



FRESH AIR LEARNING SAFETY HANDBOOK

The Fresh Air Learning Environment

Fresh Air Learning takes place in both forest and farm settings. 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.

Safety Ethic

At Fresh Air Learning, 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:

- Assess risk as conditions change – weather, tiredness, etc
- Set up a safe space with boundaries and safety guidelines.
- Observe the children’s interactions with each other and with nature.
- Support the children as they choose what activities to do and how to challenge themselves.
- Spot the children during more challenging physical activity.
- Gently guide the children to safer activities if required.
- Implementing and adapting COVID-19 policies and best practices into all programs. (Read our full COVID-19 policies [here](#)).

Site Risk Assessment

Site risk assessment occurs before the program season begins, when we choose appropriate sites for exploration. Risk assessment is also dynamic and occurs prior to the start of the program day and throughout the program session.

Facilitators are responsible for doing a site risk assessment when they arrive at a site. This includes looking at each of the layers of the forest for hazards such as holes, leaning trees, and hanging branches. If such a hazard is present, the facilitator is responsible for creating a mitigation strategy to reduce the level of risk, changing sites, or cancelling the program (in extreme circumstances).

During the class, if the site as a whole is deemed too risky due to high winds or weather such as a thunderstorm, the facilitator will call all families to let them know that the program is cancelled or relocated for the day. If the program must be cancelled 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 cancelled. If the site becomes unsafe during a program, the facilitator will go to the closest building and the group will take refuge there.

In case of early dismissal due to unsafe conditions, we will attempt to contact each child’s parent or caregiver. If we cannot contact a parent or caregiver, we will contact the next person listed on the family’s emergency contact list. If no one is available, we will stay at on site with the child until someone on the list is able to pick up that child.

The Role of the Facilitator

All of the facilitators present each day have a role to play in ensuring the safety of the children. Before the day's program begins, the facilitators will talk together to make plans for the day.

Head Counting

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.

Interactions Between Children

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.

Adults will make every effort to do the following when challenging interactions occur:

- Be proactive. Take note of the social interactions between the children.
- Be physically closer to a child or children if concerned about a social or safety situation.
- Remind the children to use gentle (kind, respectful) words to ask for what they need and to clearly articulate their personal boundaries.
- Remind the children that hands are for working and playing, not hitting.
- Redirect the children to different activities or have them chat with an adult who will help them calm down.
- When the children are calm, discuss the situation with the children involved. Encourage discussion of any differences so that the children can work on communicating their needs to each other.
- 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 if needed).
- Encourage the child(ren) to consider alternative actions that they could take in the future and actions that they could take right now to help everyone feel better.

You can find out more about our community interactions by reading our Code of Conduct document located in the Handbooks section of the website.

What to Bring to Fresh Air Learning

Your children are registered for forest school. What should you get to make sure they are warm and dry?

Children must come with gear that is appropriate for the weather that day. Children who are not adequately dressed will not be able to attend that day. Mountain Equipment Coop has many things you will need. Consignment, thrift stores and Craigslist often have great finds as well. In the past parents have arranged bulk orders with certain local companies as well. You can also join Fresh Air Learning's Facebook Gear Swap: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/156901604517453/>

Sanitization:

- Hand sanitizer containing at least 70% alcohol attached to the outside of the child's backpack, or in an easily accessible pouch for the child to reach.
- Handwashing kit and towels for parents (parents will assist children with washing their hands upon entry/exit of the program) We recommend a water bottle with warm soapy water and a clean dry washcloth.
- If your child is unable to use hand sanitizer for any reason, please pack a handwashing kit for them as described above.

Waterproof Boots:

- Children will wear their rain boots almost all year round.
- If possible, buy new boots. Children use them a lot and the soles wear through.
- The taller the boots, the better! This prevents puddles from getting into the boots.
- Bogs and Kamik both make warm neoprene boots for children.
- Kamik also sells rain boots with liners for extra warmth.
- If you go for normal rain boots, wear wool socks.

When it is rainy, we recommend:

- **Layers:** We recommend wearing layers of clothing so children can make adjustments as needed according to changes in weather/microclimate and activity levels.
- Inner layer of fleece (or polypropylene) or natural fabrics such as wool or silk. The fabric should wick moisture away from the skin and provide a warm, breathable layer.
- Middle layer of insulation made of wool or fleece.
- Avoid jeans in wet weather, since they tend to soak up the water.
- **Rain Jacket:** Outer shell jacket of waterproof, windproof clothing. Be sure to get a jacket in a larger size to allow for layers of clothing under the jacket.
- **Rain Pants:** Pants should stop at the waist so that children can use the "forest toilet" . MEC, Abeko, and Wet Skins all make good rain pants. (Parent tip: to keep gear waterproof, spray it with silicone every 3-4 months).
- **Warm socks:** Wool or other thick socks keep your feet warm. Tuck an extra pair into your backpack.
- **Hat:** Warm, waterproof hat that covers the ears.

- **Gloves:** We like Abeko/Puddlegear gloves. These are waterproof and lined. (If your child is not wearing waterproof gloves, bring an extra pair or two.

When it is cold, please add:

- Warm and waterproof gloves or mittens that slip on and off easily.
- Long underwear, Wool or MEC long underwear keeps children warm with less bulk.
- An extra pair of warm gloves and warm socks in your child's bag.
- Optional: reusable hand warmers.

When it is warm, please wear:

- **A long-sleeved shirt** (we recommend light cotton, silk or hemp).
- Durable pants.
- A sun hat.
- Running or hiking shoes (note that children may still play in water and mud, footwear should be waterproof wherever possible!).
- Sun protection.

Everyone requires:

- **A whistle:** attached to the child's jacket.
- **Backpack:** A child-sized waterproof backpack. The backpack should be small enough for your child to carry comfortably with a good chest strap. (Please put a name tag or some other distinguishing mark on the pack). Popular options are MEC brand for smaller children (ages 2-5) and Deuter for children ages 5 and up.
- **Water bottle:** Water in a spill-proof bottle. Stainless steel Klean Kanteens are very durable.
- **Snack:** A healthy, high-energy snack in a reusable container **that is easy to open for the child independently!** Metal tiffins, lunchbots, and other compartmentalized boxes work well for snacks. For "plastic wrap," we like reusable Abeego Wraps or cloth snack bags.
- **Lunch:** For programs longer than 4 hrs children will need to bring lunch and a snack.
- ***Optional - Mug:** A small unbreakable cup for warm drinks (optional, but teachers will no longer bring tea to share)
- ***Optional - Thermos:** A small kids thermos (stainless steel is best) for hot drinks in the winter months.
- **Tissues:** in a small ziplock bag, easily accessible.
- **An emergency blanket** (such as <https://www.mec.ca/en/product/0199-034/Emergency-Blanket>)
- **Extra socks, gloves, and hat.**
- **Extra layers:** It's good to keep an extra layer or two and a pair of underwear in your child's backpack in case of accidents.
- **3 Bread bags.** Clean, re-used bread bags for your child's backpack. These go over the feet if they get wet, so that children can slip their feet into their boots again. Please place a few bags into your child's backpack.

The child's backpack should have their name on it and the Fresh Air Learning phone number (**604-802-7539**) on a tag on the outside.

Activities 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 adults might use with the children to guide them toward safe behaviour in the forest.

Hiking

When we walk through the forest, we are in a sandwich. One facilitator will be in the front and one facilitator will be in the back. The children do not need to be in a line, but they do need to be inside the sandwich.

Boundaries

We choose sites with natural boundaries such as trails or heavy vegetation. An adult will make children aware of the boundaries when they first visit the site. 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.

Crossing Roads, Parking Lots, and Trails

The children will be sandwiched in between two adults when crossing roads or trails where bikes or horses could be present. The group will walk carefully across the road after looking for traffic.

Sticks

Stick will be the length of the child's arm or shorter except at the facilitator's discretion. If we are building with sticks, the children should drag them along the ground or hold them with one child on each end. *Sticks are for building, digging, and imaginative play. Big sticks need big spaces. Sticks are not for hitting. When we run, we put the sticks down. It is important to be able to use your own hands for balance.*

Rocks

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.

Climbing

We may climb as high as we are tall without being actively spotted. We only climb as high as we can climb on our own. We only climb when an adult can safely spot us (watch us and keep us safe). The adult will be present to spot a child, not to assist them to get higher. In the elementary program, a child may not climb higher than their head as the children are larger and harder to spot.

If a child is stuck, the adult will attempt to talk the child through the process of getting down prior to assisting that child.

Digging

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. Your teacher will tell you if this is a place where we can dig.

Plants

We ask an adult before eating a plant to make sure it is the right kind. We keep green leaves on the plants so that they can help the plant grow.

Fire

In the winter months, we may have an opportunity to use a real or propane fire. When we are around the fire, we sit. We walk outside the circle rather than inside the circle. We keep our bodies away from the fire as it is very hot. We do not move items in and out of the fire.

Knives and Peelers

Older children will receive knife skills training prior to using a knife or a peeler. Younger children use peelers. Elementary-aged students ages 8 and up may ask to receive training using a knife. Training is at the facilitator's discretion. Children may not bring carving knives to school until the teacher states that they are allowed to do so. Knives will be in packs until the teacher lets people know that the knives may come out. All knives must have a fixed blade (no Swiss Army Knives or Leathermans). Children using knives must carve with tight-fitting Kevlar or leather gloves for hand protection.

Children must be seated in a stable position. while using a knife. The knife remains in its sheath until the child gets permission to use it. Children will always carve away from themselves and will not use excessive force with the knife. Children will maintain an arm's length plus the knife away from other children (the safety bubble) and will never carve on or over any of their body parts.

Gardening and Stall Cleaning

Soil and particularly manure can be a hazard for children, so when we work in the barns or in the garden with manure, we do the following:

- Remind children to keep hands and equipment down low and away from everyone's faces, including their own.
- Use small rakes instead of trowels in garden plots when possible, since trowels tend to move manure up and toward the face.
- Aim for a smaller group size when doing garden activities or stall cleaning - divide up the group so that they are doing different activities, with some focused on the garden.
- Use purchased manure products when working in the garden
- Wash hands immediately after working with manure
- Wash hands before snack
- Remind parents to remove the children's outerwear and spray it off before using it again
- If a child complains that something is in their eye while using manure and it does not clear immediately, we will use eye wash to remove the object from the eye. We will call parents if the child is uncomfortable with this process.

Water

We will primarily access shallow, slow-moving water bodies such as ponds and side channels. We will not visit rivers when they are high. Before we visit a body of water, the facilitator will give instructions to the children about the appropriate behaviour around this water body. This generally includes staying close to a facilitator.

Fishing

Fishing is a possibility in our program around Rice Lake. In order to fish safely, we will do the following:

- Children will wear protective eyewear, such as safety glasses.
- Children will fish from land or the fishing dock. They may enter the water until the water is just over the foot portion of their boot.
- The children and teacher will assess the fishing area daily to remove debris left behind by others, including fish hooks and line.
- Prior to fishing, children will receive training on the proper handling of hooks and fishing gear.
- Children will not move in front of or behind other anglers. They will let other anglers know that they are coming and ask all anglers to stop casting before they move through the area.
- Children will stand 2-3 metres apart while angling, more if the area allows.

Animal Encounters

Farm Animals

The children will interact with animals in the forest and at Maplewood Farm. To ensure that the environment is safe for the children and the animals, the children should:

- Always approach an animal from the front.
- Only feed and touch the animals when the facilitator says it is appropriate.
- Use gentle hands to touch animals.
- Return small animals (invertebrates) to their homes after observing them.
- Wash their hands after touching animals or after gardening.

Dogs

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. We practice dog games at the beginning of the year so that children know how to behave.

To help prevent children from being bitten by dogs, the following safety tips will be reviewed regularly:

- Do not approach an unfamiliar dog.
- Do not run from a dog or scream.
- Be still like a tree when approached by an unfamiliar dog.
- Be still like a log if knocked over by a dog. Cover your face as much as you can.
- Do not play with or touch a dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behaviour to an adult.
- Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
- Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first (and without getting permission from the dog’s owner).

Bears

Bears are active all year on the North Shore. To promote co-existence between bears and people on the North Shore, we strive to act in a bear-aware manner.

We will not leave backpacks unattended. If the group moves along, the group will move with its backpacks.

If we see a bear, we will:

- Take a deep breath
- One teacher will calmly collect the children
- The other teacher will use their voice in a calm tone to reassure the bear
- That teacher will back away and get their bear spray ready
- The group will move out of the area

If we see a bear in a tree, we will move away from the area. This may be a young bear, or in the spring it may be cubs who have been sent up the tree by their mother, who is close by.

If we see signs of recent bear scat, a lot of bear scat, or dead wildlife that might be a bear attractant, we will move out of the area.

We will assess areas for potential denning spots such as substantial holes under logs, and until we can get guidance from the Black Bear Society, we will choose to avoid the area if we feel there could be a den there.

We will maintain extra awareness of the sights and sounds in our surroundings, particularly in overgrown areas and during camouflage and sneaking games, as we will be quieter at that time.

Cougars

In the event that we see a cougar, here are the procedures we will follow:

STOP

Make ourselves big

Back away

If the cougar does not go away, keep eye contact with the cougar, show teeth and make loud noises.

Arm ourselves with sticks and rocks.

If the cougar does attack, fight back: focus on the nose and face area. Use sticks and rocks as weapons.

Coyotes

If a coyote acts unafraid or aggressive, we will take the following action as soon as we notice the animal:

Raise your arms and wave them in the air to make yourself appear larger.

Back away slowly, do not turn your back

Make noise, throw sticks and rocks

We will also remind children of the importance of staying with the group to help avoid these encounters.

Ticks

There are ticks in all of our local parks. Tick bites can be the cause of Lyme Disease which can be a very serious and life-disrupting illness.

Here are some tips on how to be prepared:

- Wear long pants tucked into socks or rain pants cinched over top of a pair of boots.
- Wear long sleeves.
- Wear a hat.
- Check back, hairline, hair and other exposed body parts for ticks upon leaving the forest.
- If a tick is found, remove it or seek medical attention to remove it. Keep the tick so that it can be tested for disease.

For prevention against Lyme Disease, antibiotics are most effective if taken in the first 24 hours.

Here are some helpful resources for additional information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/features/stopticks/index.html>

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/lyme-disease-borrelia-burgdorferi-infection#submit>

<https://canlyme.com/about/>

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/tp23585spec>

Tick Check Video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jl_5FTGz40&app=desktop

Wasps

If a wasp lands on you, wait for it to fly off or gently blow it off. (**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, then cover your face with hands or clothing.

Severe Weather

Facilitators are responsible for checking the wind forecast the night before the program and for monitoring winds throughout the day. The program will not run in a forested area if there is a high wind warning from Environment Canada. Sometimes, a wind warning is issued while the program is in session or there are local gusts. In case of high winds, the group will exit the forest or move to an open area until it is safe to exit the forest.

In case of a thunderstorm, if thunder is heard, participants should be brought into an enclosed building (not a picnic shelter). The group will remain inside for 30 minutes after hearing the last roll of thunder. If out on the trail, the group will come down from high places, avoid open areas (if stuck in an open area, lie down), don't seek shelter under tall trees. The group will also move away from water bodies. If lightning is striking nearby, we will spread the group out in the forest, equal distances away from each other and trees. Have everyone crouch in a ball with hands over heads, covering ears and only feet touching the ground.

Emergency Procedures

At least once per month, the facilitator will practice with the children what to do when they are lost or separated from the group. We use games to practice because they help make these rehearsals less intimidating for children.

- Stop. Step back from any bodies of water or cliff edges.
- Hug a tree. Blow your whistle (or scream).
- 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 your emergency blanket to cover your body and your head if you get cold.

If a child is not present when we do a head count, 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.
- Call the ranger and 911 to inform them that a child is lost.

Medical Emergencies

Allergic Reaction

Fresh Air Learning has Epipens and Benadryl available in case of unexpected life-threatening or non-life-threatening allergies. Please ensure that you provide an alternative to Benadryl if you are not comfortable with your child consuming this.

Minor emergency

If a child falls and gets a cut, the facilitator does first aid. If a child gets a bump, scratch, or bruise, we will let the parent (or other pick-up person) know at the end of the session.

Illness that emerges during class

If a child becomes ill during class, one teacher will call the parent or other emergency contact person. The child and the teacher will remain adjacent to the group but outside the play space. The parent will walk to the group and pick up the child. If the parent is unable to walk to the group or may not be able to easily find the group, the entire group will return to the meeting space and continue with the day's program there.

Minor emergency requiring parents to be called

If a child is ill, the facilitator does first aid as required and 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, the facilitator does first aid while the other facilitator calls 911.

Documentation of Emergency Care

After any incident that requires medical care (even a bandaid), the facilitator will document this incident in our incident report forms and follow up with the family within three days of the incident.

Serious Emergencies (Earthquake, Lockdown)

In case of a serious emergency, the classes will do the following:

Key contacts

- Director's Number: 604-616-4177
- Administrator's Number: 604-802-7539

Lockdown (due to a dangerous person or animal)

1. Teacher blows whistle 3 times to alert students.
2. Students come to the teacher.
3. Students get behind the teacher and close to another adult, if one is present.
4. The other adult walks with the students to our safe location (farm room, local school, gate house).

5. Once the group is secured, the teacher calls the other teachers to let them know of the danger.
6. After the danger has passed, the teacher calls the program director to let her know about the incident and writes up an incident report.

Earthquake

1. The teacher drops to the ground and tucks into a log, if possible.
2. The teacher blows the whistle and yells, "Earthquake!"
3. The children drop to the ground close to a large log or rock, tucking their body into the log. They will cover their head and neck with their hands.
4. After the earthquake, the teacher whistles three times and collects the group.
5. The teacher does a head count and assesses any injuries and calls 911 if needed.
6. The group makes its way to its safe location.
7. If there are injured children who cannot be moved, the group will stay in place unless directed to move by 911.
8. When the group reaches its emergency location, teachers call each other to confirm that they are safe.
9. The group sets up a temporary shelter.
10. The teachers begin to call parents and alternate contacts.
11. The teacher with the sign in sheet is responsible for calling the program director.

Forest Fire

1. The teacher blows a whistle three times to gather the group.
2. The second teacher calls 911 to report a fire.
3. The group leaves the forest as quickly as possible and gathers next to the closest road, so that the children can easily be dismissed.
4. The teachers begin to call parents and alternate contacts for pick up.
5. The teacher with the sign in sheet is responsible for calling the program director.