

# Palmetto + Pine Arts and Learning Community Family Handbook

At *Palmetto + Pine*, we inspire children to explore themselves, connect with others, and develop a meaningful relationship with nature through the lens of fine and performing arts. Using a self-directed, play-based approach, children are encouraged to follow their interests, cultivate their creativity, and direct their own learning. The natural setting serves as both a classroom and stage, sparking curiosity and helping children grow strong roots of confidence and expressive branches of artistry.

Our program blends outdoor education with hands-on experiences in fine and performing arts. We are committed to:

- **Nature immersion:** Offering outdoor experiences that inspire artistic expression, self regulation, and a connection to their local environment.
- **Interest-led learning:** Empowering children to explore their unique passions in the arts, life skills and nature.
- **Emergent curriculum:** Adapting to the evolving interests of each child.
- **Inquiry-based teaching:** Encouraging children to ask questions, explore ideas, and create meaningful projects.
- **Authentic play:** Supporting unstructured, imaginative play as a foundation for creativity and learning.

Our program integrates children with nature while engaging them in enriching activities such as dance, music, visual arts, storytelling, and theater. These experiences foster a deep appreciation for the arts and the natural world, stimulating their innate curiosity and creativity.

Please note that *Palmetto + Pine Arts and Learning Community* is a nature-connection enrichment program, not a school or preschool. While we draw inspiration from the "forest school" philosophy, we use this term to describe our values and the guiding principles of our arts-focused, child-centered learning environment.

To learn more about forest school principles, visit:

- [What is Forest School?](<https://forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school/>)

## Key Principles of Palmetto + Pine Arts and Learning Community

Several key principles distinguish Palmetto + Pine from other educational programs. We trust children in their ability to guide their own learning and maintain a steadfast commitment to nature immersion, fine and performing arts, and fostering a supportive community.

### *Nature Immersion*

We embrace the philosophy that children thrive when deeply connected to nature. Erin Kenny defines nature immersion as “unstructured free time in nature, resulting in an intimate, deep, and personal connection to the natural world.” Extended time outdoors allows children to experience the rhythms of the natural world, fostering a sense of timelessness in our hurried lives. This connection builds bonds with the land, themselves, and all living beings. Close contact with nature enhances children’s motor, sensory, social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development, as well as their physical and mental well-being.

### *Interest-Led (Child-Driven) Flow Learning*

When children are captivated by something, their natural sense of wonder fuels a hunger for knowledge. Learning happens most effectively when curiosity is at its peak, and children are actively engaged in something meaningful to them. At Palmetto + Pine, play is learning, and learning is play.

### *Emergent Curriculum*

Our facilitators draw on their expertise to guide children based on the opportunities and teachable moments that arise daily. These moments are influenced by the weather, the season, and our discoveries in nature and the arts. Children’s interests shape the curriculum organically, making learning deeply relevant to them. Documenting these experiences is integral, as children actively participate in recording their reflections, interests, and discoveries through journals, art, and storytelling.

### *Place-Based Education*

We focus on teaching and exploring the natural world in our specific geographical region. This approach helps children connect with their environment and fosters a sense of care for their home landscape. By observing seasonal changes and forming personal bonds with local flora, fauna, and community members, children develop a sense of place and belonging. Early experiences with nature lay the foundation for environmental stewardship and a lifelong connection to the Earth.

### *Inquiry-Based Teaching Style*

Asking open-ended questions encourages children to think critically and creatively. This approach helps children trust their own observations and explore multiple solutions to a problem. Rich conversations and explorations promote

divergent thinking and enhance problem-solving skills, both essential for the arts and beyond.

#### *Positive Reinforcement Approach*

We focus on highlighting positive behaviors rather than drawing attention to misbehavior. Children thrive when noticed and praised for qualities such as kindness, creativity, and collaboration. Positive reinforcement fosters self-pride and encourages children to seek opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the group.

#### *Individual Empowerment and Group Bonding*

Our program emphasizes both individuality and teamwork. We encourage children to recognize their unique strengths while fostering cooperation and collaboration. In the arts, working together creates magic, but we also respect that some children may prefer to explore and process experiences independently.

#### *Kindness Towards Others, Self, and the Living Earth*

Kindness is at the heart of everything we do. Treating ourselves with care and respect allows kindness to flow outward to others and the Earth. By recognizing our place as part of the natural world, children develop a strong sense of responsibility to protect and preserve it.

#### *Authentic Play*

We believe children learn best through hands-on experiences, play, music, and process art. These activities stimulate imagination, creativity, and self-expression, making the arts and nature a joyful and integral part of their learning journey.

#### *Exposure to Moderate Risk*

Encouraging children to face moderate risk helps them develop critical life skills such as risk assessment and problem-solving. This builds resilience, self-confidence, and the ability to face challenges. Whether climbing a tree or performing on stage, children learn to trust themselves and persevere.

#### *Life Skills Gained Through Our Program*

Children develop essential skills such as social interaction, conflict resolution, negotiation, body awareness, kindness, compassion, empathy, emotional balance, and risk assessment.

#### *Skills Developed Through the Arts and Nature*

Our program nurtures creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, emotional resilience, perseverance, teamwork, peer communication, imagination, and a lifelong excitement for learning. By blending fine and performing arts with nature, we create an environment where children grow as confident, capable, and compassionate individuals.

## Who Is Welcome at Palmetto + Pine Arts and Learning Community?

*Palmetto + Pine* values the rich diversity of people and families in our community and welcomes children and families of all backgrounds, abilities, and life experiences. Our program is committed to creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels respected, valued, and supported.

We embrace and celebrate the uniqueness of each child, understanding that diversity strengthens our community and enriches the learning experience for all. Children of all abilities, including both neurodiverse and neurotypical learners, are welcome here.

At *Palmetto + Pine*, we are dedicated to fostering a space where families can connect, children can thrive, and everyone is treated with kindness and care. All are welcome!

## Toilet Proficiency (For Drop-Off Programs Only- TBA)

At Palmetto + Pine Arts and Learning Community, we require all children attending drop-off programs to be toilet proficient. This means children must recognize when they need to use the bathroom and communicate this need effectively.

Our program provides flexible options for bathroom use:

- Children may choose to use a designated outdoor area for privacy and convenience.
- Portable toilets with a pop-up tent for privacy are available for children who prefer this option.
- For younger or smaller children, a child-sized potty will be accessible when we are in the forest and away from buildings.

To support children, we regularly prompt them to check in with their bodies and assess whether they need to use the bathroom. While occasional accidents are understandable, consistent toilet proficiency is necessary to maintain the comfort and independence of all participants.

\*For all programs- At times, we may be in areas without a traditional indoor bathroom. We will always have a portable toilet and pop- up privacy tent in these cases.

## Commitment to Your Child's Physical Safety and Emotional Well-Being

At Palmetto + Pine, we prioritize each child's physical safety and emotional well-being through our values of respect, collaboration, and nurturing

communication. Guided by forest school principles and the arts, we teach children to respect themselves, others, and the world around them.

### **Our Approach**

- Modeling Respect: We use positive reinforcement and non-violent communication to guide children through their emotions and interactions with others. Respect for all feelings, actions, and boundaries is central to our approach.
- Fostering Cooperation: Activities are designed to be cooperative and creative, encouraging teamwork while celebrating each child's unique individuality.
- Empowering Expression: Children are coached to understand and articulate their emotions, helping them navigate challenges in a supportive and compassionate environment.

### **Addressing Undesirable Behavior**

If a child exhibits harmful behavior such as hitting, kicking, or biting, our response will focus on safety, understanding, and coaching:

1. Immediate Action: We will ensure the affected child/ren feels cared for and safe.
2. Calm Guidance: We will calmly address the behavior, helping the child understand their actions while guiding them toward making better choices.
3. Understanding the Root: We will seek to understand the underlying cause of the behavior and support the child in expressing their needs constructively.

Parents will be notified of any significant incidents. Additionally, if it is necessary to carry or hold a child to ensure their safety and emotional security, this will be communicated to parents promptly.

At Palmetto + Pine, we believe in nurturing children with kindness, patience, and understanding, helping them grow into confident, empathetic individuals. We understand that all behavior is a form of communication and an opportunity for growth and learning. When challenging behaviors arise, we work collaboratively with families to develop strategies that support the child's needs while maintaining a positive and safe environment for everyone.

If ongoing incidents occur, staff and families will work together to create a mutually agreed-upon behavioral plan. This plan will be rooted in our principles of respect, kindness, and non-violent communication, ensuring that the child feels understood and supported while fostering a harmonious group dynamic.

### **Addressing Concerns**

We value open communication and encourage children to express their feelings and advocate for themselves in the moment. However, if your child shares any negative experiences or concerns about their time at Palmetto + Pine, we ask that you bring them to the program director's (Mariah) attention as soon as possible.

Together, we will listen, communicate, and create a plan to address the issue, ensuring your child feels heard and supported.

Our goal is to nurture each child's emotional well-being and confidence, empowering them to navigate challenges with resilience and compassion.

### **Ticks**

When picking up your child, we recommend doing a quick tick check of the easily visible areas and then a more thorough check at home each evening. Ticks can be sneaky! Here's a helpful link with tips on prevention and checking: [TickSmart Prevention]([https://tickencounter.org/ticksmart/daily\\_check\\_card](https://tickencounter.org/ticksmart/daily_check_card))

### **Dressing for Success**

Dressing your child appropriately is a big part of making sure they have a safe, fun experience outdoors. We live by the saying: \*There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing choices!\* Here are some easy-to-follow tips:

- Lightweight, long pants and closed-toe shoes are ideal.
- Label everything! If you prefer not to write on clothes, a ribbon or tag works great.
- Choose clothes that can handle mud, paint, and all the fun messes nature brings.
- Layers and loose-fitting clothes are key to keeping your child comfortable.
- Pack a full set of labeled extra clothes (or two!) in a Ziploc bag in their backpack.
- Always include a rain jacket or poncho if rain is in the forecast. **\*\*Pro Tip:\*\*** Avoid windbreakers or lined jackets that might soak through quickly. Look for brands like REI or Columbia for truly waterproof gear.
- Bring a change of clothes for pick-up, so your car stays a bit cleaner on messy days!

### **Shoes Matter**

Comfort and safety start with the right shoes! Sneakers or hiking shoes with Velcro closures are great everyday choices, and rain boots are perfect for wet days. Please avoid Crocs or other slip-ons—they're not safe for outdoor adventures.

### **Weather Reminders**

This program embraces the outdoors in all its glory! That means rain or shine, we're out there exploring. However, in case of severe weather (like thunderstorms, high winds, or hurricanes), we will notify you via text at least 90 minutes ahead of time. If needed, we'll shift drop-off programs to Unity of Sarasota.

### **Backpacks**

Your child's backpack should be the right size for them—small and lightweight, but big enough for their lunch, water bottle, and a few essentials. Daypacks are a great option! Please avoid backpacks with wheels.

## Food & Water

A happy adventurer needs fuel! Pack a healthy snack and lunch (for full-day programs) in labeled, reusable containers to minimize waste.

- Send a refillable metal water bottle (with their name on it) every day.
- Please avoid candy or chocolate snacks.
- Leftover food will be sent home, so you'll know what your child loved and what they might skip next time.

If your child has allergies, let us know right away. For now, nut butters are okay, but we'll adjust if needed for the safety of the group.

## What to Pack

Here's a checklist to make mornings easier:

- Sunblock and/or a hat
- Bug repellent (natural is best, but optional)
- Extra labeled clothes (1-2 full sets in a Ziploc bag)
- Rain gear (a must on wet days!)
- Enough snacks and water to keep them energized
- Optional: Exploration tools (like binoculars or a nature guide)
- \*What NOT to bring:\* Toys, electronics, or anything irreplaceable unless approved by the facilitator

## Communication

We value open, clear communication with our families. Here's how to stay in touch:

- Download and use our Parent Portal App called *Our School Hangout*, and use the messaging option
- For future plans (like absences or early pickups): Email us at [palmettopinelearning@gmail.com](mailto:palmettopinelearning@gmail.com)
- For urgent updates (like last-minute absences): Text us at 352-246-8403

## Sick Policy

To keep everyone healthy, please keep your child home if they've had a fever, cough, diarrhea, or vomiting in the last 48 hours.

If anyone in your household tests positive for COVID, please keep your child home for five days. They can return on day six if symptom-free.

We'll continue to follow health guidelines, emphasize handwashing, and encourage safe, mindful play.

## Absences

If your child is sick or will miss a day for another reason, let us know:

- Use our Parent Portal App called *Our School Hangout*
- Text 352-246-8403 for same-day updates.

- Email us for planned absences (like vacations).

Unfortunately, we can't offer makeup days, but we'll welcome your child back with open arms when they return!

### **Risk and Safety**

Outdoor play comes with a little risk, but it's also where some of the best learning and growth happens!

- Climbing: Children can climb as high as they're tall but must get there on their own.
- Throwing: Sticks, acorns, and other natural objects are only thrown away from people and paths.
- Exploring: We'll set clear boundaries to ensure your child stays safe while fostering independence.
- Wildlife: Kids are taught to ask before touching any living creatures.
- Sticks and water: We allow safe, creative play with sticks and supervised splashing in creeks (with proper footwear).

Please sign our risk and liability waiver and understand that some level of risk is part of the learning experience.

### **Emergencies**

In the rare event of severe weather or other emergencies, we'll take shelter in the nearest safe location (our gazebo/ covered classroom) and contact families for pickup.

We're so excited to explore, learn, and grow with your child! Let us know if you have any questions—we're here for you.

### **Palmetto + Pine Tuition & Fees**

We aim to keep our program accessible and our tuition process clear. Below you'll find the details on fees, payment schedules, and tuition rates. Any changes will be communicated ahead of time to give you adequate time to plan for.

### **Monthly Tuition Payments**

- **Invoices:** Sent via our Parent Portal App called *Our School Hangout* and a reminder email
- **Due Date:** Check the payment schedule for the class your child is registered for on our Parent Portal App called *Our School Hangout*
- **Accepted Payment Methods:**
  - ACH (bank transfer) through our website
  - Cash



- Step Up for Students funds- more on this to come, we are still working to be approved

## Late Fees

- A **10% late fee** will be added to your account if tuition is not completed 10 days after the due date.

## Program Exit Policy

- If your child is leaving the program, please provide as much notice as possible. If more than two class sessions for that month have been attended, you will be responsible for that month's full tuition. If less than two class sessions for that month have been attended, you will be responsible for half that month's full tuition.

## Invoices for Step Up Reimbursement

- If you need an invoice for reimbursement through Step Up, please notify Mariah.

## Tuition Schedule

\*Subject to changes, all families will be notified of any changes in advance

### Palmetto Troopers (Ages 6-10)

Mondon Hill Campus, Brooksville \*Unless otherwise stated in our Program Calendar

- Maximum Enrollment: 12 children\* (Facilitator to Explorer ratio is 1:6, until we hire another Facilitator our maximum enrollment will be 6)
- Parent Participatory Program- until we transition to a drop-off program an adult caregiver will be required to be present with the enrolled child/ren. Parent/ Guardian must give the caregiver that will be with the enrolled child/ren permission to supervise, transport and be responsible for their child. This caregiver's name and info should be on the enrolled child/ren's application.
- Schedule: Tuesday's 9 AM - 1 PM
  - \$200 monthly

### Palmetto Sprouts (Ages walking-5)

Mondon Hill Campus, Brooksville \*Unless otherwise stated in our Program Calendar

- Maximum Enrollment: 20 children (10 each day)
- Parent Participatory Program- an adult caregiver will be required to be present with the enrolled child/ren. Parent/ Guardian must give the

caregiver that will be with the enrolled child/ren permission to supervise, transport and be responsible for their child. This caregiver's name and info should be on the enrolled child/ren's application.

- Schedule: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Days Per Week	Monthly Tuition
2 Days/Week	\$200
1 Day/Week	\$100

The Teen Program is still in the works! Please let Mariah know if you are interested in this.

Program Calendar below:



# FALL SESSIONS CALENDAR 2025

- KEY:
- Sprouts Stay & Play
  - Troopers Forest School
  - Community Play Days
  - Explorer Showcase

\*Last Thursday of the month are Community Play Days after Wiggles & Wonders Class

## JANUARY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
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## FEBRUARY

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## MARCH

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## APRIL

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## MAY

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## JUNE

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## JULY

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## AUGUST

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31						

August 12- Trooper's Open House

## SEPTEMBER

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## OCTOBER

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## NOVEMBER

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Fall Break 11/24- 11/28

## DECEMBER

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Winter Break 12/22- 1/2

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## **Principles of Forest school**

Principle 1: Forest School is a **long term process of frequent and regular sessions** in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.

Principle 2: Forest School takes place in a **woodland or natural wooded environment** to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

Principle 3: Forest School aims to promote the **holistic development** of all those involved, fostering **resilient, confident, independent and creative learners**.

Principle 4: Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take **supported risks** appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

Principle 5: Forest School is run by **qualified Forest School practitioners** who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

Principle 6: Forest School uses a **range of learner - centered processes to create a community for development and learning**.