



Nanaimo Forest School

Safety Handbook

Table of Contents

1. Entering the Forest
2. Boundaries
3. Hiking
4. Using and Storing Tools
5. Playing with ticks and Stones
6. Collecting Wood
7. Collecting Flowers and Leaves
8. Edible Plants
9. Eating and Drinking

Nanaimo Forest Kids Code of Conduct

Nanaimo Forest Kids takes place in two woodland and lake settings. The safety procedures in this handbook are designed to keep the children safe while allowing them the freedom to explore and interact with nature.

The educators at Nanaimo Forest Kids work to ensure that the safety measures are in place and followed daily. We work to create an environment that is as safe as possible by being proactive and following these safety principles:

- constantly assess risk as conditions change, regular head counts are performed
- set up a safe space with clear boundaries and guidelines that the children understand
- observe the children's interactions with each other and nature
- spot the children during more challenging physical activity
- gently guide the children to safer activities if required
- model safe and responsible behaviour

Table of Contents - cont

1. Using Ropes
2. Carrying and Transporting Materials
3. Tree Climbing
4. Animal Encounters
5. Clothing
6. Essential equipment for Forest School Educators
7. Essential emergency equipment
8. Health and Safety Policies
9. Emergency Procedures
10. Site Risk Assessment
11. Water Safety

1. Entering the Forest

We will enter the forest respectfully and know that when at Forest school specific expectations are in place. We will explore, investigate, learn and play in a manner that will not damage our forest environment. We understand that we share the forest with plants and animals.

2. Boundaries

Before each session begins children are made aware of how far that they can explore and of any fixed boundary markers. If children move to explore hidden areas an adult will also move into the cover deep enough to be able to see the children but allowing the children the freedom to explore independently. If we lose sight of a child we will shout ‘1,2,3, (child’s name) where are you?’ The children have been taught to respond ‘1,2,3, I’m here’ through games that are practised regularly. If a child becomes separated from the group they are taught through group games to remain still and repeatedly blow their whistle. The group will come to find them.

3. Hiking

On hikes or when in the habitat of other wild animals, children must always be in view of at least one of the adults. *Children are never more than 20ft away from an adult. *

4. Using and Storing Tools

All tools have their own clear code of conduct for correct use which include protective equipment, body posture and appropriate activities. All tools are counted out and back in at the beginning and end of each session in which they are used. When not in use they are kept secured in a locked shed. Before each tool is used it is checked for damage and working order. Children always have adult supervision when collecting, transporting and using tools. Tools are only used for a specific purpose. All adults will model correct and safe tool use, storage and transportation at all times. A ratio of 1 adult to 2 children will be observed. A ‘safety bubble’ space must be determined ensuring a safe distance from others. An example of one such tool is potato peelers for whittling.

5. Playing With Sticks and Stones

Children can carry sticks shorter than their arm’s length but are encouraged to think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks may be dragged or carried with the help of another

person when each person is at either end. Sticks must not be thrown. Sticks must not be pulled from living trees. Stones may be picked up and transported. Stones, no larger than our palm, may only be thrown near the water and dropped into the creek when we visit but, thought must be given to whether this is safe. The children are taught to consider the space around them before throwing, are there other children close enough to be hit and what is beneath where I am dropping it?

6. Collecting Wood and Other Natural Materials

We try not to remove things from the forest, this means that while some things will be able to come home with the children, many of their forest creations will need to stay in the forest. We encourage the children to be happy with having photographs and ask them to collect sparingly so as not to disrupt creature habitats.

7. Collecting Flowers and Leaves

We encourage children not to pick flowers and leaves from living plants. There is usually an abundance of interesting material on the forest floor and in the meadows that is no longer attached to a live plant. There may be rare exceptions to this for a specific project or teaching. If a child is very set on picking a leaf or flower, we help them to do as little harm as possible.

8. Edible Plants

While on our forest adventures the children are not permitted to taste any wild plants without permission from an educator with specific plant knowledge. The children are never permitted to taste mushrooms found in the forest.

9. Eating and Drinking

When having drinks and snacks children will use wipes & water to clean their hands before consumption

Safety Handbook Continued

1. Using Ropes

Children are not permitted to tie each other up. When using ropes an educator will model safe use and tie all safety knots. As educators we will teach children knot tying if they are interested but safety comes first and we always make sure that the ropes are correctly tied and securely fastened when the activity calls for it.

2. Carrying and Transporting Materials

Carrying and transporting heavy objects is a great opportunity for children to problem solve and work together. Children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag, and pull materials with their hands or by using ropes. We always model and encourage safe lifting practices.

3. Tree Climbing

An adult must be present to 'spot' a child wanting to climb a tree at Forest School. The ground cover must be checked for 'sharp objects' and the tree must be marked as suitable for climbing. A visual check must be made for loose or rotten branches and the child and educator must agree how high is safe to climb based on the size of the tree branches, the type of tree, adult: child ratio, ground cover, etc.

4. Animal Encounters

Dogs

It is possible that we will encounter dogs (leashed or unleashed) while in the forest. Some dogs are more excitable or aggressive than others. Games and discussions to stay safe around dogs will be practiced. To help prevent children from injury the following safety tips will be reviewed regularly:

- Do not approach an unfamiliar dog.
- Do not run from a dog or scream.
- Remain motionless (e.g., "be still like a tree") when approached by an unfamiliar dog.
- If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still (e.g., "be still like a log").
- Do not play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behavior to an adult.

- Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
- Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first (and without getting permission from the dog's owner).
- If bitten, immediately report the bite to an adult.

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2009. Dog Bite Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/dog-bites/biteprevention.html>

Bears, Cougars and Wolves

While we are in the forest it is very unlikely that we will encounter a bear, cougar or wolf. However, to be prepared for such an encounter we will practice the following safety protocols with the children regularly.

Bear

In the event that we see a bear, here are the procedures we will follow: If the bear has **seen us**, we will:

STOP

Make ourselves big

Back away slowly

Speak in low tone and normal volume and say, "Hello bear, we won't run away. You can stay and play; we'll come back another day."

Let TBG staff know that there is a bear in the area.

If the bear has **not seen us**, we will:

Leave the area quietly and go to a more public place.

Cougars

In the event that we see a cougar, here are the procedures we will follow:

STOP

Make ourselves big

Back away

If the cougar does not go away, keep eye contact with the cougar, show your teeth and make loud noise, blow whistle.

Arm yourself with sticks and rocks.

If the cougar does attack, fight back: focus on the nose and face area. Use sticks and rocks as weapons.

Wolf or Coyote

If a wolf appears and acts unafraid or aggressive, we will take the following action as soon as we notice the animal:

Do not allow the wolf to approach any closer than 100 metres.

Raise your arms and wave them in the air to make yourself appear larger.

Blow whistle.

When in a group, act in unison to send a clear message to the wolves they are not welcome.

Back away slowly, do not turn your back on the wolf.

Make noise, throw sticks, rocks and sand at the wolf.

We will also remind children of the importance of staying with the group to help avoid these encounters.

2 Safety procedures based on: BC Parks. 2002. Bears and Cougars. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. Available online: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/conserve/>

Wasp

If a wasp lands on you wait for it to fly off or brush gently off with like a mitten (do not brush it with your hand).

If you are faced with a wasp don't challenge it - it is far better for you to leave the area until the wasp has gone. Do not run or thrash or swat. If there is only one wasp, then keep still and, when safe, move to shade or away from what is attracting the wasp. If stinging seems inevitable, then cover your face with hands or clothing or get face-down on the ground. If there are multiple wasps then your removal to safety is urgent.

If you find what appears to be an old and seemingly inactive wasp nest do not disturb it, there may still be living wasps inside.

5. Clothing

No child will be permitted to attend Nanaimo Forest School without appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of heat or cold and keeps them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes.

Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, and to be aware they are likely to take some of our mud home with them after a session. In the forest it can often be cooler than expected under the shade of the trees.

We work on the principle that “there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing”.

Please see the PDF “What to Bring to Forest School” for a complete list of items your child will need :)

6. Essential Equipment for Forest School Educators

In addition to tools suited to the planned for activities, the TNS Leader will always take an emergency bag with them. The contents of the emergency bag will vary depending on the time of year and weather conditions, the site being used, and the planned for activities according to the relevant risk assessments and daily risk assessment. There are of course also essential items that should be carried out for every session.

7. Essential Emergency Equipment

- First Aid Kit (contents list, contents review record)
- Emergency Procedures
- Medical information for each individual and Emergency contact details for every member of the group (adults & children)
- Risk Assessments
- Communication Devices (mobile phone and/or walkie talkie – checked for working order and signal strength)
- Clean Water
- Emergency whistle
- Emergency Blanket
- Accident forms
- Medication for individuals (if not appropriate for the individual to carry the medication for themselves it should be clearly labelled – staff must have been trained to administer it and parental consent must have been received)

8. Other Possible Equipment

- Spare clothing
- Thermos of hot water
- Chocolate/sugary food
- Plastic bag
- Roll Mat and Blanket
- Wet wipes, hand gel
- Bathroom things
- Sun screen (parental permission required)
- Spare Clothing

- Thermos of hot water
- Fire blanket
- Flashlight
- Bucket and shovel
- Bottled water
- Emergency fire kit
- Knife
- Emergency shelter
- Burns kit

9. Health and Safety Policies

Nanaimo Forest School sets out clear statements of intent regarding the School's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff and visitors to the School and the School Site. Provided below is a list of additional points and measures which relate directly to our Forest sessions.

- 1) The trained and named Forest School leader is always the person in charge of sessions.
- 2) The Forest School educators have overall duty of care for the children in their charge. However all adults involved in the session are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe.
- 3) All adult helpers MUST sign and date a form to show that they have read and understood this handbook and the risk assessments appropriate to the session in which they are helping. They must sign and date the form stating that they comply with the general operating procedures for Nanaimo Forest School (code of conduct).
- 4) The Nanaimo Forest School leader or assistant will always carry an emergency bag into the forest for every session.

The Emergency Bag contains:

- Essential survival and first aid equipment
- A contact list for each child undertaking the activities
- The School's phone # (and location details for the emergency services)

- 5) The Nanaimo Forest School leader will always carry a mobile phone and will ensure that there is easy access to a land line if the group is out of range.
- 6) In the event of an emergency, The Nanaimo Forest School leader will ensure that the School contacts the emergency services. If contact with Nanaimo Forest School is lost, the leader will contact the emergency services.
- 7) The Forest School leader will review the risk assessments before every trip into the School's Forest Site.
- 8) When tools are used the adult child ratio will be 1:1
- 9) There is one exception to this – when using peelers for whittling the ratio can be 1:2.
- 10) The Nanaimo Forest School leader is responsible for the maintenance and checking of all tools and equipment to be used at Forest School, prior to their use.
- 11) The Nanaimo Forest School leader is responsible in training the children in how to use the tools and equipment safely and appropriately.
- 12) The Nanaimo Forest School leader will be responsible for the pre visit check of the Forest School site prior to a Forest School session.

10. Emergency Procedures

Lost Child

At least once per month, the facilitators will practice with the children what to do when they are lost or separated from the group:

- Stop. Hug a tree. Blow your whistle (or yell). Step back from any bodies of water or cliff edges.
- Sit by a tree in the open if possible.
- Call out or use the whistle on your jacket or pack to whistle for help.
- Respond to any noise with a noise.
- Use your emergency blanket to cover your body and your head if you get cold.

If a child is not present when we do a head count, we will:

- Stay on the site.
- Ask others to do a head count.
- Call the group together.
- Determine who saw the child last, where and when.
- Call for the child who is lost.
- Have one adult search around the boundaries of the site to find the child who is lost.
- Call police if child is not found.

Medical Emergencies

Ensure that parents have signed the medical release form so that we have permission to perform the required first aid or transfer a child to a hospital if necessary.

Minor emergency

If a child falls and gets a cut, the lead facilitator will do first aid while the other facilitator or volunteer cares for the group. If a child gets a bump, scratch, or bruise, we will let the parent (or other pick-up person) know at the end of the session.

Minor emergency requiring parents to be called

If a child is ill, the lead facilitator will do first aid as required. The other facilitator or volunteer will care for the group. The lead facilitator will call the parent or other emergency contacts. The group will arrange to meet the parent in the drop-off and pick-up location. After pick-up, the group will continue with the day's program.

Emergency requiring external medical care

In a serious emergency, the lead facilitator will do first aid while the other facilitator or volunteer calls 911. The assistant facilitator/volunteer then cares for the group. The facilitators will arrange with emergency staff what procedures work best for the transfer to medical care.

II. Site Risk Assessment

If the site as a whole is deemed too risky due to high winds or weather such as a thunderstorm, the lead facilitator will call all families to let them know that the program is cancelled for the day. If the program must be cancelled and families are already on their way, the facilitator will go to the location to meet families and let

them know that the program is cancelled.

In case of early dismissal due to unsafe conditions, we will attempt to contact each child's parent or caregiver. If we cannot contact a parent or caregiver, we will contact the next person listed on the family's emergency contact list.

12. Water Safety

Swimming is not allowed at forest school but we value the learning that playing at the creeks and lakes that we have on site allows. To minimize the risk that comes with playing near bodies of water we will always complete a thorough risk assessment and supervise children when they are playing at the water's edge.

Have Fun and Be Safe!!