasionally during the day for parent messages regarding their child.



## **Absences**

If a child will be absent due to illness or if it is a planned absence, the parent must communicate with their child's teacher in person or via Band App as soon as possible.

## **After School Pick-up Policy and Procedures**

No child is ever released to an adult who is not listed on the emergency form. If the adult is not listed on the authorized pickup list, the parent needs to inform the office ahead of time to add that person to the pickup list. IDs will be checked for the first time pick up. Parent or other authorized adult will accompany each child on their walk to their car after school. In the case of recurring late pick-ups, teachers should notify the director who will take further actions to address the issue.

## **Late Pick up Fee**

Children in our Forest School programs must be picked up by 12:10 p.m for morning session and 3:40 pm for afternoon session. If a parent is late, they will be asked to sign a form indicating the time of pickup. Late pickup fees are \$10 for every 15 minutes. Late fee payment is due within 30 days.

## ***Clothing and Gear List***

Because Swallowtail Forest School embraces all seasons and aims to remain outside during many types of weather, it is CRITICAL that your child has clothes and gear that allows them to play comfortably. We adhere to the motto: "There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing choices." Below you will find a list of NECESSARY items as well as helpful tips and suggestions regarding clothing and gear. We have provided a checklist of required items. This list of required gear is subject to change. As the school year progresses and children's engagement with natural elements are monitored, teachers may add or change necessary items and gear that are optimal for children's activities. **All items should be labeled with your child's name. It is your responsibility to check lost and found when items go missing.**

### **Basic Everyday Gear**

- Water Bottle** (filled). Children must be able to independently operate water bottle.
- Child-size backpack** that is big enough to hold rain gear, extra layers of clothing, and snack.
- Waterproof, not water resistant, rain pants.**
- Waterproof, not water resistant, rain jacket.** It is best to go with a non-insulated rain jacket. You can always add base layers.
- Rain boots**
  - Warm months: any kind of rubber rain boot
  - Cold months: insulated rain boots or waterproof winter boots
- Labeled extra change of clothing** in zip lock bag that includes:
  - Warm months: short sleeve shirt; pants; socks; underwear (quick-dry recommended)
  - Cold months: base layer long sleeve shirt and pants, additional thick sweater or fleece jacket and fleece pants, wool socks, waterproof mittens, hat, underwear
- Sunscreen labeled with name (please apply before drop-off)

- Insect repellent labeled with name (please apply before drop-off)
- Sunhat

### **Winter Gear**

- Insulated rain boots or waterproof winter boots
- Full rain gear: **Waterproof** rain jacket AND **Waterproof** rain pants
- If you choose to wear snow pants or thick coats, they must fit under rain pants and rain jacket. Snow gear is only water resistant and not an acceptable outer layer. The outer layer must keep the wetness out.
- Two-piece long underwear
  - Silk or wool is best, but polyester is also a good choice.
- Thick wool sweaters or fleece jacket
- Thick fleece pants
- Wool or fleece socks (multiple pairs)
  - Wearing a synthetic layer under your wool socks can increase warmth.
- Waterproof Mittens**
  - Mittens are warmer than five-finger gloves and easier to pull on and off (side-zip are ideal)
  - Wool or fleece mittens or gloves for a base layer if you choose
- Wool or fleece hat

### **Helpful Hints**

- Cotton clothing is NOT recommended as a base layer. Cotton absorbs perspiration, but it doesn't take it away from your body. Look for fabrics that are synthetic (eg. polyester), wool, or silk instead - especially for socks and base layers.
- Layering:
  - Layering is key! Some days are 1-layer clothing days, some 2-layer days, some 3-layers. It is much easier to take layers off as needed than to warm a child that has already gotten chilled.
  - The children's needs throughout the day are often unpredictable and will depend not only on the weather conditions but also the child's body temperature and activity level. We layer to adjust to the variety of conditions we encounter!
  - In the winter, wearing 2 layers of wool long underwear underneath a thick wool sweater and fleece pants is the most effective way to layer children under their rain gear in order to keep them warm without feeling too bulky.
- **We're going to get dirty!** Please make sure you dress your children in clothes that can get messy.
- Comfortability:
  - All clothing and footwear should be loose fitting and roomy to allow the body's own insulating layer to surround the skin. This is more comfortable and keeps the children warmer!
  - Pants are more comfortable for children when they have elastic waists instead of buttons or snaps.
  - **Please stay away from one- piece clothing such as snow bibs, as they can be problematic when using the bathroom.**

- **VERY IMPORTANT: Please label everything with your child's name.**

### **Maintaining your gear**

Once it is really wet and muddy: rain gear can be rinsed by itself when you get home (WITHOUT SOAP - to preserve the waterproofing a little longer), and then either drip dry or put it in a low-heat dryer cycle.

- Jackets may be slightly less muddy than pants, so you may get a few days of wear out of them before needing to rinse them.
- 'Tear Aid' is a product that Puddle gear recommends for maintaining rain gear. This product is much more effective than duct tape in the long run (duct tape gets gummy), but for a short-term fix, duct tape works in a pinch.
- Kookaburra or Eucalan wool wash products protect the lanolin in the wool that maintains the warm when-wet properties.
- When aired out at night, wool does not hold odors and when worn under other layers, only needs to be washed every few weeks.

## ***Child Safety Guidelines***

### **General Forest Rules**

- **No Toys:** Nature provides all the materials necessary for playing in the outdoors, so toys from home are not necessary. Art supplies and other learning materials will be provided.
- **Boundaries:** Children are expected to stay within the boundaries that have been established by teachers.
- **Climbing trees:** Children may climb trees at school while under adult supervision and only after they have demonstrated competence.
- **Ingestion:** Children will not eat or drink any substance found in nature without teacher permission. Children will never be permitted to share their snacks with others.

We are committed to keeping our children safe. We adhere to the following guidelines to provide consistent boundaries in the name of safety. We ask that parents uphold these same standards while onsite as well as at school events outside of regular school hours. It is also helpful to reinforce many of these practices at home.

### **Physical Safety**

The children are always within eyesight and earshot of an approved adult, and we maintain an appropriate teacher to child ratio. The only people that interact with the school children during the day are preapproved by the faculty and are never alone with the children. Teachers carry emergency forms and an official first aid kit at all times. There are always two or more adults onsite at all times.

- **Site Assessment:** The sites and structures are checked for safety each morning before the children arrive at school.
- **Fire Safety:** Children are only in the presence of fire while under supervision of their teacher(s). Although a child may be invited by a teacher to help tend a fire, they are given very

specific instructions based on their age and ability to discern a safe distance. They will help to collect and haul firewood, but the teachers are always in charge of adding fuel to the fire. There is always direct adult supervision when children are in the vicinity of fire or hot coals. There is a fire extinguisher on site.

- **Water Safety:** All visits to the seasonal streams and ponds are under full supervision of the teachers. Children will be allowed to walk and play in water at the teachers discretion. We will never venture into Beargrass Creek. In the event of waterplay, even with waterproof gear, there is the possibility childrens base layers may get wet. Teachers will assess and provide guidance as needed.

### **First Aid at School**

In the case of a minor injury, the teachers may administer basic first aid—wash the injury with soap and water and cover with band-aids—as they see fit. The parents will be notified of any significant injuries at pickup (or after school via phone call if the child is picked up by another adult). In the case of a major injury, the teachers will call 911 and the parents/emergency contact and apply basic first aid until medical help arrives. All teachers have easy access to First Aid kits at all times. Children will always be sent to the nearest hospital if such extreme measures are needed.

### **Bathroom Safety**

We will encourage students to use the camping toilet in the outdoor classroom, especially before hikes. Excluding extreme circumstances, teacher assistance in the bathroom will be limited to guided instruction. If assistance is needed, an additional LNC staff member will be present.

In the event that a child needs to use the bathroom outside while on the hiking trails, a teacher will walk them to a private area away from other students. The teacher will be located so that they can hear the child and are available to verbally help if needed. The teacher that helps will be close enough to the other children and teachers that they will not be “alone” with the child, since they are in proximity to and within earshot of others.

### **Emergency Evacuation**

In the unlikely event that we would need to evacuate the property all parents would be notified via phone call of the destination.

### **Social & Emotional Safety**

Swallowtail Forest School at LNC is committed to inspiring and teaching respect for the earth and all its creatures and this includes modeling and fostering respect for self and for others at all times. Outdoor learning provides many opportunities for cooperative play and teachers are there to guide children into co-creative adventures.

**There is a zero tolerance policy for hitting, grabbing, pushing, name-calling, aggressiveness or any other demeaning behavior. If these behaviors occur, the teacher will separate the instigating child from the group to a calm place for a one-on-one discussion. An incident report will be written and given to parents and the director.** Should the behavior in question not shift in a timely manner, the child will be removed from the group and be taken into the school office

until the child is ready to return to his class. Recurring instances of disruptive behavior will result in a parent-teacher conference to implement a behavior plan. We will work as a team to support each child to ensure a successful experience at Swallowtail Forest School.

Although we wish to be able to serve all children that come to our school, we will not allow the health and safety of the class to be compromised. We do take any intimidating behavior seriously and recognize that it makes a deep impact upon others. Our teaching philosophy holds the dignity of each child at its very core. Our curriculum inherently supports empowerment, teaches judgment, honors boundaries, values intuition, increases awareness, models clear communication and encourages healthy expression of all feelings. Thank you for contributing to the safety of our children and our community by modeling the types of behavior that we want to encourage in the children.

### ***Swallowtail Forest School Behavior Plan***

An important part of the preschool experience is helping children learn how to get along in the world, enjoy being with other children, and follow the direction of an adult other than their parent. A caring and positive approach will be taken regarding behavior management and discipline. The teachers will focus on the positive behaviors of the children and reinforce those behaviors as often as possible. Our goal is to help the children develop self-control and responsibility for their actions.

#### **Discipline Strategies**

1. Encouraging children to use their words when having a disagreement with another child.
2. Facilitating children in their attempts to settle their own disputes.
3. Redirecting behavior when this seems potentially effective.
4. Separating a child from the group.
5. Counseling children individually about their behaviors.
6. Making parents aware of disciplinary concerns (Incident Report).

#### **Disruptive Behaviors**

The following behaviors distract from the full benefit of the program and will result in consequences.

- Requires constant attention from the staff
- Inflicts physical or emotional harm on other children, adults, or self
- Disrespects people and materials provided in the program
- Consistently disobeys the rules of the classroom
- Verbally threatens other students and/or staff
- Uses inappropriate or offensive words repeatedly
- Unable to respect classroom boundaries

**Purposely injuring another child is cause to be sent home immediately.**

## **Plan for Disruptive Behavior**

### **Step One: Incident Report**

Disruptive behaviors will be addressed in an incident report. This will be completed by a teacher to document inappropriate behaviors that directly impact other children, staff members, or the group as a whole. This report will be shared with the parent and will explain the behavior and how the behavior has affected others. It will also explain how the situation was resolved. The incident report will be given to the parent at the end of the day to be signed and returned the next day to the teacher.

### **Step Two: Parent/Teacher/Director Meeting**

If two incident reports are written during one week, documenting that the child has difficulty managing his/her behavior on a recurring basis, parents will be asked to meet with the child's teacher and School Director to develop a behavior plan.

### **Step Three: Child may be sent home or be removed from the program**

If, after Steps One and Two, the child's behavior continues to be inappropriate, consistently disruptive, and/or dangerous, it may be necessary for the child to be sent home for a time to be determined, or removed from the program altogether.

## ***Parent Handbook Agreement Form***

The Swallowtail Forest School Parent Handbook lists the values, policies, rules, and regulations of Swallowtail Forest School. Its purpose is to assure the smooth operation of our program. Reading and understanding this handbook is imperative to the operations of Swallowtail Forest School. By signing this form, I am agreeing to abide by these written provisions of Swallowtail Forest School. I understand that my signature on this form binds me to observe the policies, rules, and regulations as set forth by the Swallowtail Forest School.

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Signature

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Date

## ***Waiver and Release from Liability***

I hereby authorize the Louisville Nature Center to take any steps to ensure my child's health in case of an emergency. I also authorize the Louisville Nature Center to use my child's name and/or photograph for education and public relations purposes.

In consideration of the Louisville Nature Center allowing my child to participate in this Louisville Nature Center Education Program ("Program"), I, for myself and my child, hereby waive and release the Louisville Nature Center, its officers, agents and employees, from any and all claims or causes of actions for injury, damage or loss to the person or property of my child while participating in the

Program. I further hereby agree to indemnify, hold harmless and defend the Louisville Nature Center, its officers, agents and employees, from any and all losses, claims, or causes of action for injury, damage or loss in any way relating to or arising from any incidence arising out of my child's participation in the Program. This Waiver and Release is intended to be an express waiver of and release from any and all claims against the Louisville Nature Center, its officers, agents and employees, arising from my child's participating in the Program, including all claims or causes of action based upon the alleged negligence or gross negligence of the Louisville Nature Center, its agents, officers and employees.

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Signature

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Date