



Parent & Volunteer Handbook

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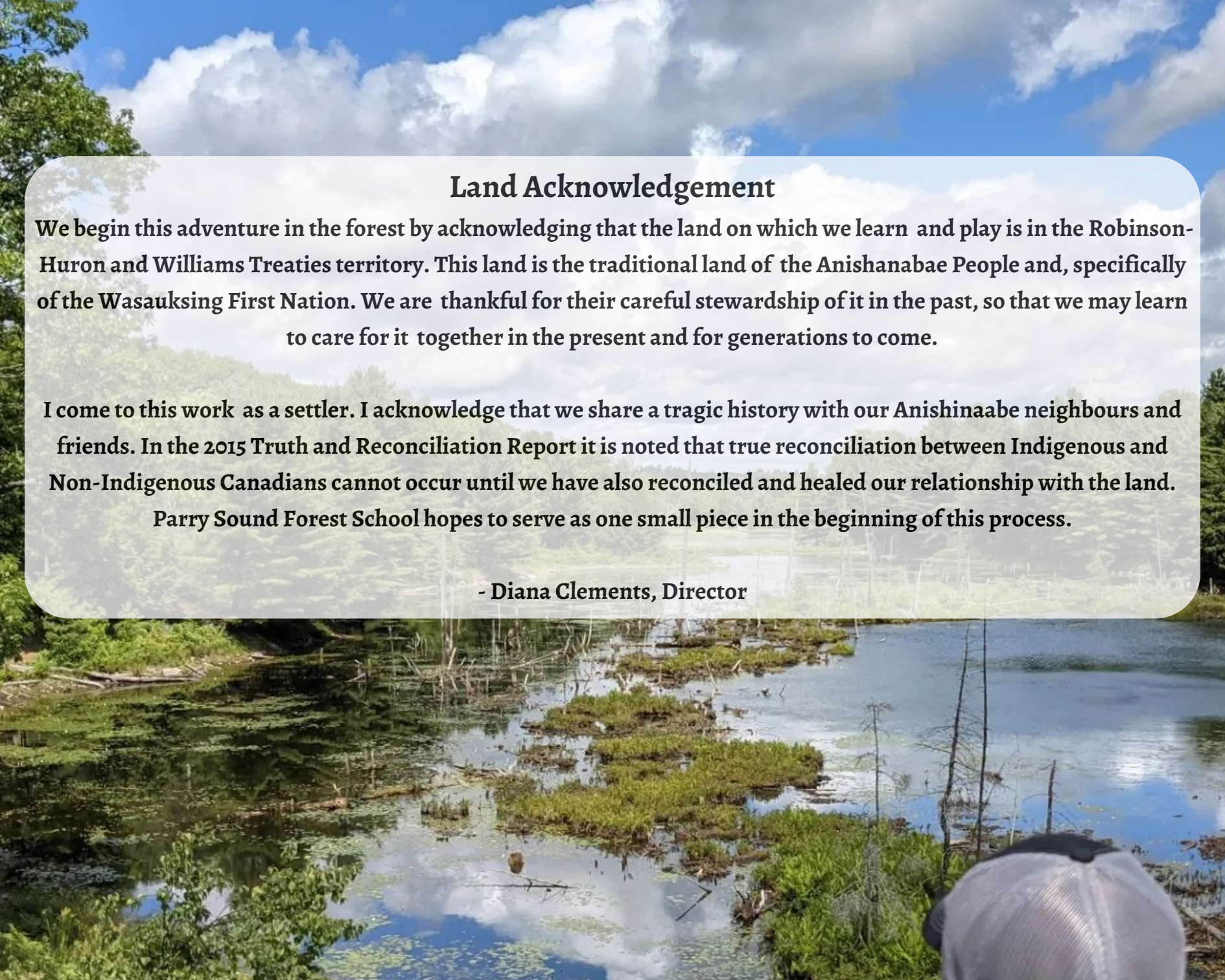
Environmental Sustainability

Land Acknowledgement

We begin this adventure in the forest by acknowledging that the land on which we learn and play is in the Robinson-Huron and Williams Treaties territory. This land is the traditional land of the Anishanabae People and, specifically of the Wasauksing First Nation. We are thankful for their careful stewardship of it in the past, so that we may learn to care for it together in the present and for generations to come.

I come to this work as a settler. I acknowledge that we share a tragic history with our Anishinaabe neighbours and friends. In the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Report it is noted that true reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadians cannot occur until we have also reconciled and healed our relationship with the land. Parry Sound Forest School hopes to serve as one small piece in the beginning of this process.

- Diana Clements, Director



Welcome to Parry Sound Forest School!

Thank you for setting time aside to review our Parent and Volunteer Handbook. The handbook gives you a summary of information about our programs. Please visit our [website](#) for further details.

Mission Statement, Vision, and Core Values

We aim to provide the opportunity for children to disconnect from technology and connect with nature and each other through play. Parry Sound Forest School (PSFS) strives to provide a child-centred experience where our learners can develop greater resilience, perseverance, communication and social skills, the ability to navigate risk safely and form personal connections to many facets of the Georgian Bay Biosphere.

Through this personal connection with nature, we hope to foster an ethic of care towards our local environment, and ultimately towards living a more ecologically sustainable life.

We believe children are competent, capable and rich in experience and understanding. We believe the parent is the child's first and most influential teacher. We believe repeated experiences in nature with nurturing and trained educators supports mental, physical, spiritual and social growth, which are the foundation of overall health and well-being. Children can also begin to develop an ecological identity where children begin to see themselves as part of, rather than separate from the natural world.

Our activities and approaches are guided by the land and our training, and also by the standards set by HIGH FIVE and Parks and Recreations Ontario.

What exactly is Forest School? Lots of people ask us this question, let us explain it to you!





About the Parry Sound Forest School

We are a nonprofit organization incorporated in 2020. Since that time we have expanded to three sites, have offered land-based learning opportunities to over five hundred children and employ fifteen full and part time staff. We offer day programming during the school year, after school programs, summer day camp and public school visits in both English and French.

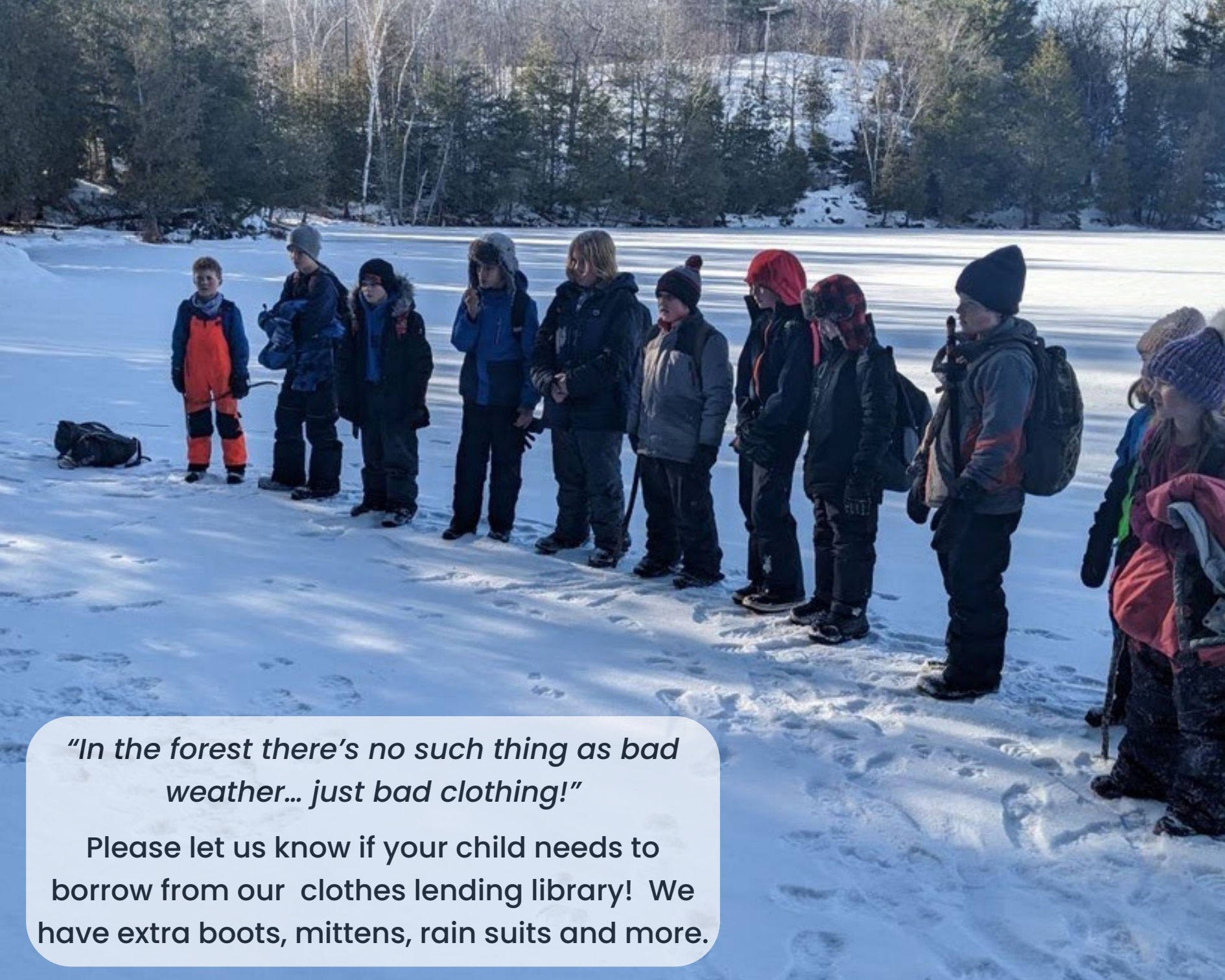
A Typical Day at Forest School

Each day at forest school will vary depending on the interests of the learners, the weather and opportunities presented by the natural environment. That being said, days will follow a similar flow. Children will arrive and be invited to play in the forest near our meeting space. Once everyone has arrived we will meet together on our stump circle under the pines to share our gratitude for the day and discuss the previous day's learning, share a story or song, and make a plan for the day. In the winter, we may stay close to the fire, building snow forts, skating on the pond or tobogganing. In the summer this could mean looking for a praying mantis, catching frogs or whittling.

Other options include exploring the land and playing group games. We will give the children long blocks of time to really get deeply involved in their play and exploration. Adults will support the children by following their interests and playing and learning beside them.

We generally follow a similar schedule to local public schools with two nutrition breaks, rather than one longer lunch break. We wrap up our days with another gratitude circle or nature stories from the day.

As part of the forest school experience, parents will walk their children to and from their respective parking lots and camp locations. This is a way to help parents be part of the magic of the day and to enjoy the anticipation and storytelling of their children. Please note that the trail may be wet or muddy and require a change of footwear for the adults involved!



"In the forest there's no such thing as bad weather... just bad clothing!"

Please let us know if your child needs to borrow from our clothes lending library! We have extra boots, mittens, rain suits and more.

What to Wear to Forest School

Spring/Summer/Fall

Sneakers or light hiking boots - No open toed shoes or crocs (even in summer).

Rubber boots - If your child chooses to wear sneakers, please pack waterproof rubber boots in their bag (we like to get wet!).

Rain gear - Splash pants or slush pants are not the same as rain pants. Rain pants are waterproof and a child can sit on the wet ground while wearing them and remain dry. The brand many families have been happy with is **Tuffo**. It wears well and is not overpriced.

Lightweight clothing - Light long pants and long sleeves are recommended to provide protection from ticks and sun

Sunscreen & insect repellent - Please ensure sunscreen & insect repellent are on your child before they are dropped off.

Sun hat - Baseball cap or wide-brimmed.





What to Wear to Forest School

Winter

Snow pants & coat - Bib-style snow pants are warmer than those that stop at the waist.

Winter Boots - The best kind for outdoor play are boots that are neoprene or are rubber with a liner and labelled as waterproof. Avoid ones that have a rubber lower half with fabric in the uppers.

Mittens, hat, neck warmer - Mittens are generally warmer than gloves. The best ones have a waterproof outer shell and insulation inside (*please avoid knitted mittens or gloves*).

Layers - Layers are key - synthetic or wool base layer, with other layers on top will keep your child much warmer than a single puffy coat.

Supplies: What to Bring

Please have your child bring the following to forest school each day:

- Small backpack for food and water
- Second bag or backpack for everything else
- Lunch and snacks
- Refillable water bottle
- A full change of clothes labelled with your child's name
- A small hand towel (for drying hands after washing them- summer only)
- Waterproof boots
- For shoulder seasons where it is both wet and cold, an oversized rain suit or rain pants to go over top of snow pants is also an excellent idea

NO TOYS PLEASE! Please avoid bringing toys from home to PSFS. They will easily get lost or soiled and we do not want them to influence how the children play in the forest.



Toileting

We require that all participants be fully toilet trained prior to the start of all programs (excluding Forest Families). As we will be away from a building for most days, children will need to be comfortable “doing their business” outdoors or be willing to learn. Practising at home before joining us will help your child to feel comfortable and confident!. Educators will assist as needed. We have access to indoor washroom facilities at all three locations, but do not use them frequently.



Inclusion & Accessibility

An important goal for the PSFS is to make our programs accessible to a wide range of participants, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language, physical ability or socioeconomic status. We strive to make our learning community safe and welcoming. Children needing one on one support can be accommodated as staffing allows.



Behaviour Guidance

We strive to create a feeling of community within the group, focusing on learning and growing together in a culture of respect and inclusion. Behaviour supports and interventions are employed as little as possible but as much as necessary in order to ensure a safe and positive experience for everyone.

At the beginning of each session, we will establish behaviour agreements as a group. If a child places him or herself at risk (ie. not responding when called, running away, or taking risks without consulting staff) or causes another child to feel physically or emotionally unsafe, the following steps will be taken:

1. The child or children in question will be taken aside from the group and the educator will ensure the child understands the nature of the concern and the reason why the behaviour presents a problem.
2. The child or children will be permitted to reenter into play.
3. Should the behaviour be repeated, the child may have to spend some “time in” with an educator. Parents will be informed of the behaviour at pick up time.
4. If the child continues to place themselves or others at risk, they may have to be sent home (without refund), for the remainder of the day or week.



Policies & Procedures



Confidentiality, Privacy and Social Media

The personal privacy of the children and families involved in our programs is protected and valued. All confidential information pertaining to children and their families will be kept secure at all times. This includes information about medical conditions, family status (including marital, financial and educational status), personal information (including phone numbers and addresses), personal concerns or issues, or delicate matters regarding a child and their family.

Personal information regarding our learners will be shared with staff only as needed or required to maintain learner safety and is not to be shared with outside individuals. We will follow Privacy Legislation including:

- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990 (FIPPA)
- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990 (MFIPPA)
- Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 (PHIPA) (ie. mental health, complex special needs)

Emails collected at registration will not be shared with third parties and will be used to disseminate program-related information only. BCC will be used at all times.

Any personal information shared with us, including photographic images, will be processed in accordance with privacy legislation and will be used only for the purposes that you have consented to. Please remember that once an image appears on the internet, it can be viewed worldwide.

Terms and Conditions

Registration forms must be completed in full before a child may begin a program. Fees are to be paid upon registration, unless otherwise arranged with Parry Sound Forest School.

Harassment Policy

Harassment or bullying of staff by parents or caregivers will not be tolerated, and may result in your child being excluded from our programs without refund.

Cancellation Policy

A full refund will be issued (minus \$50 administration fee) within 28 days notice or more, prior to the program start date. Please note, the program start date for summer camp, no matter which week your child is registered for, will be the first week of July.

A refund of 50% will be applied within 14-28 days notice prior to the program start date. All effort will be made to find a replacement participant from a waitlist, and should one exist, then the 50% not refunded (minus \$50 administration fee) will be applied as a credit to the participant's account for future use.

Any cancellation received less than 14 days prior to the program start date will not be subject to a refund. All effort will be made to find a replacement participant from a waitlist, and should one exist, then the full amount (minus \$50 administration fee) will be applied as a credit to the participant's account for future use.

We will provide full refunds within any timeframe if any of the following occur:

- In the event we are forced into mandatory closure by our governing bodies
- In the event that we are not able to hold a program based on staffing shortages/illnesses
- If a participant comes down with an extreme and/or long term illness, that lasts longer than 14 days (with a written note from their physician)

Health and Safety Policies

Privacy Policy

Any personal information shared with us, including photographic images, will be processed in accordance with privacy legislation and will be used only for the purposes that you have consented to. Please remember that once an image appears on the internet, it can be viewed worldwide.

Illness policy

We ask that participants do not attend Forest School until at least 24 hours after any of the following symptoms have occurred:

- Temperature over 38.3 degrees C
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Significant cough
- General lethargy

If any of the above symptoms occur during Forest School, the ill child will be removed from the group and parents will be called to bring the child home. We will welcome their return 24 hours after the symptoms have been resolved.

If children are showing symptoms of headlice, ringworm, pink eye, or other communicable conditions, we request that they remain home until treatment of the condition has been started.

Food Policy

We ask that participants refrain from bringing any products that contain nuts to the program.

- Participants may not share food during Forest School.
- Food is to come in reusable containers without packaging or garbage.
- We strongly recommend healthy snacks that will help your child meet the energy needs of our program.
- Children may be given the opportunity to try new foods including wild edibles and meats.

Access to Drinking Water

Children will be able to refill water bottles on site. Participants will be asked to wash their hands after using the bathroom and before eating.





Emergency Procedures and First Aid

An individual trained with a minimum of standard first aid will be available during all Forest School sessions.

A fully stocked emergency first aid kit will be kept with the group at all times.

In the event of a severe accident or emergency involving a child, the Forest School staff will adhere to the following procedure:

1. The lead Educator will establish the nature and extent of injury and provide first aid as needed.
2. Educators will ensure all children are accounted for and call 911. An Educator will meet the ambulance.
3. Inform the applicable facility director or supervisor as soon as possible.
4. Contact the family of the injured child to ensure they meet up at the hospital.
5. Ensure that the remaining group is:
 - a. adequately supervised throughout,
 - b. returns to an indoor space if needed,
 - c. are supported and comforted as needed.
6. Fill out an incident report form as soon as possible.

If a Forest School staff member is injured, a similar procedure will be followed and a back-up educator will be called in to support the group and remaining educators.

A child in a green shirt and grey pants is climbing a large tree trunk in a forest. The child is using their hands and feet to grip the bark. The background shows a dense forest with sunlight filtering through the trees.

Risk Management

The opportunity to experience and navigate risk is an essential part of a healthy childhood and is an important, anticipated and intentional aspect of Forest School. Parry Sound Forest School Educators and volunteers strive to assess and manage risk together with our learners.

Prior to the beginning of forest school sessions, the area will be assessed for inherent risks. Specific activities are continuously assessed, with consideration placed on the season and conditions.

Some of the risks inherent to Forest School and active outdoor play may include, but are not limited to:

- Injuries from running, climbing and playing vigorously in the forest
- Injuries from improper use of tools including knives or saws
- Injuries resulting from matches or fire
- The presence of wild animals, rattlesnakes, ticks and other insects
- Inclement weather

Prior to participating in PSFS, parents of all learners must read this handbook and sign a waiver, indicating that they understand the risks inherent in this kind of program.

Tool Use

During forest school your child may have the opportunity to use tools such as a hand drill, hammer, wood carving knife, bow saw or flint and steel (for fire starting). The use of these tools will be taught in a highly controlled area. If or when your child is given this opportunity will depend on the mood of the group on a given day, the readiness of your individual child, and the adult-child ratio. Safety is always our top priority. If a child is not able to follow safety guidelines, the use of tools may be eliminated.

Children may not bring knives from home under any circumstance.





Student to Staff Ratios

Following program guidelines, the ratio of school-aged children to FS educators is 8:1. For children between four and six years of age, our ratio is 6:1. We usually keep ratios well below these numbers.



Staff Responsibilities

The responsibilities of a FS educator/volunteer are extensive and will include, but not be limited to:

- Explaining potential risks to participants and working together to make the learning as physically safe as necessary, ensuring that everyone feels comfortable in the outdoors
- Helping participants feel emotionally safe so that they are willing to take risks, ask questions, and stretch themselves to be part of a cohesive community of learners
- Support participants as they take risks, scaffolding their experiences and then gradually withdrawing support as the children feel increasingly confident
- Modeling care, respect and wonder of the natural world and our connection to it; building an ecological identity
- Extending student inquiry and learning by asking provoking questions and supporting learners in finding answers to their wonderings
- Playing with and closely observing students to support their learning and to help them uncover numeracy and literacy curriculum where appropriate

Volunteer Responsibilities

Volunteers, whether student teachers, ECE placements, high school students or others, add value to our program by providing additional feedback to our students and providing additional supervision.

They must:

- Follow all policies and procedures outlined in this handbook
- Possess a current vulnerable sector screening check from the OPP (adults)



Child Entry and Release Policy

Parents and guardians must give Parry Sound Forest School written permission for people who may have access to their children. If written authorization is not possible, the parent must phone or email us with authorization. Parents must notify on-site staff through email (psfseducators@gmail.com), regarding changes to the pick up routine. Without prior notice we may be unable to accommodate earlier pick up times due to the distance we may be walking into the forest.

Custody and Access to Children

According to the law, both parents have equal access to a child and to information about the child's wellbeing and development. We can deny access only if we have received a legal document stating such.

Abuse Policy and Procedures

We have comprehensive abuse policies and procedures. They can be found here: [Abuse Policy and Procedures](#).



Rattlesnake Policy

At the beginning of each forest school program, the children will be taught safety measures that need to be taken should a rattlesnake be encountered. While there have been no recent reported sightings of massasauga rattlesnakes in Foley or at Canadore, we will be playing in appropriate habitat. If a rattlesnake is observed, we will mark off the area with pylons and leave it undisturbed for the remainder of the summer.

Large Animal (Bear, Coyote, Wolf) Policy

At the beginning of each forest school program, the children will be taught safety measures that need to be taken should a bear or other large animal be encountered.

All educators will wear a whistle while in the forest during bear season. Should a bear be sighted, a whistle will be sounded and children will immediately join their closest adult. We will exit that section of the forest in the quickest and safest means possible. There will also be an air horn stored in a red drawstring bag. This will be kept at hand at all times and brought on walks. It will be employed if an animal continues to approach the group after whistles have been blown. The location for play for the remainder of the season will be reevaluated.





Extreme Weather Policy

Educators at the Parry Sound Forest School check the forecast regularly. Weather-related safety is considered part of our risk management approach and may in part determine our activities on a given day. In the case of predicted thunder and lightning or high winds (gusts over 50 kph), educators ensure children are playing close to shelter for quick and easy access.

Should thunder be detected, children will return to base camp and prepare to move indoors if the storm begins to intensify or if there is lightning. Upon seeing lightning, the group will immediately move indoors (site specific locations), where they will remain until there has been no further lightning for at least thirty minutes.

If wind gusts increase to above 50 kph, the group will seek shelter indoors or move to an open place to play where there is no risk of falling trees or branches.

In the case of extreme heat (above 30°C), we will monitor the children carefully and ensure they stay in the shade and drink adequately.

In the case of extreme cold (below -20°C) programs will continue to run. Our cabin is warmed by a wood stove, which also dries wet clothes. Educators will play at the base camp, close to the cabin, keep children active and moving, and offer frequent warm up breaks if needed. We also have a back-up library of warm and waterproof clothing to lend to children as needed.

We will generally remain open on days when school buses are cancelled and encourage you to use your discretion when choosing to bring your child to forest school whenever road conditions are questionable .

Grievance Policy

Your concerns matter to us. If you have any issues with PSFS staff or programming please feel free to talk to the educator in question, give us a phone call, send a text (705-346-1234) or email (psfsinformation@gmail.com) and we will work to address your concerns as soon as possible.

Communication

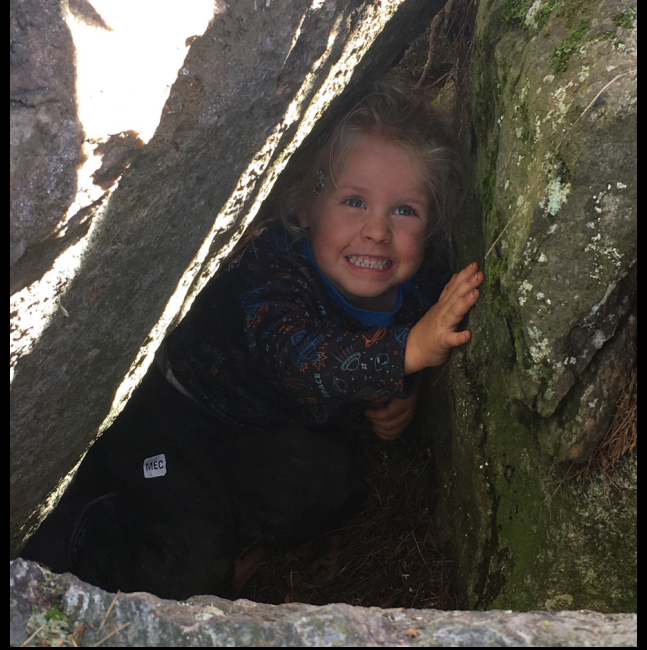
Generally, PSFS will communicate with parents prior to the start of a program using our email (psfsinformation@gmail.com). Once registered, you can email the educators directly at psfseducators@gmail.com.

Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency at PSFS, parents and guardians will be contacted by text and or telephone once emergency services have been contacted (if necessary).

Questions and Concerns

It is our goal for program participants and volunteers to feel comfortable as we play and learn together in nature. Please do not hesitate to ask us if you have any questions or concerns. If we can't talk to you right away, we can make plans to do so in the near future.



Informed Consent

Prior to participating in programs offered by PSFS, all participants- child or adult, must complete and submit an informed consent form.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR ADULTS (for staff, volunteers and supporting caregivers) of this consent can be found [here](#).

INFORMED CONSENT FOR CHILDREN (for children enrolled in our programs) of this consent can be found [here](#).



Environmental Sustainability

The areas where we will be holding our Forest School have been used in many different ways since the first people shared them with our animal brothers and sisters. They have gone through profound change over the last four hundred years, changing from traditional hunting and foraging lands of the anishinaabe, to logging, forest fires, farming and now a return to a more natural state.

It will be our goal to leave the forests and wetlands where we learn and play in better condition than we find them. Educators will model and encourage participants to remove litter from the forest floor and ponds when it is encountered. We will also help participants to minimize their impact on the living things around us by handling them gently and being thoughtful in how they use natural materials.

In this good way it is our hope that by becoming connected to this place, program participants will by extension become more connected to and caring of the Georgian Bay Biosphere specifically, and the greater natural environment generally, now and for future generations.



Gratitude

With Gratitude from Diana and the Parry Sound Forest School Staff.

Thank you for your support, generosity and kind words. Thank you for trusting us with your children and allowing us to revel in unhurried time together on the land.