



# Farm & Forest School

Cambridge

## Parent Handbook

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## Philosophy and Vision

### Mission

To provide children with opportunities to advance their education by exploring a natural space, caring for animals, identifying and navigating risk, gaining transferable life and leadership skills, and being contributing members of a community through the natural world.

### Why Choose Farm & Forest School

Create Connections: Build long-term relationships with nature, animals, staff and students.

Improve Mental Health: Time spent in nature offers many benefits to your overall well-being.

Build Confidence: Gain transferable life and leadership skills through navigating the outdoors.

Get Outside: Play-based learning promotes healthy, active lifestyles.

Navigate Risk: Nature provides a landscape to assess and mitigate risk.

Develop Agricultural Literacy: Understanding how food is grown and how animals are cared for.

## About Us

The Cambridge Farm and Forest School (CFFS) is a not-for-profit organization that provides alternative education and programming to children, families, and school groups on a privately owned 150-acre farm and forest. Located only minutes from town, the year-round site is nestled in the beautiful countryside of North Dumfries, Ontario.

### **Cambridge Farm & Forest School**

Cambridge Farm & Forest School is a combination of [Forest School](#) philosophy and agricultural literacy. It allows children to gain experiences with nature and animals while engaging in various curriculum topics such as science, engineering, mathematics, language arts, physical education, and socio-emotional skills. Qualified educators encourage children to assess risks, exercise inquiry, and practice environmental stewardship — skills that will be used throughout their lives.

### **Activities**

Our activities will depend on the season, weather and the ability and experience of participants. Examples of Forest School activities include:

- Nature exploration and identification
- Interacting with and caring for farm animals
- Building dens, shelters and other structures
- Games and invitations for imaginative play
- Natural crafts, drama, storytelling, and artwork
- Scavenger hunts and adventures
- Seasonal celebrations
- Sit Spots
- Nature Journalling
- Appreciation of Indigenous teachings
- Environmental stewardship
- Community circles - teaching, reflecting
- Skills - fire building, tracking, knot-tying, mapping
- Mindfulness, gratitude

## **Programs**

Programs run year-round and emphasize regular and repeated exposure to the same natural space, as the Forest School philosophy entails. This, in addition to child-directed, emergent, and inquiry-based learning, is what differentiates these types of programs from other outdoor and environmental education programs. As Forest School Canada states, “The defining feature of this type of nature-based education program is that children are provided with opportunities to build an ongoing relationship with the land, to a dedicated educator, to one another, and themselves.”

## Preschool & Kindergarten

Does your child dream of spending time among the trees, interacting with animals, and navigating the natural challenges of a forest floor? Why not let them explore and learn at the same time?

Our Preschool and Kindergarten programs are designed for young learners eager to discover the outdoors. The Preschool program is available for children ages 2.5 to 3, and the Kindergarten program is for children ages 4 to 5. These programs serve as a supplement to public school, homeschooling, or other childcare options. The Kindergarten program offers both weekly and monthly class options, while Preschoolers can attend one or more days each week (Monthly Forest School is not available for Preschool).

From creating new paths and building shelters to conducting experiments and tracking animals, children will gain hands-on experience with nature and animals. They will also engage in the core principles of Forest School: trust, reciprocity, and freedom.

## School Age

This program is designed for students ages 6-12 who are homeschooled or in public school and want to attend Forest School one day per week or one day per month throughout the school year.

Students will participate in a range of seasonal activities on-site, including caring for farm animals, hiking, pond exploration, tree climbing, shelter building, nature identification, animal tracking, and even mushing (dog sledding). The program integrates these activities with curriculum topics like science, technology, engineering, mathematics, literacy, the arts, health and physical education, and social-emotional learning.

## Summer Day Camp

Summer in the forest and on the farm brings endless new opportunities: longer days, grazing animals, active wildlife, and plenty of sunshine! Whether your child is new to camp or a seasoned camper, our staff will guide them through this exciting environment. Surrounded by nature, farm animals, and caring people, they will enjoy a summer full of adventure.

Our Summer Camp programs are available for children ages 2.5 to 14. To learn more about our current offerings, visit the *Programs* section on our website.

## March Break Camp

The March Break Camp program runs during the second week of March and is open to children ages 4 to 14 (note that the Preschool camp is not offered at this time). The activities available on the farm and in the forest will depend on the weather, each bringing its own set of adventures and learning experiences. With a wide age range of participants, there are plenty of opportunities for exchanging ideas, sharing, and mentoring.

Activities may include crossing streams, catching frogs, or working together to build the strongest forts—whether with sticks or snow!



## Policies and Procedures

### Privacy Policy

All personal files and forms, both electronic and hard copy, are stored securely in a locked cabinet in the Director's office and on a secure Google account, accessible only to authorized staff. The following information is collected from each student: household details and emergency contacts, student photo, signed waiver of liability, student ID (such as a passport, birth certificate, or baptismal certificate), a copy of the Immunization Record (or specific vaccine dates) or a certificate from the Vaccine Education Course by Public Health, a completed consent form, Student Information Form, and Medical Form. This information is collected to enable CFFS to respond appropriately to emergencies or health concerns, ensure authorized individuals can pick up students, organize classes by age and readiness, and provide the Ontario Ministry of Education with required statistical information annually.

All personal data, including photographs, is processed strictly in accordance with privacy legislation and is used only with your consent, as indicated in the registration forms. Please note that if consent is given to share images online, they may be viewed by the general public. We do not share personal details with third parties without consent, except where legally required (such as with the Ontario Ministry of Education). CFFS shares personal information with the Ontario Ministry of Education to assign, update, and validate the Ontario Education Number and related student information.

**Photos/Videos:** Every family who enrolls may opt in or out of the use of photos or videos of your child for promotional, educational or outreach purposes, including but not limited to photo, audio,

and/or video media. \*Note: Your child's picture and video may appear on CFFS' public social media pages (Instagram & Facebook).

All information collected in the registration forms is considered private and confidential and will be treated accordingly in adherence to this Privacy Policy. Should you have any questions or concerns relating to our Privacy Policy or if you would like access to your student's files, please email [info@farmandforest.org](mailto:info@farmandforest.org) for more information.

## Payment Procedure

Payments for Forest School and Camp are made through the [registration portal](#). You can access your invoice and track any changes in the Financial Section of your Household Account at any time. Be sure to save your invoice(s) for your records. Detailed payment instructions will be provided in the final steps of the registration process. Payment options include credit card or eCheck.

A deposit of \$200 for Forest School and \$100 for Camp (which is part of your total fees) is required upon registration submission (not required for the Waitlist). You can then choose to pay in full or opt for monthly installments, which begin in September for Forest School. Installments are automatically withdrawn from your account on the first day of each month.

Please note that 100% of program fees are directed towards current or future operations at CFFS. We are unable to offer make-up days or refunds for single days missed due to illness or other circumstances.

## Terms and Conditions

### Cancellation Policy

You must advise CFFS staff of any changes or your intentions to withdraw from the program with 30 days' written notice in order to waive the payment penalty of the \$130 Cancellation Fee. If you cancel with 30 days' written notice, we charge a \$55 Administration Fee for one child (and an additional \$45 for a second child) and refund the remainder of your payment. If you cancel with less than 30 days' written notice, we charge a \$130 Cancellation fee for one child (and an additional \$120 for a second child) and refund the remainder of the payment. Please inform CFFS of cancellations by email ([admin@farmandforest.org](mailto:admin@farmandforest.org)). CFFS does not issue refunds for single-day absences. If a student will be absent for multiple days, CFFS reserves the right to review this on a case-by-case basis to determine if CFFS can issue a refund for the missed days. Refunds will not be given in the event that a day's program is cancelled due to inclement weather.

## Tours

CFFS strongly encourages interested or newly enrolled families to schedule a tour before their child's first day of programming. This visit allows your child to explore the farm, meet some of the staff, and get acquainted with their new drop-off location. To arrange a tour, please email the CFFS administrative team at [admin@farmandforest.org](mailto:admin@farmandforest.org)

## Emergency Contact with Educators

You can contact the school during office hours from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm at 226-533-9591.

## Child Entry and Release Forms

Parents/guardians must give written authorization for any adults who may be picking up their child. In the case that staff do not have written authorization for someone to pick up, staff will phone the parent/guardian to receive verbal authorization by phone for the new pick-up person. Parents must notify [our school administrative team](#) before changing the usual pick-up routine.

## Sign-In and Sign-Out Requirements

Children must be picked up by a person who is at least 16 years old and who is listed on the authorized pick-up list on the child's [Household Account](#). Staff will take attendance electronically on cell phones or tablets. Please report any absences for your family by emailing our school administrative team at [admin@farmandforest.org](mailto:admin@farmandforest.org). Thank you for your assistance with this process.

### Unauthorized Pick-up Procedure:

If someone other than a parent/authorized adult arrives to pick up a child and we have not been notified in advance by the authorized adult, educators will:

1. Call the parent/guardian for verbal authorization
2. If the parent/guardian cannot be reached, the child must remain in the staff's care until the parent/guardian has been reached.
3. Staff will remain with the child until an authorized adult gives verbal consent or arrives.

## Late Pick-up and Extended Day Policy

Parents must make alternate arrangements for pick up if they cannot pick their child up by 4:00 pm (for Forest School) or 4:30 pm (for camp). A late fee charge of \$10.00 for every 10 minutes, or part thereof, will be charged for the aforementioned times. If there is an emergency and you are going to be late, we ask that you call the school to notify us at 226-533-9591.

Numerous or persistent incidences of late pick-up may result in termination of care. Parents need to have an alternate person who can pick up their child when they are late. All available alternate pick-up persons must be on the registration form prior to the beginning of Forest School or camp.

During the school year, parents can opt into our extended care each day, or as needed. Parents must register for extended day care in advance (at least 48 hours in advance) and there is an additional daily fee. Before-School care is from 8:00-8:30 am for \$9.00 per day, and After-School care is from 4:00-4:30 pm for \$9.00 per day or both options for \$16.00 per day.



## Risk Management

Risk—the experience and management of it—is an inherent and integral part of Forest School, as well as of healthy child development. CFFS educators and volunteers endeavour to assess and mitigate risk alongside students. We believe this is an essential skill for children to acquire and for adults to support. Our educators and volunteers conduct seasonal on-site risk assessments and activity risk assessments on an ongoing basis, always considering the balance between risk and benefits when doing so.

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

- Injuries from executing strenuous and demanding physical activities (i.e. on uneven ground in the forest)
- Injuries from failing to properly use tools (i.e. knives) despite proper instruction
- Injuries resulting from fire
- Contracting poison ivy
- The presence of wild animals and ticks
- Interacting with farm animals
- Inclement weather

### On-Site Risk Assessment Procedure

Forest School sites must be reasonably safe and easily accessible, so whenever possible, we will visit and assess site areas before activities take place. During our assessment, we will seek to identify any significant hazards and take the necessary precautions to reduce the risk to an acceptably safe level.

Due to changing weather conditions, possible wildlife and visitors, we may be faced with new challenges, such as fallen branches, high water levels, the presence of wildlife, or even human litter. These risks will need to be assessed and may alter previously arranged activities. Where checks are not possible before the group's arrival, a site sweep and assessment will be made immediately upon the group's arrival. We pause our activities to articulate these assessments with students at any point where there is a hazard or risk. Assessing and managing risk is an important skill for children to develop, and it can offer great learning opportunities.

### **Emergency Procedure and First Aid**

CFFS has detailed emergency procedures with which all educators are familiar. A copy of these procedures is carried by staff, along with a First Aid Kit, emergency numbers, contact numbers, and medical information about all participants. All staff will be trained in First Aid and the school's emergency procedures. First Aid Kits will be restocked as needed and adjusted for every season. The nearby site and areas, as well as the Back Forest areas, are accessible by vehicle and allow emergency vehicles to access these areas if needed. All staff will carry a mobile phone and a walkie-talkie in case of emergency and will be able to contact the director.

Please note that there is a potential risk that your child may be subject to small and minor injuries (i.e. bumps, bruises, scratches). Parents will be notified at the end of the day if these minor injuries occur. If children experience a greater injury or an injury to the head, parents will be notified by phone immediately. Accident forms will only be given out based on the case and circumstances. If you require more information, please contact one of our educators or our director. Additionally, each student will receive a Waiver of Liability form to be completed by a parent or guardian prior to the start of Forest School.



## Tool Use

Tool use may be offered in Forest School and Camp classes. Before introducing tool use, parents or guardians must sign a waiver of liability permitting their child to handle tools. These skills will be taught only by experienced and qualified staff, with lessons tailored to the child's age, ability, and experience. CFFS staff reserve the right to restrict a child's use of tools if they do not follow safety precautions or instructions.

The availability of tools will depend on the child's fine and gross motor skills. Children will start with small, beginner tools and progress to more advanced tools as recommended by the educator. For example, a child might begin carving with a vegetable peeler and advance to a small fixed blade once their motor skills are sufficiently developed. Educators will also assess the child's kinesthetic awareness and understanding of safety concepts, such as the "blood bubble," knife safety, and proper body positioning.

Tools provided by the school are only available for use on-site; students are not permitted to bring their own tools to Forest School. All tools are kept out of children's reach and accessed only at appropriate times. Educators are responsible for ensuring children use tools properly and safely.

In case of an accident, an additional First Aid Kit will be kept in the tool cabinet, along with a list of local emergency phone numbers. Each educator is certified in Emergency First Aid and CPR-B or CPR-C to handle emergencies on site.

## Inclement Weather/Closure

When students are at CFFS during the winter, staff will use their discretion to discern unsuitable weather and will consult the forecast regularly, keeping the safety of our students and their parents/guardians in mind at all times. Safety measures include:

- Covering as much exposed skin as possible while outside (we have additional gear in our Gear Library--thanks to some generous donations from our school and community members). Educators will also do frequent checks of the face, ears, and extremities to make sure there are no signs of frostbite.
- Participating in intentional movement and gross motor play while outside (including hiking, climbing, sliding, and building) to keep bodies warm.
- Taking more frequent breaks from the weather by going into the Schoolhouse and Portable to warm up and dry off.
- Eating more food and drinking more water to refuel before returning outside.

Extreme weather is defined as strong winds, blizzards, ice storms, risk of tornadoes, poor air quality (as defined by the [Air Quality Health Index](#)), and extreme temperatures. Our Schoolhouse, Barn, and Portable shelter us from the elements. CFFS staff will keep our driveway and parking lot clear of deep snow. Our school would close if there were not enough staff available or if our hydro was out. In either case, you will be notified of a school closure as soon as possible. If the WRDSB/WCDSB announces a school closure or bus cancellation due to inclement weather, CFFS' programs will remain open. It is up to the families' discretion if they are comfortable travelling to the school. If your child will not be attending due to weather, please notify the school by emailing [admin@farmandforest.org](mailto:admin@farmandforest.org).

## Illness Policy

CFFS is currently adhering to the Health and Safety Measures established by the Ministry of Education and Public Health Ontario.

We ask that all participants (including students, educators, and accompanying volunteers) stay home from CFFS programs for at least 24 hours after their last symptoms have subsided in the following cases:

- Fever (100.4°F or higher)
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Pink eye
- Any contagious illnesses

If any of these symptoms develop while at Forest School, the parent or guardian will be contacted and asked to pick up their child immediately.

For communicable diseases such as measles, conjunctivitis (pink eye), chickenpox, mumps, influenza, strep throat, viral pneumonia, etc., a sick child may return to Forest School only after

their healthcare provider confirms it is safe. Any outbreak of a communicable disease or lice will be communicated to parents or guardians through their preferred contact method.

### **COVID-19 Protocols:**

CFFS Programs follow the protocols set out by the Region of Waterloo Public Health unit, which include: cleaning frequently touched surfaces, frequent hand washing or hand sanitizing (e.g. before and after eating or handling our animals) and self-screening. An update of the Region of Waterloo Public Health unit can be found [here](#).

## **Immunization Policy**

At CFFS, we want to protect the health and well-being of the staff, students and families who are enrolled or present on-site. Under the [Immunization of School Pupils Act](#), all primary students need to have proof of immunization against:

- Diphtheria
- Tetanus
- Polio
- Measles
- Mumps
- Rubella
- Meningococcal Disease
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Varicella (chickenpox)

**FOR SCHOOL ONLY:** CFFS requires parents/guardians to provide an up-to-date copy of each child's immunization record in case an outbreak should occur. All immunization records are to be sent to [info@farmandforest.org](mailto:info@farmandforest.org) ATTN: Immunization Records.

Parents who have medical, conscientious, or religious objections to immunization must notify Public Health. They will then be required to apply for an exemption for their child through Public Health and must attend a mandatory Vaccines and Preventable Disease Program. To contact Public Health at 519-575-4400 x 5003 to book an appointment and get more information. A copy of your certification of program completion must be sent to [info@farmandforest.org](mailto:info@farmandforest.org) ATTN: Immunization Records.

If a disease (listed above) appears in your child's school, your child may have to stay out of school/childcare until the disease is no longer present.

## **Poison Ivy**

Poison ivy is present in some locations on the farm and forest. To limit exposure, we suggest that all participants wear long pants, socks and closed-toed shoes while taking part in our programs in all seasons. Washing affected skin within 15-60 minutes of exposure is likely to remove the oil that can lead to a reaction, so staff will carry potable water, soap and cloth at all times. In the event of a participant coming in contact with poison ivy, we are able to wash the affected area. Staff will notify parents/guardians if their child comes into contact with poison ivy.

## Ticks

Ticks are present in the region. To limit exposure, we suggest that all participants wear long pants, long socks, and closed-toed shoes while taking part in our programs in all seasons. We suggest that participants tuck pant legs into socks and tuck shirts into pants to limit possible tick exposure. We recommend using insect repellent to deter ticks. We recommend that parents/guardians send their child with insect repellent that contains DEET, or natural alternatives, to reapply as required throughout the day.

Parents are responsible for checking on their children after a day at Forest School. If a tick is seen on a participant, it is brushed off. If a tick is attached, staff who are trained to do so will safely remove the tick and save it in a clear plastic bag. Parents/guardians will be informed at pickup, and given the opportunity to take the tick to the health unit for testing. All parents will be informed if there has been a tick encounter and they will be reminded to check their children.

Blacklegged ticks, which carry Lyme disease, are not commonly found in Waterloo Region. According to public health, the risk of encountering a black-legged tick in the region is low.

For more information about ticks, we recommend visiting the Waterloo Region Public Health website:

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/health-and-wellness/insect-and-animal-diseases.aspx>

For more information about being outdoors during tick season, visit a blog post on the Child and Nature Alliance website: <http://childnature.ca/what-can-we-do-about-ticks/>

## Head Lice

Head lice may affect participants at CFFS. Head lice is not considered a communicable disease but rather an annoying condition that can spread rapidly. If head lice or nits are present, we ask that you:

- Contact the director at CFFS immediately so that CFFS staff can be informed (the affected individuals will remain anonymous).
- Follow the treatment suggestions on the information sheet provided by Waterloo Region Public Health: <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/pests.aspx>
- Additional resources regarding the treatment and prevention of lice can be found [here](#).

## Food Policy

- **Nut Free Zone:** Due to the prevalence of life-threatening nut allergies, we ask that participants refrain from bringing products that contain nuts. Soy and sunflower seed substitutes for nut butter are welcome.
- **Snack-Sharing:** In addition, we ask participants not to share snacks, as this practice contributes to the health and safety of the community.
- **Litterless Lunches:** We encourage participants to bring snacks that are litter-free (as much as possible). Some examples of containers to use are beeswax wraps and Bento boxes

(brand) lunch containers, which have multiple dividers. We seek to empower even our youngest participants to carry their own snacks/water bottles on our adventures, which is possible with small containers.

- **Hand-washing and Drinking Water:** Participants will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water before eating and after using the washroom. They will also be able to refill their water bottles on-site. All water on-site is potable drinking water, designated as safe by the Region of Waterloo water sample test (conducted bi-annually).

## Washrooms and Toileting

Washrooms will be available at all times inside the schoolhouse and at our outdoor porta-potty. We ask parents/guardians to remind their children to use the washroom before their day begins.

In the forest, if a child needs to use the washroom, an educator will assist them in finding a suitable location (to maintain privacy from other students) while following the Leave No Trace philosophy to minimize environmental impact. If this is not feasible, an adult will accompany the child to the washroom inside the schoolhouse. Water and hand sanitizer will be carried by the group at all times.

All children must be able to use the washroom independently before attending CFFS programs. Staff will schedule regular washroom breaks throughout the day (approximately every hour) and encourage children to use the washroom before excursions to the Back Forest. The on-site toilets are equipped with heights and stools suitable for all ages.

We understand that accidents may occur, especially as children learn to navigate the farm and forest. If a child has an accident or is unable to reach the toilet in time, we will use the extra clothes sent with the child. Parents/guardians will be asked to replenish these extra clothes for future attendance.

## Napping Policy

At CFFS, we only admit students to our programs who **do not require naps** while at school. To maintain the integrity of our programming, we follow the Principles of Forest School (Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, 2020 [here](#)). These Principles include, but are not limited to, the following concepts:

- Learning centres around the Land and the child-at-play.
- Programs take place in outdoor spaces.
- Relationships are built through regular and repeated sessions.
- Programs provide adequate time and space for children and youth to dive deeply into their play.

These criteria cannot be met if children are regularly napping indoors while at Forest School. Although we realize that our youngest learners may be in the process of transitioning out of naptime, the expectation is that students have the stamina to enjoy an active, outdoor program for the full day. Our goal is to provide optimal Forest School experiences for the entirety of the student's day.



## Environmental Sustainability

At CFFS we strive for both participants and staff to show deep respect for the natural world. We believe that repeated exposure to the same natural areas fosters a love for the environment and the community.

We recognize the importance of being mindful of our ecological impact. Each area on-site will undergo a thorough Site Assessment, including an evaluation of environmental wear. This assessment will vary with each season and depend on the level of exposure from the children. Educators will determine if an area is unsuitable for daily use based on weather conditions and usage by other groups. If an area becomes too worn or damaged due to excessive use or weather, we may close it until the land recovers. Children will be encouraged to propose land revival strategies to take responsibility for their impact.

For crops and gardens, we will ensure proper crop rotation and maintain soil health each growing season. In the forest, children will learn to avoid picking living plants unless used as a learning opportunity by the educator. They will also gain knowledge about healthy ecosystems and their life cycles.

Any fire-building activities will be contained using rocks, a Hibachi bucket, or a Kelly Kettle to prevent the spread of fires or root fires.

All children will be encouraged to act as stewards of the land, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership over their environment.

## CFFS Educators

Our educators are passionate about connecting children to the natural world while modelling and encouraging relationships with others that demonstrate respect, kindness and cooperation. All of our staff are Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs), certified Forest School Practitioners through *Forest School Canada*, Registered Early Childhood Educators, or have other relevant experiences with children. Our educators and organizational volunteers are recognized for their passion and experience working with children, youth and families. We aim to provide a high-quality, educational, and social experience, and our qualified staff are key to achieving this goal.

It is the responsibility of CFFS to support the safety of all participants in our care. We are committed to creating an environment which is inclusive and provides safe spaces for everyone. Any suspected cases of abuse and negligence will be promptly and appropriately dealt with by the staff.

Furthermore, all staff and volunteers will have clear and recent Vulnerable Sector Police Checks. Each on-site team will hold current First Aid and CPR qualifications and be trained in Epi-Pen use. We will also provide adequate support to ensure all staff and volunteers are confident and competent when following the policies and procedures we have set out in this handbook.

## CFFS Staff Responsibilities

The responsibilities of a CFFS educator/volunteer are wide-ranging and include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Ensure the physical safety of participants, including students, educators and accompanying volunteers, by co-assessing and co-managing risks on an ongoing basis and making participants feel comfortable in the natural environment.
- Model the proper care and respect for the natural world, as well as the respectful use of tools and supplies.
- Take primary responsibility for ensuring that policies and procedures, rules and guidelines are followed.
- Seek to be co-learners with the group, prompting questions and curiosity, modelling wonder and enthusiasm for learning and understanding the natural world. They encourage new learning by introducing loose parts, supplies, provocations, and resources that change the environment. Leaders work to scaffold participants' learning so that deeper questions and ideas arise.
- Ensuring students' families understand how to equip students with proper clothing, outerwear, and other supplies according to the season.

## Participant to Staff Ratios

The ratios between CFFS educators/volunteers and students vary depending on the age of the group of students and the adults accompanying them. The following ratios will be maintained for the majority of the school day and especially during risky play and travelling to forested areas:

- Preschool-aged children-to-staff ratio is 5:1
- Kindergarten-aged children-to-staff ratio is 8:1
- School-aged children-to-staff ratio is 8:1

Reduced ratios can only be in effect when children are arriving, leaving, during indoor periods, and during recess. The reduced ratio cannot be less than two-thirds of the required ratio (except lunchtime when one supervisor is present). This is under the recommendations from the Ontario Ministry of Education.

## Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

Parents/guardians will be asked to complete forms and upload paperwork before their child begins the program with CFFS. The completed consent forms will give relevant medical details of the child, consent for the child to participate in the Forest School activities, permission to administer medicines and permission to admit the child to the hospital for emergency treatment. The form also provides emergency contact details and optional permission to take and use photographs and videos of the child for promotional purposes, reports, and more. The educators will keep a copy of these forms with them while the child is present at the program.

Parents are also expected to observe prompt drop-off and pick-up times for the registered programs. Unless special permission has been granted, parents/guardians are to drop children off without lingering. Having parents stay with the group can create problems for group dynamics and separations of individual children.



## Preparing for Forest School: Supply List

We aim to experience nature in all seasons, so it is imperative that participants dress appropriately to stay comfortable and dry. Below are suggested clothing options for various types of weather. Please label all of your children's gear and clothing with their names.

Weather	Clothing
Warm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short or long-sleeved shirt</li> <li>• Durable and breathable pants</li> <li>• Sun hat</li> <li>• Closed-toed shoes or boots</li> <li>• An extra pair of socks in a backpack</li> </ul>
Cold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Base layer shirt and long underwear of fleece, wool, or polyester to wick away moisture (no cotton)</li> <li>• Middle layer of wool or fleece</li> <li>• Outer shell of waterproof, wind resistant shell, and breathable material, including jacket and pants</li> <li>• Waterproof and insulated boots</li> <li>• Thick wool or polyester socks (no cotton)</li> <li>• Warm hat that covers the ears</li> <li>• Warm, waterproof mittens</li> <li>• Balaclava and/or tube scarf</li> <li>• An extra pair of mittens in a backpack</li> <li>• An extra pair of socks in a backpack</li> </ul>
Rainy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waterproof shell, of hooded jacket and pants, or coveralls</li> <li>• Waterproof boots</li> <li>• And an extra pair of socks in a backpack</li> </ul>

At the beginning of a program, please bring:

- A labelled plastic bag with a change of clothing (underwear, pants, socks, shirt) for your child.
- Optional: A bin (preferably with a lid) that will hold all of your child's extra gear. The bin can remain at school and parents will be notified when items need to be replenished.

Every day that your child attends, please bring:

- A backpack containing the following supplies
  - Extra socks
  - Extra mittens (in cold weather)
  - Reusable water bottle
  - Two plastic bags (to put over dry socks, in the event of a boot "soaker")
  - A nut-free, healthy, litterless snack (optional)
  - Lunch (nut-free, litterless)
  - Bug jacket (May until September only)
  - Sunscreen and/or bug spray (optional)\*

\*Note: if participants need to apply sunscreen and/or bug repellent, parents/ guardians are asked to apply this before the child comes to the program, either at home or in the parking lot when they arrive at school. Staff may help your child to reapply later in the day.

**Please do NOT bring:**

- Toys from home
- Pocket knives or other tools
- Electronic devices including cell phones, mP3 players, and gaming devices\*

\*CFFS is not responsible for any personal property that is lost or damaged.



## Learning and Development

### During the Day

CFFS programs vary greatly, depending on the age and interests of the children, the length of the program, and the weather. Each day is as unique as the children in the group and the adults leading them.

During the program:

- Opening circle, introductions, Land acknowledgement, gratitude, planning our time together
- Community-building activities and lessons from educators
- Any new information (weather, hazards, other considerations)
- Go to the Exploration site
- Describe boundaries
- Engage the group in developing rules and guidelines for the program

Ending the Day:

- Return equipment if needed
- Remove structures (i.e. stick forts), if needed
- Check for litter and dispose of it appropriately
- Closing debrief and circle time featuring Story of the Day, reciprocity, gratitude, Rose/Bud/Thorn, reflective debrief
- Walk to pick up point
- Reflective debrief between educators

## Emergent Learning

Learning at CFFS may look different than learning in a conventional school. Our learning strives to be learner-led, experiential, inquiry-based, and play-based. Through this approach, the students can pursue their interests, develop an appreciation for the farm and forest, construct knowledge, acquire new skills, ask questions, and learn to express themselves in safe and appropriate ways.

## Play

Each program will include unstructured, free play time, which CFFS believes is fundamental to healthy development and learning. Through play, children make connections to the world around them. Social play teaches participants how to effectively communicate, negotiate roles and responsibilities and share. Much of children's play in Forest School is imaginative and uses natural objects (logs, water, leaves, etc) which are always at their fingertips at the farm and in the forest. All educators involved in the Forest School programs are conscious that it is an exploratory experience for the group. Programs give multiple opportunities for the group to play and learn as independently as possible. If invited to provide support, then staff will do so; otherwise, they observe and ensure a safe learning environment, allowing the experience to be as learner-directed as possible.

## Behaviour Management

At CFFS, staff collaborate with children to establish clear boundaries and guidelines aimed at fostering self-esteem, self-awareness, self-regulation, emotional intelligence, respect for oneself, cooperation, nonviolent communication, and effective risk management. We proactively design both physical and social/emotional spaces to encourage positive behaviour.

CFFS is committed to:

- Focusing on behaviour rather than labelling the child.
- Considering each child's developmental level and needs.
- Implementing behaviour management strategies positively and consistently.
- Assisting children in learning appropriate behaviours and conflict resolution techniques.
- Helping children develop self-control, self-confidence, decision-making skills, effective communication, and sensitivity in their interactions with others.

CFFS strictly prohibits sexual abuse, harassment, molestation, corporal punishment, bullying, neglect, humiliation, deprivation of basic needs, and confinement.

If a child consistently exhibits inappropriate behaviour, they may need a support person or may be required to temporarily leave the program. We will make every effort to integrate all children into our Forest School community.

CFFS reserves the right to suspend or expel a child if their behaviour is deemed unsafe. Decisions regarding re-entry into the program and creating a return plan will be made on a case-by-case basis, with the safety and learning environment of the group being the top priority. Inappropriate

behaviour will be documented in Incident Reports, which will be reviewed by staff and parents/guardians at the end of each day.



## Equality

### Inclusion

We have observed many positive impacts of Forest School on children with exceptionalities and strive to be as inclusive as possible. Currently, we do not have additional staff for one-to-one support or Independent Education Plans (IEPs). However, our low staff-to-student ratios and flexible curriculum allow us to offer support as needed.

CFFS staff role of Inclusion Facilitator is proud to offer support to children who may have a neurodivergent diagnosis, experience learning differences, and need occasional support to be successful during their Forest School or camp experience. The role of the Inclusion Facilitator is to support an individual child for a short period to reintegrate them back into their group.

If your child requires one-to-one assistance, a support worker may join the site, provided they submit a recent, clear Vulnerable Sector Check, are familiar with CFFS policies and procedures, and align with the Forest School philosophy. Our staff are open to collaborating with other specialists or professionals to support the development and learning of all students. If available, please include a copy of your child's most recent documentation or reports to keep in their file.

While CFFS staff will make every effort to accommodate all students, if recurring behaviours are found to be disruptive to others, we will refer to our Behaviour Management policies to find the best solution for everyone.

### Accessibility Policy

CFFS is committed to equal opportunities for all and strives to provide an environment in which everyone feels welcome, valued, and safe. Our policies help to ensure that we promote the

individuality of all, irrespective of ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, language or background.

When planning a visit, information is requested from school groups and parents/guardians about participants with access or medical requirements so they can be fully included in the program. We will work to adapt as many activities as possible to make it easier for students to participate.



## Communication

### **Participants**

Due to the nature of our student-led programs, we value the input of our participants and look for opportunities to collaborate. Each program will include “looking ahead,” where participants can voice their interests and ideas to educators. This will inform the staff planning for the next program.

### **Staff**

CFFS’ Administration Staff and Educators will be communicating with families in-person, by phone or by email, to keep everyone aware of new announcements, upcoming events, and the things happening on-site. Staff will contribute to weekly documents to jointly track the process and interests of the group as well as possible directions for further learning. We will have ongoing and regular contact with staff to plan and prepare for possible programs and to discuss the facilitation of current programs.

## **Emergency Communication**

In the event of an emergency, parents/guardians will be contacted by telephone. If the primary contacts cannot be reached, the Secondary Emergency Contact (listed on the Household Account and registration forms) will be contacted. Staff will remain with participants until the parent/guardian has arrived. In the event the child needs to be transported to a hospital, a staff member will accompany them to the next location until an authorized parent/guardian is available. Due to the alterations in staff-to-participant ratios, programs may need to go indoors until an alternative staff or volunteer can come and assist.

### **Questions and Concerns**

CFFS encourages all participants and parents/guardians to provide regular feedback on their experiences, including what they enjoyed about Forest School and any concerns they may have. Feedback can be submitted through our feedback forms, or staff are available for discussions in person or over the phone. CFFS strives to be open, honest, and straightforward with parents/guardians about any issues. Maintaining positive two-way communication helps us address and resolve concerns before they escalate.