

SAFETY HANDBOOK

The Forest Path

Kids' Nature Programs, Nelson

2026



"As safe as necessary, not as safe as possible."

The safety procedures in this handbook are designed to keep the program participants safe while allowing them the freedom to explore and interact with the environment around them. Here you find our procedures for risk assessment, appropriate gear, wildlife interaction and emergency protocols. Let us know if you have any questions!

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1. Safety Ethic

1.1 Forest & Nature Schools Canada Risks and Safety

“Avoiding hazards and risks is often deemed necessary as a means of avoiding injury, litigation, and insurance claims, as well as keeping children “safe”. These assumptions are fueled by societal norms that now view overprotection as a fundamental part of the role adults should play as they care for children. Avoiding all risks and hazards comes at a great cost as healthy risk plays an important role in the development of the child. “An exaggerated safety focus of children’s play is problematic because while on the one hand children should avoid injuries, on the other they might need challenges and varied stimulation to develop normally, both physically and mentally” (Kennair & Sandseter, 2011).

As our children tell us that they want to experience age-appropriate risk through their every effort to climb trees, jump rocks, run down hills, build shelters, and get their hands full of mud, how do educators in Forest and Nature School programs begin to support and navigate healthy and age-appropriate risks?

The first step is to acknowledge children’s competencies and capacity to navigate risks and hazards, and that recognizing and experiencing risk in childhood is a fundamental component of healthy development and learning. In doing so, we are setting the stage for children to begin navigating risk in healthy and controlled doses. Additionally, FNS supports children as they learn to self-regulate: as children experience more risky activities and terrain, they learn to determine for themselves whether something feels safe or not, rather than look externally to adults to decide this for them.

Secondly, in Forest and Nature School risk management is viewed as a fundamental skill needed for young people’s safety and well-being. It is through risk management that we are then invited into a world where we can be supported to experience risk in their day to day. Educators have a duty of care towards young people, and therefore have responsibility not only to keep young people safe, but also to enable them to learn to manage appropriate risks for themselves.

In FNS, it’s very important to engage children in calculated, age-appropriate, purposeful and meaningful levels of risk. This is both an art and a science, and an educator spends a significant amount of time in the “Forest and Nature School Practitioners Course” developing appropriate policies and procedures to communicate this to their community at large. This process is, and should be, dynamic and revisited on a regular basis.”

From FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL IN CANADA: A Head, Heart, Hands Approach to Outdoor Learning. 2014

1.2 The Forest Path Safety Ethic

In our overall philosophy, we see the disconnection between humans and the more-than-human-world as the biggest risk and threat to our and the world's wellbeing. Staying inside, reducing our window of tolerance and narrowing our comfort zone to primary inside environment and vehicles, is really dangerous for our physical, mental and spiritual health as well for the living environment that we are dependent upon and our responsibility to care for. Our intention is to nourish balanced health in our participants, community and for the land. Part of safety is the abilities of awareness and resilience.

However, that perspective does not reduce our care for the children and vigilance to prevent, assess and mitigate risks. At the Forest Path, one of the roles of the facilitator, parents, and/or community volunteers is to ensure that all safety measures are in place and are followed daily. We work to create an environment that is as safe as possible by being proactive and by using sensible, simple guidelines that the children and adults can remember.

Our safety principles include:

- Constantly assess risk as conditions change (dynamic risk assessment).
- Set up a safe space with boundaries and safety guidelines.
- Observe the children's interactions with each other and with nature.
- Spot the children during more challenging physical activity.
- Gently guide the children to safer activities if required. If we feel that the children's play is becoming dangerous, we will redirect the children and remind them that it is important to stay safe outdoors.

2. Risk Assessments

2.1 Levels of Risk

There are many different kinds of risks we take in our everyday lives, but the level of risk is dependent on our individual experiences, perceptions and our worldviews. We define risk as: an either real or perceived threat, or exposure to, potential harm, injury, loss, or otherwise undesirable outcome.

Risks can be physical, environmental, emotional, psychological, social, and medical. Each of these risk categories should be weighed when making decisions in the wilderness, not only for oneself, but for the overall wellbeing of the group. The first risk mitigation assessment we prioritize is the actual environmental risks. Environmental risks should be constantly assessed.

Three levels of outdoor risks can be categorized as: low, medium, and high (or severe). These levels help in assessing the potential harm or danger associated with an activity, and in planning appropriate risk management strategies. Playing outdoors is a relatively safe activity. Minor, easily healed injuries like bruises, cuts, and scrapes are common and often result from falls. Broken bones and head injuries unfortunately happen. Severe, lifechanging injuries are rare, and fatalities are nearly unheard of.¹

Low-level risks are generally associated with minor injuries like cuts, scrapes, or bruises, often resulting from falls or minor accidents. These risks can usually be managed with basic first aid. Examples include:

- Tripping hazards: Uneven ground, roots, or obstacles in pathways.
- Minor cuts and scrapes: From rocks, branches, or tools.
- Minor falls: From low heights.

Medium-level risks involve more serious injuries or situations that require more advanced first aid or medical attention. Examples include:

- Moderate falls: From heights that could result in sprains, strains, or broken bones.
- Exposure to extreme weather: Heatstroke, hypothermia, or sunburn.
- Injuries from tools: Cuts from knives, or burns from fire.
- Getting lost or separated from a group: Especially in unfamiliar environments.

High-level risks are associated with severe injuries, life-threatening situations, or potential for fatalities. Examples include:

- Severe weather events: Flash floods, avalanches, or extreme heat/cold.
- Falls from significant heights: That could result in serious head injuries or fractures.
- Encountering dangerous wildlife: Bites, stings, or attacks.

At The Forest Path, we do not take level 3 risks and we make great efforts to avoid level 2 risks and minimize level 1 risks.

2.2 Site, Daily, Seasonal and Activity Assessments

A thorough risk assessment should include identifying potential hazards, evaluating the likelihood and severity of negative outcomes, and implementing strategies to minimize or mitigate those risks.

At the start of each season we check each old and new location in the **site risk assessment**. Every location is chosen with safety concerns and is inspected regularly to check for risk of branches falling, poisonous plants, old barbed wire or other hazards.

¹ P32

<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Risk-Benefit-Assessment-Toolkit.pdf>

Each day there is a **daily site risk assessment**. If the site as a whole is deemed too risky due to high winds or weather such as a snowstorm, the facilitator will call or text all families to let them know that the program is canceled for the day. If the program must be canceled and families are already on their way, the facilitator will go to the location to meet families and let them know that the program is canceled. Every effort will be made to post a notification of closure on the front page of the website. If we cannot contact a parent or caregiver, we will contact the next person listed on the family's emergency contact list.

The facilitators continuously do **activity risk assessments**. The facilitators assess the risks of activities as playing with sticks, climbing trees or rocks or using tools. We assess the benefits of the risk as well. The children are involved in looking for hazards and learning about which hazards to watch for and appropriate actions. We ask the children for input on how we can ensure that everyone feels comfortable. Decisions will be made according to the age and development of the child, the weather situation, group dynamic and other factors.

Each adult is responsible for **head counting**. Counting heads takes place every 10 minutes when the group is in one area. Each time the group transitions from one place to another, heads are counted again. All of the adults present each day have a role to play in ensuring the safety of the children. At some points in the day, the adult's role will be to engage with the children as they pursue a particular activity. At other points in the day, the adult's role will be to observe the children's play to ensure that it is safe.

2.3 Weather Hazards

We are in most cases an all-weather school! Here are some exceptions.

When the temperature forecast calls for mostly **below -10°**, and depending on the wind chill, forest school will cancel. When it is a no bus day for the schools, we cancel too, for example when there is too much snow and roads are not cleared. Note that there is no standard temperature recommendation when to close schools. Up north, kids might be used to playing outside in -20, and in places like the UK that seldom gets snow, they might close schools at any snowfall.

In case of **strong winds** or wind gusts 40 m/s, we might cancel or relocate. We monitor standing dead trees, leaning trees, dead branches, cottonwood trees that often have dead branches. We look for areas that are more clear of trees and less dangerous.

Regarding **lightning storms**, there is no safe place outside however the risk of getting struck is very low.² When we hear thunder, we kneel on our insulated sit pads, spread out from each other. We make sure we are not on a mountain top or high elevated protruding area or by water,

² the odds of being struck by lightning in a given year are less than one in a million, and almost 90% of all lightning strike victims survive. <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/lightning/victimdata.html>

creeks or by isolated tall trees. Use the '30-30' rule: take shelter if the time from seeing a flash to the time you hear thunder is 30 seconds or less. Do not resume activities until 30 minutes have elapsed from the last lightning and thunder. If you prefer, we can call the parents and you can pick up your kids.

We will follow recommendations from the authorities if there is a risk of **flooding or heat wave** or unsafe air due to forest fires. Usually we are not in places that can be flooded. For hot days, we stay in the shade in the forest that is cool and by shallow creeks. We have extra water and spray bottles for misting.

Smoky air due to **forest fires** is sad and stressful and hard to measure as the air quality keeps changing. In the past we have moved some camps inside and run an air filter machine. The Air Quality Index (AQI) communicates the air quality of the single worst pollutant. The index rating for the new Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) is the sum of the health risks from each of the pollutants in the index.

In Canada, Air Quality Health Index is used (AQHI) with numbers 1-10. In the US they use Air Quality Index (AQI) that goes from 0 (healthy) to 500 (very hazardous) and it is colour coded. Red, over 300, represents hazardous air quality. Recommendations for air quality are:

High - AQHI Index level 7 to 10: Reduce or reschedule outdoor activities and take it easy.

Very High – AQHI Index level above 10: Strenuous activities outside and physical exertion should be avoided.³

In the US AQI model, The Forest Path will consider moving indoors at level orange. Orange (101-151 AQI)- It's OK to be active outside, especially for short activities such as recess and physical education (PE). For longer activities such as athletic practice, take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms and take action as needed.

BC Air Quality Health Index (look at Castlegar)

https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/provincial_summary/bc_e.html

Air quality index: <https://www.airnow.gov/?city=Nelson&country=CAN>

Air quality real time map <https://map.purpleair.com/>

Smoke forecast map <https://firesmoke.ca/forecasts/current/>

Children with asthma, allergies, or chronic health issues may have more trouble breathing when smoke or ash is present. Dust masks, surgical masks, bandanas, and breathing through a wet cloth will not protect your child from smoke.⁴

³ <http://www.bcchildrens.ca/about/news-stories/stories/tips-for-wildfire-smoke-and-children>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/air/wildfire-smoke/children.htm>

2.4 Interactions Between Children

The children will participate in adult-led and child-led activities and will also have time for free play. Sometimes children will have interactions between them that are challenging for both the children involved and for the adults around them. If conflict resolution seems necessary, an adult may step in to mediate.

Discipline methods used by facilitators and volunteers are inspired by No Drama Discipline as described by Dr Daniel Siegel and the attachment based style of Dr Gordon Neufeld and understanding the impact of early trauma as described by Gabor Mate and others and the book Trauma proofing your kids by Peter Levine and Maggie Kline. Adults will make every effort to do the following when challenging interactions occur:

- **Build connections and emphasize the positive.** We spend lots of effort to bond as a group and practice behaviour of inclusion, self-regulation, respect and kindness.
 - **Be proactive.** We practice breathing awareness and body awareness to develop skills to notice and name which emotional state we are in and know ways to self-regulate and co-regulate. We take note of the social interactions between the children and look out for the emotions most likely to exaggerate a situation: H.A.L.T. (Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired). Active games can help release tension and help to do a calm activity after, like a wave goes up and then has to come down. The 8 shields rhythm of the day helps support the various needs including quiet sitspot.
 - **Be physically close while composed and calm** to a child or children if concerned about a social or safety situation. Get closer or on their level or shoulder to shoulder. Smile, connect to your own heart and intention of love and have an open body posture. We aim to **connect before we redirect**. Ask curious questions about what they are doing.
 - Remind the children to **use gentle (kind, respectful) words** to ask for what they need.
 - Remind the children to **use gentle, kind hands with each other - hands are for working and playing, not hitting or destroying**.
 - We communicate comfort by **validating and reflecting/mirroring** what we hear. 'Sounds like you are feeling upset? That makes sense.' 'You like to throw stones, is that right?'
- Acknowledge children's feelings** and encourage them to express their feelings about a situation (i.e. "I felt sad when...", help them to identify/name feelings, and find the needs behind. In NVC, comfortable feelings arise from met needs, and uncomfortable feelings result from our needs not being met. We can choose different strategies to meet a need. For example the need for autonomy not being met can lead to frustration, that can be expressed by hitting a person, talking about it, stomping, art, finding ways to get a sense of choice and control by being heard and supported in problem solving.
- **Redirect** the children to different activities or have them chat with an adult who will help them calm down. Give two choices what they can do instead. 'Would you like to build a sandcastle or look in a bird book?'

- When the children are calm, we could have a **talking circle** to discuss the situation with the children involved. We use a talking piece and include the children in a conversation first letting the involved parties express their feelings and needs and requests and making sure the other parties hear and accept that. Then we ask questions to help the kids find solutions going forward.

2.5 Prevention and procedures

Every camp or program has at least one facilitator with Emergency Child First Aid certification. Every facilitator or volunteer needs a criminal background check. Each session requires caregivers to fill out a consent form/liability waiver. If there are incidents, we write a report. The Forest Path carries a 6 million dollar liability insurance.

At the outset of a new program, we take time to set the tone for safety and caring for one another in outdoor play. Lean heavily on predictable routines and prompts to support risk management practices. Examples of these routines include:

- Choosing easy-to-access and close-by outdoor spaces when working with a new group for the first couple of sessions
- Starting each session with a storytelling circle and sharing a story about how we look out for one another when we are outdoors
- Developing and regularly revisiting 'Community Standards' to engage children in a conversation about how we want to be as a community of learners and play people (With younger groups, we keep these standards to a maximum of three items and we come back to them often. With older groups, we may want to write the standards on a flip chart and revisit them over a couple of sessions.)
- Practicing the "HOOT" and the "HOWL" or other identifiable and playful calls as prompts to gather a group quickly, when needed
- Using a tangible, bright item as a visual prompt for children on how far they can go (For example, hang a bright orange First Aid backpack called the "bright sun" in a tree. Tell the children that wherever they go, they need to be able to see the bright sun. Or bandanas marking boundaries)
- Having predictable pauses for water, food, and sometimes rest.

Questions to guide your thinking:

- How can I incorporate a thoughtful pause into my practice to give children time to navigate their way through risk?
- How can I support children's intentions and goals in their play while addressing risks (e.g., share my concerns, avoid unclear and non-specific advice)?
- How can I help children better identify and manage risks themselves (e.g., encourage reflection and discussions amongst children)?

- How can I gain control of a potentially dangerous situation (e.g., pausing techniques, gathering signals)?⁵

OTHER HELPFUL COMMUNICATION PROMPTS : □ “Stay focused on what you’re doing.” □ “What is your next move?” □ “Do you feel safe there?” □ “Take your time.” □ “Does that branch feel strong and stable?” □ “I’m here if you need me.” □ “Please find a safe spot for your stick while you’re running.” □ “I’ve noticed that this is a really busy area. What are some of the things we need to watch out for with so many kids around?” (and give some examples). Or, “Let’s move this to a lower-traffic zone.” □ “I’ve noticed that there are a lot of fallen trees and sticks to trip on here. □ “Should we move this game to a more open area?” □ “Sticks need space. Mike, please back up from Sarah. She’s holding a big stick!” □ “Sticks need space. Sarah, look around you. Do you have enough space to swing that big stick?” □ “What’s your plan with that big stick?” □ “Rocks need space!” □ “Find more space!” □ “Before you throw that rock, what do you need to look for?” □ “That rock looks really heavy! Can you manage it?” □ “Please give each other lots of space so that no one feels like they need to push and no one gets knocked over by accident.” □ “Do you feel stable/balanced?” □ “Do you need more space?” □ “Check in with each other. Make sure everyone is still having a good time.” □ “Ask her if she’s ok.” □ “Ask him if he’s still having fun.” □ “Did you like that? Make sure you tell her if you didn’t like that.” □ “If you need to run, meet me at the next trail marker!” □ “Let’s check this cave/fort to make sure it is safe to hide in.”

3. Clothing and Gear for Comfort

The children must come with gear that is appropriate to the weather that day. Children who are not adequately dressed will not be able to attend that day. We recommend wearing layers of clothing so children can make adjustments as needed according to changes in weather/microclimate and activity levels.

3.1 Footwear:

Boots or sturdy waterproof shoes with good grips on the bottom. Bring an empty bread bag (plastic bag) to use if boots get wet. Even when it is not raining, the children may play in water or mud. In the warmer seasons, closed toe sandals or waterproof shoes that are possible to run in are fine.

3.2 When it is rainy, we recommend:

- Inner layer of fleece (or polypropylene) or natural fabrics such as wool or silk but not cotton. The fabric should wick moisture away from the skin and provide a warm, breathable layer.

⁵ P60 Risk benefit assessment

- Middle layer of insulation made of wool or fleece.
- Outer shell of waterproof, windproof clothing, including a rain jacket and rain pants.
- For the feet, we recommend neoprene Bogs or Kamik boots. Alternatively, your child can wear waterproof boots that are one size too large with two pairs of socks (wool is excellent for socks).
- Warm, waterproof hat that covers the ears.

3.3 When it is cold, please add:

- Warm and waterproof gloves or mittens that slip on and off easily.
- Long underwear of fleece (or polypropylene) or natural fabrics such as wool or silk but not cotton.
- An extra pair of warm gloves and warm socks in zip lock or water proof bag in your child's bag.

3.4 When it is warm, please wear:

- A long-sleeved shirt.
- Durable pants.
- A sun hat.
- Running or hiking shoes (note that children may still play in water and mud.)
- Footwear should be closed-toed (no sandals).
- Sun protection. Apply on your kid before start of the program and bring more for the day if your kids skin needs it.

Always bring a sweater.

3.5 Everyone requires to bring:

- A child-sized (preferably waterproof) backpack should contain:
 - Water in a spill-proof bottle. The facilitator will also carry water.
 - A healthy, high-energy snack in a reusable container.
 - A damp bagged towel or hand sanitizer to clean their hands before snack time.

For cold seasons:

- Extra socks, gloves, and hat, in a zip-lock or waterproof bag.

- Optional: A whistle, attached to the child's jacket or backpack.

Handwarmers in the winter.

Make sure that your child can carry the bag and it is not too heavy. Every child is required to carry their own backpack. At times, the teacher might carry the water bottles if needed.

4. The Children in the Forest

Every day, we practice dynamic risk assessment as we visit the site and determine whether it is suitable to use. The following guidelines (in italics) are written with phrases that you can use with the children as you guide them toward safe behavior in the forest. These rules are for the smaller children and will be adjusted to the learning level and awareness of the individual child and the situation.

4.1 Hiking and boundaries

When we walk through the forest, we are in a sandwich or in a dragon. Our facilitator will be in the front (the dragons head or the top bread) and another teacher or volunteer will be in the back (the tail or the bottom bread slice). The children do not need to be in a line, but they do need to be inside the sandwich (what filling are you, mayonnaise, lettuce etc?). Depending on the age and abilities, the head (adult) can have antennas and eyes that stay close but are ahead of the adult.

When we come to a trail fork or intersection, we stop and wait for everyone to catch up to make sure everyone is fine and we know which way we are going.

If needed, boundaries will be established. Each adult will watch to ensure that the children do not move beyond the boundaries. An adult will remain in close proximity to the children at all times. If we are working in groups in different areas, there will be one adult per group. It is very important that kids are able to stay with the group, answer back and come back if being called, and not run away or stay hidden: *kids need to stay together with the group.* Kids who cannot learn this within a few weeks are not ready for forest school.

4.2 Sticks

Stick for play will be the length of the child's arm or shorter for the younger kids except at the facilitator's discretion. *Sticks are for building, digging, and imaginative play. They are not for hitting. When we run, we put the sticks down. It is important to be able to use your own hands for holding and for balance. What can this stick be used for, hmm maybe a fishing rod? Or for building a fort? Magic wand? (redirect) Stick play might happen in a designated area, if the teachers decide so and set up rules and supervise.*

4.3 Rocks and digging

Rocks are home to animals - under rocks or on rocks. Maybe really small eggs. Let's leave the animals' homes as we are guests in their house. Would you like a giant to throw away your house, or your couch?

When we are near the water, we may throw rocks. When we throw rocks, we look around and check to make sure that no one is close to us, in our personal bubble (the area a few meters around our body). We may throw rocks that are as large as the palms of our hands.

We make sure if we lift up rocks we put them back in place. We let rocks stay in their place so they do not roll down the hill and hit someone.

Ask the facilitator if you would like to dig a hole that is larger than your hand. When we dig a hole, we will fill it back in when we are finished so that we disturb the forest as little as possible.

4.4 Climbing

We may climb as high as we are tall as a start. With older age and higher capacity, we might climb the height of two adults. We only climb as high as we can climb on our own (up and down). We only climb when an adult can safely spot us (watch us and keep us safe) so sometimes we need to take turns climbing high.

The adult will be present to spot a child, not to assist them to get higher. If the adult cannot be present or cannot safely spot the child, the child will not be able to climb that high. When a teacher has assessed a child's ability to climb safely and skillfully, the child may be allowed to climb higher, depending on the day conditions and group situation. If it is a small tree, we may limit how many kids can climb at the same time.

Point of three rule - three points of connection ie just move one foot or one hand at the time. Aware of sap, rocks under the tree, others climbing under you. *Do you know what kind of tree and strength of this kind of tree?* Choose an alive tree and alive branches, not rotten ones. Put feet and hands close to the trunk where branches are strongest. Make an agreement together with a very climby kid about where, when, how high, if to tell a teacher that you are climbing etc.

4.5 Plants

We ask an adult before eating a plant or berry to make sure it will not make us sick. If an adult said yes, we also ask the plant. We often show the kids which plants are the poisonous plants and to not touch those. We keep green leaves on the plants so that they can help the plant grow. If there are lots of plants, for example dandelions or clover, we can pick them. If there is just one flower of a kind, for example a tiger lily, we let it grow. This is a balance of preserving and respecting nature but not treating it like a sterile museum where we cannot touch or pick

anything. We believe humans are nature and harvesting is an ancient human trait. We teach honourable harvest.

Poisonous plants commonly found here: Western Yew (tree), Baneberry, Black Locust (tree), Deadly nightshade, Poison ivy (not common but I know some at Slocan pools), Indian Hellebore (in the alpine), Snowberry, Poison Hemlock, Anemones, Columbine, Lupine, Buttercup, Death camas, Larkspur. Ivy. Giant hogweed, tansy.

<https://cccf-fcsg.ca/ece-resources/topics/child-health-safety-environment/toxic-plant-list/>

4.6 Fire

When we are around the fire, we sit. We follow fire ban rules. We will talk about how to safely navigate around the fire and understanding what is considered a safe distance from the fire to avoid injury. Playing and running happens away from the fire area. An adult should be supervising. We model the use of a good fire site and attending the fire and how to extinguish the fire. We make sure to have water nearby and fireproof gloves. We make the fire site clear of burnable objects and line debris with sand or rocks if needed.

4.7 Water

Before we visit a body of water, the facilitator will give instructions to the children about the appropriate behavior around this water body. We may greet the water and give thanks to 'Sylks' water in Sinixt dialect. Children may not stand in the water without permission from the facilitator. Tippy toes rule - just put toes in! We do not go swimming or visit deep water at the Forest Path as of now.

Before participating in water activities, the teachers must ensure all kids receive swim assessments to evaluate their swimming abilities and ensure their safety. These assessments help determine which activities are appropriate for each camper and allow staff to provide additional support where needed. Supervision is essential at all times.

Children aged 6 and under must be supervised at a ratio of 4:1 without life jackets or 8:1 with life jackets, ensuring that there are enough adults to provide adequate attention and support. For children aged 7 and older who pass the facility swim test, a supervision ratio of 8:1 is required to ensure their safety and well-being in the water.

We also implement a buddy system, pairing kids according to their swimming ability and they can check on each other, as a complement.

4.8 Knives and tools

As of now, our programs do not include knife safety and whittling, to the appropriate age and awareness level of individuals. We require consent with caregivers before knives are part of a

program. Please do not bring knives unless it is part of that particular program. We use potato peelers to practice pre-knife skills.

4.9 Animal Encounters

Dogs⁶

It is very possible that the group may encounter dogs (leashed or unleashed) while in the forest. While dogs are supposed to be “under control” even if off leash, some dogs are more excitable or aggressive than others. Games and discussions to stay safe around dogs will be practiced each month. To help prevent children from being bitten by dogs, the following safety tips will be reviewed regularly:

- Do not approach an unfamiliar dog. Ask the owner if you can pet the dog. If no, give the dog space.
- Only play with a dog when there is an adult watching you closely.
- Stretch out your palm and let the dog smell your hand. Make sure the dog has sniffed you first before you pet the dog.
- Do not run from a dog or scream.
- If the dog is too much for you, stay motionless (e.g., “be still like a tree”). Cross your arms over your chest and look away from the dog. Call the teacher if you feel uncomfortable with the dog.
- If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still (e.g., “be still like a log”).
- Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behavior to an adult.
- Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
- If bitten, immediately report the bite to an adult.

Bears and Cougars⁷

Depending on the season, we will be more likely to encounter a bear in the fall and spring. It is quite unlikely we will meet a cougar. However, to be prepared for such an encounter we will practice the following safety protocols with the children each month.

Bear

We will make noise and talk and sing while walking in the forest. In the event that we see a bear, here are the procedures we will follow: If the bear has seen us, we will: STOP Make ourselves big. Make sure we are all together. Back away slowly. Speak in low tone and normal volume and say, “Hello bear, we won’t run away. You can stay and play; we’ll come back another day.” Let city staff know that there is a bear in the area. If the bear has not seen us, we will: Leave the

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2009. Dog Bite Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/dog-bites/biteprevention.html>

⁷ Safety procedures based on: BC Parks. 2002. Bears and Cougars. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. Available online: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/conserve/bearsandcougars.pdf>

area quietly and go to a more public place. If the bear shows signs of aggression and is approaching close, the facilitator is always carrying bear spray that might be used.

Cougar

In the event that we see a cougar, here are the procedures we will follow: STOP Make ourselves big. Make sure we are all together. Back away. If the cougar does not go away, keep eye contact with the cougar, show your teeth and make loud noises. Arm yourself with sticks and rocks. If the cougar does attack, fight back: focus on the nose and face area. Use sticks and rocks as weapons as well as bear spray.

Wolf and Coyotes

In the very unlikely event that a wolf appears and acts unafraid or aggressive, we will take the following action as soon as we notice the animal: Make sure we are all together. Raise your arms and wave them in the air to make yourself appear larger. When in a group, act in unison to send a clear message to the wolves they are not welcome. Back away slowly, do not turn your back on the wolf. Make noise, throw sticks, rocks and sand at the wolf. We will also remind children of the importance of staying with the group to help avoid these encounters.

Wasp

If a wasp lands on you, wait for it to fly off or brush gently off a leaf or stick (do not brush it with your hand). If you are faced with a wasp don't challenge it - it is far better for you to leave the area until the wasp has gone. Do not run or thrash or swat. If there is only one wasp, then keep still and, when safe, move to shade or away from what is attracting the wasp. If stinging seems inevitable, call for help, then cover your face with hands or clothing or get face-down on the ground. If there are multiple wasps then your removal to safety is urgent. If you find what appears to be an old and seemingly inactive wasp nest do not disturb it, there may still be living wasps inside. We carry benadryl and epi pen.

Ticks

Ticks are small bugs, about the size of a sesame seed, which feed on the blood of humans and animals –and, sometimes, transmit diseases. Ticks are prevalent throughout the B.C. Interior and are typically found in tall grass and wooded areas. We have had 3 cases of ticks at forest school the last 7 years. Signs of many tick-borne infections can be quite similar and include fever, headache, muscle pain, and rash that looks like a “bull’s eye” target which expands from the site of the tick bite. Lyme disease is rare in BC with 0.5 cases per 100 000 population and less than 1% tick infection.

Wood Ticks (Dermacentor andersoni), the species most commonly found through the Interior Health region, do not carry the Lyme disease bacteria – they can carry other diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever, however.

Ixodes ticks (Ixodes pacificus or Ixodes angustus) are the species that transmit Lyme disease. They are more common throughout coastal B.C. but may be present in some Interior Health areas. While less than one per cent of *Ixodes* in B.C. carry Lyme disease, it is important to recognize the symptoms.

It is important to remove ticks found on people and pets. To do so, wear gloves and use needle nose tweezers to gently grasp the tick close to the skin. Pull the tick straight out without squeezing it. After it is removed, clean the area with soap and water. If the tick is alive (live ticks can be tested for Lyme disease), you can save it in a sealed container with a cotton ball soaked in water. Record the date of the bite on the container.

The best defense is regular tick checks and appropriate clothing. Baths on Forest School days are always a good idea. This will serve to wash off any ticks that are still crawling around, and will give you a great opportunity to check their whole body. Ticks like warm, moist places. So armpits, behind ears, on the scalp, behind knees, belly buttons, in the groin, are all important places to look. However they could be found anywhere on the body. In spring, the new ticks (nymphs) are very tiny – the size of a poppy seed, so can be difficult to spot. Putting clothing in the dryer on high for 10 minutes will kill any ticks on the clothing as well.

- [Ticks and Lyme Disease](#) – Interior Health
- [Tick Bites and Disease](#) – HealthLink BC
- [Tick Talk](#) – BC Centre for Disease Control

4.10 Bathroom

While we will sometimes be within walking distance of a toilet, we will not always be able to return to an indoor bathroom. Children must be comfortable using the bathroom outdoors or at least willing to learn this.

Find the appropriate location behind a tree or big rocks, away from water ways and trails and no pokey plants⁸. You don't have to walk completely out of sight, you just need to block the line of sight from your bum. Pee downhill by facing downhill making sure it does not puddles around your shoes. Facilitators will bring a small shovel, toilet paper and hand sanitizer or soap and water (or if the ground is icy, doggy poo bags). We teach appropriate ways to [leave no trace](#) and choice of site and will assist younger kids by respectfully asking them if they need help with their clothes (especially overalls). Pull their pants and underwear down so that when they squat the clothes sit around mid-thighs to knees and tell them to squat far down with the bum down and with wide enough knees.

⁸ For technical details on how far away from rivers, etc to pee check out:
http://www.backpacker.com/gear/ask_kristin/193.

We help small boys and girls by holding them up if needed and wiping. The child will face away from the adult, leaning their back on the adult's chest, the educator will hold under the child's bent knees. Here is some advice for [girls](#).

Help us make it easier by choosing clothing that the child can unbutton themselves to go to the bathroom. Two piece suits can be easier for that for older kids. Add shoulderstrap pants on top of the jacket so they do not have to take off both the strap and the jacket to go to the bathroom on a cold day. If you model how to go in nature, your child will take up on your ease but if that is new to you we are also here to teach the ease.

5. Emergency Procedures

At least once per camp or once per month, the facilitator will practice with the children what to do when they are lost or separated from the group:

- Stop. Hug a tree. Blow your whistle (or scream). Step back from any bodies of water or cliff edges.
- Sit by a tree in the open if possible.
- Call out or use the whistle on your jacket or pack to whistle for help.
- Respond to any noise with a noise.
- Use extra clothing to cover your body and your head if you get cold.

If a child is not present when we do a headcount, we will:

- Stay on the site.
- Ask others to do a head count.
- Call the group together.
- Determine who saw the child last, where and when.
- Call for the child who is lost.
- Have one adult search around the boundaries of the site to find the child who is lost.

Medical Emergencies

Please ensure that you have signed the Participant Agreement form so that we have permission to perform the required first aid or transfer your child to a hospital if necessary. The facilitator will carry the first aid bag that will remain with us at all times.

Minor emergency

If a child falls and gets a cut, the facilitator does first aid while the volunteer observes the group. If a child gets a bump, scratch, or bruise, we will let the parent (or other pickup person) know at the end of the session.

Minor emergency requiring parents to be called

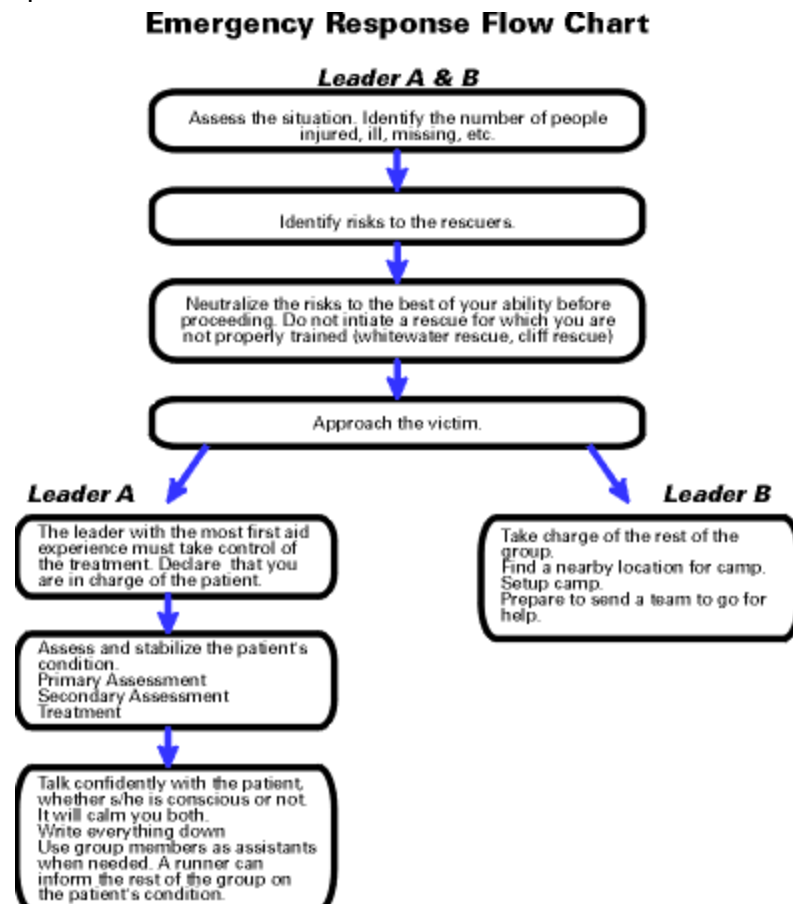
If a child is ill, the facilitator does first aid as required. One facilitator or volunteer manages the group. The other facilitator calls the parent or other emergency contacts. The group arranges to meet the parent in the drop-off and pick-up location. After that, the group will continue with the day's program.

Emergency requiring external medical care

In a serious emergency, one facilitator does first aid while the other facilitator calls 911. One facilitator then manages the group. The facilitators will arrange with emergency staff what procedures work best for the transfer to medical care.

Resources

<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Risk-Benefit-Assessment-Toolkit.pdf>



EMOTIONAL FIRST AID from Peter Levine

1. Tend to your feelings, name them, be aware of your breathing, ground.
2. Keep the child still and quiet, cover with blanket, ask bystanders to give space. Be calm and confidently firm.
3. Give plenty of time for rest and safety.
4. Hold the child, not too tight. or hold a hand on the back or shoulder. No excessive patting or rocking.
5. As shock wears off, gently guide the child's attention and sensations. Softly ask 'How do you feel in your body?' Mirror back their answer. Wait 1-2 minutes. What do you feel in your tummy, arm, head etc? What is the shape, texture, colour, size of the sensation? Wait. What do you feel now?
6. Avoid talking about the accident at this point and no shaming.
7. Continue to validate the child's physical and verbal responses. Do not stop tears or trembling. Say 'It is over. You will be ok. You are safe. I take care of you. It is good to cry and shake.'
8. Do not interrupt or distract.

Psychological First Aid reduces psychological distress by providing a safe, caring, calm, comforting presence and connection.

First Aid Items The Forest Path

First-Aid Basic Care

Antiseptic wipes (BZK-based wipes preferred; alcohol-based OK)
Antibacterial ointment (e.g., polysporin)
Assorted adhesive bandages (fabric preferred)
Butterfly bandages / adhesive wound-closure strips
Gauze pads (various sizes)
Nonstick sterile pads
Medical adhesive tape (10 yd. roll, min. 1" width)
Blister treatment
Insect sting / anti-itch treatment
Splinter (fine-point) tweezers
Safety pins
First-aid manual or information cards
Cold-pack

Wraps, Splints and Wound Coverings

Elastic wrap
Triangular cravat bandage
SAM splint(s)
Rolled gauze
Rolled, stretch-to-conform bandages
First-aid cleansing pads with topical anesthetic
Hemostatic (blood-stopping) gauze

Medications/Treatments

Ibuprofen / other pain-relief medication
Insect sting / anti-itch treatment
Antihistamine to treat allergic reactions
Sunburn relief gel
Glucose or fruit leather (to treat hypoglycemia)
Injectable epinephrine (for severe allergic reactions)
Aspirin (primarily for response to a heart attack)

Tools and Supplies

Knife (or multi-tool with knife)
Paramedic shears (blunt-tip scissors)
Cotton-tipped swabs
Irrigation syringe with 18-gauge catheter
Medical / surgical gloves (nitrile; avoid latex)
CPR mask
Small notepad with waterproof pencil or pen or
First Aid report forms
Medical waste bag (plus box for sharp items)
Waterproof container to hold supplies and meds
Emergency heat-reflecting blanket
Hand sanitizer
Biodegradable soap

Rescue remedy
Veg. oil to remove sap on hands or bearspray
Bug spray
Bear spray
Hand and foot warmers

Hand sanitizer with lavender
Mixed bandaids,
BZ Wipes
Bandage roll

Fruit leather
Polysporin
Gauze
Medical tape

SMALL 1st Aid KIT

TP	Whistle
Gloves,mask	Plastic bags

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US PLAY SAFE AT THE FOREST PATH, NELSON!