



Family Handbook

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Mission

The mission of Forest Academy is to utilize the natural environment to foster child-led learning for students of all abilities, using an inclusive, authentic, play-based curriculum to inspire development of the whole child.

Vision

We believe that education should be a multifaceted process that encompasses physical, social, emotional, and intellectual learning. Forest Academy will provide opportunities for our students to develop perseverance, problem solving, flexible thinking, and self-control through exploration and supported adventurous play in nature. Our school serves students ages 3 – 16 years old in multi-age classes to help foster social emotional skills. Spending time in nature will help our students develop connection to the natural world and help them become stewards of the environment. Forest Academy has a long-term plan to support children with special needs with individualized accommodations and therapy services including pediatric occupational, physical, and speech therapy. Providing services in inclusive classes will help all students to develop a sense of compassion, empathy and respect for each other and the Earth.

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

Our director will send out a weekly email highlighting explorations and activities from the previous week. In addition, administration 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 and after classes, 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, in a shared online Google photo album, 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

Parents sometimes 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

Drop off is a car line on the concrete area outside of the Program Center at 9:00 am and 1:00 pm. Parents should pull into the right lane when entering the parking lot and turn back toward the program center. Students should exit the car on the passenger side. All children should be at school by 9:15 am

and 1:15 pm at the latest. We will be leaving on our hike out into the forest by 9:15 and 1:15 pm each day. Please do not drop children off before the Head Teacher arrives to greet them.

Pick-Up

Parents should park in the parking lot at pick-up and walk to the concrete, at the same area where children are dropped off. Teachers will dismiss children to their parents here. All children should be picked up by 12:00 pm and 4:00 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 erin@forestacademylafayette.org.

If your child needs additional medical related accommodations, please schedule a time to create a plan with administration.

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. Hand sanitizer will also be available throughout each class period.

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.

Over the counter medication and topical cream is kept in the first aid kit each day, but will not be given to any child without parental consent on a case-by-case basis. If a minor incident occurs, such as a bee-sting or an injury, the head teacher will phone the emergency contact and ask if any over-the counter meds are requested to avoid any over-dosage or un-desired medications.

If your child requires daily medication during school hours, please contact the administration to schedule a meeting and develop a care plan. Once the plan is established, the director will communicate the necessary information to all relevant staff to ensure consistent and appropriate care.

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

Lyme disease is a preventable tick-borne illness commonly associated with exposure to wooded or grassy areas. To help reduce the risk, families are strongly encouraged to perform regular tick checks, particularly after children have spent time outdoors in nature-rich environments. Consistent tick checks are an important preventative measure and are especially important with repeated outdoor exposure. We appreciate your partnership in promoting student health and safety.

Children will perform a guided 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 at the end of this handbook 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. Headlamps & flashlights are useful tools 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.

If your child requires daily medication during school hours, please contact the administration to schedule a meeting and develop a care plan. Once the plan is established, the director will communicate the necessary information to all relevant staff to ensure consistent and appropriate care.

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 call 911 and 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.

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

Your Child's Day at School

What to Bring to School – Please label each item in your child's backpack

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 including socks
- Water bottle
- Cotton bandana for sitting and/or games
- Emergency medication as needed
- Bug nets to put over heads (optional)

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 safe for climbing, jumping, running, etc. Please avoid 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. Especially during the seasons of high temperature changes 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, go for warmth, waterproof, good support, easy to put on, and not too heavy. Make sure that the appropriate socks are worn with boots – i.e. Long socks are needed with tall rain boots to avoid rubbing and irritation of the legs.

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 packing light rain gear in case of changing weather. If rain is expected, a packable hooded rain coat would be useful.

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

Winter:

We recommend packing extra socks and mittens in a ziplock/waterproof bag as these will get wet and cold easily

- Snow Pants and Winter Coat
- Insulated/Waterproof Boots
- Wood or Fleece-Lined Hat
- Mittens/Gloves (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. Families will be asked to supply snacks for your child's class on a rotating basis. The director will send out a schedule one week before the start of each month with information about how many snacks to provide, as well as any food allergies or restrictions in the class. Updated snack lists with class numbers and allergy information will be available in the Forest Academy share-drive at all times.

We kindly ask that families provide individually wrapped snacks for their children whenever possible. These convenient options help us make the most of our 15-minute snack period and allow for a smooth, efficient transition back to nature-play.

Examples of preferred snacks include:

- Granola bars
- Crackers (e.g., Goldfish, Ritz packs)
- Applesauce or yogurt pouches

- Trail mix or snack-size dried fruit packs
- String cheese

Thank you for your support in helping us keep snack time organized and manageable for both students and staff.

Please let us know if this is a financial burden on your family and we will find another solution.

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 times and strive to make teamwork fun. Forest Academy staff meets monthly as a team to decide on best practices for certain behaviors and situations based on past and current observations.

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

When physical aggression does occur, we address it promptly and consistently, following a progressive discipline plan:

1. 1st Offense: A discussion will be held between the child, their parent(s), and the educator. During this conversation, we will work together to understand the cause of the behavior, reflect on appropriate alternatives, and develop a plan to prevent future occurrences. The child will also be guided on managing emotions and impulses in a positive way.
2. 2nd Offense: If the behavior persists despite the initial intervention, the child will be suspended from the program for one day. This is to give the child time to reflect on their actions and for the family and educators to reassess strategies for managing the behavior moving forward.
3. 3rd Offense: If physical aggression continues after the second offense, the child will be expelled from the program. This step will be taken only after all other avenues for intervention have been exhausted to ensure the safety and well-being of all children and staff.

We acknowledge that with the large range in age and developmental levels of the students in our classes, younger children may hit or kick due to decreased control of emotions and impulses. With students ages 5 and under, physical aggression will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

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. This could be a permanent or temporary removal.

School Closures

Forest Academy will follow weather-related school closures of Lafayette School Corporation. We will cancel morning classes if Lafayette School Corporation is closed or delayed due to weather. (Even though we typically follow Tippecanoe School Corporation's calendar). Our afternoon classes will be canceled if LSC closes, but not for a delay. Our director will send out an email as soon as we know if LSC cancels or delays school. If school is not cancelled but you decide to keep your child home due to weather, please call or email the director to let them know.

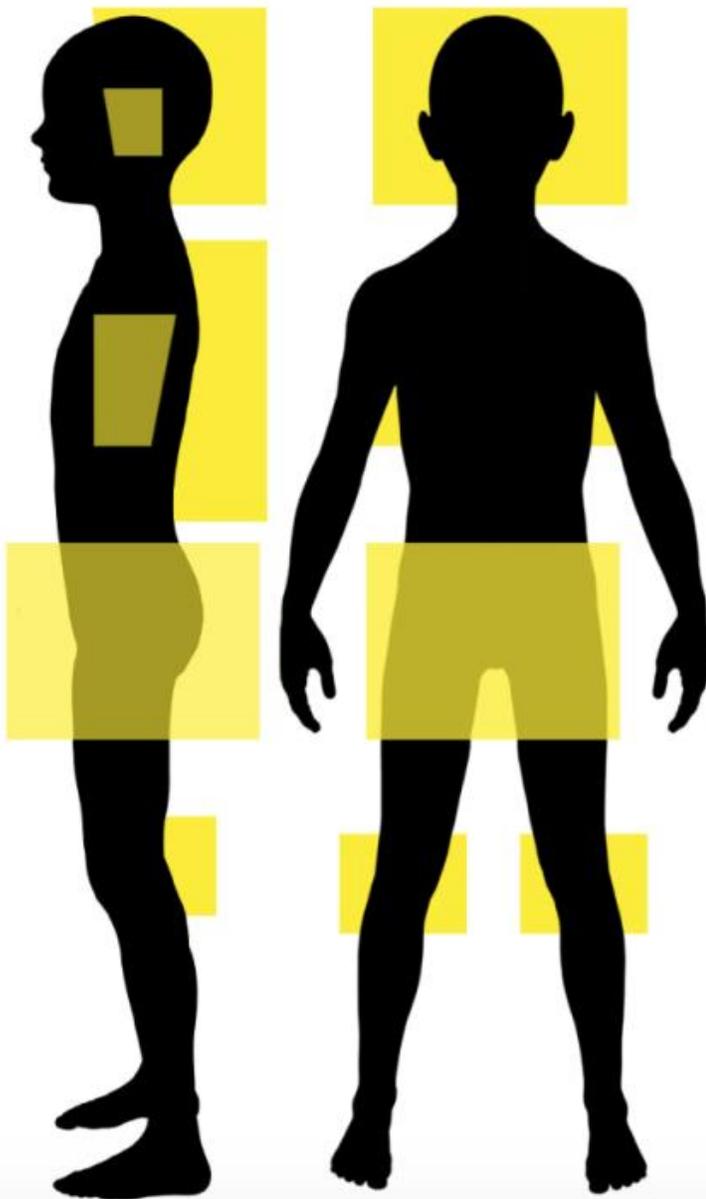
Grievance Policy

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.

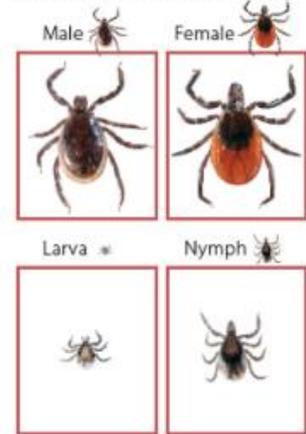
Checking Your Child For Ticks



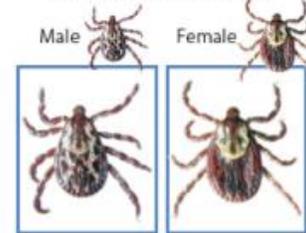
Feel for bumps & look for tiny brown spots, especially in these areas



Blacklegged or Deer ticks



American Dog ticks



Lone Star ticks

