



Parent Handbook

Welcome to Forest and Nature Programs at the Oakville Parent-Child Centre! We are excited to welcome your child to sessions filled with outdoor learning and exploration. In our Forest and Nature programs, children are at the centre of their learning, and we provide opportunities for them to explore their interests as we support their development. With visits to the nearby nature trail, children will foster a deeper connection to and understanding of the natural world.

Adventure awaits!

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About OPCC

Oakville Parent-Child Centre (OPCC) has been serving the Oakville community since 1980. As a not-for-profit centre, we offer a variety of programs and services including drop-ins, parenting support & workshops, Discovery Station Early Learning and resource libraries. OPCC is the EarlyON Child and Family Centre for Oakville. The mission of OPCC is to support, nurture and empower children and their families as they learn and grow together.

Program Overview

Forest and Nature Class at OPCC follows the guiding principles of Forest and Nature schools in Canada, as outlined by the [Child and Nature Alliance of Canada](#).

We gather as a community at our classroom space at 481 North Service Rd. W, Unit 25, either inside or out front depending on the weather and planned activities. We begin with a daily welcome, setting or reviewing the program expectations as a group, and provoking curiosity about the natural world through sharing artifacts or stories. Then we walk to the Indian Ridge Trail, located just behind the centre. On the trail we will hike, play games, participate in exploration activities and use natural materials to create, learn, imagine and grow. We return to our classroom to reflect on our time together before departure.

Most of our time will be spent outdoors, rain or shine, unless in instances of extreme weather when we will hold our class indoors in our classroom space.

Please come dressed for the weather and prepared to be outside, with sunscreen and bug spray already applied as needed.

What to Bring

- Refillable Water Bottle, labelled with your child's name
- Nut-free snacks or snack and lunch, depending on program length
- Close-toed outdoor shoes
- Indoor shoes
- Change of clothes

Educators

Program Lead: Brileigh McCrank

Brileigh is an OCT-certified Primary/Junior/Intermediate teacher with a Master of Teaching from the University of Toronto where she completed her research on Environmental Education. She has been working with children of all ages in outdoor settings for the past three years on the Learn-to-Camp Team at Parks Canada. Growing up in Muskoka sparked her early interest in Outdoor Education and she loves fostering a connection between children and nature.

Educators have First Aid and CPR training. Forest and Nature Summer Camp is also supported as needed by our RECE instructors and the administrative team at OPCC.

Policies and Procedures

Ratios: A minimum of two educators (Program Lead and a Program Assistant) will be facilitating the program, with a third educator added as needed. Our group size will never exceed 15 children.

Arrival and Departure: Parents are greeted at the entrance door by a staff member. Each day upon arrival, children will be signed in on the sign-in sheet; please indicate who will be picking up your child for departure time.

Please be available to collect your child by their pick-up time. In the interest of safety, we cannot allow a child to leave the centre with someone we do not know. Your child will only be released to those people designated on your registration form. We require that any new authorized pick-ups provide photo identification at departure time. In the event of extenuating circumstances, changes to the designated authorized pick-up list for your child must be submitted in writing from a parent or guardian to bmccrank@op-cc.ca.

Cancellation: A \$25.00 withdrawal fee is charged for withdrawal from this program. Fourteen days written notice is required for withdrawals. If 14 days written notice is not given, the program fee will be withheld. The 14-day period commences on the date written notice is received by OPCC. If the 14-day notice is received, the program fee will be *returned less a \$25.00 administration fee*. OPCC holds the right to terminate care immediately if any of the following situations occur: nonpayment of program fees, chronic late pick up and/or other extreme situations.

Weather: We will be outdoors for as much of the program as possible. Educators will continually monitor the weather and adjust the program accordingly. In the event of a thunderstorm, all participants will remain indoors until at least 30 minutes after the final lightning strike. We will not enter the forest during periods of high winds and will instead remain in the field space or classroom. Extreme heat or cold will result in shorter outdoor sessions with indoor breaks.

Snacks and Lunches: Please pack **nut free** snacks/lunch for your child. If your child has an anaphylactic allergy to another food item, indicate this on your registration. We will request that families refrain from sending snacks containing that ingredient as well. Sharing snacks is not permitted.

Photographs: During the program, program staff will be taking photos of the children engaged in indoor and outdoor activities. These photos will only be used for this program and may be shared through email to the children's families only or posted for the families to see at pick up time. If a parent objects to their child being in a picture, please discuss this with the Program Lead.

Allergies and Medication: The centre will not administer any medication (prescription or non-prescription ie. Tylenol etc.), except in the event a child requires emergency medication in response to an allergic or life-threatening condition. If your child has an epinephrine auto injector or a rescue reliever inhaler, please contact the Program Lead to complete the required forms. This package must be completed before your child can start in the program. If there are any changes in a child's medical condition, it is the parent's responsibility to contact the Program Lead immediately. OPCC, at the discretion of the Executive Director, may refuse to undertake responsibility for administering medications or procedures, which staff does not have the expertise to administer.

Environmental Considerations: When visiting the trails, environmental considerations include the presence of ticks, poison ivy and urban wildlife.

1. **Ticks:** Tick checks will be conducted by children prior to re-entering the classroom at the end of each visit to the trails, and it is encouraged that parents perform a more thorough check of their child at home. More information about risks, prevention and what to do if you find a tick can be found here: <https://www.halton.ca/For-Residents/Immunizations-Preventable-Disease/Diseases-Infections/Lyme-Disease>
2. **Poison ivy:** Poison ivy is present on the trails. Children will be asked to remain on the trails and will be shown what poison ivy looks like and told the importance of avoiding it. Any possible contact will result in washing the affected area immediately and thoroughly with soap and water and changing clothes. Long pants can help prevent reactions from poison ivy, but clothing should be laundered as oils from the plant can linger and transfer to skin. Learn more here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/home-garden-safety/poison-ivy.html>
3. **Urban wildlife:** The Town of Oakville has guidelines in place for best practices to ensure the safety of wildlife and humans as we share natural spaces. These include not feeding the wildlife, keeping trails clean of any food waste and reporting certain wildlife encounters. More information can be found here: <https://www.oakville.ca/environment/wildlife-biodiversity.html>

Child Guidance: It is the purpose of OPCC and this program to provide a warm, caring environment in which each child feels safe and secure. Consistent limits for behaviour have been set, appropriate to the developmental level of the child and deal with health and safety, appropriate use of the equipment and the rights of each individual. We believe that the child responds best to positive direction, using encouraging language and tone of voice. The child learns respect for others by being given respect for himself/herself. Our child guidance policies reflect this philosophy. Methods used include:

- Redirection – guiding a child into an acceptable option when engaged in an unacceptable activity
- Natural and Logical Consequences
- Limit Setting – boundaries are developed by the program staff for the children as a group or for individual children, according to each situation
- Modeling
- Providing choices
- Anticipating conflict – planning and preparation of the environment
- Positive reinforcement and encouragement

If a difficult situation arises with the child, educators may discuss appropriate solutions in co-operation with the parent. Any disciplinary practice based on negative control technique is not allowed. The provision of Prohibited Practices forbids corporal punishment and other harmful disciplinary practices to protect the emotional and physical well-being of children. These practices are never permitted in our centre. If the child guidance strategies outlined above and collaboration with the parent/guardian are unsuccessful at ensuring the safety and well-being of every child, the child may be removed from the program.

Emergency Management: In the event of an emergency, we will evacuate the children to our safe place and once children are settled safely, parents/caregivers will be notified. Our safe place for our NSR-Satellite location is our NSR-Main site, at 461 North Service Rd W., #17.

Note: all directions given by emergency services personnel will be followed under all circumstances, including directions to evacuate to locations different than those listed above.

As soon as possible, OPCC must notify parents of the emergency situation and when the all-clear has been given. Where emergencies have occurred that did not require evacuation of the centre, OPCC must provide a notice of the incident to parents.

If normal operations do not resume the same day that an emergency situation has taken place, OPCC will provide parents with information as to when and how normal operations will resume as soon as this is determined.

If staff, parents and/or children have experienced distress from a crisis situation that occurred at OPCC, then the Executive Director/Manager will support and work with the appropriate agencies to assist in the recovery process to ensure help is given to those that require it.

Please contact the Manager if you have any questions at any time.

Incident/Accident Forms: OPCC is required to complete an Incident/Accident Form in the event of an injury. These forms are shared with the parents and must be signed by the parent at pick-up and given a copy. The original forms are then kept in the child's file.

Serious Occurrence: A severe situation or injury warrants immediate attention and action. Any confirmed cases of COVID-19 is considered a serious occurrence and will be reported as required to Halton Region Public Health. It is the responsibility of the educators to report immediately any occurrence, or suspected occurrence, to the Manager and/or the Executive Director. A report will be completed by the Manager/Executive Director, and the occurrence will be reported to the Board of Directors.

Concerns about the Suspected Abuse or Neglect of a child: Everyone, including members of the public and professionals who work closely with children, is required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. If a parent/caregiver expresses concerns that a child is being abused or neglected, the parent will be advised to contact the [local Children's Aid Society](#) (CAS) directly. Persons who become aware of such concerns are also responsible for reporting this information to CAS as per the "Duty to Report" requirement under the *Child and Family Services Act*.

COVID-19

Guidance: OPCC's policies and procedures relating to COVID-19 are taken from [COVID-19 Public Health Measures and Advice](#) and Halton Region Public Health.

Please ensure that your child is healthy before attending our programs. Refunds are not issued in the event of illness. Refer to the [Provincial School Screening](#) to complete the screening before coming to program. If you are unsure if they should attend, please give us a call.

This handbook has been designed to provide you with detailed information regarding our Forest and Nature programs. If you have any questions or concerns, please give us a call at 905-849-6366.