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# 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 connects children to nature, fostering rich learning experiences, ecological literacy, and healthy living. With the role-modelling 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 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 better understand 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 natural environments' cultural and historical significance.

#### **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 independently.

### **Curriculum Highlights**

The curriculum covers various topics, including plant and animal life cycles, weather patterns, and ecological relationships. We integrate religion, phys. ed., wellness, science, math, language arts, and art are included in 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 8:40 a.m. and end at 3:15 p.m.

### **Kindergarten**

Monday/Thursday and scheduled Wednesdays. Please see the Kindergarten calendar on our school website.

### **A Typical Day**

Each day at Nature unfolds differently based on the student's 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 dress 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. We may be transported to places like the Interpretive Forest, Natural Playground, Turner Park or River Valley. Snacks and lunch will be scheduled appropriately throughout the day. As the day ends, we often tell stories and discuss our day. While every day is different, play, exploration, and connection to each other and the land is our focus in all our adventures.

### **Grades 1,2, 3 and 4**

2 half days a week, 1 full day a month

### **A Typical Day**

Students in the Nature Programs will transition to the nature classroom or their homeroom classroom at 11:45 a.m. Depending on the weather, lunch is enjoyed outdoors, setting the stage for on-site adventures or off-site 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. Our Nature Programs integrate with the curriculum by aligning outdoor activities with key educational outcomes.

### **Emergent Learning**

Learning in our Nature Programs can and often does look different from that in a conventional school. We are committed to participant-led, emergent, inquiry-based, and play-based learning in Nature Programs. This means that all participants can construct important knowledge about the world by pursuing their 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, and engage with natural materials. Play can take many forms. For example, symbolic play involves using 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 negotiate rules and procedures effectively - 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**

A trained, certificated teacher and Program Assistant will support children. Understanding that students in Nature Programs are 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 and 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, and programs from the Strathcona Wilderness Centre.

### **5. Fees**

**Nature Kindergarten:** Mondays/Thursdays and scheduled Wednesdays. Children should be enrolled in our regular program on Tuesday/Friday and scheduled Wednesdays. The cost for the Nature Kinder program is \$350/month.

**Grades 1-4 Nature Program:** Two half days outside, 1 full day a month. The cost for the Grade 1-4 Nature program is \$60/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 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 filled with water daily.

### **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 butter are welcome.

### **Snack Sharing**

In addition, we ask that participants do not share or trade snacks, as this ensures the community's health, safety, and happiness. We will sometimes cook and sample snacks together (such as bannock, hot chocolate, and fruit and vegetables).

### **Garbage-Less Lunches**

We encourage participants 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 engage in many physical activities, which will cause them to become thirsty throughout the day. Please ensure that they come to school with a 12-14 oz reusable water bottle filled with drinking water. The bottle will be sent home daily to be sanitized.

## **7. Communication**

During Nature programming, you can reach your child's teacher through Class Dojo. In the event of an emergency, please 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. They will constantly assess the children's comfort and safety, watching for signs of frostbite, hypothermia, heat exhaustion, etc. If 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 via Class Dojo.

### **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 via PowerSchool and the teacher via Class Dojo 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 minor injuries (bumps, bruises, scratches, etc), parents/guardians will be notified at the end of the day at the teacher's discretion.
- For more significant injuries, 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 learn appropriate behaviour and techniques



- Involve consulting with parents/guardians/teachers to include their input on successful approaches with a child, as well as to keep them informed of issues/concerns as they arise
- Help children develop self-control, self-confidence, decision-making skills, and 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 or guardians will be informed (by phone or face-to-face at the end of the day) of the behaviour and consulted to discover its cause.
3. Educators and parents/guardians will develop strategies to adjust and eliminate inappropriate behaviour together. 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 inform each other of the child's progress concerning the behaviour.
4. Educators will follow up with the child to be consistent with expectations and approach and offer feedback and positive reinforcement.

**If inappropriate and/or unsafe behaviours continue despite these interventions and collaborative efforts, and if the safety and well-being of the child, other students, or staff remain at risk, the child may be removed from the Nature Program. This decision will be made thoughtfully, in consultation with parents/guardians, school administration, and staff, with the goal of ensuring a safe, positive, and supportive learning environment for all children.**

## **ST. JOHN XXIII CATHOLIC SCHOOL NATURE SUPPLY LISTS 2025-2026**

### **Nature Kindergarten**

*\*Please have all items labelled*

- 1 package of baby wipes
- 1 pair of indoor shoes (non-marking) \* separate from regular kindergarten
- 1 non-spill water bottle (12-14 oz)
- 1 backpack with water bottle holder
- 1 lunch kit
- 1 complete extra change of clothes, including underwear and two pairs of socks (labelled Ziploc bag)

### **Fall/Spring Outerwear:** (to be left at school)

- 1 waterproof rainsuit
- 1 sun hat
- 1 bug spray
- 1 sunscreen
- 1 pair of fall mitts
- 1 pair of waterproof mitts
- 1 pair of waterproof boots

### **Winter Outerwear:** (to be provided daily; can leave an extra set at school)

- 1 toque
- 1 balaclava or neck warmer
- 2 pairs of warm, waterproof mitts
- 1 snowsuit (warm/waterproof)
- 1 pair of winter boots (warm/waterproof)

### **Clothing Ideas to keep warm and dry:**

- Fleece or wool jacket (works well under a windproof jacket)
- Fleece or wool sweater
- Fleece or wool pants
- Wool socks

*\*Cotton/Jean is not ideal for cold weather situations.*

**Nature Grades 1-4**

*\*Please have all items labelled*

- 1 Kleenex box
- 1 package of paper towel
- 1 non-spill water bottle (12-14 oz)
- 1 backpack with water bottle holder
- 1 lunch kit
- 1 complete extra change of clothes, including underwear and two pairs of socks (labelled ziploc bag)

**Fall/Spring Outerwear:** (to be left at school)

- 1 waterproof rainsuit
- 1 sun hat
- 1 bug spray
- 1 sunscreen
- 1 pair of fall mitts
- 1 pair of waterproof mitts

**Winter Outerwear:** (to be provided daily; can leave an extra set at school)

- 1 toque
- 1 balaclava or neck warmer
- 2 pairs of warm, waterproof mitts
- 1 snowsuit (warm/waterproof)
- 1 pair of winter boots (warm/waterproof)

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- Fleece or wool jacket (works well under a windproof jacket)
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### Suggested Places to Purchase:

Mountain Equipment Co. (MEC)

Mountain Warehouse

Oakiwear

Jan & Jul

Kombi

### Example of Winter:



### Example of Spring and Fall;

