

Orcas Island Forest School

Family Handbook

2017-2018



Table of Contents

A Note to Parents.....	3
Mission/Program Philosophy.....	4
Staffing.....	5
Staff Hiring, Teacher-Student Ratios	
Logistical Information.....	6-7
Hours of Operation, Tuition, Late Payment, Additional Expenses, School Closures, School Calendar, Withdrawal Policy	
Enrollment Requirements, Attendance.....	8
Weather, Clothing Suggestion.....	8-9
Parent Participation, Communication.....	10
Camp Orkila, Adjustment to Forest School, Your Child's First Day.....	11
Saying Goodbye, Drop-Off & Pick-Up, Meals.....	12-13
A Few Principles of Forest School.....	13
Additional Practices & Policies.....	14-17
Kindness, Sick Child Policy, Medication, Risk Assessment, Child Abuse Reporting, Car Seat Safety, Anti-Harassment, Non-Discrimination, Confidentiality	

A Note to Parents

We are so excited to be moving forward into our third year! This school would not exist without the families who believe deeply that this educational experience is important for their children. Thank you for being part of our community.

We ask that as parents of a school in its early stages, you maintain some flexibility with us as the program evolves and matures, but also that you consider yourselves contributors to the vision. Each one of us carries our own story for why we believe children belong in nature, and we hope that each of our personal connections to this idea can bring depth to the school as it builds.

The Forest School model is a time-tested and thriving idea in much of Europe, and we are happy to see it expanding to the United States. In many ways, we did not have to reinvent the wheel to develop this school; the framework already exists.

Any new school or program, however, has to go through a process of researching what language and values feel appropriate to embody. In developing the program and curriculum of Orcas Island Forest School, we have read through various texts and philosophies, pedagogies and ideas. Many are rich and insightful, and have contributed to the foundation of our school. Waldorf Education, for example, resounds with our commitment to the importance of play. Reggio Emilia schools introduce the idea of emergent curriculum, and naturalists from Rachel Carson to Richard Louv have put words to our intrinsic sense that it is our responsibility to ensure that our children know the natural world through their own experience. We have found harmony amongst many of these contributors, and feel that our sense that this is important now is confirmed through their words--from the 18th century to the present.

Rachel Carson's *The Sense of Wonder* reminds us that children need the adults in their lives to join them in their awe in order for it to be truly rich, and it is our hope that this school can offer more than a rich education to our children--we hope that it can reignite the magic of wonder in all of us, and therefore become an experience that we all share, long after the children have been picked up from school.

Mission

Orcas Island Forest School is dedicated to providing a play-based, all-weather, outdoor early childhood education program that fosters an intimate connection to the natural world and supports children as they develop physically, socially, and emotionally.

Philosophy

We believe that a natural environment is an ideal classroom for cultivating the mind, body, emotions and spirit of every child. The Forest School model gives young children an opportunity to develop a sense of wonder for the natural world and fosters compassion and empathy for the earth and all its creatures.

When given the time and space to play, children learn how to draw upon their innate curiosity to observe and make sense of their world. Using an emergent learning approach, we listen and observe children as they play, determine their deep interests, and then offer a plan to help them expand and grow.

Research shows that children who are immersed in nature are healthier, able to think more clearly, have an easier time paying attention, and cope more effectively with stress. Our students will have the opportunity to work through physical challenges and risks of the natural environment to develop independence, self-confidence, and resilience.

Each child at Orcas Island Forest School will have the opportunity to:

- Participate as a member of an interdependent community
- Care for themselves and those around them
- Realize and express their own needs in a clear way
- Cooperate with other children to accomplish group goals
- Understand the expectations of others in a given setting
- Be inquisitive and make connections
- Initiate new ideas and invent solutions to problems
- Stick at difficult tasks or come back to them later in order to succeed.

- Run, catch, throw, kick and tumble
- Laugh and play with a sense of joy
- Care for common spaces and materials to maintain cleanliness and order.
- Act as stewards of the environment

Staffing

When hiring teachers for our program, we look for staff members who have a passion for nature, as well as a passion for working with young children and their families. We want teachers who feel that they are contributing to a rich future for humanity and the earth. The foundation of our teaching team is built upon staff members who:

- Are knowledgeable about developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood learners.
- Are prepared to share their life experiences, talents and interests.
- Enjoy the outdoors and have a personal connection to the natural world.
- Are professional, creative and passionate individuals, experienced in fostering the whole child and developing a child-driven curriculum.

Student to Teacher Ratio

We believe in the importance of maintaining high standards regarding staff to student ratios. We also believe that the process of developing meaningful relationships with the outdoors is best achieved in small groups. Therefore, we are committed to maintaining a student-teacher ratio of 5:1.

Logistical Information

Hours of Operation:

Orcas Island Forest School is open from 9:00 am-1:00pm Monday-Friday, September-June. Families may enroll for 3, 4 or 5 days a week, or they may also choose the Fridays Only option. We will follow the public School Calendar for Holidays and Breaks.

Contact Information:

School Phone (on during school hours: 8:30am-1:30pm) 360-298-5210

Email : oiforestschool@gmail.com

Tuition:

Tuition is based on a 10 month school year. Parents are welcome to pay the full tuition prior to the first day of school, but may choose to pay in monthly installments. **Monthly payments will be due by the 1st of the month.** The parent is responsible for payment of all scheduled days, regardless of attendance.

Please drop your tuition check in the locked mailbox at the shelter on site or mail your check to Orcas Island Forest School, PO Box 1314, Eastsound, WA 98245.

Vacations: Refunds or credits will not be issued for vacations.

Holidays: Refunds or credits will not be given for holiday closings.

Inclement Weather Closings: Refunds or credits will not be given for inclement weather closings

Late Payment:

A \$5 fee will be charged for payments postmarked after the 5th of each month. Please alert us if you have concerns about making any payments on time, and we will attempt to work with you.

School Closures:

As an entirely outdoor program, Orcas Island Forest School is more affected by extreme weather than indoor schools. As much as possible, we will follow the Orcas Public Schools for inclement weather closings. However, as your children's safety and learning experience is paramount to us, on occasion inclement weather may cause the limitation or cancellation of

school hours independent of the public school system. In case of closure, we will always do our best to notify you as far in advance as possible. Delays and cancellations will be sent to parents by e-mail, and if the school should need to close early due to weather you will be notified by phone. Please let us know if one form of communication is better than another.

Calendar 2017-2018

We will follow the Orcas Island Public School calendar for holidays and breaks.

Please note that more celebrations and festivals will be added to the calendar throughout the year. We will keep you updated!

September 4th: Welcome to school Family Potluck, 5-630pm

September 6th: First Day of School!

November 10th: School CLOSED, Veterans Day

November 23rd-24th School CLOSED, Thanksgiving

December 11th-15th: Student Reviews & Parent/Teacher Conferences

December 25th- Jan 5th: School CLOSED, Winter Break

January 15th: School CLOSED, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

February 29th-23rd: School CLOSED, Mid-Winter Break

April 16th-20th:: School CLOSED, Spring Break

May 28th: School CLOSED, Memorial Day

June 11th-15th: Student Reviews & Parent/Teacher Conferences

June 20th: Last Day of School & Community Potluck

Withdrawal Policy:

If you choose to withdraw your child from the Orcas Island Forest School, you must fill out a 30-Day Notice of Withdrawal form (available upon request). This form must be signed by the Board President and be submitted at least 30 days in advance of your child's intended date of withdrawal. You will pay for your child's final month in the preschool. If you paid the full tuition up front you will be reimbursed the remaining months minus a 10% processing fee.

Enrollment Requirements: In order to enroll in the Orcas Island Forest School, your child must be:

- 3 years old by December 31st, 2017 and no older than 6 by June 16th, 2018
- Potty trained by the start of preschool. Unlike traditional indoor programs, your child will frequently be sorting through many layers of clothing on their way to and from the bathroom. The ability to know and regulate toileting is therefore a necessity.
- Your child must be prepared (and want!) to be outside rain or shine.

Attendance: Regular attendance is an important element of your child's success here at the Orcas Island Forest School. Please speak with your child's teacher if an extended absence is anticipated.

Weather: A Forest School, by its very nature, is exposed to the elements. The meaningful experiences students gain from interacting with various forms of weather is invaluable and a core part of the program. Parents should expect that their children will spend the duration of school outdoors. *If a student is not suitably dressed for the weather, parents may be contacted to bring appropriate gear and/or pick the child up from school.*

Clothing Suggestions: If we can be warm and comfortable in our clothing, then we can be outside in any weather. As the oft-repeated Forest School slogan goes: "There is no bad weather, only bad clothing."

Wearing the right clothes for the weather is crucial to ensuring everyone has a good experience. Encouraging your child to be a part of the experience of picking out their "special" forest school clothes will help ensure the process of getting dressed in the morning goes smoothly. Here is what we recommend:

All Year -

- Comfortable, warm and waterproof footwear
- Clothing that can get muddy and dirty
- Loose fitting clothing for easy movement

- Rain pants and jacket that is either worn or stored at school daily *** (Please don't buy rain pants with suspenders or full body suits! It makes it very difficult for your child to use the bathroom.)***
- Minimum 1 pair of extra clothes stored in student's backpack (i.e. long underwear, pants, shirts, and thick socks).
- A water bottle

Winter Months -

- Warm, non-cotton hat. Loose fitting non-cotton long underwear, fleece jacket & other warm layers
- As needed, rain coat with hood.
- Warm, waterproof mittens that are easy to take on and off.
- Loose fitting non-cotton long underwear, fleece or other warm non-cotton pants to wear underneath rain pants.
- Non-cotton, preferably wool socks
- Warm, waterproof boots (we recommend Bogs Boots or similar)

We do not require children to be outfitted in a particular brand or style of clothing, but we do require them to be dressed so that they can remain warm for the full morning that they are at school. The following **resources** are recommendations for finding appropriate clothing:

www.oakiwear.com,

www.bogsfootwear.com

www.landsend.com

www.sierratradingpost.com

www.rei.com

www.modernparentsmessykids.com/2012/10/outdoor-preschool-how-to-dress-for-hours-of-rain-cold.html

We recognize that it can be costly to outfit your child in quality clothing. Please let us know if this is something you need assistance with.

Labeling: We recommend putting your child's name in their clothing. Accidents happen, and it can be easy for clothing to get mixed up.

Accidents: Accidents happen! In the event of your child having an accident we will pull clothes from their cubby (and/or offer OIFS extra clothes to meet your child's needs) & change immediately. We will send dirty clothes home in a plastic bag at the end of the day.

Parent Participation

We believe that one of the things school can offer our children, which we ourselves cannot, is a new experience of autonomy and independence, as well as an opportunity to explore new social relations with both other adults and children. For this reason, the classroom is first and foremost the children's classroom, and we want to honor it as something they experience as theirs as they grow a new sense of responsibility and ownership. This does not mean that we intend to exclude parents, but rather to emphasize the children's ability to have things that are their own.

Parents are welcome to step inside their child's forest classroom at the end of the day, and are encouraged to take a look around and engage with their children & their community.

Additionally, throughout the school year, Orcas Island Forest School will host community potlucks, celebrations for the seasons, and educational gatherings to support communication & collaboration between us all. Please refer to the school calendar for scheduled events.

As we become more established, we are exploring the possibility of including parent volunteers in the classroom. Please let us know if this interests you.

Communication

An open line of communication enriches the educational experience of our students and is an essential element for building partnerships. We are a budding school, and the continuing success of this program depends on all of us to be communicating openly with one another. Please do not withhold any concerns you have about the school at any time. We are always happy to schedule time to discuss any academic, social, emotional, or developmental questions either by phone, e-mail or in person.

Please also let us know of any significant events in your child's life. Visitors, work trips, moving, new babies, divorce, illness or death can affect children in class. When we are informed about these changes we are better equipped to offer support and encouragement to your child.

Camp Orkila

We are so fortunate to have been granted use of Camp Orkila's beautiful land. They have been very generous and flexible in working with us to create the space for this school. Please help us express our thanks by considering yourself a steward of the land.

The teachers will meet you in the parking area beside the barn at 9 am each morning. At the end of the day, you are welcome to walk into the forest classroom to pick up your child.

***Please note: Please help us respect Camp Orkila and the property by keeping the children out of the barn at drop-off and pick up and by refraining from feeding the horses. It has come to our attention that some of the horses are on special diets and cannot eat the variety of foods that the children so generously offer them!**

Adjustment to Forest School

Starting school is a big step for most children. Some children are excited to participate and they easily acclimate to class. Other children are nervous at first but quickly 'warm up' as they get engaged in activities. Still others may have a longer adjustment period as they gradually become comfortable with a new environment and expectations. There is no right way for a child to adjust to preschool. Our expectations are open-ended and we understand your child will acclimate in their own unique way.

Occasionally a child who is eager at first may have difficulty later upon realizing the change is a permanent one. This adjustment is not necessarily related to a child's maturity level; every child handles new situations in his or her own way. We acknowledge these differences and provide support and encouragement to help each child adjust to our program.

Ritual and routine often support healthy transition for all - the child, the parents, and the teachers. We welcome the opportunity to brainstorm and practice the consistency that works best for you and your family.

Your Child's First Day

Please bring the following to the preschool on your child's first day:

- All required enrollment packet forms
- Backpack with: snack, lunch, water bottle, and layers
- Extra sets of clothing (we suggest labelling with your child's name)

Saying Goodbye

Figuring out the best way to support your child at drop-off can be anxiety-inducing process for parents as well as children. It is important to recognize that if a child does not know when the parent is leaving, there can be constant stress waiting for that moment and he/she may never fully settle. If you or your child is concerned about saying goodbye, we are more than happy to work with you to make a plan ahead of time.

The most important thing is to tell your child exactly what will happen and then follow through decisively.

Planning and practicing a routine the night before can be comforting for everyone involved. Let them learn how to let go and find their rhythm, make friends, and discover their favorite school-time activities while also communicating your confidence that they will do fine. When it comes time to say goodbye, trust that doing just that is the best course of action. It can be difficult to walk away on that first day of school, but in so doing you will assure your child that it is alright for them to do the same and join in with their peers. A quick, direct exit from the parking lot will provide secure boundaries for your child and signal to them that you are confident they are going to be happy and safe.

Drop-Off & Pick-Up

Because the children will walk into the classroom with the teachers each morning as a group, please aim to be at the parking lot by 8:55 each morning. We completely understand that any number of things can lead to being late, but please be aware that the group will be waiting.

The teachers will wait until 9:10 each day before heading into the woods. If you know you are running late, please call or text our school phone (360-298-5210). If you arrive later than 8:55, you are welcome to walk your child to the classroom, but please be respectful that the day is underway for the other children.

At the end of the day, we welcome parents to pick-up their children from the forest classroom. This will be a more informal time for witnessing what your children have created or discovered during the day, and having a chance to engage with the teachers and with other parents.

***Please note: For safety reasons, dogs are not permitted in the forest classroom. If you bring a furry friend along for drop-off or pick-up, please leave them in the car.**

Meals

We ask that you provide a healthy snack and lunch for your child. We think that it is appropriate for the children to have two mealtimes in the four hours that they will be in school, and will create time for that. Please be aware that we have to pack out anything we bring into the forest, and help us eliminate the trash we accumulate. Mealtime is also a cherished opportunity for children to practice autonomy.

Please consider the weather when packing lunch (can they eat this with gloves on?) and use container which support leftovers and are easy to open and close.

A Few Principles of Forest School

Play- The Forest School model assumes that Play is the most important work of the child. At OIFS we work to preserve a child's right to spend their time engaging their imagination, being physically active and having no concern for "clock time." Not long ago, it was commonplace for children to spend many uninterrupted hours outside playing, and it is our aim to preserve this as a right of childhood.

Work- When children are given responsibilities, they develop valuable new skills, such as perseverance, attention to detail and ownership. Simple chores, like tidying up an area, can give children a great sense of participation. At OIFS, children will be expected to care for their classroom and to take part in tasks that lead to ownership of their environment.

Social/Emotional Development- At OIFS, we see the social & emotional development of the child as one of our highest responsibilities. One of our greatest aims is to help children develop rich emotional lives by teaching them skills which empower them in social interactions & conflict resolution. This work takes time!

Expectations- Instead of the word “rules” we prefer to use “expectations,” because we believe it sets a tone that encourages a sense of responsibility in children without the risk of value judgement. We strongly believe that the children should have an active role in developing and implementing the expectations for their classroom, and our teachers will work with the children to ensure that everyone is and feels safe.

Emergent Curriculum- Through a child’s free play, learning unfolds naturally. At OIFS, it is the teacher’s role to stay in tune with each child - their interests and development - and expound upon learning opportunities as they come up. This journey and exploration is documented as a group in our Nature Journal, and is reflected upon and shared through parent newsletters and the OIFS blog.

OIFS PRACTICES & POLICIES

Kindness

“Kindness” is a key component underlying each and every interaction at Forest School. It is expected that both children and teachers are consciously kind to themselves, their peers, and their environment. This means taking the time to think about each action we make, every play we pursue, and the communication we engage in - as such thought encourages and supports a respectful and loving learning community.

Kindness towards ourselves is explored through allowing each child to be heard and respected in their needs and wants. We support and empower each child to express emotions, ideas, concerns, and needs - and equally expect that each child listen to one another. This is a vast journey for a young child, to identify, express, and respond to themselves. At Forest School, we value each child’s unique unfolding of personal awareness & expression.

Kindness towards each other is explored through daily social interaction and play. Children and teachers are expected to have an open ear and mind with others when communicating and listening to individual wants/needs. We follow an all inclusive guideline in play, in which children can brainstorm and create a way for all to be involved or may choose to step aside and play individually. We discourage “teasing” and “competition” between children, and ask that they alternatively engage in discussion about their personal capabilities, successes, challenges and offer ways to help others when needed. Children are also encouraged to compete instead with themselves - striving for personal growth and development.

Kindness towards our environment is constantly explored, as children play amongst living plants and wildlife. Unique to each moment, it is encouraged that children stop and ponder how their play affects the natural world. We practice gentle touch during tactile exploration and making use first of forest materials that have dropped to the ground in our play. It is a constantly evolving discussion of how to respectfully and kindly exist amongst the forest, and we never shy away from the conversation.

Bare Feet

At OIFS, we support the children's desire to remove their shoes and discover the earth with bare feet from time-to-time. We see this as a chance to make incredible new discoveries, both about our own bodies, and the nature around us. Through guided discussion, teachers and children moderate risk-taking and support the desire to climb and balance without shoes on. To limit beestings, we ask that children are seated while barefoot in the meadow, and do not permit running without shoes on.

Dogs

Dogs are not permitted in the forest classroom. If you bring a furry friend along for drop-off or pick-up, please leave them in the car.

Birthdays

We believe that it is important to mark the day of each student's birthday with a special ritual . At morning stump circle, we celebrate the "child of honor" with a natural crown, candle, song and a conversation about how different families celebrate birthdays. This simple practice gives the children a sense of reverence while also promoting celebration and diversity of culture.

We ask that families refrain from sending special foods or treats on their child's birthday, out of respect for the differing diets within the school.

Cold

We use a combination of many of the following techniques to ensure that children do not suffer in cold temperatures:

- Large fires
- Warm rocks
- "Eating gloves"
- Thermoses of hot water
- Regular walks
- Running/jumping games

40 ° Policy

If the temperature is 40°F or below, all children are required to wear non-cotton long underwear, a wool hat and wool socks.

If a student is not suitably dressed for the weather, parents may be contacted to bring appropriate gear and/or pick the child up from school.

Risk Assessment

At OIFS, we believe that it is important for children to take moderate risks in order to grow & develop. During free play children climb, run, jump, crawl, stumble, and physically explore the forest environment. In doing so, children develop their own sense of risk assessment and personal physical awareness, becoming more self sufficient, resilient, and active problem solvers. It is the responsibility of our teachers to observe and assess appropriate levels of risk to ensure that all children are safe.

Because the children will be outside in winter, we intend to introduce fire as an element of the classroom. We will have a designated fire ring, and the teachers will be responsible for assessing the readiness of the group in being prepared to follow expectations around safety with fire.

Sick Child Policy

Parents are required to keep children home if they exhibit any symptoms of illness as listed below. We understand the difficulty of this for working parents, but this must be done to maintain a healthy environment for everyone. Parents are obligated to report any communicable disease or condition (i.e., conjunctivitis, head lice, chicken pox, etc.) to the staff so that we can alert other parents as soon as possible. The nature of this program makes these standards especially important in order to prevent worsening or spread of symptoms. Please consider whether your child is able to be outside for three and a half hours in addition to the conditions listed below.

Please keep your child home if they have any of the following conditions:

- Fever of 100+: (Must be fever-free for 24 hours before returning)
- Diarrhea: More than one loose stool within a 24 hour period
- Vomiting: More than once in 24-hour period
- Severe coughing with runny nose and green mucus
- Rashes: (un-identifiable or non-typical rash)
- Pink-eye (conjunctivitis): Redness of eyelid, swelling and/or discharge Change of color of skin or eyes (may be signs of hepatitis)

- Unable to participate in normal activities including outdoor play
- Lice or scabies: For head lice, children and staff may return after treatment and no nits; for scabies, return after treatment.

Staff members will follow the same exclusion criteria as children.

If a child arrives at school and exhibits possible symptoms of an illness, we will move the child away from others and have them lie down quietly and rest where possible.

If a child continues to feel ill, we will call the parents. If parents cannot be reached, a relative or emergency contact will be called to pick the child up.

In the case of minor injury, the child's parents will be notified and an Incident Report will be completed. If a child has a head or eye injury, the parent will be notified by phone. In the case of an emergency involving serious illness or injury, parents and 911 will be called.

Medication

Any medication or special medical procedures will be administered only with a signed Medication Authorization form (available upon request) from the parents or guardians. They are required for all types of medication, including non-prescription medication such as Tylenol, sunscreen, Chap Stick, lotions and ointments, etc. Please follow the procedures below:

- Prescription drugs must be in the original prescription bottle with the child's name and dose indicated on the bottle
- Non-prescription medications must be in the original container with the child's first and last name and the date it was brought to school written on the container.
- Medication will only be administered to the limit of the instructions on the label.
- All medications must be dispensed by a staff member and may not be kept in the child's possession.

Child Abuse Reporting

As required by Washington State Law, suspected child abuse and/or neglect will be reported to Child Protective Services (CPS). Directors are responsible for submitting reports. Under law, child care personnel do not notify parents when CPS has been called about possible abuse, neglect or exploitation except on the recommendations of CPS or police personnel.

Car Seat Safety

Washington State law requires that children less than eight years old must be restrained in child restraint systems, unless the child is 4'9" or taller. Childcare providers are mandatory reporters and will report any child not safely secured upon arrival or departure from the center.

Anti-Harassment

We are committed to providing a work environment where staff and families are treated with respect. We will not tolerate harassment from staff, families, vendors or visitors. Harassment takes many forms, and can include unwelcome comments, slurs, jokes, innuendoes, cartoons, pranks or other verbal or physical conduct that creates an uncomfortable working environment.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Orcas Island Forest School does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion or age in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, and all other school-administered programs.

Confidentiality

Orcas Island Forest School respects the privacy of every child and family and holds confidential all records regarding your child's personal information. All records will be kept secure in the child's file. Only the school directors and lead staff have access to these records. Orcas Island Forest School will always seek your permission to share information with other professionals.