

Nature Preschool Family Handbook

This handbook is intended to provide additional program information beyond what is available on our website, including information on vaccinations, toileting, equity, behavior, weather and safety-related cancellations, and more for parents and guardians with children registered in our Nature Preschool program. Wild Whatcom reserves the right to amend policies and procedures in this handbook, but if so, will notify guardians if they have already registered. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you have questions or concerns.

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Health and Wellness

The health and safety of our participants and staff is a priority at Wild Whatcom. To help us ensure everyone's safety, please do not bring your child to program if they are experiencing cold or flu symptoms, COVID-19 symptoms, or other unexplained symptoms (e.g. those not related to a chronic health condition or allergies). If unexplained symptoms arise during the course of programming, the emergency contact(s) listed during registration may be contacted for early pick-up.

Immunizations

To protect all children and staff, and as per Washington State law, each child in our program must provide a completed Certificate of Immunization Status (CIS) signed by a health care provider **or** print a completed CIS by signing up with [MyIR](#). The official CIS form or a copy of both sides of that form is required (other forms/printouts are not accepted in place of the CIS form). View the Washington State Department of Health's *School and Child Care Immunization* page for more information (link last updated Jan 1, 2024):

<https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/schools/immunization/families>.

For questions regarding the CIS or immunizations, please email info@wildwhatcom.org.

All employees and volunteers at the program are required to provide an immunization record indicating that they have received the MMR vaccine or proof of immunity.

Children are required to be vaccinated or show proof of acquired immunity against the following vaccine-preventable diseases:

- **Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis (DTaP/DT)**
- **Polio (IPV)**
- **Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)**
- **Hepatitis B**
- **Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) until age 5**
- **Varicella (Chicken Pox)**
- **Pneumococcal bacteria (PCV) until age 5**
- *See the WA Department of Health '[IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS: School Requirements](#)' chart for or more information.*

Immunization records are reviewed regularly until the child is fully immunized.

If a parent/guardian chooses to exempt their child from immunization requirements, they must complete and sign the Certificate of Exemption (COE) form, which accompanies the CIS form. The child's health care provider must also sign the COE form for a medical, religious, or personal/philosophical exemption. For information about COE's please visit the FAQ section of the Washington State Department of Health's *School and Child Care Immunization* page for more information (link last updated Feb 1, 2023):

<https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/schools/immunization#regs>.

No health care provider signature is required for a "religious membership" exemption.

As of July 2019, state law prohibits personal and philosophical exemptions for the MMR vaccine.

Medical and religious exemptions are allowed for children.

Children who are not immunized may not be accepted for care during an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease. This is for the protection of the unimmunized child and to reduce the spread of the disease. This determination will be made by Public Health's Communicable Disease and Epidemiology division. A current list of exempted children is maintained at all times.

Health History

As a part of Wild Whatcom's registration process, all participants/families are required to fill out a health history form during registration with up-to-date medical information. This information is crucial to ensure the highest level of safety possible for all participants. The more information you share, the better prepared we will be. This information will be shared internally on a need-to-know basis with those responsible for participants' care and treated confidentially.

Medications

Medication is given only with prior written consent of a child's parent/guardian. A completed [Child Care Medication Authorization Form](#) indicates written consent.

Prescription medications

Prescription medications can be administered to a child in care by an early learning provider only if the medication meets all of the following requirements:

1. Prescribed by a health care provider with prescriptive authority for a specific child;
2. Include a label with:
 - a. Child's first and last name;
 - b. Date prescription was filled;
 - c. Prescribing health provider's name and contact information;
 - d. Expiration date;
 - e. Dosage amount;
 - f. Length of time to give the medication; and
 - g. Instructions for administration and storage;
3. Accompanied with a completed Child Care Medication Authorization Form signed by a parent/guardian;
4. Only given to the child named on the prescription.

Over-the-counter (non-prescription) medications:

If following the instructions on the label and dosage recommendations for the child's age on an over-the-counter medication, it can be administered to a child in care by an early learning provider only if the medication meets all of the following criteria:

1. It is in its original packaging;
2. Labeled with the child's first and last name; and
3. Accompanied with a completed Child Care Medication Authorization Form signed by the parent/guardian.

If an over-the-counter medication's label instruction doesn't include age, expiration date, dosage amount, and/or length of time to give the medication/product, as is often the case for vitamins, herbal supplements, fluoride supplements, homeopathic or naturopathic medication, and teething gel or tablets, it must be accompanied with a completed Medication Form that is signed by the health care provider with prescriptive authority.

An over the counter-medication is given only to the child named on the label provided by the parent/guardian.

Non-medical products:

A parent/guardian must provide written annual consent (valid for up to 12 months) for the following non-medical products to be given or applied to a child by the early learning provider:

1. Sunscreen;
2. Hand sanitizers or hand wipes with alcohol; and
3. Lip balm or lotion.

Parent/guardian instructions (for duration, dosage, amount, frequency, etc.) on the Child Care Medication Authorization Form are required to be consistent with any label recommendations, prescription, or instructions from a health care provider.

Medication and non-medical products are not accepted if they are expired.

Written consent for medications covers only the course of illness or specific time-limited episode.

Medication is added to a child's food or liquid only with the written consent of a healthcare provider.

Homemade medication, such as sunscreen, cannot be accepted by an early learning provider or given to a child in care.

Medication Storage

Medication is stored in teacher backpacks and is:

- Inaccessible to children;
- Separate from food;
- Separate from staff medication;
- Protected from sources of contamination;
- Away from heat, light, and sources of moisture;
- At temperature specified on the label (i.e., at room temperature or refrigerated);
- So that internal (designed to be swallowed, inhaled, or injected) and external (applied to outside of body) medications are separated; and
- In a sanitary and orderly manner.

Rescue medication (e.g., EpiPen® or inhaler) is stored in the lead mentor's backpack or carried in their pocket to keep a stable temperature when cold outside.

Controlled substances (e.g., ADHD medication) are stored in a locked container or cabinet which is inaccessible to children. Controlled substances are counted and tracked with a controlled substance form.

Medications no longer being used are promptly returned to parents/guardians, or discarded in accordance with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommendations for medication disposal. Medications are not disposed of in the sink or toilet.

Staff medication is stored out of reach of children. Staff medication is clearly labeled as such.

Toileting and Potty Training

Pre-Program Requirements

Our requirements are that children are 3 years old by September 1st of the year in which they enroll in Nature Preschool, and that they be out of diapers and need minimal assistance with toileting.

We will primarily use the private Chuckanut Center restroom facilities or the “nature potty” while on-site. We may occasionally use the public bathrooms at Fairhaven Park. If so, we may encounter members of the public when using restrooms. Wild Whatcom mentors will always accompany children inside the bathroom. A mentor will check the restroom before a child goes inside to assess whether it is safe to enter. Children will use restrooms when no other park visitors are present unless their toilet needs are urgent.

Toileting FAQ

How often will my child have access to the restroom?

We will start and end the day, at the very least, near a restroom. The bathrooms will be checked for cleanliness and safety prior to the children’s use and the toilet seats, sinks, or other surfaces that children touch will be cleaned and disinfected daily. Step stools for the toilet and sink as well as a smaller toilet seat to put on top of the regular toilet seat are provided if needed.

How does outdoor bathrooming work?

Children will likely need to use the “nature potty” at some point during their school year. We will ensure that children understand how to use the nature bathroom before they need to use it. This means they will pee in the bushes and use “blue bag” systems for solid waste.

If a child needs to use the bathroom for solid waste, we will try to get them to the nearest toilet but are prepared to use the bathroom outdoors if a toilet is too far away or it becomes an “emergency” for the child. Wild Whatcom uses what is commonly referred to as a “blue bag system,” packing out solid human waste in a multi-bag system in order to reduce our environmental impact. While this can be a source of anxiety for new participants, using blue bags does not have to be scary, and many note that it is actually much easier than digging catholes (another backcountry solid

waste disposal method). Mentors will provide instruction on how to use the bathroom outdoors before participants are required to do so.

If you have any concerns or questions, or would like help teaching your child how to use the nature bathroom, we are happy to help. Practicing with your child can make this process much easier in a nature preschool setting!

What if my child has an accident?

While we require that children are largely independent when bathrooming prior to registration for nature preschool, we understand that accidents happen! If a child has a bathroom accident, we will assist the child in changing into clean clothes if needed and place soiled clothing in a separate plastic bag. We will inform guardians of any accidents, send home soiled clothing, and request clean replacement clothing be provided to keep on site or in the child's backpack.

Equity

Wild Whatcom staff and board of directors are united in a commitment to prioritize building equity in our community and the outdoor education industry, ensuring equal access to the outdoors, and creating thoughtful learning environments for kids and adults. Check out our [Commitment to Equity](#) on our website.

This is, and will be, a continuing conversation we have with each other, our participants and families, our funders, our partners, and you as we continue to learn, grow, and act together.

What this looks like in Wild Whatcom's Nature Preschool:

Gender/Pronouns

At nature preschool, we want to ensure everyone feels safe, valued, and respected. One way we foster these values is by making an effort to use everyone's identified pronouns. By 3 years of age, most children recognize and label gender groups and also label their own gender.¹ We provide space both in our registration process and the preschool day for pronouns to be shared so that we may encourage children to use an individual's identified pronouns as a way of promoting respect for others.

¹ Mayo Clinic. (2021, January 16). *Children and gender identity: Supporting your child*. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/children-and-gender-identity/art-20266811>

Indigenous Learning

Wild Whatcom acknowledges that the learning and playing we do at the Chuckanut Center and along the trails we explore take place on the traditional territory of the Coast Salish people, including the [Lhag'temish \(Lummi\)](#) and the [Nuxwsa'7aq \(Nooksack\)](#) peoples. They are the original stewards of this land, and we believe it is important to honor their knowledge and relationship with the land. Some ways we do this include:

- Learning indigenous names for plants and some of their traditional uses
- Learning Nooksack words during our opening circle
- Learning to love the environment we play in and how to care for it (only playing with the materials nature has to offer that are dead, downed, and detached; picking up our trash)

Anti-Racist Learning

Early childhood is a critical time when children are developing their ideas and attitudes about race. Children start forming racial biases as early as infancy and by the time they reach ages 4 and 5 they peak in their outward expressions of racial prejudice.

In order to work toward creating an anti-racist space, we try to create a loving community, practice self-love, and embrace everyone's uniqueness and differences. We read stories with people of different races and ethnicities, and learn about various cultures.

Different Learning Styles

We recognize that children have a wide array in ways that they learn best and that there is not one correct way to learn. In order to support children's various needs, we provide options and a variety of means to learning. Some of these include:

- Incorporating visuals where possible
- Children are allowed to sit or stand in our circle
- Children may fidget with nature items during circle time
- If children are not ready to join the whole group for circle time, they may sit close by so they can still hear
- Adapting activities and art projects to meet different sensory needs

Behavior

Assessing behavior prior to enrolling your child

In addition to the above-mentioned requirements around toileting, there are a few signs of behavior that will let Wild Whatcom mentors know that your child is ready to join our program.

- Group orientation: your child will come to circle on their own some of the time
- Impulse control: your child will not run out into a street (or any other dangerous situation) after being told
- Situational awareness: your child can understand sometimes how their actions affect others

If your child routinely runs away from you, cannot follow safety instructions such as “do not go into the street or touch a dangerous object”, or has no interest or awareness of their peers, you may want to discuss with a staff member if your child is ready to join our program. If our staff sees these behaviors during the program, we will initiate a conversation with you as described below.

Behavior and socio-emotional learning

At Wild Whatcom we pride ourselves on helping children to learn socio-emotional skills in addition to naturalist and wilderness skills. We strive for the success and inclusion of all of our participants. Children will receive supportive and positive guidance to encourage desired and developmentally appropriate behavior.

If a dangerous or destructive behavior occurs during the program, mentors will address and seek to resolve it directly with the child using positive reinforcement and redirection. We encourage children to solve conflicts on their own while offering them the tools and guidance to do so. Below are a few examples of behavior and resolution strategies we may use:

- If a child takes an object from another child, we give the child guidance in how they might be able to ask for that object. Ex. “Can I have a turn with that?” If the other child says no, we might then encourage the first child to look for their own object, ask another child with that same object, or encourage the child with the object to let them know how many more minutes they would like to use it for.

- If a child pushes someone, we might offer them the idea to say, “Excuse me.” We might ask why they pushed them and then try to resolve the underlying conflict. We also encourage them to make amends, checking to see if their friend is ok and saying “sorry.”
- Repeated unprovoked hurting of another child, using objects as weapons to injure staff or children, or any behavior that compromises the Mentors’ ability to maintain safe overview of the outdoor classroom for an extended period of time leads to a call to the guardian(s) to come and take the child home.
- Behavior that leads to injury of another child, a staff member, or the destruction of an object will be detailed with an incident report and guardians will be informed by the end of the program day.

Every effort will be made to help guardians and children resolve difficulties that may arise in the program. Steps toward resolution may include:

- Scheduling a guardian/Mentor conference
- Developing a written plan of action agreed upon by guardians and Mentors
- Possible withdrawal of the child if a behavioral problem is so severe that no positive solution can be found

The following behaviors or situations may result in removal of your child from our program:

- Inability to adjust to the program after 30 days of enrollment
- Serious injury of a child or staff member, 3 or more incident reports for similar behavior or habitual behavior that compromises the safety of the children
- Regularly running or wandering away from staff or secure locations
- Inability to follow safety directions, even after repeated requests and reinforcement from guardians

We always want to provide a safe and positive learning experience for children in our care. We also recognize that we might not be able to provide care that is supportive for all children, especially in an outdoor setting; in this case, we will do what we can to help you find the care your child deserves elsewhere.

Mandated Reporting

Wild Whatcom’s staff have a duty to protect children. Staff will report suspected or known incidents of physical, emotional or sexual abuse; and neglect, maltreatment or exploitation of a child to Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Weather and Safety-related Cancellations, Program Gear and Clothing

Weather and Safety-related Cancellations

Wild Whatcom has an extensive Risk Management Plan containing the guidelines and policies upon which staff rely to facilitate safe outdoor experiences. These policies include decision making processes regarding inclement weather such as high winds, extreme heat and cold, air quality and other major weather events. We will do our best to amend our school day in order to run during inclement weather. However, when weather conditions make it unsafe to run a least a portion of the school day outdoors/under shelter, Wild Whatcom reserves the right to cancel all or part of the school day. We will alert families as soon as possible via email and phone.

The cost of the program assumes up to two (2) days of weather and/or safety-related cancellation without refund. Three or more cancellations will result in a prorated refund or credit option.

Packing Overview

When packing, check for detailed weather forecasts at [NOAA](#) or [Weather Underground](#). Plan and prepare using their forecast and this pack list as a guide. This list has essentials that we expect will be needed throughout the year. Please pack according to the weather and conditions, keeping in my mind that extra warm and waterproof layers are always a good idea!

Each day your child will bring a backpack small enough to carry comfortably, that holds a snack, a lunch, a bottle of water, and extra clothes. They will be expected to carry their backpacks with them as we explore our trails. A list of appropriate gear and clothing can be found below. **Please also send your child with a change of clothes, including pants, top, underwear, and extra socks.** In addition to a change of clothes stored in their backpacks, if you are able to provide an extra labeled bag of spare clothes we can store on site, we have found that to be helpful. We highly



recommend labeling everything with your child's first and last name as gear can easily get mixed up!

Loaner Gear: We have gear and clothing available to loan. If obtaining any of this gear is keeping you from participating, please contact us and we will work to get you everything you need! Also, note that consignment and thrift stores can be less expensive sources for outdoor clothing. **Fill out [this form](#) to apply for free loaner gear** for the season or full year. We will get back to you as soon as possible about availability and pick up.

Check out our custom page at www.outdoorschoolshop.com/schools/wild-whatcom/ and use code: **WHATCOM** for 15% off your order on outdoor gear.

Layering

Learning to layer your child's clothing appropriately for the weather is a skill all families will practice during the course of the school year. See Wild Whatcom's [Essentials of Layering](#) to decide how to dress your child for the current weather/season. **Even when rain is not present or forecast, please pack your child's rain gear or dress them in rain gear. Default to dressing in rain gear in the winter months!** It acts as a windproof and warming layer when it's not raining, and the ground is often still wet and muddy. Also, sometimes rain will happen even when not in the forecast.

Printable Nature Preschool Pack List

Footwear

- ❑ *Insulated Rain Boots OR Rain Boots with separate liner: 1 pair*
 - Many days during the school year are wet or rainy. Insulated rain boots will allow participants to explore wet areas and puddles, without compromising warmth or dryness!
- ❑ *Wool or Insulating Socks: 1 pair to wear, 1-2 extra pair*
 - *Insulating socks are a must in the cold wet weather! They provide much needed warmth during damp weather. Please send your child with 1-2 extra pair in their backpack.*

Clothing

- ❑ Long Underwear Top and Bottom: 1 each
 - *Wicking (synthetic or wool-blend) long underwear bottom and long-sleeve top*
 - *Example materials: wool, wool synthetic blend, capilene. No cotton!*
- ❑ Long Pants: 1
 - *Quick-dry, lightweight material. Even on warm days, we request long pants to protect children from scratches and sunburn.*
 - *These pants will serve as the outer layer during warm/dry days when rain/shell pants may remain in children's backpacks.*
 - *Elastic waistbands are easiest for children while toileting.*
- ❑ Warm Pants: 1 pair
 - *Warm fleece pants or extra pair of heavyweight wicking (synthetic or wool-blend) long underwear.*
 - *Fleece pajamas can be a great inexpensive option. Elastic waistbands are easiest for children while toileting.*
- ❑ Fleece Sweater/Jacket: 1
 - *Lightweight, fits over base layers*
- ❑ Rain Pants & Rain Jacket OR One Piece Rainsuit
 - *Waterproof*
 - *Must fit over all layers*
- ❑ Cold weather Jacket: 1
 - *Warm, synthetic jacket or down jacket. Note: Down is 50% warmer than synthetic and considerably lighter weight and compressible, but more sensitive to moisture - and more expensive.*
- ❑ Hats: 1-2
 - *Warm hat*
 - *Hat: brimmed, lightweight for sun protection (sun hat, visor, or baseball cap)*
- ❑ Mittens or Gloves: 2-3 pairs
 - *Thin mittens/gloves can be a helpful option to wear for more dexterity for certain tasks, such as eating or art, and they can be layered under shell/rain mittens. Please also include warmer mittens on chilly days!*

- ❑ Rain/Shell Mittens
 - *Waterproof, fit over thin gloves/mittens*

Gear/Personal Items

- ❑ Backpack
 - *Comfortable enough to carry, but large enough to contain lunch/snack, water bottle, and extra clothing*
 - *It is helpful to have a chest strap to keep the backpack secure on the child's back, while exploring the trails.*
 - *For our rainy days, it is helpful to keep extra clothes inside a plastic bag to keep them dry. A rain cover for the backpack could also be used.*
- ❑ Spare plastic bag for wet/muddy clothes
- ❑ 8-12 oz water bottle (filled)
- ❑ Lunch Box w/ lunch and snack
- ❑ Medication w/ Medication Form (if child will take medication during program)
- ❑ Change of clothing:
 - *Pants, top, underwear, and socks*
 - *One set in backpack everyday; one set in a separate, labeled plastic bag to be kept on site*
- ❑ Reusable napkin/cloth for dirty hands or runny noses
- ❑ Please apply sunscreen (when needed) to your child's exposed skin before program. Wild Whatcom provides SPF 50 sunscreen for Mentors to re-apply as needed throughout the day to the exposed skin of children whose families consent.

Please DO NOT Pack

- Valuable items that may get lost, stolen, or damaged.
- Medications or vitamins of any kind that are not listed on your health form.
- Toys, blankets, or stuffed animals ("stuffedies") from home