

Parent Handbook

2026-2027



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:

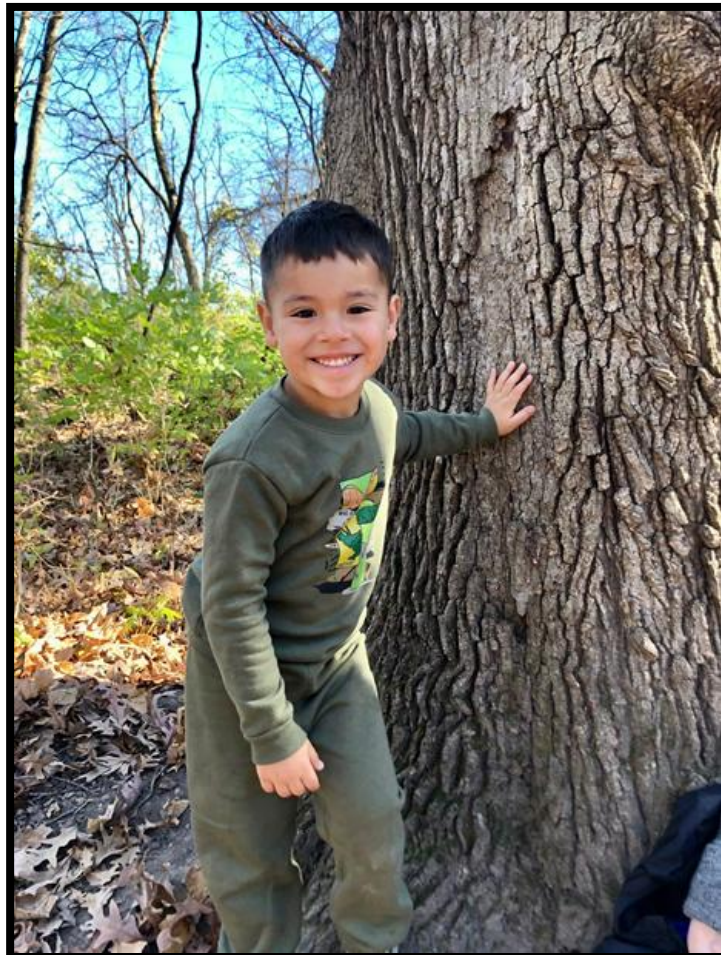
To nurture whole child development through primary experiences with nature while fostering a life-long, meaningful relationship with the natural world.

Educational Philosophy:

Developing a love of learning is the basis of our curriculum. Our curriculum promotes learning within an environment that encourages discovery and experimentation. Children shape the content of our inquiry-based units through their interests. We explore each theme by taking nature walks, studying natural phenomena, and engaging in both play and reinforcing activities to build physical, social-emotional, and academic skills. Our instructors use open-ended questions to guide 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.



Facilities:

Hoover Forest Preserve provides an exceptional 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 instruction within this preserve's boundaries, the children have access to numerous daily experiences with plant and animal life both inside and outside the physical building. 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 participants are inspired and guided by instructors 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 these organic experiences, children will share experiences with our ambassador animals. Children are taught the correct way of handling these animals. Direct contact is always under the close supervision of an educator.



Daily Schedule:

At Natural Beginnings, we value spontaneity in activity to take advantage of the “teachable moments”. We also understand that young children benefit from knowing what to expect. Although every day promises to be a new adventure for our groups, we maintain a structured schedule with predictable events throughout the day.

The following is an example of a typical daily schedule:

Arrival: Drop off children and sign-in with the educator.

Free choice time: Children could play a game, participate in large motor activities, perform scientific experiments, or engage in arts.

Whole group time: Children may take part in thematic conversations, listen to stories or poems, sing songs, discuss the season or the weather, engage in 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 mealtime manners as well as good health and safety practices. Good snack options include 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 an allergy list and snack ideas at the beginning of the program year. Please send a water bottle in your child’s backpack. The bottle will need to be securely sealed, and easily resealed as we may carry these on hikes.

Hike: Children will explore the trails and diverse natural areas of Hoover Forest Preserve daily. They will discover the wonder and beauty of prairies, creeks, rivers, and woodlands. 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 inquiry unit and will focus on various themes throughout the year.

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

Small group activity: Following the thematic curriculum, children may study the unit further through art, crafts, journaling, or science experiments.

Free Choice: Children will have the ability to choose from several different “stations”. 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 2026-2027 program year is **\$1900 for 2-days** per week and **\$2600 for 3-days** per week. **A non-refundable registration fee of \$150 plus 10% of the annual tuition (\$190 for two days; \$260 for three days) per child is required upon registration.** The 10% advance tuition payment required at registration is non-refundable, but will be applied towards the 4th quarterly tuition payment. **Should you withdraw from the program, the registration fee plus the 10% tuition fee will not be refunded for any reason.**

Installments can be made on a quarterly schedule. Payments for two days per week sessions are \$475.00 (\$285.00 for Q4), or \$650.00 for three days per week sessions (\$390.00 for Q4). Quarterly payments are due on July 16, 2026; October 15, 2026; January 14, 2027; and April 15, 2027. Installment payments for credit cards will include an additional 3.5% processing fee, and will be charged automatically on the due dates based on the card information provided at registration on the credit card form.

If paying by check and you miss the deadline, or if a credit card payment is declined, you will be notified and receive a 5-day grace period to make an alternate payment.

A \$15 late 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.

Registration Process:

All new families who wish to register for the Natural Beginnings Early Learning Program must create an online account through the District's **DaySmart** Recreation Program.

District staff will not be responsible for creating online accounts.
Your application cannot be processed unless you created an online account.

To create an online account, visit the District's website, kendallforest.com, and click on the "Create an Account" button.

The direct link to create an account is:

<https://apps.daysmartrecreation.com/dash/x/#/online/kendallcountv/register>

Registration for Natural Beginnings is NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE.

Registration papers then must be completed and returned to our main office 110 W Madison Street, Yorkville.

Registration is available beginning January 13, 2026 at 9:30am for current or former families and on Tuesday, January 20, 2026 at 9:30am for new families.

Registrations are taken in person or by mail at the Kendall County Forest Preserve Offices, 110 W. Madison St., Yorkville.

You may also email your registration form to swiencke@kendallcountyil.gov.

Registrations will be processed in three tiers with in person registration being first, email registration second, and USPS registration third.

For more information, visit <https://kendallforest.com/natural-beginnings-yorkville.php> or please email Stefanie Wiencke. swiencke@kendallcountyil.gov.

Arrivals:

All children are to be dropped off at a designated location where your instructor will sign-in your child when you arrive. Our daily outdoor activities will start promptly at 9:00 am or 12:00 pm. Children need to be dressed appropriately for the weather. Natural Beginnings instructors are responsible for the supervision of the children once sign-in is complete. Instructors will be ready to begin receiving children 5 minutes prior to the start time of each session

Please make sure that your child has had access to a restroom prior to the start of their session.

Departures:

Instructors will not dismiss your child to an unauthorized person or someone not indicated in 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. Pick-up starts at 11:25 or 2:25. Children become worried when parents are late. If a parent is later than 15 minutes and the instructor has not been contacted, the staff will begin to contact the child's emergency contacts. If you are running late, please contact your child's instructor directly via Seesaw message, or a staff member at the Kendall County Forest Preserve District Main Office at 630-553-4025.

Speed Limit:

Do not exceed the posted speed limit of **10 MPH**. This protects the wildlife, visitors and **your children** from being injured. Groups 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. You 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. Parents are asked to communicate with their child's instructor if they wish to send items from home with their child. This may include comfort items such as a toy. Items brought from home could be lost or damaged. Natural Beginnings is not responsible for items brought from home.

Health and Safety Concerns

Communicable Illnesses and Diseases:

The parents of any child that develops a communicable illness or disease must notify their child's instructor. A notice may be sent to the other families attending the same session to alert parents to observe for symptoms. Instructors will not under any circumstance identify or inform other parents or caregivers which children have presented with an illness. Children experiencing significant health issues or symptoms at drop off will not be allowed to participate on that date. Parents will be called to request an early pickup for those children experiencing onset of significant or severe health issues during their session.

Keep your child home if:

- Your child has a temperature greater than 100°F 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 any rashes.
- Your child has lice.
- Your child has been vomiting or has had diarrhea, and continue to keep them home for 24 hours after the last bout of vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Medicine Administration:

Natural Beginnings instructors 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 the child's emergency contacts will be called in every case, and in this order of priority where a Natural Beginnings participant 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 the program start. Instructors are not permitted to apply these to the children.

Allergy Information:

Here at Natural Beginnings, children will come in contact with many different allergens found outdoors and in the natural world. While exploring the forest preserve, children will be exposed to potential contact with tree nuts, egg shells, shellfish (crayfish/mussels/snails), pollen, seeds, grass, poisonous plants, and venomous insects. You must make the Natural Beginnings program administrative staff aware of any and all of your child's allergies **prior to enrollment**.

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



First Aid and CPR:

All Natural Beginnings instructors are 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) 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 first responders. Should emergency treatment be required, staff will have your child's medical information on hand. An incident 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 contact system.** First Aid equipment will be on hand at all times.

Absences:

If your child will be absent, please contact your child's instructor by messaging on the SeeSaw app or calling the Rookery 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, 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. 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 instructors have undergone a background check through the State of Illinois and have received training in CPR and first aid. Building doors will be closed and locked while children are inside the building. Weather and safety drills will be practiced throughout the year.

Program Cancellations and Weather Conditions

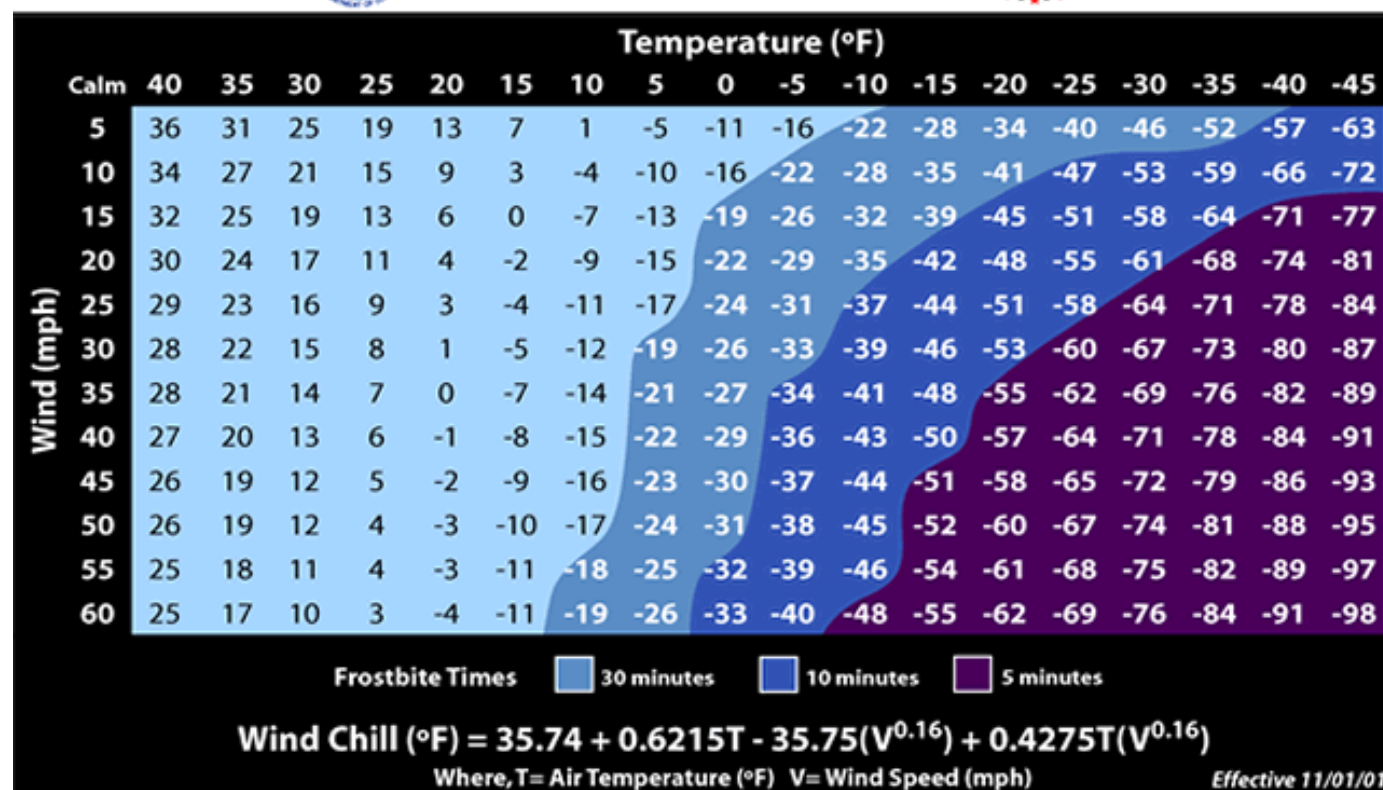
Natural Beginnings sessions may be cancelled for severe weather events. Instructors will send out a cancellation notification via the Seesaw app. No refunds will be issued for weather related closings, nor will any additional days be added to make up for severe weather days.

Since your child's safety is our priority, 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 prior to the beginning of the program session as to whether or not the children will be going inside 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 group 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. If conditions become unfavorable, 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 inform of an indoor drop off.



Wind Chill Chart



Being Prepared for a day at NB

Clothing:

Clothing should be kept simple, comfortable and washable. Children 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 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 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. Shoes need to be comfortable, protective 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 are preferred 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 tips will be shared at orientation as we go over appropriate gear for all types of weather. We frequently spend all or most 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.

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 minimize play or hike interruptions 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.

Behavior Guidelines

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

To achieve this, our daily program embeds an abundance of free play. With plenty of physical and social activities outdoors, children tend to become calmer and more focused during organized group experiences (such as circle time).

Adults will be available to help children solve possible conflicts. 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 regulating themselves. We want the child to see a connection between their behavior and the consequences. Methods of discipline include clear rules, redirection, planning ahead to prevent issues, 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 the staff in helping find solutions to persistent behavioral issues. 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 group 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 group will join together for a special birthday celebration. The birthday child will receive a personalized memento and we will sing a song for your child. Then the birthday child will hold a globe and walk around the sun (other children waving scarves) once for every year of their life. Parents are invited to stay for this portion of the day to participate in their child's celebration. Additionally, parents can choose to read a special, age-appropriate book to the whole group 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 consider purchasing something from our NB wish list in honor of your child. To make sure that we honor children with summer birthdays, we will celebrate half-birthdays or a day closer to your child's birthday. Your child's instructor will share a birthday calendar at the beginning of the program year.

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 loved ones to participate in our Natural Beginnings program. There will be opportunities for families to participate at Natural Beginnings through play-along events, special events, fundraisers, potluck 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 email, phone calls, parent-instructor conferences and the communication app; Seesaw. Photos will be posted on Seesaw every week. These forms of communication should keep you current with the happenings at the NB program and your child's learning. If you have any additional questions, please contact your child's instructor.

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.

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 Learning 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. An invitation to Seesaw will be sent prior to the beginning of the program year.

For more information, visit <https://kendallforest.com/natural-beginnings-yorkville.php> or please email Stefanie Wiencke. swiencke@kendallcountyil.gov.

