

# SPARROW'S NEST PLAY PARENT HANDBOOK

## **I. Forest Kindergarten History and Philosophy**

Forest School History: Friedrich Frobel, 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.

Our Philosophy: Sparrow's Nest Play offers play-based programs that allow 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. Sparrow's Nest Play 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 children learn best through direct experiences with the world around them. Being outdoors provides them with not only fresh air, but it 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. Activities and Units of Learning flow organically from the natural rhythms of the seasons and from the children's daily discoveries. There are no set lesson plans: each day is shaped by the animals, insects, birds, amphibians, weather and foraging that is encountered, providing spontaneous teachable moments.

### Sparrow's Nest Play Mission Objectives:

- Have a safe place to learn and grow.
- Learn to care for creation through sustainable agricultural and consumer practices.
- Learn the value of small things, such as small acts of love, kindness, and justice.
- Experience being part of a membership with one another and with creation.
- Develop and practice tools for peacemaking and reconciliation.

### Programming Guidelines & Objectives:

- Provide 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 for ages 4-6 and 1:12 teacher to child ratio for ages 7-12
- Build children's on-going relationship with the land, their community, one another, and to themselves
- Provide opportunities to work collaboratively to create, problem solve, support one another, dream of a bigger and better world
- Encourage healthy habits and lifestyles
- Facilitate children's risk-taking, made as safe as is reasonably possible
- Increase motivation, self-esteem and concentration
- Develop respect for the natural world and also respect for its dangers
- Stimulate children's innate curiosity by being close to nature
- Teach children to become well informed and caring stewards of the natural world
- Encourage family involvement in nature-related learning on site and at their homes

## II. Staff Information and Organization Overview

**Teacher Qualifications:** All teachers have current First Aid and CPR certification. All teachers and substitutes have completed an interview process, background check and come with strong references from their previous employers.

**Licensing:** Sparrow's Nest Play operates under an Exemption from Georgia Bright from the Start and is not required to be licensed. We conduct SNP as an "extra-curricular" program.

**Communication:** Parents can communicate with teachers and admin using the Whats App. Instructions to download app will be provided prior to the program start. Enrolled families will be added via email to the appropriate class.

## III. General Information

**Enrollment:** Registration forms should be completed as soon as possible on our website at \_\_\_\_\_. A physical copy of our Participant Waiver must be signed and will be kept on file for our records. All families are required to pay an annual Registration Fee of \$25 to hold their child's spot. Your child's space in the class will be officially reserved as soon as all paperwork is submitted and the Registration Fee is received.

**Withdrawal:** Parents who wish to withdraw their child from Sparrow's Nest Play must communicate directly with the Director. No refunds or credits will be given.

**Illness:** To control the spread of illness, children with vomiting, diarrhea, and/or fever should not be sent to Sparrow's Nest Play 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:** It may be necessary for your child to receive medication while at Sparrow's Nest Play. You will need to provide a signed authorization to allow 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 Sparrow's Nest Play staff member who administers the medication will document the time, the dosage, and any noticeable side effects.

**Calendar:** Yearly schedules will be distributed and posted online prior to the beginning of the school year.

**Severe Weather Closings:** We strive to provide opportunities for 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 close if conditions warrant such actions. It is at the discretion of the Sparrow's Nest Play Director to make the decision to dismiss early, open late, or close. If the director decides to dismiss early, families will be notified via WhatsApp.

In the event of delays or cancellations, a decision will be made and broadcast via the following outlets:

- Sparrow's Nest Play Facebook
- Whats App

**Severe Weather Warnings:** If warnings are issued for Cobb County and/or the West Georgia area for severe thunderstorms and/or tornadoes during program hours, or heavy downpours and lightning occur, all children will be moved indoors until the threat is over. We will also carefully monitor children's comfort level in cold temperatures and will move them indoors if they become too cold to enjoy their outdoor experience.

Food: Natural, organic and seasonal snacks are provided for Sparrow's Nest Play students. Students may bring wholesome snacks (no candy or processed foods, please.) Children will eat outside.

Food Allergies: Teachers are aware of any allergies present in their class from the information provided on the Registration Form. Teachers will not offer food to a child if it contains an ingredient that the child is allergic to and will notify the parent(s) ahead of time if a food is being served that a child cannot eat. Parents are responsible for providing alternate food for their child if the food served at school cannot be consumed due to an allergy.

#### IV. Arrival and Pick-up Policies

An Attendance Log-In will be completed on your child's arrival to Sparrow's Nest Play each day. Parents will be notified via Whats App that their child is safe and at Sparrow's Nest Play. Upon arrival children will participate in quiet time before starting their day in the forest. Children may engage in quiet observation, journaling, reading, etc.

Punctuality: Because our classes are outdoors and hiking to our sites each day is a part of the daily activities, it is important that children arrive on time. If arrival time will be delayed, parents must communicate with the teachers via the Remind app as soon as possible so alternate arrangements for meeting the group may be planned.

Pick-up and Drop-off Policy and Procedures: No child is ever released to an adult who is not listed on the Registration Form without direct communication between the parent and teacher. An adult will accompany each child on their walk to their car.

Late Pick up Fee: Children must be picked up at the conclusion of the program day. Late pickup fees are \$5 for every hourly increment. Late fee payment is due within 30 days. Parents and guardians should notify teachers and/or the Director if they anticipate a delay in picking up their child.

## V. Clothing and Gear List

Clothing: Given that Sparrow's Nest Play embraces all seasons and all types of weather, it is CRITICAL that your child has clothes and gear that allow him or her 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 require that your child have the following items:

Fall and Spring: • Lightweight rain pants or quick-dry long pants: long pants rather than short pants are important to protect legs from thorns, insects, poison ivy etc. • Rain boots with lightweight socks • When temperatures are cooler: long-sleeved tops and/or rain jackets • Sunhat • Sunscreen • Insect repellent

Winter: If there is snow or ice, no water play will be allowed. • Rain boots (with one or two pairs of socks) • Full rain gear (hooded jacket and pants) • Two-piece long underwear--silk or wool is best, but polyester is also a good choice. • Silk or wool socks • Mittens and a hat: wool or fleece is warmest.

Year Round: • Water bottle • Small backpack • Extra set of clothing. Backpacks need to contain a complete change of clothing in case they need warm, dry layers while outside. The complete change of clothing should include pants, underwear, warm socks, short-sleeved shirt, long-sleeved shirt, sweater or sweatshirt, warm hat and mittens.

\*\*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. \*\*We will also hold a clothing swap and sell in May for enrolled families.

### Helpful Hints

- 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 become 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. 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 they can get messy.
- All clothing and footwear should be loose fitting and roomy to allow the body's own insulating layer to surround the skin.
- 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.
- Please label everything with your child's name.

Maintaining your gear once it is really wet and muddy:

- Rain gear can go in the wash by itself when you get home on the rinse cycle (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.

## VI. 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 while under adult supervision. They may not climb higher than twice their height and only after they have demonstrated competence.
- Sticks: The children may not play with sticks that are longer than their arm, unless it is clearly and responsibly being used as a walking stick, a tool (digging, for example), or for building, under the supervision of the teachers. Running is not permitted while holding a stick.
- Ingestion: Children will not eat or drink any substance found in nature without teacher permission.

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 program 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 maintains 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 day 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.

- Water Safety: All visits to the creek and pond are under full supervision of the teachers. Children will be allowed to wade in water that is less than knee deep while wearing boots.

Social & Emotional Safety: As naturalists we are 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. Should the behavior in question not shift in a timely manner, the parent will be called to take the child home. 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 Sparrow's Nest Play.

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 (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 measure is needed.

Bathroom Safety: The bathroom area consists of an indoor toilet facility. The teachers are located so that they can hear the children and are available to help when needed. If a child needs assistance using the bathroom, the teacher that helps is close enough to the other children and teachers that they are not “alone” with the child since they are in proximity to and within earshot of others. The bathroom door is not closed while

a teacher is physically assisting a child in that space, but may be closed for privacy when the child is in there alone while the teacher waits outside the door.

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

## VII. Sparrow's Nest Play Behavior Plan

A very important part of the Sparrow's Nest Play 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

## 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.

**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. At Sparrow's Nest Play, children will be taught the expectations for correct behavior and encouraged to live and act accordingly. When children know something is wrong, and choose to do it anyway, consequences will follow to communicate that the behavior is not acceptable and will not be tolerated in our school.

### Behavior Plan Agreement

I have read the School Behavior Guidelines. I have discussed this with my child and agree to comply with the discipline policies and procedures of Sparrow's Nest Play.

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Legal Guardian Name Printed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Parent Handbook Agreement Form

The Sparrow's Nest Play Parents' Handbook lists the values, policies, rules, and regulations of Wauhatchie School. Its purpose is to assure the smooth operation of our program. Reading and understanding this hand books is imperative to the operations of Sparrow's Nest Play. By signing this form, you are agreeing to abide by these written provisions of Sparrow's Nest Play.

I understand that my signature on this form binds me to observe the policies, rules, and regulations as set forth by Sparrow's Nest Play.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name\_\_\_\_\_