



**Oro-Medonte Forest School**  
**Parent Handbook**

*Updated August 2020*



## **Mission Statement**

To build a community that fosters rich, experiential learning, age appropriate ecological literacy, and promotes healthy living by connecting children to nature through the use of the Forest School model in the foundational early years and beyond.



## **OMFS Vision**

The Oro-Medonte Forest School (OMFS) Vision is to provide as many children as possible with frequent opportunities to play and learn in local forests, meadows, and wetlands with educators who understand the power of play and child-directed learning. OMFS hopes that children will develop a strong sense of self, a healthy connection to the land and community, and will become the next generation of environmental stewards who can contribute to a more sustainable world.



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**COVID-19 Specific Policies** will be sent to families upon registration - please note that these temporary policies may replace policies written in this handbook. Components of the handbook that may be replaced by Covid-19 Specific Policies are marked with an asterix (\*).



## 1. General Information

### 1.1 What is Forest School?

The Forest School approach to learning originated in Scandinavia in the late 1950s and has been widely adopted around the world. Oro Medonte Forest School (OMFS) applies the guiding principles of Forest School Canada to promote learning and connect children and their families to the natural world through experiential learning. OMFS acknowledges our presence on First Nations' land and aims to build relationships with indigenous teachers who wish to visit, share and connect with the children in the program. In the Forest School program, children spend anywhere from a half day to a full day outdoors in meadows, forests, mountains, shorelines and natural spaces. Forest School programming fosters children's development through child based learning, outdoor play, collaborative & independent inquiry and exploration in an outdoor setting. Having time to regularly visit and learn in the same forested land is an excellent chance for children to connect with nature, themselves and to build healthy relationships with their peers. The Forest School program provides many benefits which include: helping to build children's self-awareness and confidence, communication skills, critical and creative thought, physical and social skills, and the ability to navigate risk. It is recognized that the Forest School approach to learning can have a significant impact on the overall development of children.

For more information on Forest and Nature Schools in Canada please visit [Forest School Canada](#).

*“All Forest School programs adhere to: regular and repeated access to a natural space, as well as child-directed, emergent and inquiry-based learning. The defining feature of this type of nature-based education program is that children are provided with opportunities to build an on-going relationship with the land, to a dedicated educator, to one another, and to themselves through this educational lens.” – Forest School Canada*

## 1.2 What is Oro-Medonte Forest School (OMFS)?

OMFS offers children a space to connect to the land and to each other. While involved in child-directed, emergent outdoor play, children gain confidence to face new challenges. Various Forest School programs are offered to children between the ages of 2 and 12 years old.

### What OMFS IS and IS NOT -

OMFS is a recreational program that children may attend one or two days weekly. OMFS is not an academic based program, the forest school program is a supplement/compliment to a child's home or school based academic learning. The OMFS program does not follow a curriculum. If your child is not attending public education, the responsibility for academic learning does not fall to OMFS. While attending forest school the expectation is that a child is enrolled in academic learning or has home based academic learning taking place.

### Where We Learn -

OMFS programs run **almost exclusively outdoors** and use the natural environment for exploratory play, no matter what the weather might be. OMFS educators help to prepare children for the weather conditions and the children's safety and enjoyment is the number one priority. OMFS believes that learning and playing actively, in an outdoor environment, will help future generations feel more comfortable in, and be more connected to the natural world. While OMFS has some extra outdoor clothing, children should arrive dressed for the weather each day (see section on Clothing). Although there is access to an indoor area, it is generally only used this briefly during the colder months and in very inclement weather.

### Why is Outdoor Learning Important?

Being outside in a natural environment has been shown to relieve stress by reducing the stress hormone, cortisol, in the brain. Children are increasingly surrounded by stressful situations and environments such as media, busy urban environments, academic testing, screen time etc. and being able to learn outside gives them the time needed to relax, enjoy themselves and be stress free. In addition, learning outside helps children to build a personal connection with nature. Ideally, this personal connection with nature will allow our future generations to understand and value the natural world.



### What happens on an 'average' day at Forest School?

The day's activities at Forest School are free-flowing and dynamic, as they depend on the ever-changing natural environment in which the program takes place (changing seasons, evidence of animals, emergence of new flowers, insect activity, effects of weather on the land etc.) and on the interpersonal relationships formed between the children and educators in the group. Educators can also add to the day's learning by introducing provocations such as simple tools and loose parts used for building and creating. Forest School educators follow the lead of the children, focusing on their interests and questions of the day and allowing for independent play as well as collaboration. We open and close each day in the gathering space where we may incorporate literacy activities such as stories, poems, songs, plays, sharing, artwork and music-making to expand on the children's learning and discoveries. On an average day we spend most of our time **outdoors, rain or shine!**

### 1.3 Program Location:

OMFS acknowledges that we walk, learn and play on the traditional land of the Anishnaabeg people, which includes the Ojibwe, Odawa and Pottawatomi nations. We are dedicated to honouring the enduring Indigenous presence on this land and we are committed to teaching children the spirit of reconciliation and respect.

Oro-Medonte Forest School operates out of the Horseshoe Resort at the Nordic Centre and in the Copeland Forest in Oro Medonte. The Nordic Centre is located across the road from the main resort at **1106 Horseshoe Valley Road, Oro Medonte**. Look for the red building!



OMFS gathers in the Cedar Grove area, around the fire pit located behind the red chalet. Groups access trails on the resort property and will make trips to the Copeland Forest located directly behind this property. The rustic ski chalet offers the children shelter from inclement weather while the adjacent forest offers endless space for them to explore and play! The property backs onto Copeland Forest which is a vast area with many trails, a shallow creek and other woodland features that make it fantastic for forest school learning.

## Directions

From Orillia heading west on Horseshoe Valley Road: After passing the 4th line, descend the hill and at the bottom turn right into the Nordic centre Parking lot and head toward the Red Chalet.

From Highway 400 heading east on Horseshoe Valley Road: After passing the 3rd line, descend the hill and at the bottom turn left into the Nordic Centre Parking lot and head towards the Red Chalet.



## 1.4 Programs

OMFS offers a variety of program options to suit your family's hopes for forest school programming!

\* **Forest Wanderers** is a half or full day program (full day only for kindergarten age and up) designed for children aged 3-5, who are toilet trained and eager to explore the outdoors with our educators. Our Forest Wanderers gain much independence and comfort in the forest as they take part in this once weekly program.

**Forest Adventurers** is designed for children ages 4-10. These young adventurers will be comfortable being outside for a full day and must be at least kindergarten age to enter the program. This program is currently available 2 days/week (Monday & Thursday).

**Forest Trekkers** is a full day program suitable for children ages 6-12 who are eager adventurers and comfortable both in the outdoors, and with a full day of programming. Our entire day is spent in the forest, with the indoor space available for lunch in the winter months and during significant inclement weather in the other seasons.

\* **Forest Friday** is a caregiver & tot program most beneficial for children ages 2-4, though some slightly younger and older participants have enjoyed and thrived participating as well. Parents and children explore together, while our educators take part in carving out a wonderful, child directed environment. The Forest Friday program takes place in pre-registered sessions on Friday mornings, however, drop in is generally available weekly!

To register for one of the above programs, please visit the [Registration](#) page for dates and registration forms. [Oro-Medonte Forest School - Forest School](#)

## 1.5 Registration

Registration will open for the next session at least 2 months in advance. Returning families will be given at least 2 weeks notice to re-register for the next session, prior to opening registration to the public, *this includes families switching between our various programs.*

Registration will be conducted on our website and on a first come, first served basis, as such it is recommended to include a first and second choice for the program you wish your child to attend. Families will be reached by email to confirm their registration and will be requested to make a deposit payment (or make their payment in full if that is their preference).

Please note that while OMFS makes every effort to place a child in the preferred program, this cannot be guaranteed. Children are placed on specific days of the week based on age, experience and other factors determined by the OMFS Director.

Summer Camp registration will open in late January or early February each year. Please check the OMFS website and social media pages for details.

## 1.6 Payment, Invoicing and Refund Policy -

*\*Please refer to the Covid-19 Specific Policies for 2020/21*

If you are paying monthly, payment is expected within the first week of each month. Payments are considered overdue if they are made following the 5th of the month. A 5% administrative surcharge will be applied for any outstanding fees. These fees will be reflected on the next invoice.

Payments may be made by e transfer to [info@oromedonteforestschool.ca](mailto:info@oromedonteforestschool.ca) using your child's first name as the passphrase (do not use nicknames); cash and cheque payments must be in an envelope labelled with the following: Child's Name, Invoice #, Amount and Date.

Summer Camp payment will be invoiced after your child's registration is accepted. Payment is due within 7 days of registration acceptance.

If you are required to withdraw your child from OMFS programming, for any reason, 30 days written notice is required. **Any fees due within this 30 day time frame are still required to be paid in full and are not refundable.** Please note that the family registration fee and program deposits for OMFS programs are non-refundable nor are they transferable.

**OMFS does not offer refunds for illness or weather cancellations.**

**OMFS Forest Camp:** If you must cancel your child's participation in one of our Forest Camp programs the following refund policy will apply:

30 or more days notice: FULL REFUND minus a \$25 admin  
fee  
14-29 days notice: 50% REFUND  
Less than 14 days  
notice: NO REFUND AVAILABLE

## 1.7 Contact Us

**Email:** [info@oromedonteforestschool.ca](mailto:info@oromedonteforestschool.ca)

**Phone:** 705-817-3338

Emails and phone messages will be responded to within 24-72 hours on business days. Messages received on weekends may not be answered until Monday. Messages on holidays will be responded to upon reopening. If you do not receive a timely response, please resend your message as it may have been deleted due to sensitive spam filters.

### **Mailing address (this is NOT our school location):**

Oro Medonte Forest School  
18 Seneca Lane  
Coldwater, ON  
L0K1E0

## 2. OMFS Policies

### 2.1 Privacy

Oro Medonte Forest School respects the privacy of the children registered with us and we have taken steps to protect it. Personal data shared with us, including photographic images, will be processed strictly in accordance with privacy legislation, and will be used only for the purposes that you have consented to. OMFS will not share details with third parties without consent, except where we are legally or obligated to do so. Upon registration you will be asked to sign a media release consent form. Photos will only be shared with this given consent and for the purposes agreed upon (ie. social media updates, website pages, program promotion). Please note that where consent is given to share images on the internet, they can be viewed worldwide including countries where Canadian data protection law does not apply.

### 2.2 Illness Policy

*Please refer to the Covid-19 Specific Policies for the 2020/21 Forest School year*

\* In order to ensure the health of our community, OMFS participants are asked to stay home from our program if they have experienced any of the following symptoms in the past 24 hours:

- Fever
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Significant, unexplained rashes
- Significant cough
- General lethargy

In the case where one of the above illnesses occurs during the Forest School day, the affected participants will be required to return home. Keeping in mind that, while experiencing these symptoms or even more mild cold symptoms, being outside in the elements is likely quite uncomfortable and unpleasant for children. Phone calls to parents/guardians and/or emergency contacts will be made so that the child can be picked up.

Any participants affected by a communicable disease (such as measles, chickenpox, mumps, whooping cough, strep throat, influenza, pneumonia etc) are asked to stay home from forest school until their health care provider has communicated that it is safe for them to rejoin public programming.

**Please note that there are no refunds or make up classes for missed days due to illness.**

### **2.3 Food and Allergy Policies**

OMFS strives to keep all children safe by implementing the following food policy. If your child has a food allergy, ensure that you include the details of this on your registration form. Children with life threatening allergies will be required to carry an Epi-pen on their body at all times. Please also provide one for the Lead Educator to carry as a backup. Please refer to our Health/Registration Form for details on this requirement.

**All children are required to bring their own food and water to the OMFS program.**

There is a strict policy that children do not share food due to hygiene and allergies in groups. Food is to be kept in reusable containers which can be easily stored in a child's backpack or pockets as groups have snacks while out in the forest. In an effort to generate minimal waste, please make an attempt to provide a snack for your child that does not contain any packaging or garbage, all garbage will be sent home in your child's lunch containers. If your child's snack requires a utensil, please ensure that this is sent as educators do not have utensils available while out in the forest. Children should bring healthy snacks that will give them the energy needed for the program.

**Please note that OMFS is a Peanut Free Community.**

**Please avoid sending peanuts in your child's snack/lunch at all times.**

*Food will not be provided due to Covid-19*

**\* On occasion educators will provide the children with herbal tea and fresh, dried or cooked fruit/vegetables. In addition, groups may do some campfire cooking. Please note on the child's registration form if they have any food allergies or intolerances.**

Please touch base with your child regularly about their snacks and how they are working out for them. Too much/too little; too messy; too squishy are all concerns that you might run into with snacks in the outdoor environment. Example: **Please do not send unpeeled oranges or clementines with your child if they are unable to peel them independently.**

Water: Please ensure your child has a full water bottle each time we meet. Please ensure this water bottle is leak-proof and has a large enough capacity to keep your child hydrated (OMFS recommends 500ml for all children attending a full day), though is going to be light enough to carry in their backpack. Educators will carry extra water and we have a refill station for water at the Cedar Grove gathering place.

### ***A Special Note about Food Allergies:***

There are children in OMFS programs who have significant allergies, not all life threatening. For this reason, educators teach the children to eat while being mindful of their peers. If your child has an allergy that can be impacted by crumbs, touching others who have eaten a specific food, or by smell, please be certain to inform OMFS of this on your child's registration form. Educators will make every effort possible to ensure their safety.

### **2.4 Toileting and Handwashing**

***OMFS requires that all participants are fully toilet trained prior to starting drop off programs. \*\*This does not include Forest Friday\*\****

If your child has an accident, educators will happily assist them in changing into their spare clothing. However, OMFS cannot accept children into the drop off programs who are using diapers. Please ensure that your child is independently using a toilet prior to the start of the session. ***\*\*Exceptions to this rule may be that a parent chooses to (temporarily) remain on site with their child to support their toilet training effort.***

While groups will sometimes be within walking distance of a toilet, they will not always be able to return to an indoor bathroom. Children must be comfortable using the "washroom" outdoors, with minimal "coaching" from an educator. All educators will carry appropriate toileting and hand washing tools such as toilet paper, wipes, hand sanitizer, water and soap.

#### ***\* Handwashing will be significantly increased due to COVID-19***

Educators will provide children with hand washing opportunities before meals and after washroom breaks whether indoors or in the forest. The educators will carry water and hand soap and hand sanitizer for this purpose on each outing. Please send your child with a small hand towel for drying their hands, to be kept in their backpack each day.

### **2.5 Participant:Staff Ratios**

OMFS will maintain a ratio of either 5 children : 1 educator or, 6 children : 1 educator depending on the age and experience of the groups. If either the parents or educators feel that a child requires additional support, they may request a meeting to prepare an appropriate plan, noting that OMFS does not provide one on one support for children. These small ratios are important to the success of the program, the safety of the

children, and the ability to facilitate the child-led learning approach in an outdoor environment.

In the case that the ratios cannot be maintained for an unanticipated reason (illness, first aid emergency etc) the group will remain at the Cedar Grove next to the chalet or head indoors until the ratios have returned to normal.

## 2.6 Risk Management -

OMFS educators will aim to balance children's desire to experience and navigate risk in the natural environment with a concrete safety plan that has clear boundaries, emergency procedures and by maintaining the above mentioned child to adult ratio. Being able to recognize risk, experience risk and learn how to manage risk is an important part of healthy child development. Therefore, *in many instances*, OMFS educators will strive to co-assess risk with the students and work together to formulate a plan to manage it.

Some of the risks inherent to Forest School and outdoor play in general include, **but are not limited to:** (please see Informed consent form for a more detailed list of inherent risks)

- Injuries from executing strenuous and demanding physical activities, possibly on uneven ground in the forest
- Slivers, scrapes, bruises, blisters
- Injuries resulting from matches or fire
- Contracting poison ivy
- The presence of wild animals and ticks
- Presence of hunters in the Copeland Forest\*\*

\*\*Hunting in the Copeland Forest does occur at intervals throughout the year, though primarily takes place on the Ingram Rd. side of the forest. OMFS works to mitigate this risk by the following:

- Avoid going into the Copeland Forest during hunting season
- Add brightly coloured clothing to any child in dark outerwear during hunting season when groups may be playing in or near the boundaries of the Copeland Forest
- Travel in large groups so that noise may alert hunters of the group's presence.

## **2.7 Emergency Procedures and First Aid -**

OMFS has written emergency plans and procedures in place. All educators are familiar with the plans and review them on an annual basis.

Each group will carry an emergency bag at all times. The emergency bag will contain an emergency contact list and a regularly stocked first aid kit. The emergency bag is equipped with various sizes of bandages, splints, antiseptic wipes, eye wash, anti-allergy medication, and hypothermia blanket. Each of the OMFS educators will carry appropriate communication devices, a whistle and a first aid kit at all times.

Each parent must ensure that the Forest School educators have current emergency contact information. OMFS educators carry this information in a waterproof bag with them at all times to ensure that, in the case of an emergency, the appropriate contact can be reached. OMFS educators will carry a cell phone at all times to contact parents/guardians and/or EMS if required.

OMFS educators will all maintain the following certifications (at a minimum):

- Current Criminal Record Check with a vulnerable sector check
- Current Standard First Aid/CPR or greater (ie. Wilderness First Aid)

## **2.8 OMFS Responsibilities**

- OMFS will ensure the physical and emotional safety of all participants, volunteers and staff by co-assessing and co-managing risk, on an ongoing basis, so that all participants feel comfortable and can learn effectively in their surroundings.
- OMFS educators will model care and respect for others, our shared community, and for the natural world.
- OMFS educators will aim to connect with each student in order to understand their questions and interests and will provide regular and repeated access to a natural outdoor space, so that they may build strong relationships with themselves, each other and the land.
- OMFS will ensure parents are aware of any changes or adaptations to programming or policies and will update all families on a regular basis with such changes.
- OMFS will ensure all educators, supply teachers and volunteers have a recent Vulnerable Sector Criminal Reference Check and Standard First Aid/CPR current certification on file.

The educator's role varies from a traditional classroom teacher in that OMFS educators are not the "experts", but simply a guide for the child's learning. They seek to learn alongside the children by prompting with questions and deepening conversation about the natural world. OMFS educators help students construct knowledge about themselves and their world by introducing tools or supplies that can modify the learning environment and bring forth growth in the learner. They view unstructured free play as the primary vehicle for learning. Forest School is a place where play and "doing" can help children make meaning in their environment. For example, a child at Forest School may use objects found in nature to take the place of a conventional toy, find challenge in moving fallen tree branches to build a structure or discover patterns in the way water moves. OMFS educators will help a child to see these possibilities and then let their play and imaginations take off!

## **2.9 Volunteer/ Accompanying Adult Responsibilities**

We welcome and value the support of volunteers at OMFS. Volunteers will need to acquire a Current Criminal Record Check with a vulnerable sector check before helping out. We encourage volunteers to become familiar with the Forest School Program and the role of Educators in guiding learning. Volunteers will be responsible for helping to monitor and will be available to support children during the program.

## **2.10 Parent Responsibilities**

By registering your child for Forest School at OMFS you agree to the following responsibilities:

1. Submit all forms and applicable fees prior to your child's session of forest school. If forms are not received, children will not be permitted to attend until which time they have been filled out and reviewed by OMFS.
2. Ensure your child is equipped with proper clothing, outerwear, food and other supplies suitable for the season and duration of the day (please see Clothing and Equipment). Groups are basically outside all day, in all types of weather. If a child does not come properly prepared for a day of Forest School they will be asked to return home and change and arrange to meet the group in the forest.
3. Communicate openly with educators and provide us with any information that will assist us in meeting your child's needs. Share any changes pertaining to contact information, health or wellness needs asap.
4. Follow all policies and guidelines outlined here in the parent handbook *and ensure you are aware of the Covid-19 Specific Policies for 2020/21*
5. ***ENSURE ALL ITEMS SENT TO FOREST SCHOOL ARE CLEARLY LABELLED.***

## **2.11 Preparing for Forest School**

The following is an important component of taking part in OMFS programs. All children are required to have appropriate gear to participate in forest school programs. Please read carefully and ask questions as needed.

### **2.11.1 Sunscreen and Bug Spray**

Please send **labelled** sunscreen and bug spray with your child during the spring, summer and fall. If you do not wish for your child to use sunscreen we will require that they wear a long sleeve shirt while in full sun. Bug head nets or jackets are recommended when bug spray is not used, especially during the spring season when black flies and mosquitos can be quite numerous in the forest!

### **2.11.2 Clothing and Equipment**

**All gear sent to Forest School MUST be clearly labelled!**

OMFS is not responsible for lost or missing gear and will place all found gear into the Lost and Found which will be emptied and donated where possible seasonally. Please check regularly.

Each child, regardless of season will require a small, well fitting backpack. Children will often carry this pack with them on walks into the forest. They will carry their water, snack, a small hand towel, dry socks and/or mittens and any layers that they remove or put on as we go. Please ensure that this pack fits your child properly and that they can carry it with ease. It is suggested that you do a trial walk with their pack to ensure that they are comfortable.

Children **MUST** have a full water bottle in their backpacks each morning.

During the Spring and Fall, OMFS requires that children wear **WATERPROOF** rain gear when accessing shallow bodies of water (such as the creek). Waterproof gear is equipped with heat taped seams to prevent water absorption. Nylon material is not waterproof and while it is quick drying, this will not keep their base and/or mid layers dry. Please check with the Lead Educators if you are uncertain if your child's gear is waterproof.

Of key importance is the material of your child's clothing. **Cotton is not an acceptable material for outdoor adventures in most temperatures, as it dries slowly and can cause your child to be chilled when wet.** Where possible, please choose synthetic, wool or silk clothing which breathes well, dries quickly and insulates against the elements.

Children will need a change of clothes to be brought to Forest School each day. This does not need to be carried in their pack, but is left with our supplies at Cedar Grove. Please ensure that the change of clothing is suitable for the season and is kept in a bag **marked clearly with their name.**

\*\*OMFS Summer Camp participants will be emailing a packing list prior to the program start date.

The following are the OMFS recommendations of how to dress your child for the elements. As the weather often changes throughout the day and as it is often cooler and damper in the forest than in town, please use the layering system described:

**If sourcing appropriate gear is an issue, please do not hesitate to let OMFS know as we often know of great deals, ideal choices and used options.**

**Remember that it is often a few degrees cooler in the shade of the forest than it may be at your home. Please dress with this in mind!**

### 2.11.3 Seasonal Layering Systems for Forest School

#### **Cool Rainy Day Clothing (Fall/Winter/Spring):**

Base Layer: Synthetic or wool long john shirt and pants; wool socks

Mid Layer: Fleece or wool sweater and pants

Outer Layer: Durable, WATERPROOF raincoat and rain-pants; warm toque; waterproof, insulated mittens; waterproof boots (Bogs, Kamik or similar)

Extra Layers: 1-2 pairs of wool socks, 1-2 pairs of waterproof insulated mittens; warm toque; mid layer as indicated above; underwear.

Optional: Extra boots

#### **Cool Dry Day Clothing (Fall/Spring):**

Base Layer: Synthetic or wool long john shirt and pants; wool socks

Mid Layer: Lightweight fleece or wool pants and sweater

Outer Layer: Warm jacket; durable rain-pants, waterproof boots, waterproof mittens; warm toque

Extra Layers: 1-2 pairs of wool socks, 1 pair of waterproof insulated mittens; mid layer as indicated above; underwear.

#### **Warm Rainy Day Clothing (Fall/Spring):**

Base Layer: Lightweight, synthetic material t-shirt and long sleeve; lightweight, synthetic material pants (quick-dry material is ideal); wool socks

Outer Layer: Durable, WATERPROOF raincoat and rain-pants; waterproof boots

Extra Layers: Fleece Sweater; wool socks, toque

Optional: Extra boots

#### **Warm Dry Day Clothing (Fall/Spring):**

Base Layer: Lightweight, long pants that can easily be rolled up; t-shirt; lightweight synthetic socks

Outer Layer: Fleece sweater or jacket; closed toe running shoes or hiking boots; sun hat

Extra Layers: Extra socks; base layer

Optional: Bug jacket/headnet (Spring)

#### **Cold Winter Day Clothing:**

Base layer: Wool or synthetic long john shirt & pants; wool socks

Mid layer: Wool or fleece sweater and pants; fleece or wool neckwarmer

Outer Layer: Warm, waterproof, windproof and breathable snow suit; warm toque; waterproof insulated mittens; warm waterproof boots

Extra layers: 1-2 pairs of wool socks; warm toque; mid layer, 1-2 pairs of insulated mittens

Optional: Extra boots, hand-warmers, extra snowsuit

## **No Toys Please!**

Please avoid bringing toys from home to OMFS. Toys present a problem in getting lost, not being shared and they tend to influence the children's outdoor play. If, however, a child has a tool they would like to bring to share with the group this may be accommodated. Ex: compass, flint and steel, snowball maker etc.

*\* Please refer to the Covid-19 Specific Policies*

*\*OMFS will provide sleds and ask that families do not send them from home.*

## **2.12 Inclement Weather/Closure Policy**

OMFS will consider the SCDSB snow day criteria. If the buses are cancelled for the NORTH or CENTRAL ZONE, there is a good chance that our programming will not run that day. That said, the Director will post to all families via SeeSaw, typically, prior to 7:30 am, to notify of our closure for the day. In these circumstances, the closure is likely due to the road conditions around Horseshoe Valley and surrounding area, or due to extreme cold.

In very rare situations OMFS may opt to close due to severe cold as running programming outdoors in such weather may pose a risk to the safety of both children and staff.

In the event that OMFS is required, due to severe weather, to close early for the day, our decision will be communicated to families via the number that we have on record to reach you during our programming.

**Please note that there are NO REFUNDS available for OMFS closure due to weather.**

## **2.13 Extreme Weather Policy -**

The educators at OMFS pay close attention to the weather forecast and include weather considerations in our safety assessment throughout the day. There are days where groups will stay close to shelter due to high chances of thunder/lightning or high winds. This close proximity will allow the group to quickly take shelter.

Outside temperatures that include extreme cold, -25C or below, or extreme heat, 30C or above, will prompt educators to employ measures to ensure the children's safety. Educators will limit the children's length of exposure based on age and outerwear, and will constantly assess the group's comfort and safety, watching for both cold and heat related conditions. OMFS will use indoor facilities when required in these instances.

When significant weather warrants that OMFS runs programming indoors or under shelter, educators will continually assess the outdoor environment for safety and return only once they are certain the inclement weather has passed.

#### **2.14 Program Pickup & Drop Off -**

If your child is going to be absent, please text (705)817-3338 Melanie or email (info@oromedonteforestschool.ca) the school BEFORE 8:30am. Knowing the number of children expected each day is essential.

Forest School programs commence at 9:30am each morning at our gathering place, the Cedar Grove, behind the red Horseshoe Cross Country Chalet at the fire pit. Please drop your child off between 9:25-9:30am to ensure that all children are on site at the start of the program. Please do not come any earlier as we will be busy with our preparations for the day.

Please plan to be here on time for your child's pick up time (12:00pm for half day and 3:00 or 3:30pm for full day).

*\* Please refer to the Covid-19 Specific Policies pertaining to pick up and drop off for 2020/21*

#### **Late Pick Ups:**

OMFS does not provide after hours care. Educators meet daily after programming to reflect and plan for the next week. While a child will never be left unattended, late pick ups and drop offs are both stressful for the children and difficult for program operations. If extenuating circumstances arise and you are going to be late with either drop off or pick up, please ensure that you have notified an OMFS Lead Educator via text or phone call. Please make every effort to be on time each day.

### **3. Program, Learning & Development**

Forest School Programming is inquiry based and driven by the childrens' interests and needs. This creates an atmosphere of relevant and meaningful learning for the children. Educators extend this child led learning by providing provocations based on seasonal cycles, what children have discovered or are curious/have questions about. Planning takes into account weather, site conditions and social dynamics. Educators observe the children's interactions and activities throughout the day and when appropriate, document activities mentally or with photos. With this information, educators meet at the end of the day to reflect on the day noting areas of concern, interests, growth and use this information to plan future activities.

#### **3.1 Program Management -**

Children may adventure to the forest in smaller groups or as one large group. This decision is made by Lead Educators at the beginning of each day or session and the decision is based on a number of factors: environmental impact, group management, social dynamics, programming needs etc. OMFS may choose to organize this on a more permanent basis or will do this as needed depending upon the specific group needs. Adventure groups or animal groups are formed by Lead Educators with Educator input and while OMFS appreciates feedback from parents, ultimately this decision lies in the hands of OMFS staff.

*\* Please refer to the Covid-19 Specific Policies for group sizes in 2020/21*

#### **3.2 Peaceful Play and Gentle Discipline**

The OMFS community is the most important asset at Forest School. As a community, educators will help the children to work together, to respect one another and to value the ideas of others. As a group, educators and children alike will work through any challenges that arise, ensuring that children's concerns are heard and their feelings are validated. OMFS promotes peaceful play whereby the children are encouraged to speak to one another with kindness, compassion and empathy, building leadership skills and a sense of self-worth.

OMFS educators prioritize gentle discipline practices, working with the principles of redirection, validation of the children's feelings and work to create an empathetic environment. Whenever possible, educators encourage discussion of any differences, so that the children can work on communicating their needs to each other and/or to an educator or volunteer.

OMFS educators make every effort to do the following when challenging interactions occur:

- Be proactive and observant. Take note of the social interactions between the children.
- Remain physically close to a child or children if concerned about a social or safety situation.
- Remind the children to use kind and respectful words to ask for what they need.
- Remind the children that hands are for working and playing, not hitting.
- Redirect the children to different activities or have them speak with an educator or volunteer 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 using "I statements".
- Encourage the child(ren) to consider alternative actions that they could take in the future and provide immediate positive feedback when they choose these alternative actions on their own.

### **3.3 Behaviour Management Policy -**

In general, if a significant unsafe or inappropriate behaviour does take place the following steps will be taken:

#### 3 Step Plan:

1. Child will be taken aside from the group and spoken to about their behaviour and the educator and the child will create a plan to understand and modify the behaviour. Parents will be notified of the situation that occurred by phone/email or an in person discussion, beginning the communication between parents and OMFS.
2. Parents/guardians and OMFS will create a plan for the child with the goal to modify the unsafe or inappropriate behaviour. Educators will work with parents/guardians to determine the potential cause of the behaviour and develop strategies to adjust the behaviour. Parents/guardians and educators will look to create a consistent expectation and approach. This will be done via phone or email. Educators and parents will stay in touch to keep informed about the child's progress with regards to this situation.
3. A meeting will be undertaken between the OMFS director/lead educators; the child and the parents with the goal of changing the unsafe or inappropriate behaviour. The OMFS director/lead educators will convey the message that if the behaviour is unchanged after a period of time designated in the plan, that forest school may not be an option for the child at that time.

\*\*\*OMFS Educators will confer with one another to ensure consistent expectations and approaches for that individual.

*In extreme cases where a child's behaviour is consistently inappropriate or unsafe for the child, or for others, and after the above process has been implemented, the child may be required to have a support person in place, or to temporarily leave the program. Though, every effort will be made to ensure that all children will find their place in our Forest School community.*

### **3.4 Balance of Risky Play and Safety Ethics -**

With hopes that each child will learn how to navigate risk, the OMFS goal is not to keep children from all risky situations, but is instead to teach children how to safely navigate the risks that they encounter in the forest. In order to do this, it is required that children are able to respond to educators' voices (or animal calls!!) at all times. If a child has consistent difficulty listening, and it is **posing a safety concern**, the behaviour guidelines listed above will apply.

OMFS works 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:

- Constantly assess risk as conditions change (dynamic risk assessment) and conduct regular risk/benefits assessments of site and activities.
  - Done daily and dynamically as the environment changes both with and without the children.
- Set up a safe space with boundaries and safety guidelines.
  - Children respond to a crow call to stay within view of the educators at all times.
  - Children are made aware of safety guidelines regularly.
- Carefully observe the children's interactions with each other and with nature.
- Spot the children during more challenging physical activity ex. climbing.
- Gently guide the children to safer activities if required.

If OMFS educators observe that the children's play is becoming dangerous and/or not following the OMFS safety guidelines, the children will be redirected and reminded of the safety guidelines established as a group.

The following guidelines and phrases are examples that educators will use with the children as they are guided toward safe choices in our natural playground.

Hiking: *When we walk through the forest, we are in a sandwich.* One educator will be in the front and an educator or volunteer will be in the back. The children may not need to be in a line, but they do need to be inside the sandwich.

Boundaries: *When we play in the forest we stay where we can see a teacher.* When needed, boundaries are established with the input of the children. Educators watch to ensure that the children do not move beyond the boundaries. Educators remain in close proximity to the children at all times. If groups are working in different areas, there is an educator available for each small group. A child is within the "boundaries" if they can easily see an educator and an educator can see them.

Sticks: *Sticks are for building, digging, and imaginative play. They are not for hitting. When we run, we put the sticks down. We are aware of other's space. We keep sticks away from others' faces.* Children are taught to keep sticks down low when in a group and how to create a "safety bubble" when on their own.

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 safety bubble (the area a few meters around our body). We may throw rocks that are as large as the palms of our hands. We throw rocks only where they won't disturb others (animals, birds, people).* Children love to throw natural objects and they will be given the safety parameters on how to do this.

Climbing: *We may climb as high as we are tall. 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).* Educators are present only to spot a child and will not physically assist them to climb higher. If an educator can't be present or cannot safely spot the child, the child will not be able to climb.

Water: *If you don't know, don't go!* Groups primarily access shallow, slow-moving water bodies. Before a group visits a body of water, educators engage in a conversation with the children about safety consideration while around the water. If a child cannot determine the depth of the water to be below their boot height, they generally will not access that water.

## **4. Inclusivity/Accessibility -**

### **4.1 Inclusivity and Accessibility Statement**

OMFS strives to create a program which is accessible to a wide range of participants, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language, physical ability, or socioeconomic status. OMFS aims to create a community that is safe, inclusive and welcoming to all participants. OMFS works to provide and source “subsidies” for families who may not otherwise be able to participate. OMFS strives to promote an environment that is physically accessible for all participants. In addition, the organization offers an online gear swap of outdoor clothing to ensure that participation in OMFS is not limited by lack of access to appropriate gear.

All children and their families are welcome in the OMFS community where everyone is respected and appreciated as valued members. We encourage feedback to learn how we can improve our programs by working towards removing barriers and ensuring a safe and welcoming place in the forest.

## **5. Communication Strategy**

### **5.1 General Communication**

OMFS maintains the belief that communication with families is of vital importance and benefits the children best. Please refer to your child’s Seesaw page for current information about what the children have been up to at Forest School during the week and how you can deepen/support their experiences at home.

OMFS Educators may be available to give a brief overview of your child’s day at pick up, upon request. The Director and/or Lead Educators are also available, upon request, for Parent Meetings to communicate about your child’s interests, current learning, friendships and to answer any questions you have. Please contact OMFS if you would like to arrange for a parent meeting. In addition, the OMFS Seesaw page offers a secure online parent communication forum where we can communicate with you directly about your child’s time at Forest School and share photos/creations etc.

OMFS Forest Camp families can expect communication via email rather than Seesaw.

## **5.2 Emergency Communication**

In the case of a significant incident (eg. eye scratch/particles in eye, wounds, bleeding, potential fracture, suspected head injury), Emergency protocol will be followed and parents will be contacted before EMS and asked if they would like OMFS to call or if they would like to take their child to the hospital themselves.

In case of a severe incident (major trauma and the child cannot be moved), Emergency protocol will be followed and EMS will be contacted and parents will be notified as well of the situation.

Parents must ensure that the Emergency Contact information given to OMFS remains current at all times. If a change occurs, please email [info@oromedonteforestschool.ca](mailto:info@oromedonteforestschool.ca) with the subject: Contact Information Change.

## **5.3 Questions and Concerns**

OMFS welcomes your questions! If you ever have a question or concern about your child's learning, their experiences or their place in the Oro Medonte Forest School community, please email the Director, Melanie at [info@oromedonteforestschool.ca](mailto:info@oromedonteforestschool.ca). All questions will be answered in a timely manner, within 24-72 hours. If your inquiry is more urgent, please say URGENT in the subject heading and the Director will respond ASAP. If you would like her to respond to you by phone, please let her know the best number to reach you at.

If you would like to meet with us to discuss your child's needs, this can be arranged by sending an email indicating your availability.

The Director or Lead Educators may be available for brief conversations following the program each day. If your questions pertain to more than they are able to answer in the moment they will direct you to email and set up a call or meeting.

## **5.4 Grievance Policy**

OMFS is always open to your concerns, questions and feedback. Growth is important to this organization and it is through this communication that OMFS will continue to grow and build relationships with our community. If you have a concern, please let us know by email, phone or in person and we will be back in touch within 24-72 hours. If your concern is urgent, please indicate this and a response will be prioritized. All concerns will come directly to the Director and consultation with Educators will be a part of the next steps to finding a suitable resolution.

## 6. Environmental Policies

### 6.1 Land and Environmental Ethics -

At OMFS, educators aim to teach the children how to be stewards of the land. The belief is that our youth will play a vital role in the protection of our Earth and its resources in future years. The first step in this important learning process is for youth to be given the opportunity to spend time in nature and to build their own relationship with the natural world. During daily programs, the children will learn about and practice environmental ethics in the forest, respecting the land they use and travel through.

### 6.2 Leave No Trace Principles

OMFS uses and teaches the LNT principles to guide our time spent in the forest whenever possible.

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel on durable surfaces.
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfire impacts
- Respect wildlife
- Be considerate of other visitors



*“If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, we must allow them to fall in love with the earth before we ask them to save her.” (David Sobel)*



OMFS Fall 2020  
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