

Out to Play Parent Handbook

Summer 2025



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Land Acknowledgment

We are grateful to learn and play on the traditional and unceded land of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg Nation. We acknowledge the First Nation people who have been here before us, and who are still here.

Welcome to Out to Play

Out to Play is a community of families and educators committed to seeing more children playing outside on the land.

A pedagogy

All Out to Play programs are rooted in holding space for play and connection to the land. We follow the Forest and Nature School approach offering:

- child-centred, curiosity-led, educator-supported, learning and connection through play on the land.
- regular and repeated access to natural spaces to offer relationship to the land knowing it nurtures our relationship with each other, and ourselves
- curious and affirming language that supports self awareness and deepens relationships

Location and Directions

Out to Play programs take place on-site at the Out to Play Centre (230 Davidson's Side Road, Nepean, ON K2K 2Z4, access through NCC Greenbelt P2), and on public land across the city of Ottawa and Gatineau.

The 2025 day camp programs take place at the Out to Play Centre and The Nest.

The Nest - A cabin with a fire circle, loose parts, mud kitchens, access to public trails, the Deep Dark Woods, and the marsh. Parking is along the farm lane at 230 Davidson's Side Road. Drop off is a short 2min walk.

The Out to Play Centre - Large canvas wall-tents in a meadow surrounded by forests, and a creek, with lots of loose parts, and mud kitchens. Parking is off Carling, at the NCC Greenbelt P2 parking lot. Drop off is a 4min walk along the #10 trail.



What to Expect

Forest Friends - The Fox and Crow Programs

On your child's first day they'll arrive and be greeted by their educators, who will show them where to put their backpack and their extra gear. They'll be invited to join into the play or welcomed to watch until they are ready. Children may be playing in the junkyard, building with large scrap materials, or searching for frogs in the grasses. Some children might be at the mud kitchen, baking mud muffins sprinkled with cedar and grasses, or sitting in the shade drawing or reading. Sometimes they're building muddy sculptures and digging tunnels.

Your child might easily join play or they might need some time. Our educators will step in to help your child transition. They might introduce your child to friends or play alongside them to scaffold that process. If your child is struggling with drop-off, we will stay close, read a story, perhaps write you a letter together, or sit down to snack. We'll encourage you to say goodbye and head off.

After snack the group hikes out to a play space in the shade. There they might hang up hammocks, build a slackline or invent a new game. They'll lunch together and hike back in time to meet you for pick-up. Our days are warm and sunny, so you'll receive a detailed welcome letter sharing how to dress and what to pack to help your child have a wonderful and playful day.

Adventure Camp - The Wolf Program

Adventure Camp days follows the same rhythm as the Forest Friends, with a focus on skill-building. In 2025- each Adventure Camp week will offer a broad range of interest-led skill-building instruction including orienteering, fire-building and shelter-building.

A Typical Day

A call gathers the children for circle time and story. Each day's story connects children to the land and each other. It may offer inspiration for play or suggestions for managing challenges they could encounter. After story the children will hike out to a play space on the land to create, play, and build. Quiet moments will be offered through sit spots and stories to offer some rest through the day. Closing circle offers them a moment to reflect on their day, nurture relationships and share with the group. Their bags will be packed up and when you arrive they might be playing or reading.

Is it "just" play? Yes, it is! It's play that sparks children's imagination and follows their curiosities. Play builds friendships and helps children nurture their generous, kind and collaborative selves. It offers opportunities to navigate conflicts and tensions. It offers organic emergent learning as children test their environment, building simple machines and learning the laws of the natural environment. It's play that holds space for children to consider and assess risk, to feel the scary-funny feeling in their body and make the choice to try that scary thing or change their plans. Play is an incredible and powerful way to learn.

You can learn more about Forest and Nature Schools by visiting the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada at www.childnature.ca.





Preparing for Forest School

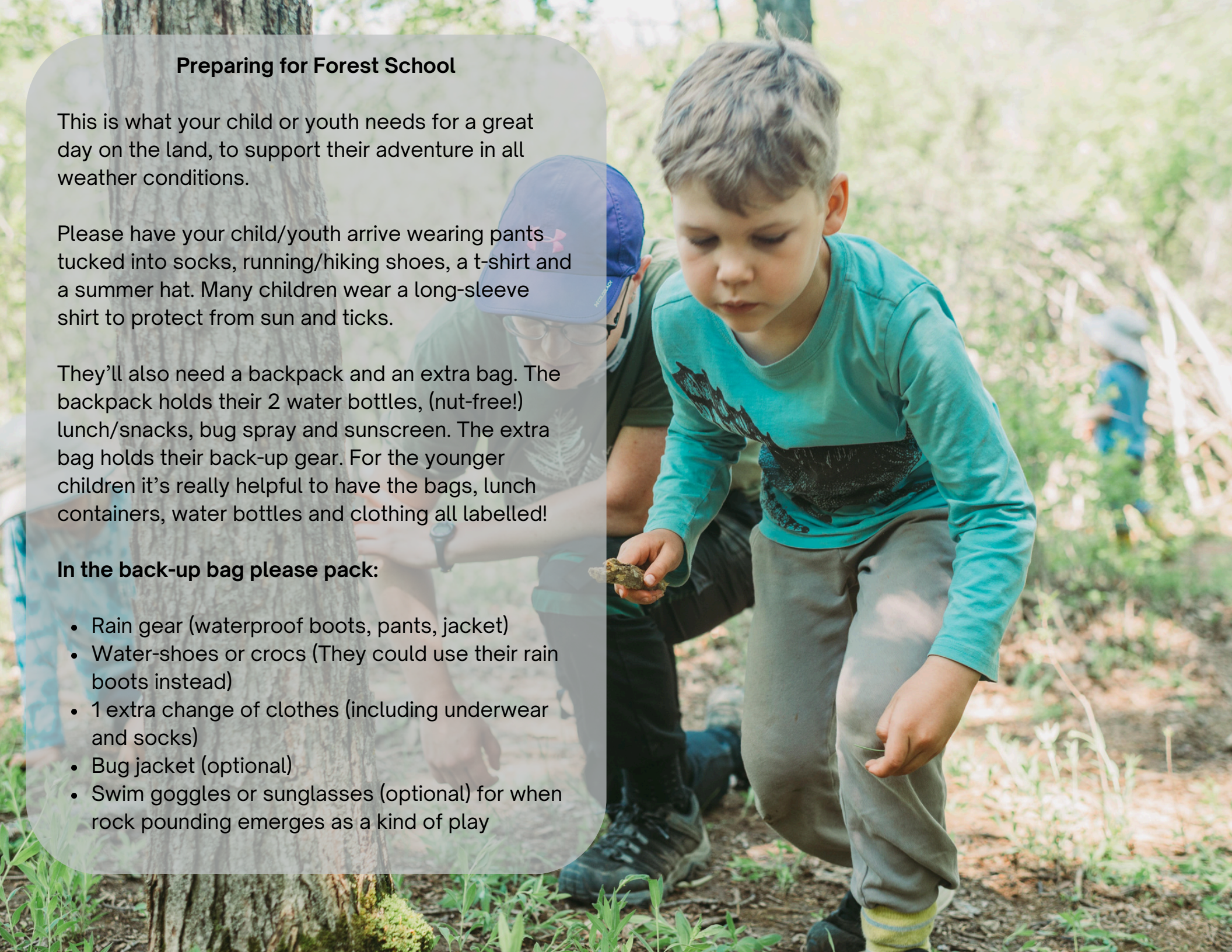
This is what your child or youth needs for a great day on the land, to support their adventure in all weather conditions.

Please have your child/youth arrive wearing pants tucked into socks, running/hiking shoes, a t-shirt and a summer hat. Many children wear a long-sleeve shirt to protect from sun and ticks.


They'll also need a backpack and an extra bag. The backpack holds their 2 water bottles, (nut-free!) lunch/snacks, bug spray and sunscreen. The extra bag holds their back-up gear. For the younger children it's really helpful to have the bags, lunch containers, water bottles and clothing all labelled!

In the back-up bag please pack:

- Rain gear (waterproof boots, pants, jacket)
- Water-shoes or crocs (They could use their rain boots instead)
- 1 extra change of clothes (including underwear and socks)
- Bug jacket (optional)
- Swim goggles or sunglasses (optional) for when rock pounding emerges as a kind of play







We're grateful to this land that offers us space to move and play and grow food and build imaginary spaceships and play tag along paths in the hayfield.

Behaviour Guidance and Support

Out to Play's approach, child-centred, interest-led, inquiry-driven, educator-supported learning through play on the land applies to all aspects of our work, including our behaviour guidance with children. Our team uses PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) to build relationship, create a safe space and respond to unsafe or unkind behaviors. Educators play alongside children using strategies that include physical proximity, storytelling, humour and dialogue to support children in building positive and meaningful relationships with each other and the land.

When inappropriate or unsafe choices are impacting the well-being of a child or the group, staff will offer PACE-full support, clear feedback and redirection. When a child is dysregulated and needs time to reset, additional staff may be required to join so one educator can be with that child. Several steps are taken afterwards to communicate with the team and the child's trusted adults.

Inappropriate behaviours at Out to Play include disrespectful language or actions, swearing, sexual gestures/comments, excluding children from play or otherwise contributing to an unsafe community culture. Behaviours defined as **unsafe** include leaving the group, non-consensual physical contact, striking another child with their own body or another object, physical, emotional and verbal aggression, words that are sexist, homophobic, transphobic or racist, and continued high-risk choices.

We are committed to meeting children where they are at and have developed a step-by-step process, when we are encountering one time issues or patterns of behavior that fall under the above categories.

We begin each season with a social contract or community standard agreement with the children.

When encountering inappropriate or unsafe behaviours we use a PACE-full response, and inform the team to ensure everyone has an understanding of the behavior and the ways we are responding. One person will be the point person for the process of managing the behaviour and communicating with families.

We inform parents as soon as possible, preferably at pick up, or by email/phone when a pick-up conversation is not possible.

We inform both/all parents – the child(ren) who displayed behaviour and those impacted by behaviour.

When inappropriate or unsafe behaviours show up repeatedly after continued support we:

Share with parents and agree on a strategy to support the child.

Contract with the child and parent together with clear expectations.

May call for an early pick up or arrange for half days to scaffold the learning until the child is able to be with the group for a day without the unsafe behaviour.

If the expectations to stay with the group and make safe choices are not possible for your child, Out to Play will endeavour to offer the 1:1 option (a fee applies) or alternative programming. We're aligned with you in raising up your children. You'll find us collaborative in addressing these issues.



Registration, Payment and Refund Policies

Registration must be completed in full before the program begins. Through the Out to Play Jumbula Registration system, once your account is created each registration will be a quick process.

Registration includes your agreement to the Assumption of Risks Informed Consent, COVID-19 Agreement and Medical Consent, which are required for any Out to Play program.

Payment must be made in full for the duration of the daycamp weeks. We can accept e-transfer if you are unable to pay with your credit card but **this needs to be prearranged (before registration) with the Out to Play office.**

Refund Policy

In the unusual situation that camp is cancelled due to low participation or for any other reason every effort will be made to find a suitable substitute for your child. If we are unable to provide a satisfactory substitute, your fees will be fully refunded to the same method of payment.

In the case that you need to cancel your registration please note:

Each child's week's registration fee includes a \$55.00 non-refundable administration fee. This fee will be waived if the amount is left as an account credit.

Cancellations before June 1 2025 will be honoured with a full refund.

Cancellations after June 1 2025 are non-refundable with the exception of extraordinary circumstances, with medical documentation.

We regret that spaces cannot be sold, given away or transferred.

To cancel your registration please email info@outtoplay.ca with your child's name and the weeks of the camp you require to be canceled. We appreciate your patience with the refund process, the summer camp weeks are busy and our admin team works hard.



Social Media Policy

You can find us at:

Facebook: Out to Play Farm and Forest School or @OuttoPlayOttawa

Instagram: @outtoplayottawa.

We share photos of our Farm and Forest School site, urban wild spaces across the city, and children moving and playing on the land together. Our Photo Consent requests your consent for both Out to Play.

Your consent is not required for registration. We'll respect your choices in this regard.

FOOD POLICIES

Vegetables from the garden

At the Out to Play Centre children may pick tomatoes, kale, or other vegetables from the garden to snack on. We love to watch children build a relationship with the land through growing food. If your child has an allergy to tomatoes, peas, carrots or kale, please make sure to include this information in your registration.

Nut-Free Zone

Out to Play is a nut-free zone. Some of the children in our groups have life-threatening allergies. Soy and sunflower seed substitutes for nut butters are welcome.

Snack-Sharing

Children in Out to Play programs are not permitted to share snacks. We know sharing snacks can put some children at risk. We are present with the group when they are eating. Serious allergies in children's groups will be communicated to all families in that group.

Birthday Celebrations

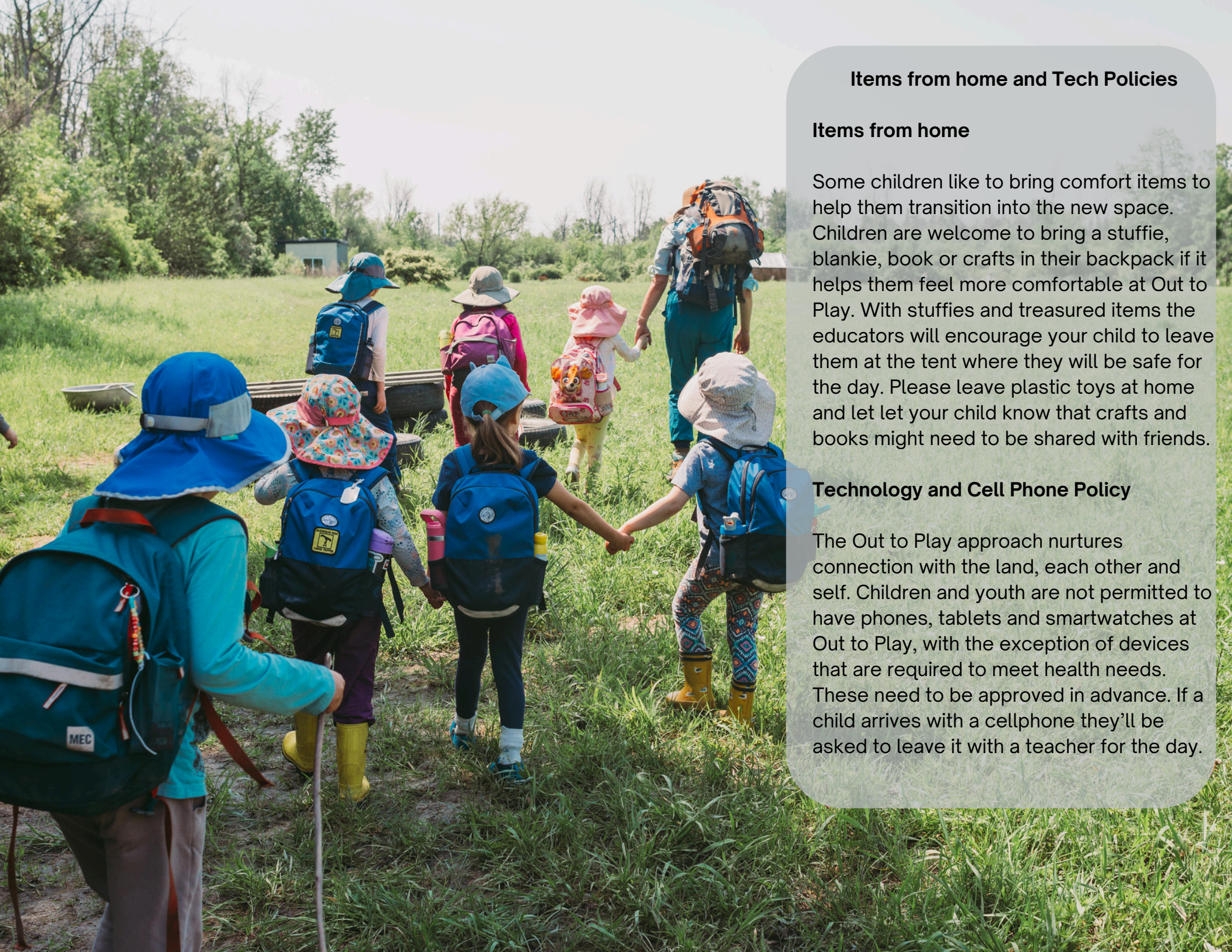
While we cannot accommodate shared treats coming to Out to Play with your child we promise a warm and intentional birthday celebration. We celebrate children's birthdays by gathering together and listening to a birthday story.

Garbage-Less Lunches

Please try to send a garbage-less lunch with your child. Children will need to pack their garbage home with them. Children also carry their own lunch-bags and water on the hike with them so while we recommend a hearty lunch, please try to use light containers.

Hand Washing and Drinking Water

Participants will be asked to sanitize or wash their hands with soap and water before eating and after using the bathroom. They will also be able to refill their water bottles on site with water.



Items from home and Tech Policies

Items from home

Some children like to bring comfort items to help them transition into the new space. Children are welcome to bring a stuffie, blankie, book or crafts in their backpack if it helps them feel more comfortable at Out to Play. With stuffies and treasured items the educators will encourage your child to leave them at the tent where they will be safe for the day. Please leave plastic toys at home and let your child know that crafts and books might need to be shared with friends.

Technology and Cell Phone Policy

The Out to Play approach nurtures connection with the land, each other and self. Children and youth are not permitted to have phones, tablets and smartwatches at Out to Play, with the exception of devices that are required to meet health needs. These need to be approved in advance. If a child arrives with a cellphone they'll be asked to leave it with a teacher for the day.



Out to Play Ecological Value-Impact Assessment

Out to Play has environmental preservation and education at the root of our approach. We know that to love the land is to care for it, so our approach is to nurture in children that love for the land.

We know that if children build the awareness that they feel strong, healthy and grounded when they are playing outside then they'll return to that grateful reciprocal relationship with the land, as adults.

We know also, that to play on the land is to have an impact. Flowers will be picked, branches will be snapped, young plants underfoot will be trampled and new trails will emerge.

Out to Play has an Ecological Value-Impact Assessment that guides our approach and our decisions in play. This document assesses the value of the play experience, and the impact on the land to help us make a decision that considers and values the natural environment.

You are welcome to request to see our Ecological Impact-Value Assessment.



Our Approach to Safety and Well-being on the Land

Poison Ivy and Wild Parsnip Policy

Poison ivy and wild parsnip are present along the trails on NCC land and forests through the Spring, Summer and Fall. To limit exposure, we rely on education and awareness. We also require that all participants wear long pants, long socks, and closed-toe shoes while taking part in our programs in all seasons. Staff carry water and soap at all times to wash any accidentally exposed skin, which will reduce the possibility of an allergic reaction.

Tick Policy

We know there are ticks in the forests and fields we play in through most of the seasons. Our educators dress to limit the possibility of exposure to ticks and they'll help your children do the same. Please tuck long pants into socks and tuck shirts into pants. We use deet-free (icaridin) bug spray on clothes. After lunch all children are checked for ticks before they head back out to play. If a tick is ever found on your child we'll remove it properly and let you know so you can decide if there are steps you'd like to take. Every day when you arrive home, do a full-body check for ticks.

More information about ticks in Ottawa can be found at the City of Ottawa Public Health website:

<https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/index.aspx>

Head Lice Policy

As with any children's program, head lice could be present at Out to Play. If head lice or nits are present, please contact Out to Play immediately so that other families can be informed. We recommend that families follow the treatment suggestions on the information sheet provided by Ottawa Public Health.

Inclement Weather Policy

Our program stays open in most weather. Group programs, summer camp and 1:1 programs continue to run as scheduled through rain, thunderstorms, sunny hot days, snow, and deep cold. To see the circumstances where program is cancelled, please see our Extreme Weather Policy on the next page.



Extreme Weather Policy

At Out to Play the weather is a consideration every day. We check the weather forecasts and monitor the changes through the day. We talk with children about our weather-related decisions and include that as a strategy for developing strong risk assessment skills.

In the case of predicted thunder and lightning or high-winds, educators ensure children are playing close to shelter for quick and easy access. During thunder and lightning and high winds, participants will stay under shelter. In extreme conditions, for instance a tornado watch or warning, or an Air Quality Health Index warning, Out to Play staff may call for an early pick up or cancel program for the day to prioritize the health and safety of our staff team and your children.

Extreme weather cancellations are non-refundable. We are grateful for your support, understanding and quick response to our communications should this occur.

In the case of extreme heat (30C+), OTP educators choose play spaces carefully with the intention to prompt quiet play in the shade. We drink lots of water and keep spray bottles close to cool ourselves with mist. We constantly assess participants' comfort and safety, watching for signs of heat exhaustion, while offering different ways to cool off.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid

Out to Play programs have Emergency Procedures with which all educators and volunteers have trained. A copy of the procedures, including emergency phone numbers, is carried by an educator at all times.

Accident and Emergency Procedure

In a severe accident or emergency, the Out to Play staff will follow this procedure:

Establish the nature and extent of the emergency. A senior staff will take the lead responding and administering first aid.

In consultation with other educators, make sure the area and all other members of the group are accounted for, safe, and adequately supervised.

Assess the injury/situation and ask another adult to call 911 emergency services, while the educator(s) administer appropriate first aid.

The person phoning will need to respond to the following questions:

- Nature of emergency

- Injured party details: age, gender, medical history (see Emergency Medical Form in first aid backpack)

- Location and First aid administered

An adult will meet the ambulance at the parking lot to direct EMS to the location.

Inform the child's emergency contact, and management, of the injury/incident as soon as possible.

Ensure that an appropriate adult attends the receiving hospital with the child, taking with them any medical information available.

Ensure the remainder of the group(s):

- Are adequately supervised throughout the emergency

- Return to their base as early as possible

- Receive appropriate support, debrief and reassurance

A senior educator will continue to liaise with emergency services until the incident is over.

As soon as reasonably possible after the event, the accident will be reported using an Accident Report Form.



Risk Management

Out to Play supports adventurous, sensory-seeking, noisy and risky play alongside quiet and small detailed play. When risky play emerges our educators are trained in observing, co-assessing and co-creating boundaries with children.

All Out to Play programs include Site and Experience Risk Benefit Assessments to anticipate known hazards, and address and mitigate the risks. Before participation, typically during registration, all children, volunteers and teachers are required to sign the Assumption of Risk Informed Consent document.

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, falling on uneven ground and terrain in the forest; injuries from failing to properly use tools, such as carving knives; injuries resulting from matches or fire; injuries from poison ivy or wild parsnip; the presence of wild animals and ticks, and inclement weather. Our risk-benefit assessments consider these hazards and guide educators in steps to mitigate the risk.

OTP Staff: Participant Ratios

Out to Play educator ratios are maximum 8 children to 1 educator, with children aged 4-12. All of our staff are experienced and qualified educators with first aid training. Our educators work alongside another educator or volunteer at all times.

Educator Responsibilities

The responsibilities of an Out to Play educator are wide-ranging and include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Managing the safety of children. Co-creating safety guidelines and Community Standards Agreements, so children understand the clear expectations and feel supported as they make decisions in play
- Prioritizing the social and emotional safety of children, and building a relationship, so children are aware there is another trusted adult in their world, who will support them in navigating relationships and challenges
- Modelling care and responsibility for the natural world, as well as the safe use of the tools, loose parts and found materials
- Being co-conspirators in play - playing beside, showing genuine curiosity, and engaging in affirming language - in order to show respect, maintain dignity, build relationship and scaffold learning.



They're little ones with a vision. They're collaborating, working hard, encountering challenges, building resilience, and actively moving their bodies in the cool air. They go home sleepy, proud of the imaginary world they built.

Safety and Security Policies

Child Entry and Release Policy

All pick-up persons must have their ID ready to be checked, which will be cross-referenced with the names on your Jumbula registration. Parents must add all pick-up individuals to their Jumbula account. We will not release a child to a friend or family member not listed on your account. In the case of an emergency, an email or text is sufficient.

If someone other than a parent/guardian or authorized alternate pick-up person arrives to pick up a child, and we haven't been notified in advance by these authorized persons, we will contact the parent/guardian. If the parent/guardian cannot be located, we'll wait with the child until we are able to connect with the guardian. Staff will remain with the child until an authorized pick-up person arrives. Only youth 13 to 15 years old are permitted to wait without an educator, with the written consent of a parent.

Release of Children to a Person Who Appears Intoxicated/Impaired

Staff will not release a child to a person who appears intoxicated or impaired. Staff will make other pick-up arrangements (i.e. a spouse or other authorized person). Staff members are legally responsible to protect the children in their care from any perceived risk.

Custody and Access to Children

According to the law, both parents of a child have equal access to a child and to the information about the child's development, health and welfare. The only time a staff member can deny access of a parent to a child is when there is a written separation agreement or a legal court order. If we need to deny access, please share this document with us.

Child Protection Policy

Out to Play is committed to taking a proactive position regarding the prevention of child abuse. In accordance with the Child and Family Services Act, it is the responsibility of every person in Ontario, including a person who performs professional or official duties with respect to children, to immediately report to a Children's Aid Society if they suspect that child abuse has occurred or if a child is at risk of abuse. Out to Play staff take this responsibility seriously. Reporting procedures and training are provided to all staff.

Accessibility/Equity Policy

One of the primary goals of Out to Play programs is to make our programs accessible to a wide range of participants. It matters to us that quality outdoor play opportunities aren't an exclusive opportunity but widely available to all children. We have partnered with the Ten Oaks Project, Inuuqitiit, the Canadian Museum of Nature and the Vanier Hub to offer Forest and Nature School to more children, youth and families. To share, partner, offer, and build relationships in the right way, is an action in our commitment to reconciliation. As we build Out to Play Children's Programs we commit to offering Pay What you Can programs alongside our paid programs, building our subsidy fund, and considering physical mobility in the development of our site. We welcome your feedback, suggestions and financial support in the realization of those goals.

With Gratitude from Lara and the Out to Play team

Thank you for your trust and your care. Thanks for the warm words that lift our spirits through the year. We're grateful to stand alongside you and humbly offer play and unhurried time to your children and families.

