
St. John XXIII

Nature Programs

Parent Handbook



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Welcome to the St. John XXIII Nature Programs!

We are excited to have your child join us in exploring the wonders of nature. This handbook is designed to provide you with essential information about the program, its goals, and what to expect.

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1. Program Overview

EICS Mission Statement

We are a Catholic community committed to developing educational opportunities in the context of Gospel values, where students' gifts and talents are celebrated and nurtured through lifelong spiritual and personal experiences.

St. John XXIII Nature Program Philosophy

Our Nature Program philosophy is to connect children to nature, thereby fostering rich learning experiences, ecological literacy, and healthy living. With the role-modeling of skilled educators who understand the power of play and child-directed learning, children can grow in resilience and compassion to contribute positively to a more sustainable world. Through hands-on experiences, interactive lessons, and outdoor exploration, we aim to instill a sense of wonder and environmental stewardship in each child.

Nature Program Rationale

Nature-based programming for kids involves activities and experiences that take place in natural settings. Nature-based programming provides a holistic approach to children's development, encompassing physical health, mental well-being, environmental awareness, social skills, and cognitive growth. There are several compelling reasons why parents might choose nature-based programming for their kids:

Health and Well-being:

- Physical Health: Outdoor activities encourage physical exercise, helping children develop better fitness and coordination.
- Mental Health: Spending time in nature has been linked to reduced stress, anxiety, and depression in children. It promotes overall mental well-being.

Environmental Awareness:

- Connection to Nature: Nature-based programs foster a sense of connection to the environment, instilling an appreciation for nature and a desire to protect it.
- Ecological Understanding: Kids gain a better understanding of ecosystems, biodiversity, and their role in preserving the planet.

Learning and Development:

- Hands-On Learning: Nature-based programs involve hands-on experiences, which can enhance cognitive development and critical thinking skills.
- Creativity: Outdoor environments stimulate creativity and imagination in children, providing a rich context for imaginative play.

Social Skills:

- Collaboration: Group activities in natural settings promote teamwork and cooperation among children.
- Communication: Nature-based programs encourage communication skills as kids learn to express themselves and share their experiences.

Resilience and Problem-Solving:

- Challenge and Risk: Outdoor activities often involve challenges that help children develop resilience and problem-solving skills.
- Adaptability: Being in nature requires adapting to different conditions, fostering flexibility and adaptability.

Cultural and Ethical Values:

- Ethical Values: Nature-based programs incorporate lessons about sustainability and ethical environmental practices.
- Cultural Appreciation: Children learn about the cultural and historical significance of natural environments.

Foster a Love for Learning:

- Intrinsic Motivation: Positive experiences in nature can ignite a lifelong love for learning, inspiring children to explore and seek knowledge on their own.

Curriculum Highlights

The curriculum covers a range of topics, including plant and animal life cycles, weather patterns, and ecological relationships. We integrate religion, phys.ed, wellness, science, math, language arts and art into our nature-based lessons to provide a well-rounded learning experience.

2. Learning and Development**Schedule**

Start and End Time: At St. John XXIII Catholic School we begin our day at 8:40am and end at 3:10pm. On the first Wednesday of every month we have Early Dismissal which means the students are dismissed from school at 2:10pm.

Kindergarten

Tuesday/Thursday and scheduled Fridays

A Typical Day

Each day at Nature unfolds differently based on the students' interests, the season and weather, and the various loose parts found or introduced at the site. After getting off the bus, we will gather in our classroom, greet each other, and get dressed for the day. Once everyone has settled in, students will be called together to make a plan for the day. Sometimes that plan will take us on a hike through the school site, and we'll

discover new places to play, build forts, or climb trees. Other activities can also include making art, putting on a play, or engaging in rich learning experiences in our mud kitchen. Other times, we may be transported to places such as the Interpretive Forest, Natural Playground, Turner Park or River Valley. Snacks and lunch will be scheduled appropriately throughout the day. As the day comes to a close, we often tell stories and talk about our day. While every day is different, play, exploration, and connection to each other and the land is our focus in all our adventures.

Grade 1 and 2

Monday and Wednesday, half days.

A Typical Day

Students in the Nature Program transition to the Nature Classroom at 11:25 AM. Depending on the weather lunch is enjoyed outdoors, setting the stage for onsite adventures or offsite trips via bus. The afternoon includes hands-on activities, environmental education, and nature exploration. Reflection time and nature journaling wrap up the day, fostering a connection to the natural world while maintaining a balance with traditional learning. The grade 1 and 2 Nature Program seamlessly integrates with the curriculum by aligning outdoor activities with key educational outcomes.

Emergent Learning

Learning in our Nature Programs can and often does look different than it does in a conventional school. In Nature Programs, we are committed to participant-led, emergent, inquiry, and play-based learning. This means that we believe that all participants are capable of constructing important knowledge about the world through pursuing their own interests, asking questions, and expressing themselves in multiple, complex, and interrelated ways.

Importance of Play

Within our Nature Programs, we believe that unstructured, free play is fundamental to healthy development and learning. Play is the primary way through which children make meaning of the world. Unstructured free play is something that children experience infrequently in our current society. Outdoor settings offer an important provision in today's culture enabling children to explore the natural environment, climb trees, build forts, play in the snow or otherwise, and engage with natural materials. Play can take many forms. For example, symbolic play involves the use of an object (or a sign or symbol) to "stand in for" or represent something else - in Nature Programming, a spruce cone might become a person. Social play requires participants to effectively negotiate rules and procedures - this is a part of nearly all play at Nature Programming. Regardless of the type, all play provides the building blocks for greater cognitive functioning and learning for children and adults alike.

Active/Risky Play

Active/Risky play is defined as play that provides opportunities for challenges, testing limits, exploring boundaries, encountering uncertainty and learning about injury risk. Walking, running, climbing, and riding a bike require negotiation with injury risks. If a child isn't willing to get hurt, they can't acquire these skills as readily, if at all! Engaging in active/risky play builds resiliency and problem solving skills for children.

3. Staff

Children will be supported by a trained, certificated teacher and Program Assistant. Understanding students in Nature Programs as knowledge builders who make meaning of the world through play and other self-selected activities means that the role of a Nature Teacher is also quite different from the role a teacher may play in a conventional classroom. Instead of being an “expert” or the one who has all the “right answers” (and thereby occupying a position of power over and above learners) nature educators seek to be co-learners with participants. They aim to prompt questions, extend and deepen participants' thinking, and nurture compassion for the world around them. They scaffold the learning by posing questions, using or introducing tools, guided activities, and supplies that change the learning environment and experience of the learner.

4. Location

Most days will be spent exploring areas in and around each school, however, some days may be spent off site to explore other wonderful outdoor areas. These can include places in Fort Saskatchewan such as the Interpretive Forest, Natural Playground, Turner Park or River Valley as well as programs from the Strathcona Wilderness Centre.

5. Fees

Nature Kindergarten: Tuesdays/Thursdays and scheduled Fridays. Children should be enrolled in a Monday/Wednesday regular program. Cost for the Nature Kinder program is \$425/month

Grade 1 and 2 Nature Program: Monday and Wednesday half days outside. Cost for the Gr.1 and Gr. 2 Nature program is \$200/month

This fee is paid online through your PowerSchool account and will pay for your child's :

- All Nature field trip fees
- Transportation to Field trips
- Certified and professional staff
- Materials and resources used in the program
- An educational experience that will enrich their lives

*Regular school fees still apply

6. Snack and Lunch

Food Guidelines

Please send garbage-free snacks (wrappers are taken off already at home, this helps with litter and keeping fingers warm while eating with mittens on in the spring/fall and lunches that are healthy and filling. Your child will be busy playing and exploring so they will need lots of energy to refuel themselves for the day. Your child will also need a reusable water bottle that is filled with water every day.

Nut Safe Zone

Due to the prevalence of life-threatening nut allergies, we ask that participants refrain from bringing nuts or nut products to St. John XXIII. Soy and sunflower seed substitutes for nut butters are welcome.

Snack Sharing

In addition, we ask that participants do not share or trade snacks, as this ensures the health, safety, and happiness of the community. At times, we will be cooking and sampling snacks together (such as bannock, hot chocolate, and fruit and vegetables).

Garbage-Less Lunches

We encourage participants to try to bring a garbage-less lunch. At the same time, we ask that parents/caregivers consider the size/weight/safety of the containers in which their child's snacks are packed. In our Nature Programs, we seek to empower even our youngest participants to carry their own snacks and water bottles on our adventures, which is totally possible with small containers.

Drinking Water

While in our Nature Programs, the children will be doing a lot of physical activities. This will cause the children to get thirsty throughout the day. Please ensure that they come to school with a 12-14oz reusable water bottle that is filled with drinking water. It will be sent home daily to be sanitized.

7. Communication

During Nature programming, you can reach your child's teacher through Class Dojo or email. In the event of an emergency you would call the school office.

8. Health and Safety

Inclement Weather Guidelines

Teachers in our Nature Programs consult the forecast regularly, and weather-related safety is considered in all decision-making (i.e. how far to venture away from the main building, how long to be outside). In the case of predicted thunder and lightning, teachers will ensure participants are close to shelter so that they can quickly take cover. In the case of extreme cold (-25°C including wind chill or below) or extreme heat (30°C), teachers will limit children's length of exposure, and will constantly assess the children's comfort and safety, watching for signs of frostbite, hypothermia, heat exhaustion, etc. In the event that the road conditions make travel to/from any field trip locations unsafe for either staff or students, we may need to cancel the field trip for that day. We will notify you by DOJO if possible at least 1 hour prior to the start time.

Health & Wellness

We are committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for every child. A child with a communicable disease must be kept at home. This includes fever, cold, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, chronic cough, pink eye, etc. The following points are to be observed according to AHS protocol:

- A child must be fever-free for 24 hours before they can return to school
- Gastrointestinal Illness: stay home until 48 hours after all symptoms have resolved.
- Please inform the school and teacher that the child will be absent.
- If the child does not appear well while participating in the program, a parent or emergency contact will be notified immediately.

Incidents and Emergencies

- For small injuries (bumps, bruises, scratches etc) parents/guardians will be notified at the end of the day.
- For greater injuries (but not emergency) and always an injury to the head, parents/guardians will be notified by phone immediately.
- For emergencies, 911 will be called first and then the parent/guardian. 911 is always called if a child loses consciousness for even a brief period. Any fees such as ambulance fees are at the cost of the family.

9. Expected Behaviour

In our Nature programs we manage behaviour proactively by engaging in developmentally appropriate activities and by nurturing a positive physical and social/emotional space. In general, our behaviour management will:

- Consider the child's developmental level and needs
- Make expectations clear and provide scaffolding to help students participate positively
- Focus on the behaviour rather than the child
- Be implemented in a positive and consistent manner
- Be designed to help the child to learn appropriate behaviour and techniques

- Involve consulting with parents/guardians/teachers to include their input of successful approaches with a child, as well as to keep them informed of issues/concerns as they arise
- Help children to develop self-control, self-confidence, decision-making skills, the ability to communicate effectively and sensitively in their interactions with others.

In our St. John XXIII Nature Program, inappropriate behaviour is defined as using actions or words that make other students or staff members feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Unsafe behaviour is defined as any behaviour that puts a child or educator at risk. This includes not responding when called, running, hiding, taking risks without consulting teachers, and not following guidelines so that behaviour becomes potentially dangerous to the child or others.

In the case of inappropriate/unsafe behaviour the following steps will be taken:

1. Educators will remove the child from proximity to the group and the two will work together to define the inappropriate/unsafe behaviour and create a plan to modify it.
2. Parents/guardians will be informed (by phone or at the end of the day face-to-face) of the behaviour and consulted to discover the cause.
3. Educators and parents/guardians will, together, develop strategies to adjust and eliminate the inappropriate behaviour. These strategies will be implemented with the child at home and the Nature Program to offer a consistent approach. Educators and guardians will stay in contact to keep each other informed of the child's progress with regard to the behaviour in question.
4. Educators will follow up with the child to be consistent with expectations and approach as well as to offer feedback and positive reinforcement.

Nature Program Supply List

Nature Program Supply List

- Backpack
- Lunch Kit
- Indoor Shoes (in addition to regular kindergarten)
- Water bottle (Ideally 12-14 oz)
- One Complete set of extra clothes, (including underwear and 2 pairs of socks)
- Hand cream and Lip Chap
- Bug Spray
- Sunscreen
- 1 pack of baby wipes

All items to be labeled with the child's name.

Fall/ Spring List (ALL CLASSES)

- Waterproof Rain gear (to be left at school)
- Waterproof Boots (Bogs make a great option, can also be left at school)
- Hat (for sun protections and cooler weather)
- Fleece sweaters (for layering under jackets)
- Jacket for cooler days
- Stretchy gloves (or mitts) (2 pairs)

All items to be labeled with the child's name.

Winter List (ALL CLASSES)

- Winter hat (to fully cover ears)
- Balaclava or neck warmer (to cover face on colder days)
- Waterproof mitts (2 pairs, long to go over snowsuit)
- Warm, waterproof snowsuit (MEC makes a great option)
- Warm waterproof winter boots (Sorel, Baffin, Kamik)

All items to be labeled with the child's name.

Where to Purchase:

Mountain Equipment Co. (MEC)

Mountain Warehouse

Oakiwear

Jan & Jul

Kombi

Example of Winter:



Example of Spring and Fall;

