



EverWild Forest School

Volunteer Guidebook

Note: the contents of this guidebook are subject to change

Welcome to the Forest Family!

On behalf of the entire EverWild community, we extend our warmest greetings and heartfelt gratitude for choosing to be a part of our mission. Your decision to contribute your time and energy to our community and outdoor education programs is truly commendable, and we are thrilled to have you on board.

EverWild is more than just a place; it's a vibrant community dedicated to fostering a deep connection with nature and inspiring the next generation to connect with and appreciate the natural world.

Your role as a volunteer is pivotal, shaping the experiences of those attending EverWild Forest School and supporting our fundraising initiatives for expanding outdoor learning opportunities. Whether it's participating in community events, assisting with classes, or contributing to marketing efforts, your involvement leaves a lasting impact on individuals and the wider community.

We deeply appreciate your dedication to making a difference. Your passion for community engagement and outdoor education perfectly aligns with our vision for a world where people are connected to nature, empowered to explore, and motivated to preserve the natural wonders that surround us.

Once again, welcome to EverWild. Thank you for being an integral part of our community and for contributing to the betterment of our world through outdoor education.

Should you have any questions or need assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out. We are here to support you on this exciting journey.

Kindly,
Taylor Payne
Director of People Operations
Taylor@everwildforestschool.org

Contents

Introduction	2
What is Forest School?	2
About EverWild	2
Our Mission	3
Our Values	3
Our Approach	4
Our Staff	4
Programs	4
Volunteer Educators	6
Teaching Philosophy	6
Class Rules & Expectations	6
Frontloading	7
Positive Discipline	8
Growth Mindset Language	9
Program Logistics and Communication	11
Conduct	11
Safety	11
Volunteer Contract	11
Time Commitment and Absences	11
Class Cancellations	12
Mobile Applications and Software	12
Background Checks	12
Health and Sanitation Policy	12
Illness	12
Handwashing	13
Toilets	13
Safety, Risk Management, and Emergencies	13
Climbing	13
Throwing	13
Exploring	13
Wildlife	14

Wild Edibles	14
Sticks	14
Water	14
Ice Play	15
Encounters with the Public	15
Physical Contact	15
Temperature, Extreme Weather and Air Quality	16
Wet Clothes	16
Wind	16
Injuries	16
Emergencies	16



Introduction

What is Forest School?

In a nutshell, Forest Schools are all-weather outdoor early education programs that utilize nature immersion to develop cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills in children.

While the term Forest School is not regulated in the United States, a “true” forest school maintains the following six principles (source: [Eastern Regional Association of Forest and Nature Schools](#)):

- » Outdoors in all weather
- » Child-led flow learning
- » Guided risk taking
- » Place-based curriculum
- » Environmental stewardship
- » Small class sizes

Forest schools allow children to seamlessly apply the scientific method of developing questions, testing hypotheses, and creating conclusions that inform their theories and worldview. In addition, the forest school pedagogy nurtures children’s independence, emotional intelligence, and sense of community.

About EverWild

At EverWild Forest School, we believe that the connection between children and nature is incredibly important. Our students get to experience this bond firsthand by observing the changing seasons over time in a place they can call their own. Our aim is to help children develop high emotional and cognitive intelligence, be globally aware, and be engaged in their local communities.



EverWild Forest School is part of the National Outdoor Learning Alliance, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that offers nature immersion programs for people of all ages. It is supported by tuition, donations, and grants. The organization values inclusivity, collaboration, trust, and authenticity. Your integrity and individual genius are highly valued, and we have high expectations for your success. We expect everyone employed to practice clear and consistent communication, exercise honesty and authenticity, and uphold the values of EverWild Forest School.

We have an “open door” policy here at EverWild Forest School. If you need support, please reach out to anyone on the Leadership Team at any time!

Our Mission

To create safe and accessible outdoor education programs that connect children to themselves, their communities, and to the natural world through free play, place-based curriculum, and nature immersion.

Our Values

- » Youth Are Powerful: We believe that youth are intelligent, capable, and curious. We create programs that honor their intellect and autonomy and allow them to be the experts of their own learning journey.
- » Belonging Builds The Foundation: We believe that a strong sense of place sets a solid foundation from which children can grow into independent and secure individuals. Our programs connect children to the local human and natural communities to develop deep roots from which to bloom.
- » We Are A Global Community: We focus on the commonalities that bring us together in this human experience, especially our shared responsibility as stewards of the Earth. Our programs prioritize empathy, respect, and understanding, regardless of differences in schools of thought, orientations, cultures, or creeds.



Our Approach

We work to fulfill our mission and vision with the following curriculum, teaching, and caregiving approaches:

- » Play: Play is learning! Play has multiple benefits for children of all ages. Enhancing their imaginations, promoting language development and social skills and refining their coordination and physical skills are just a few. We provide a safe environment for students to freely explore the outdoors and participate in risky play.
- » Academics: We help students build knowledge of various concepts across disciplines including science, math, history, and language arts.
- » Relationships: We support each student's developmental and emotional needs through trust-based mentorship, growth-mindset language, and positive discipline.
- » Life Skills: We help children build resiliency, independence, and confidence by facilitating skills-based and immersive experiences outdoors in all weather.
- » Mindfulness: We help children build resiliency, independence, and confidence by facilitating skills-based and immersive experiences outdoors in all weather.
- » Community: We facilitate deep connections with the local natural and human communities through place-based learning and community engagement.
- » Stewardship: We help children fall in love with nature to promote the intrinsic motivation to care for it.

Our Staff

View our staff directory [here](#).

Programs

We offer three divisions of programming: Forest School, Family & Community Programs, and Enrichment Camps.



Forest School: September through May

- » Forest Kindergarten (ages 5 & 6)
- » Early Learning (ages 4-6)
- » Homeschool Enrichment (ages 7-12)

Our Family & Community programs: year-round

- » Tots & Trees
- » Family Nature Classes
- » Celebrations

Enrichment Camps: year-round

- » Winter Break Camp
- » Spring Break Camp
- » Summer Camp
- » Afterschool Camps
- » No School Nature Days



Volunteer Educators

Teaching Philosophy

The teaching philosophy at our school centers on positive reinforcement, growth mindset language, respectful communication, and positive discipline, known as "educaring." Educators prioritize the emotional, cognitive, and physical needs of each student, nurturing the whole child with a balanced approach to encouragement and discipline. Autonomy and consent are emphasized, avoiding forced sharing or apologies, and conflicts are resolved through guidance and modeled apologies. Conversations about feelings support the development of empathy. Play and risk-taking are encouraged within the philosophy of "as safe as necessary" rather than "as safe as possible," aligning with the forest school approach. Forest School Educators play a multifaceted role, including mentorship, leadership, education, and guidance. They support children in developing their knowledge and interests, learning alongside them and encouraging the cultivation of individual skills. This approach contrasts with traditional teaching methods focused on standardized lesson plans and mandated academic standards.

Class Rules & Expectations

Respect Myself

- » Practice self-awareness
- » Follow teacher instructions to keep me safe
- » Tell a teacher if I need help

Respect Others

- » Respect body boundaries
- » Use kind words
- » Include others
- » Help keep others safe

Respect Nature



- » Treat all beings with kindness
- » Only take something if you can count 100 of them (e.g. stones, flowers, etc.)
- » Leave only footprints
- » Tell the teacher if you see trash

Specific safety rules may be found in our “Health and Safety Protocols” that accompany this Guidebook.

Frontloading

Frontloading enables students to confidently make informed behavioral choices and assess risk independently.

Example:

If students are interested in walking on ice, sit down with the class prior to letting them explore. Start with a discussion about the physics of ice (brittle, slippery, etc.) and discuss your class agreement with ice play (students may walk on ice with no more than approximately 6 inches of water underneath). Ask your students about the risks of cracking ice, and what can be done to reduce risk.



Positive Discipline

We use positive discipline and natural consequences to encourage good behavior. Unwanted behavior often stems from a need for connection, empathy, stress, or frustration. To initiate behavior change, we suggest pulling the child aside, showing empathy, and keeping things respectful and solution-based rather than consequence-based.

Behavior	Positive Discipline
Scolding, yelling, punishing, timeouts, and/or physical restraint or manipulation is strictly prohibited.	"You are angry that he took the stick from you. I would be angry too if that happened to me. How can we help get your anger out in a safer way than hitting? I like to stomp my feet when I get angry! Let's stomp!"
Once the intense emotion subsides, the child is usually in a better place to accept and retain a discussion of the behavior.	"When you use your body in a way that hurts someone, like hitting, it breaks our rule of keeping each other safe. If it's hard for you to remember to stomp the next time you get angry, what do you think we should do about that?" (children tend to follow rules better when they set their own consequences).
Alternatively, you can choose the consequence.	"I can't let you hurt other people, so if you hit someone again instead of stomp, I'll keep you by my side for the rest of class to keep everyone safe. We can practice our stomping together and then when you come to class next time, you'll be a pro!"

Even in the best circumstances, there may be times when a child's behavior requires intervention. Begin by ensuring that the child understands why their



behavior is unsafe or harmful. If the behavior persists, establish clear boundaries focused on eliminating the behavior, rather than punishing the child. It is crucial to keep parents, the School Director, and Programs Manager informed of any behavioral or safety concerns to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone involved. Remember, it's okay to ask for support when needed.

Example:

If a student consistently runs far ahead while walking out to your habitat (despite discussion about group safety), explain that you're noticing that they're struggling to control their body, and that they need to walk between you and your co-teacher until you're at the habitat to help them remember how to safely walk at school. Consider practicing with a game of "Red Light Green Light."

Growth Mindset Language

A growth mindset encourages students to see positive outcomes as a result of their focus and dedication, rather than innate traits. Instead of praising students for traits or products, focus on observing their behavior and encourage them to self-assess their progress.

Avoid praising students for 'traits' or a 'product' produces. Focus on observations of student behavior and encourage students to self-assess their progress.	Instead of "Good job!" ★ "You really took your time on that project!" ★ "Are you happy with what you made?"
If you must tell a student they cannot do something, add the word "yet" where it makes sense.	Instead of "you're not tall enough to climb that high" ★ "You're not tall enough to climb that tree yet."



Encourage students to use the word “yet” when assessing their own learning process.	If a student complains “I can’t skip rocks” you may reply with ★ “You can’t skip rocks yet. What might help you learn?”
Avoid quantifying the difficulty of tasks, as hearing “come on, it’s easy!” is harmful to students who are struggling with the supposedly ‘easy’ tasks.	Instead of “of course you can skip rocks, it’s easy!” ★ “Skipping rocks can be challenging, but I know you can do hard things.”
Use pointed language instead of generalized phrases	Instead of “be careful” say ★ “Focus on your feet” or “think about where your body is going” (use pointed language instead of generalized phrases)
Disassociate identity with feeling. Explain what/why something is triggering the feeling.	Instead of “I’m frustrated!” say, ★ “I feel frustrated because people are screaming too loudly for my ears.”
Focus on what to do instead of what not to do.	Instead of “don’t swing the stick” say, ★ “Please point the end of the stick toward the ground”
Focus on self-discovery	Instead of “that’s a morel mushroom,” ask, ★ “What do you notice about this mushroom?”



Program Logistics and Communication

Conduct

You are expected to conduct your volunteer duties as assigned in a safe and respectful manner in alignment with our mission, values, policies and procedures. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Community Engagement Manager or to the Director.

Safety

Your safety and that of our student's is our top priority. You are expected to adhere to our safety and conduct policies throughout your tenure with EverWild Forest School.

Volunteers must always be in view of at least one teacher. **Volunteers must never allow themselves to be alone with a student.**

Volunteer Contract

Each volunteer is required to sign the Volunteer Letter of Agreement to volunteer with EverWild Forest School. The Contract outlines specific expectations as well as those outlined in this Guidebook (handbook). When signing the Contract, each volunteer agrees to the terms within this Guidebook as well.

Time Commitment and Absences

EverWild Forest School does not currently enforce a predetermined time commitment for volunteers. We do ask that each volunteer specifies an



EverWild Forest School location, day and session to commit to. For example, you may specify that you would like to volunteer each Monday at the Veterans Memorial Park location. In the event of a planned absence, please notify Taylor at least two weeks in advance.

If an unexpected illness or event occurs and you are unable to meet your volunteer commitment, notify Taylor, Program Manager, as soon as possible.

Class Cancellations

You will be notified if there is a weather-related class cancellation that impacts your regularly scheduled volunteer commitment.

Mobile Applications and Software

EverWild Forest School requires every volunteer to download Brightwheel on their mobile device to communicate with educators and administrators. Invitations to set up profiles will be sent to every volunteer.

Background Checks

A criminal background check must be completed for each volunteer applicant. If you have access to a recent background check, you can provide it to the Director of Development and Operations, Kaelan at kaelan@everwildforestschool.org. Alternatively, a background check request can be sent through Chekr.

Health and Sanitation Policy

Illness

Please stay home if you have any symptoms of illness. If you have COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, tightness in chest, loss of taste, etc.), please notify Taylor, Program Manager.



Handwashing

Sanitize your hands after using a tissue to blow your nose or after assisting a child to do so.

Toilets

EverWild Forest School educators will set up our portable potty, a “Luggable Loo” and privacy tent for student use during class. Volunteers are not permitted to assist children who need help using the toilet. If asked by a child directly for help, please notify the educator(s) you are working with so that they can assist the child. Ensure each child either sanitizes or washes their hands after using the toilet.

Safety, Risk Management, and Emergencies

One of the many benefits of allowing children to have lots of time to play freely outdoors is that they gain in self-confidence and independence, in part by taking reasonable risks and testing their limits. Our goal is to allow reasonable risk taking, balanced with watchfulness for true safety hazards. There may be age and situationally appropriate exceptions for many of the broad policies below.

Climbing

Children are permitted to climb as high as they are tall and must be able to reach that height by themselves (do not lift them up to a place that they cannot reach themselves).

Throwing

Children are permitted to throw sticks, acorns, and other natural objects AWAY from the group, and away from trails or other places people might be walking. Please ask the educator(s) if you need assistance or to delineate a throwing zone if needed.

Exploring

EverWild Forest School educators will communicate site boundaries to the students and volunteers before and during each class. Children and volunteers are to be in the line of sight of the educator(s) for the session.



Wildlife

Teach children how to be gentle with living things and ensure they ask permission before touching or picking up any wildlife they find. Wildlife, including worms and insects, are not toys and are to be respected; however, we will encourage the children to safely handle and investigate wildlife where possible.

Wild Edibles

EverWild Forest School educators will explore some basic, easily identifiable wild edibles with children (huckleberries, blackberries, and western salsify, for example). As part of this exploration, children are taught to never eat anything from nature without permission from an adult.

Sticks

Playing with sticks is part of childhood. We know that children will collect, carry, swing, dig, throw, and sword fight with sticks. Children are taught how to handle sticks safely. Fantasy play, including sword fighting, is generally acceptable if the play does not involve physical contact and the level of imaginary violence is not distressing to children who are not involved in the game. EverWild Forest School educators will redirect play that crosses physical or emotional safety boundaries. Please ask an educator for assistance if you feel that stick play is breaching safety boundaries.

Water

Many of our explorations take us to the banks of the Boise River. EverWild Forest School educators are responsible for identifying areas of water play that are safe for wading. Children are only allowed to wade in shallow streams and pools and may not enter moving water higher than the middle of their shins. Children are always closely supervised, especially when playing in and around the water.



Ice Play

Prior to allowing students to walk on ice, EverWild Forest School educators must evaluate the area to determine the approximate depth of the water underneath. Before exploring an icy area with a student, ensure the educator(s) have evaluated the area for safety. Students may walk on ice with no more than approximately 6 inches of water underneath. If the depth of water cannot be determined, students shall not be allowed to walk on the ice.

If students struggle to stay off of the ice in areas where the water depth is more than 6 inches (when more than one warning is given), the class will be relocated to a different area.

Encounters with the Public

When conducting classes on public property, it's important to address encounters with other people. Emphasize the significance of staying close to the group and avoiding interactions with individuals outside of it, referred to as "hikers." Encourage labeling all members of the public without stereotyping to reduce paranoia. However, exercise caution when approaching transient encampments or garbage piles due to potential hazards like human waste, needles, and glass. In the event of an approaching individual, instruct the group to stand confidently and greet them. If the person persists and appears threatening, request they stop, allowing the group to move away. If the threat continues, vocalize the possession of pepper spray as a deterrent and signal educators to be prepared to use it and evacuate the area with the children.

Physical Contact

Just as we must protect our group from strangers, we must be cognizant of the issues surrounding physical contact from known individuals, including yourself. We value consent and body autonomy, and therefore, hugs are not permitted between staff and children. If a child asks for a hug, you may offer a high-five or similar mode of comfort. In moments of high duress, such as an



injury or meltdown, comfort hugs may be offered by EverWild Forest School educators after they have obtained permission from the child.

Temperature, Extreme Weather and Air Quality

EverWild has extensive policies for keeping children and educators safe in the event of extreme heat, cold or poor air quality. In the event of conditions requiring early pick up, EverWild Forest School educators will ensure all parents are contacted in a timely manner.

Wet Clothes

Volunteers are not permitted to assist children when changing clothes. EverWild Forest School does have policies for keeping children safe and comfortable. You might witness an educator assisting a child to change their clothes.

Wind

Classes will be canceled when wind speeds at 22mph or higher are sustained for an hour or more during class time. If we are under a wind advisory with gusts predicted to be at 40mph or faster, classes will be canceled. At any point during a wind advisory classes shall be conducted in open space. setting up tarps under trees during a wind advisory is strictly prohibited.

Injuries

Volunteers are not permitted to provide first-aid care to students. Minor injuries may be treated by an educator with a first aid kit.

Emergencies

In the case of injuries, the line between minor, moderate, and severe can be confusing and subjective. EverWild Forest School educators will determine the level of injury and respond as appropriate following our guidelines.