

# Parent Handbook

## 2023-2024



**Natural Beginnings**  
Kendall County Forest Preserve District



Thank you for investing in your child's future by enrolling in the  
Natural Beginnings Early Learning Program with the  
Kendall County Forest Preserve District!

We hope that you and your family find Natural Beginnings to be a "natural" fit for  
your family's educational needs. It is also our hope that you enjoy your time spent  
with us as much as we will enjoy taking this journey with your child.



## Program Overview

### **Mission and Goals**

#### **Mission:**

To nurture whole child development through primary experiences with nature while initiating them into a life-long, meaningful relationship with the natural world.

#### **Educational Philosophy:**

Our curriculum is designed to promote learning by providing an environment that encourages discovery and experimentation. While exploring several different inquiry units throughout the year, children will have the chance to help shape the content by communicating their interests in the theme. We explore each theme by taking nature walks, studying natural phenomena, and engaging in reinforcing activities to build physical, emotional, and academic skills. Developing a love of learning is of the utmost importance to our staff and is always the basis of our curriculum. Our curriculum will include activities intended to take the children to the next level of understanding based on the children's abilities and interests. We encourage divergent thinking and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children's ideas and insights.

#### **Goals:**

- Foster curiosity through inquiry, hands-on projects, and play.
- Stimulate intellectual, social-emotional, and physical development.
- Develop respect and appreciation for the natural world.
- Develop self-confidence and a growth mindset.



## Natural Beginnings during COVID Restrictions

Parents are advised that the program policies and guidelines described within the Kendall County Forest Preserve District's 2023-2024 Natural Beginnings Parent Handbook may be modified to address CDC COVID variant restrictions and related safety precautions.

Parents will be notified of all changes to the program's operations in a timely manner.

### Facilities:

As Kendall County's largest forest preserve, Hoover Forest Preserve provides an unparalleled location for nature-based learning. Children will discover the wonder and beauty found in Hoover's nearly 350-acres of prairies, woodland trails, and creeks, as well as the Fox River. This program is designed to encourage children to explore the connections between their lives and the world around them.

By offering Natural Beginnings within the preserve's boundaries, the children have access to numerous daily experiences with plant life both inside and outside the physical classroom. Aside from daily hikes amid the natural habitats, the children will tend to outdoor gardens as well as care for the indoor plants and animals. Natural Beginnings students are inspired and guided by naturalists and teachers trained in nature education and experienced in sharing their enthusiasm for the natural world.

During outdoor explorations, children regularly have the opportunity to observe native wildlife including White-tailed deer, Cooper's hawk, Eastern tiger swallowtail butterflies and hundreds more. In addition to those organic experiences, children will have daily experiences with animals inside the classroom. Children are taught the correct way of handling the classroom's educational animals and to wash their hands thoroughly after every contact. Direct contact is always under the close supervision of an educator.

We also have many other mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects visit our classroom throughout the school year.



## Daily Schedule

At Natural Beginnings, we value spontaneity in activity and take advantage of the "teachable moments" that we are afforded. We also know that young children who are experiencing regular activity away from home for the first time benefit from knowing what to expect as they are in our program. Although every day promises to be a new adventure for our class, we maintain a loose, but structured schedule with predictable events throughout the day. The following is an example of a possible classroom schedule:

**Arrival:** Drop off children to sign in with the teacher.

**Opening activity:** Children could play a game, participate in large motor skill activities or perform science experiments until all students have arrived.

**Circle Time/Literacy Development:** Children may take part in thematic conversations, listen to stories or poems, sing songs, discuss the season or the weather, engage in Jolly Phonics curriculum, explore movement, or receive special visits from naturalists or our education ambassadors (animals).

**Snack:** This is a great time for social interaction and practicing table manners and good health and safety practices. Good options are for example fruits, vegetables, crackers, or cheese in reusable containers. Snack is not intended to be a meal, but rather a small snack. We will send out a class allergy list and snack ideas at the beginning of the program year. Please send in a water bottle in your child's backpack. The bottle will need to be securely sealable as we may carry these on hikes.

**Hike:** Children will explore the vast trails or natural areas of Hoover Forest Preserve daily. They will discover the wonder and beauty of prairies, creeks, rivers and woodland trails. While exploring, children could be climbing, fort building, digging, engaging in water play or acting out dramatic play. Many hikes are intended to enhance the scheduled unit and will focus on various themes throughout the year.

**Responsibilities:** Children are encouraged to take ownership in tasks that help the classroom as a community.

**Reinforcing Activity:** Following the thematic curriculum, children will study the unit further through art, crafts, and journaling or science experiments.

**Free Choice:** Children will have the ability to choose from several different "stations" in the classroom. Examples of stations include: nature blocks, sensory activities, science experiments, dramatic play activities, math manipulatives, music and movement activities, writing activities, arts and crafts, reading activities and more. These stations change frequently throughout the year and can be based on thematic materials.

**Departure:** Children will be picked up by their guardians.



## Program Nuts and Bolts

### Tuition

Tuition for 2023-2024 school year is **\$1700 for 2 days per week** and **\$2200 for 3 days per week**. **A non-refundable registration fee of \$150 + 10% of the annual tuition (\$170 for two days; \$220 for three days) per child is required upon registration.** The additional 10% tuition payment required at registration is non-refundable, but will be applied towards the 4<sup>th</sup> quarterly tuition payment. Should you withdraw from the program the registration fee and the 10% tuition fee will not be refunded for any reason.

Installments can be made on a quarterly schedule (\$425 for two days a week (\$255 for Q4) or \$550 for three days a week (\$330 for Q4) and are due on July 13, 2023; October 12, 2023; January 11, 2024; and April 11, 2024. Installment payments set up with a credit card (2.5% processing fee will be applied for all cc payments) will be deducted automatically on the due dates.

If paying by check and you miss the deadline, you will be notified and receive a 5-day grace period. If a credit card payment is declined, you will be notified and a 5-day grace period will be allotted. A \$15 processing fee will be assessed after the grace period. Failure to pay within two weeks following the due date will result in suspension from the program.

Quarterly payments are non-refundable. Tuition refunds will be granted for payments that have been made in full provided a valid physician's written excuse is submitted or proof of relocation out of the area is submitted. Refunds will be pro-rated based upon the remaining number of quarters left in the year, minus the 10% prepaid tuition fee for registration.

### Arrivals

All children are to be dropped off at a designated spot where your instructor will sign in your child when you arrive. Our daily outdoor activities will start promptly at 9:00am or 12:00pm. Children need to be dressed appropriately for the weather. Natural Beginnings' responsibility for the child begins when he or she is signed in. Instructors will be ready to receive children 5 minutes prior to class. **Please make sure that your child has had access to a restroom recently prior to the start of class.**

### Departures

We will not dismiss your child to an unauthorized person or someone not indicated on your Enrollment Form. You may add people to your list at any time. A handwritten and signed note from the parent or guardian is acceptable to add people to your list. For identification purposes, a driver's license may be required prior to departure. All children must be signed out before leaving the premises.

Please be prompt when picking up your child. Class lets out at 11:25 or 2:25. Children become worried when parents are late. If a parent is later than 15 minutes and has not called, the staff will begin to contact the child's emergency contacts. If you are running late, please contact a staff member at the Rookery Building at 630-553-3939 or text your child's teacher.

## **Speed Limit**

Please respect the posted speed limit of **10 MPH**. This protects the wildlife, visitors and **your children** from being injured. Classes are often out on the trails and crossing the road or walking through the parking lot. Hoover Forest Preserve is home to many local school field trips and there can be numerous classes out on any given day. Please make sure that you watch for school buses that are parked in the road with a red flashing sign. We may not pass these buses while the children are loading and unloading. When entering the forest preserve, slow down and enjoy the drive while your child looks for animals along the way.

## **Personal Belongings**

We understand that your child's personal belongings are special. Because we do not wish that their items are lost or damaged, we do not permit them in the classroom and we discourage bringing them in a backpack. Please leave all personal items at home.

## **Health and Safety Concerns**

### **Communicable Diseases**

The parents of any child that develops a communicable disease must notify the classroom teacher. A notice will be sent home with students in that classroom to alert parents to observe for symptoms. We will in no circumstance identify the ill child to other parents.

### **Medicine Administration**

The Natural Beginnings program staff will not administer prescription and non-prescription medications under any circumstances other than the following:

- Medications that may be administered with physician instructions and parental consent include and are limited to inhalers to treat asthma; epinephrine pens, Benadryl, and other similar treatments to address severe allergies and/or allergic reactions.

Emergency services and student emergency contacts will be called in every case, and in this order of priority, where a Natural Beginnings student is experiencing a severe allergic reaction regardless of whether pre-approved medication(s) are administered under parental consent during the program in order to ensure that timely medical care and treatment is rendered by trained medical personnel. If you wish your child to have bug spray or sunscreen, the parent or caregiver must apply it before class. Instructors are not permitted to apply these to the children.

### **Allergy Information**

Here at Natural Beginnings, students will come in contact with many different allergens in the natural world outside. We have a vast forest preserve to explore and numerous chances to come in contact with tree nuts, egg shells, shellfish (crayfish), pollen, seeds and grass. If your child has allergies to these things or anything else, you must make the Program Manager aware of this **prior to enrollment**.

While we are always vigilant about your child's safety, due to the nature of outdoor education, we may not always be able to prevent accidental contact.

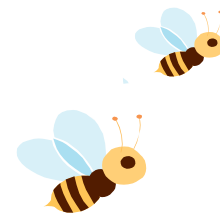
### **First Aid and CPR**

The staff at Natural Beginnings is fully trained in First Aid and CPR. If your child gets injured while at Natural Beginnings, the instructor will administer first aid and you will be notified at pick-up or by phone after class for minor incidents. For more significant medical issues or emergencies, you (or your emergency contacts) will be contacted immediately to make arrangements for your child's pickup. You will also be contacted and informed immediately if Natural Beginnings staff have contacted emergency responders. Should emergency treatment be required, staff will have your medical information on hand. An accident report will be filled out by a staff member and kept on file. **If you change cell phone numbers, please notify the staff so that we can make the change for our emergency text system.**

First Aid equipment will be on hand at all times during class.

### **Keep your child home if:**

- Your child has a temperature greater than 100\* and continue to keep them home for 24 hours after the temperature is back to normal.
- Your child has a severe cold.
- Your child has an inflammation of the eyes.
- Your child has been vomiting or has had diarrhea.
- Your child has any rashes.
- Your child has lice.



### **Absences**

If your child will be absent from class, please contact your child's instructor via text or using the SeeSaw app, or contact Natural Beginnings at 630-553-3939. No refunds will be issued for any sick days.

### **Daily Screening of Illness**

If your child displays obvious signs of illness, depending upon the symptoms displayed, a decision will be made on the advisability of the child remaining at Natural Beginnings. The parent or guardian will be notified if the child needs to return home. Your child will be sent home if there is a fever, vomiting, diarrhea or if he or she is not participating in the classroom or unable to walk during outdoor hikes and requires a lot of extra attention from an adult. Our main goal is to keep the children healthy by preventing unnecessary spreading of illnesses.

Proper hand washing is a simple and extremely effective way to stop the spread of unwanted germs. During class, we practice good hand washing habits before snack, after animal care and after using the bathroom.

### **Change of Address or Phone Number**

Please notify the staff when you experience a change so that your emergency information can be updated.



## Safety

All teachers have undergone a thorough background check through the State of Illinois and have received training in CPR and first aid. Classroom doors will be closed and locked during class. Weather and safety drills will be practiced throughout the school year.

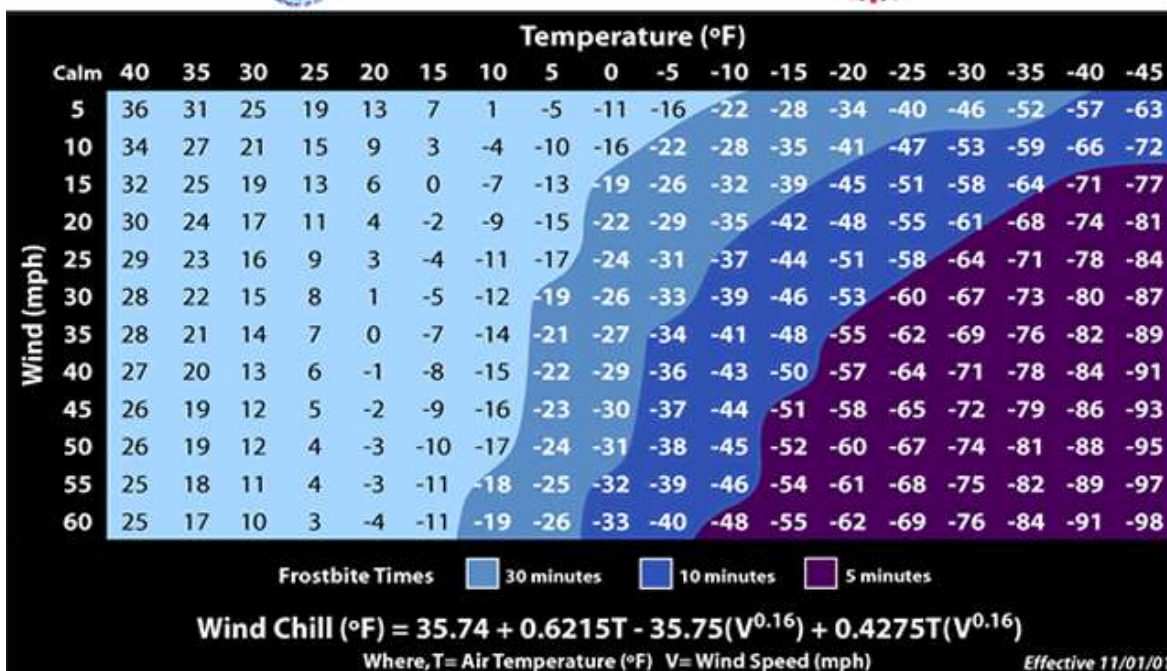
## Class Cancellations and Weather Conditions

Natural Beginnings sessions may be cancelled for severe weather events. Teachers will send out a cancellation notification using the SeeSaw app. No refunds will be issued for weather related closings, nor will any additional days be added to the school calendar to make up for severe weather days.

**Since your child's safety is our priority during class, we will not explore the outdoors in unsafe conditions.** Our goal is to inspire children go outside because they enjoy it, not because they are forced to. **The instructors at Natural Beginnings will make judgment calls directly prior to class time as to whether or not the children will be taking a hike or engaging in outdoor activities that day.** Several factors go into making that decision. Instructors base their decisions off of temperature, wind chill, sunlight, rain, lightning, and heavy winds. To determine for how long the class will be able to stay outside the instructors will also use the wind-chill-chart below as a reference. An equally important factor on how warm and comfortable the children will feel are the layers and clothing that they wear. Even the location of the time spent outdoors can make a big difference. With this in mind the instructors will pay close attention to the well-being of the children at all times and will adjust their plans accordingly. For example, if there is a light rain without lightening or heavy winds, we may go on an expedition or stay indoors depending upon the instructors' discretion. **We advise that you dress your child for the weather as specified in this handbook every time you come to school.** If temperatures get too cold, we will stay inside, but due to the nature of our outdoor drop off, you will still need to dress your child appropriately so that they can participate in the opening activity until their friends arrive and they make their way to the building. In extreme weather conditions, we will attempt to contact parents prior to class to advice of an indoor drop off.



## Wind Chill Chart



## Being Prepared for Class

### Clothing

Clothing should be kept simple, comfortable and washable. Students will be involved in many different types of activities while at Natural Beginnings and should be dressed accordingly. Active exploration of the outdoors is encouraged during class time and children will be permitted to splash in mud puddles, dig in the soil, make mud pies, and play with paint and other things of that nature. We encourage sending your child to school in clothes that can get dirty. Discovery learning requires freedom from restrictive clothing as well. This includes tight clothing and fancy dresses. Children should wear clothing that they can manage themselves in a washroom or in the case that they need to change into dry clothes. Students need comfortable, protective shoes with gripping soles for climbing, running and jumping. Sneakers are best during dry weather. Rain boots are best during wet or cool weather. Snow boots for temperatures below 50 degrees. Flip flops are **not** acceptable footwear for trails and are deemed a safety hazard. Long pants should be worn in all-weather due to poison ivy. Rain pants, rain jacket, thick wool-blend socks, snow pants, winter jacket, hats, and waterproof mittens are all essential for outerwear at nature-based programs. Outdoor gear tip sheets will be passed out at orientation as we go over appropriate gear for all types of weather. We spend much of our day outside, so gear is very important.

All clothing must be **labeled** including boots, mittens, snow pants, coats, etc. Although staff members will do their best to keep track of clothing, many look the same and Natural Beginnings is not responsible for lost articles of clothing. A lost and found is kept in the entryway in a labeled basket.

Please do not send an umbrella with your child.

### Bathroom Time

**Please make sure that your child has recently used the bathroom prior to drop off.** The public bathrooms will be available for you to use with your child when you arrive. We start our day outside with outdoor play or a hike and it is conducive to the outdoor experience that we don't interrupt the play or hike to return for bathroom visits.

Make sure that the child's clothing is conducive for easy care in the bathroom. Elastic waist pants are great. If your child has pants with zippers, snaps or buttons, make sure that they are able to do this on their own. This will give the child a feeling of empowerment and independence.

Potty training is required for participation in Natural Beginnings. Please note that if a child has several toileting accidents within a short time frame, the staff will evaluate the child's toileting skills and speak to the parents and may suggest the child's withdrawal from the program until he or she has mastered independent toileting skills.



## **Behavior Guidelines**

Optimal learning occurs when there is freedom for discovery, enough structure to allow everyone to learn, and physical and emotional safety. At Natural Beginnings, we will maintain a calm atmosphere with clear expectations from everyone while allowing the freedom to engage in exploration.

To achieve this, our daily program is structured to provide enough time for children to feel satisfied in play. With enough outdoor activities, children tend to expend their energy in appropriate ways and are then ready to be less physically active and more cognitively ready when they enter the indoor classroom.

Adults will be available to help children solve social problems. Some children need to have exposure to the language skills necessary for dealing with issues that pop up in early childhood classrooms. Adults will serve as models and facilitate resolutions.

Adults will intervene in an educational manner, rather than punitive, when children are having a hard time controlling themselves. We want the child to see a connection between his behavior and the consequences. Methods of discipline include clear rules, redirection, planning ahead to prevent problems, encouragement, and the use of logical and natural consequences. Techniques NOT used at Natural Beginnings are: physical punishment, threats, bribery, and other methods that would hurt, frighten, belittle, or humiliate children.

It is expected that the parents will work with teachers 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 this behavior has a continuing negative effect on the classroom climate, management may determine that Natural Beginnings cannot meet the child's needs and the child may be dis-enrolled from the program. No tuition will be refunded for said child's current quarter.

## **Special Events and Communication**

### **Birthdays**

Birthdays are very important for most young children. Because we would like to participate in the celebration of your child's life, the students will join together for a special birthday celebration during class. At the start of our class, the birthday child will receive a personalized necklace and we will sing a song for your child. Then the birthday child will hold a globe and walk around the sun (classmates waving scarves) once for every year of their life. Parents are welcome to stay for this portion of the class to participate in their child's celebration. Additionally, parents can choose to read a special, age-appropriate book to the whole class during the celebration.

Please do not send in birthday treats due to allergy restrictions. If you would like to honor your child's birthday, please purchase something from our school wish list and we will add it to our classroom in honor of your child. To make sure that we honor children with summer birthdays, we will celebrate half-birthdays. Your child's teacher will send home a birthday calendar at the beginning of the school year so that you know when we will celebrate your child's special day at Natural Beginnings.

## **Parent Participation**

Parent involvement is critical to the development of young children and we value working as a team for the benefit of your child. This is why we have included several opportunities for parents to participate in our Natural Beginnings program. There will be opportunities for parents to participate at Natural Beginnings through play-along events, special events, fundraisers, pot luck dinner, creek hikes, and the Year-End Celebration.

## **Communication**

Communication between staff and parents benefits the educational experience of children. Due to limitations on conversation during arrival and departure time, our primary means of communication will be through texts, email, phone calls, parent-teacher conferences and the private parent page, seesaw. Photos will be posted to the parent-page every week. These forms of communication should keep you current with the happenings in your child's classroom. If you have any additional questions, please call or email your child's teacher.

We ask parents to keep staff notified of significant events and changes in their children's lives. Visitors, moving, new babies, illness, divorce and death all affect a child's life at home and at school.

Your comments, questions and concerns about the program are very important to us. Please feel free to contact a staff member and share your input. We are always looking for ways to improve our program and provide an excellent educational experience for your child.

## **Important Contact Information**

Natural Beginnings Early Childhood Program is held in the Rookery Building at Hoover Forest Preserve. To reach the staff at Natural Beginnings call 630-553-3939. The main office for the Forest Preserve District is located at 110 W. Madison St., Yorkville, IL. For billing inquiries, please call 630-553-4025. You will receive emails and cell phone numbers for your child's Lead Teacher at Parent Orientation.

