



Family Handbook

gretchen@forestacademylafayette.org

(765) 414-0125

Table of Contents

Mission	1
Our Educational Guiding Principles	1
Communication	1
Confidentiality	2
Social Media Policy	2
Private Care Arrangements	2
Arrival and Departure	2
Late Pickup	3
Releasing Children	3
Health Policies	3
Toileting	4
Medication	4
Sunscreen and Bug Spray	4
Lyme Disease Prevention	4
Allergies	4
Safe Conditions Policy	5
Emergency Response Procedures	6
Safe Outdoor Play	6
Accidents and Injuries	6
What to Bring to School	7
Clothing	7
Snacks	8
Holidays and Birthdays	8
Child Guidance and Discipline Policy	8
Grievance Policy	9
Checking Your Child for Ticks	Appendix A

Mission Statement

The mission of Forest Academy is to return a sense of wonder and joy to the young child's educational experience through immersion in a natural environment that provides opportunities for developmentally appropriate, child-led play.

Our Educational Guiding Principles

At Forest Academy, we facilitate your child's natural desire to explore and learn about the world and themselves through active exploration of the environment and cultivating relationships with others. To do this we:

- **Use nature as the primary context for learning**
There is growing evidence that direct contact with nature improves physical, mental, and emotional health and development in children. Children need nature. Natural environments provide unending opportunities for observation, exploration, inquiry, physical challenge, and imaginative play.
- **We are child-centered, focusing on the whole child**
We use an emergent, child-led curriculum that supports the learning of the individual by following their lead and facilitating the interest of each child. We focus on the development of the whole child, whose social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development is supported each day.
- **Encourage active learning through play**
We value and respect play as a child's intrinsic mechanism for exploring and learning about all aspects of the world in which we live. By respecting and nurturing play in childhood, we encourage lifelong learning.
- **Promote social emotional growth and development**
Each day, we help our children learn to handle their emotions and engage socially with their peers. Children will often work/play in groups, where they must learn to negotiate and cooperate.

Communication

Teachers will send out a monthly email highlighting explorations and activities from the month. In addition, teachers will do their best to respond to emails within 24 hours. We welcome parents' suggestions, concerns, and questions. We are eager to discuss anything related to your child. The staff is an excellent resource for discussing developmental concerns and issues. Please understand that we may not be able to have lengthy conversations while supervising children, but we will always make time for a meeting via phone, email, or in person.

Confidentiality

Forest Academy will maintain confidentiality and respect each family's right to privacy, refraining from the disclosure of any confidential information. Children's files are stored away and only accessible to those who are working directly with your child. Educators and staff will not discuss private and confidential information regarding the programs, fellow employees, families, or children with anyone outside of Forest Academy. Educators and staff will also not discuss your child's development or situation with any other parents in the program. The only exception to this is authorized personnel on a need to know basis, particularly as it related to mandated reporting laws. All employees and volunteers are required by state law to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.

Social Media Policy

The goals of taking photos and videos in the classroom setting and sharing them with families are to assist with authentic assessment of the child's development through play and activities (versus testing), enhance learning, share experiences with peers, and contribute to the sense of community that the children and families build with one another.

In addition to our documentation, photos and videos may also be used in our newsletters, on Forest Academy's social media, in our marketing and family information, and/or by the local press with permission from the family. Forest Academy will honor your request if you indicated that you would like for us to abstain from using your child's photograph on any form of media.

Private Care Arrangements

Often parents ask if educators are available to provide evening or weekend childcare in their home. Forest Academy does not endorse or recommend staff to parents or parents to staff. Staff members who provide such childcare are doing so outside the scope of their Forest Academy employment and as such Forest Academy is not liable for any conduct within a private arrangement of this nature.

Daily Procedures

Arrival and Departure

Drop off is outside the Program Center at 9:00 am. Pick up is in the same location at 12:00 pm.

- All children should be at school by 9:15 am at the latest. We will be leaving on our hike out into the forest by 9:15 each day.
- All children should be picked up by 12:00 pm each day.

Late Pick-up

If you are running late please contact Forest Academy and let us know. The phone number is (765) 414-0125.

If you are consistently late our late fee policy will be put into effect.

If a child is picked up late and the center was not notified our policy is to charge:

- \$10 for any pick-up more than 10 minutes late
- Every subsequent 10 minutes late will result in another \$10 fee

Releasing Children

Children will only be released to their parent(s)/guardian(s) and the individuals named in the child's file as approved for pick-up. Parents and guardians must notify Forest Academy staff of any changes to the list of approved adults picking up their child in writing. Children will not be released to unauthorized persons. If the pick-up person is unfamiliar to our staff we will ask for ID.

Health Policies

Health Policies A child may not come to school if the child:

- Has a fever of 100.4 o F or greater
- Has an illness that affects their ability to function at school
- Has vomiting
- Has diarrhea (more than 2 loose/watery stools)
- Has a communicable disease such as pink eye, strep throat, hand, foot, and mouth disease, etc.

A child may not return to school unless they have been free of fever, diarrhea, or vomiting for 24 hours without medication and all signs of a communicable disease have passed. We may require a doctor's note for your child to return to school.

If a child becomes ill during the school day, we will notify their parent(s)/guardian(s). Upon notification of a sick child during school hours, a parent or guardian must pick up their child immediately.

Please inform Forest Academy of any health problems your child is experiencing. It is helpful for us to track illnesses going around and inform parents of exposure to any communicable diseases.

Student absences must be reported by calling (765) 414-0125 or emailing at gretchen@forestacademylafayette.org.

Toileting

Students will be encouraged to take a bathroom break before heading into the forest each day. While playing around Camp Sycamore Valley, a camping toilet will be available in a pop-up tent. Children use wipes to wash their hands after toileting.

Medication

If your child requires prescription or nonprescription medication during the school day, it will be accepted only in the original container. The medication will remain in the container in which it was received. For prescription medication, the label of a medication container must identify the name of the medication, the name of the child for whom the medication is intended, and instructions for administration. For nonprescription medication, we will follow the manufacturer's instructions on the original label.

Written permission from parent(s) or guardian(s) requesting that the school administer medication must be provided on a Medication Permission Form. Educators will subsequently record the date and time a medication is administered, the amount of medication given, any comments or reactions, and their initials on the medication log.

Medications will be kept in staff medical kits if appropriate (epi-pens, inhalers, etc.) or in a locked or out-of-reach area of the classroom.

Sunscreen and Bug Spray

Families should apply sunscreen and bug spray to their child before arriving at school. Forest Academy will not re-apply sunscreen or bug spray during our 3-hour sessions.

Lyme Disease Prevention

We will perform a tick check of easy to see places at the end of our time in the forest, but please remember to perform a more thorough tick check at home every day. See Appendix A for a daily check guide that you can print.

Make tick checks a daily routine, e.g. after returning home from school or before bedtime. Use a headlamp or flashlight to find and spot ticks.

Allergies

If your child has any allergies, please be sure to inform Forest Academy staff. If any medication (Benadryl, Epi-pen, etc.) is needed, please fill out a Medication Permission Form.

Safe Conditions Policy

- Forest Academy will provide a minimum of 5:1 child: staff ratio for supervision. There will be a maximum of 15 children in each class. At most times, 15 children will be supervised by 3 adults.
- Staff will use a checklist to inspect all outdoor areas each morning before children arrive, looking for any hazards, including broken glass, etc.
- Staff will use a checklist to inspect all indoor areas each morning before children arrive, including furnishing, toys, electrical outlets, and all play areas.
- Indoor areas will be cleaned after each session during which they are used.
- If evacuation is required during indoor time, Forest Academy will follow the guidelines posted for evacuation.
- If inclement weather arises while out in camp, a safe area (designated by the property owners) inside the closet building will be used for shelter.
- Children will be notified of physical boundaries for each activity during the school day. Areas that are not defined by natural elements will be given artificial boundaries by roping off certain areas.
- Parents need to bring their children dressed appropriately for outdoor play every day. Outdoor playtime may not occur or be shortened due to weather conditions. This includes a wind chill at or below 10 degrees F and a heat index at or above 90 degrees F as identified by the National Weather Service. The director or program manager will be responsible to determine if any limitations on outdoor play need to be considered.
- Children will have access to drinking water while playing outdoors to prevent dehydration. During times when the heat index is 90 degrees F or higher, all outdoor play activities longer than 15 minutes will be held in a shaded area and water breaks will be scheduled every 20 minutes.
- During times when the wind chill is at or below 10 degrees F, children will be outside for no more than 30 minutes at a time.
- A copy of emergency contact and medical information for each child will be on hand at all times.
- A first aid kit will be available through all sessions. Special medications will be readily accessible for children with asthma, bee allergies, or other conditions that may require immediate treatment.
- A hazards binder will be available through all sessions. This will identify any hazardous plants and animals that may be seen around the property, as well as the appropriate response to exposure to these plants or animals.
- Transportation of Forest Academy students is never provided by a Forest Academy staff member or volunteer unless the student is related to the staff member or volunteer.

Emergency Response Procedures

If an emergency occurs at school, we will take the following actions;

If it is life-threatening, we will contact emergency medical services (9-1-1). If a child must be transported in an ambulance, a staff member will accompany the child if their parents are unavailable.

If it is not a life-threatening emergency, we will determine appropriate next steps in caring for the child(ren).

In both cases, the child's family(s) will be called. If we are unable to reach the families, we will try the other emergency contacts listed in their paperwork. If we are unable to reach the family or the emergency contact, we will contact the proper authorities.

You must keep your current emergency contact information updated with Forest Academy. Notify us immediately if there is any change.

Safe Outdoor Play

Camp Sycamore Valley offers varied and interesting environments that stimulate social, physical, creative, emotional, and intellectual play. The natural setting includes diverse and dynamic natural habitats and play-spaces with a range of objects and materials (loose parts) that children can select to develop their own play.

Educators aim to extend the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it. We manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.

Accidents and Injuries

All staff are trained in safety and first aid procedures. In the case of a minor injury such as a bump, scrape or small cut, staff members are limited to treatment using cold packs, washing the injured area with soap and water, and applying a bandage. If a child incurs an injury at school, an incident report is filled out and the parent or guardian is notified of the injury at pickup.

In the case of a serious or life-threatening injury, the staff members will notify the family as soon as possible. If the parent(s) cannot be reached, one of the emergency contact persons listed on the enrollment forms will be contacted. If emergency treatment is required, the child will be transported by emergency personnel to the nearest hospital and a staff member will accompany the child.

Your Child's Day at School

What to Bring to School

Here is a list of suggested items for our students to bring to school each day:

- Child-sized water-resistant backpack
- Close-toed shoes
- Extra set of clothing that is weather appropriate for each day
- Water bottle
- Unlined notebook or journal and pencil
- Cotton bandana for sitting and/or games
- Emergency medication as needed

Clothing

Discovery-based learning can be messy. For this reason, it's important that children come dressed for messy play and in clothing that is not unsafe when climbing, jumping, running, etc. This includes tight clothing, fancy dresses, and costumes that get in the way during active play. Hold onto clothes that have stains or holes as those would be appropriate to wear for their days at Forest Academy.

Layers of clothing for changing weather and moving from outdoors to indoors are needed for children to enjoy the variety of activities offered throughout the day.

The type of shoe your child wears at Forest Academy is very important. Please have your child wear shoes that have a closed toe and provide good support. Flip-flops are not acceptable for safety reasons. Rain boots, sneakers or hiking shoes are great. When purchasing boots choose ones that are easy to put on, preferably with pull handles. Go for warmth, waterproof, good support, easy to put on, and not too heavy.

Expect your child to spend a large majority of their time outside every day they attend Forest Academy. If there is severe hot or cold weather, we may take breaks inside to cool or warm ourselves. We do have an indoor classroom for use during unsafe weather conditions. Children should be appropriately dressed for outdoor play for all seasons of the year!

Clothing needs for each season include:

Fall/Spring:

We recommend keeping rain gear at school in case of changing weather.

- Rain/Rubber Boots
- Jacket/Sweatshirt, Raincoat or a One-Piece Rainsuit
- Mittens
- Sun hat

Winter:

We recommend keeping extra socks and mittens at school as these will get wet and cold easily

- Snow Pants and Winter Coat
- Insulated/Waterproof Boots
- Wood or Fleece-Lined Hat
- Mittens (insulated and waterproof)
- Scarf/Neck Cover
- Wool/Fleece Socks
- Warm base layers of clothing

Please let us know if clothing is a barrier and we will work with your family on finding a solution.

Snacks

Snack is a special time for building relationships and developing connections while engaging in conversations among children and educators. Forest Academy will provide a snack each day, but families are welcome to send snacks from home. Please make sure to inform Forest Academy staff of any food allergies.

Holiday and Birthdays

Forest Academy will acknowledge and celebrate many holidays throughout the year. We acknowledge that many holidays and cultural events are of significance to our families. Families are always welcome to share their own cultural celebrations with the class in a way that is age appropriate. Let your child's classroom educator know if you want to come in to share a family tradition or something about a holiday your family celebrates. We honor everyone's traditions and values and view the holidays as a jumping-off point to introduce our children to diversity and aspects of many cultures.

Birthday celebrations are significant events in children's lives. Please feel free to celebrate your child's birthday with their class, just check in with your child's teachers beforehand. Simplicity is often helpful in these events and snack items such as fruit, mini muffins, or donut holes are very easy to manage favorites of the children.

Child Guidance and Discipline Policy

To prevent discipline issues, we always provide adequate supervision, offer stimulating activities, and provide ample time for free play and projects. As an activity is coming to an end, we will offer notice to the children and foreshadow what will be happening next. We require children to participate in clean up rituals and strive to make teamwork fun. We meet as a team to decide on best practices for certain behaviors and situations.

We use positive reinforcement and acknowledge and validate each child's emotions. We investigate conflict with the children to understand all perspectives. We see conflict as a normal part of childhood (and life!) and help children navigate by offering choices and appropriate language. Teachers will often observe if children are working through a conflict and only intercede if they appear to need assistance.

Teachers use a variety of positive guidance strategies including positioning, observing, noticing, describing, encouraging, being consistent, setting limits, redirecting, offering choices, listening actively, resolving conflict through negotiation and problem solving, allowing consequences to teach, establishing contingencies, modeling, and having well-planned environments, developmentally appropriate activities, and predictable daily routines.

We will not allow children to destroy property or strike, bite or kick each other or a teacher. In the natural world, this also means we will not permit children to kill wildlife (including insects), break branches off living trees, or pull up grass. Physical aggression will be addressed with the following progression:

- 1st offense: discussion with child and their parent.
- 2nd offense: child will be suspended for 1 day.
- 3rd offense: child will be expelled from the program.

It is expected that family members work with educators in helping find solutions to persistent behavioral problems. In the rare event that a child's ongoing disruptive behavior does not improve despite the best efforts of the staff and family and this behavior has a continuing negative effect on the classroom climate, Forest Academy reserves the right to request the removal of a child. Such a request will be made if it becomes apparent that the safety and well-being of children or staff members are in jeopardy.

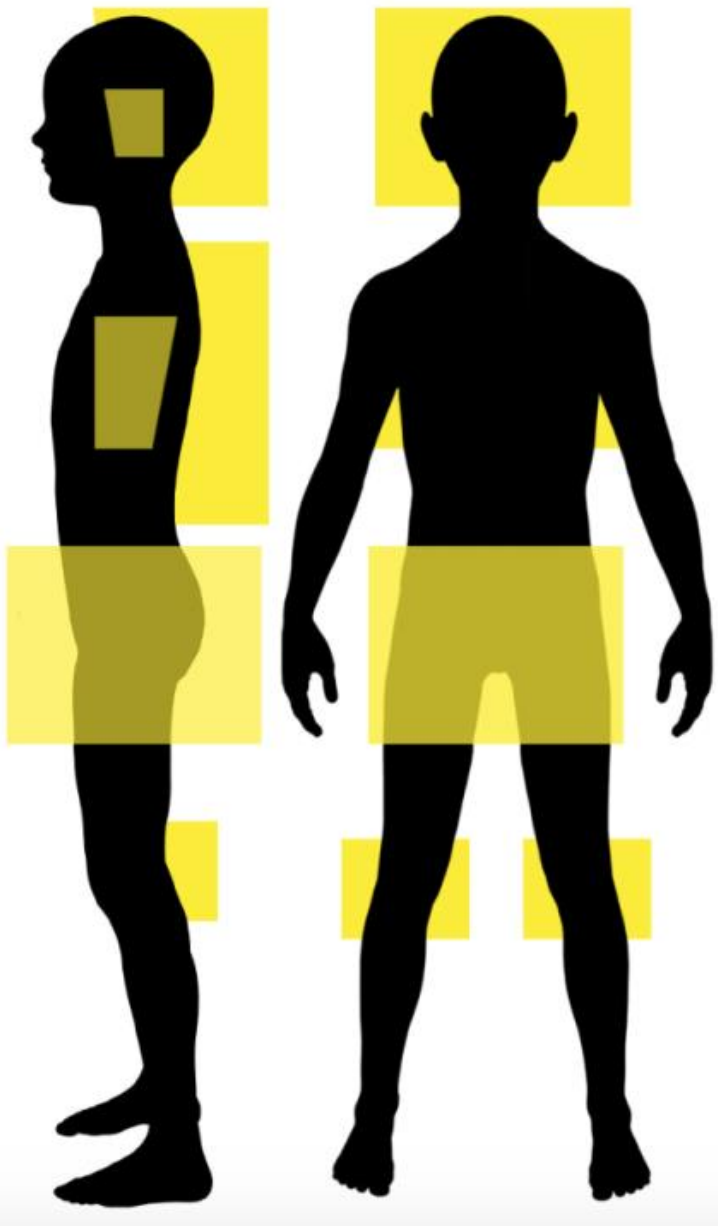
Grievance Policy

If you have any concerns that you don't feel are adequately addressed by the educators or relate to educator performance, please contact Gretchen Shissler, Executive Director at (765) 414-0125 or gretchen@forestacademylafayette.org.

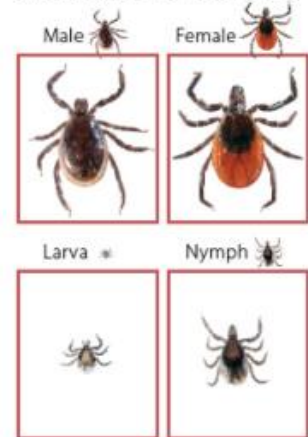
Checking Your Child For Ticks



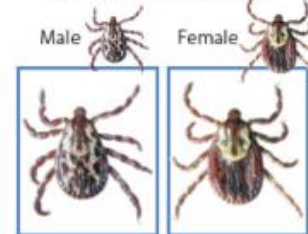
Feel for bumps & look for tiny brown spots, especially in these areas



Blacklegged or Deer ticks



American Dog ticks



Lone Star ticks

