

# FCPA PRESCHOOL PARENT HANDBOOK

## Riverbend Park Preschool Philosophies

### **Play and learn outdoors in all weather.**

Riverbend Park Forest Preschool is a unique primarily outdoor preschool setting. Several different teaching approaches are used to provide children with a fully emergent and immersive nature-based learning experience. These teaching approaches include Montessori, Reggio Emilia and Waldorf. What you can expect your child to experience is a unique approach to early-childhood education that is child-directed and adult-facilitated. The school days will be structured based on routines. The curriculum is specific to our wonderful park and changes along with the seasons and interests of the children.

Riverbend Park contains about 400 acres of protected parkland that will be the primary classroom. Our program believes that learning happens best through play and allowing preschoolers to explore how the world works. We will spend time outdoors in all weather. We will get messy! Be prepared for kids that go home tired, messy and happy!

A core philosophy to our approach is having a growth mindset not only for our preschoolers, but also for our teaching team and families. We define a growth mindset as being willing to confront challenges, having a passion for learning, trying new things, and approaching conflict with curiosity. Our goal is to help children in our program develop a life-long love for learning and nature.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Is forest preschool safe?**

Yes! The teaching team considers the safety of your children when planning every activity. All activities pose risks and learning opportunities. Bumps and scrapes will happen as children learn to navigate and explore the environment. Staff communicate with other team members in the park using cell phones and a radio. A first aid kit is taken on all adventures away from the schoolhouse. Your teachers are CPR, First Aid and MAT trained.

### **How much time will my child spend outdoors?**

Our goal is to be outside 80-90% of our school day.

### **Are you really outside in all weather?**

Unless the weather is unsafe, preschool will be held outside. Unsafe includes inclement weather such as below freezing temperatures, ice and lightning.

### **Are there ticks in the park?**

Yes. A daily tick check is recommended.

### **How should I dress my child for forest preschool?**

Layers are going to be your child's best friend. Be mindful of the weather and dress your child so that they will be comfortable outside. Wear clothing that it is ok to get dirty in. Ask for recommendations for brands/items to buy and avoid.

### **What food should I pack?**

We will have snack and lunch time. To avoid any unknown allergy issues as well as reducing the chance to share germs, we have a firm no sharing food policy. Please pack lunch and snack in separate containers so that we can opt to leave lunch behind when we go on a hike. Pack foods that will provide your child with energy for the day. Consider using food and beverage containers that help keep food cold/hot depending on the temperature outside.

### **How do you manage challenging behaviors?**

Preschool is a time when there are lots of big emotions. The teaching team strongly believes that behavior is a form of communication. We work with each child individually and with the group as a unit on emotional regulation and how to be a part of a group.

Positive reinforcement is the main technique used. Additionally, the teaching team uses calming techniques such as breath work and body movements to help preschoolers regulate their emotions/reactions. The team will also provide breaks from the group as needed.

### **What is family day?**

Forest preschool is more collaborative than other preschool experiences. While our program does not operate as a co-op where parents/guardians are required to volunteer and perform tasks, we do want families to be involved!

Family day is once a month on the weekend and is a day where your teaching team will be ready to welcome all families for a day of fun at the park. Each family day will be different, but the emphasis is on letting your preschooler show you some of the fun they have been having. Everyone in the family is welcome to come and there is no additional charge. Parents are responsible for the supervision of their child/family.

Prospective families will also be invited to certain family days to allow them a chance to experience forest preschool.

## **Policies and Procedures**

### **Organization Information**

Riverbend Park Forest Preschool is operated by the Fairfax County Park Authority at Riverbend Park. It is not affiliated with any religious organizations. Transportation is not provided. The preschool program is fully funded through student tuition.

Riverbend Park Forest Preschool is an inclusive program. The Fairfax County Park Authority is committed to the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which includes making programs, services, facilities, and employment accessible for visitors and employees with disabilities.

### **Lines of Authority**

You may address any questions, suggestions or concerns to your child's preschool teachers, the program supervisor, the park manager and/or the Youth Services Manager at Fairfax County Park Authority headquarters. This is the staff chain of command.

### **Enrollment Fees**

Enrollment fees are non-refundable and payable at time of registration for new students and due mid-March for current students interested in enrolling for the next school year. If a child leaves the program for one month or more and returns the same school year, a new enrollment fee must be paid.

### **Tuition**

Monthly tuition payments are due one month in advance. For example, October's tuition is due on September 1<sup>st</sup>. If the first day of the month falls on a holiday, tuition is due on the first business day of the month.

A late fee of \$25 will be applied if tuition is received after the 15th of each month. If payment is not received by the 20th of the month, your child's preschool enrollment will be terminated.

### **Refunds**

No refunds/credits are given for absences due to illness.

### **Program Withdrawal**

We require written notice of at least two weeks prior to withdrawing a child from preschool. Any tuition that was prepaid beyond the required two weeks' notice will be reimbursed.

### **Emergency Procedures**

In the event of an emergency or facility closure, staff will notify parents by phone and/ or email as soon as possible and provide information about picking up children early. Preschool staff will stay with the children until the last child is picked up. Contact the supervisor to review the facility Emergency Preparedness Plan. Monthly evacuation and biannual shelter-in-place drills are conducted for the children's safety. Parents will be notified immediately if a child is lost, requires emergency medical treatment, or sustains a serious injury. Minor injuries will be communicated to parents at pick-up.

### **Holidays/ Teacher Workdays**

Fairfax County Park Authority preschools follow Fairfax County Public Schools schedule for holidays and teacher workdays. Refer to school calendar as given out by preschool staff.

## **Inclement Weather Delays & Closures**

Fairfax County Park Authority preschools follow Fairfax County Government closures in cases of inclement weather. However, due to the nature of our local roads, Riverbend Park may close or delay preschool even when the government remains open for the safety of our students. If this happens, staff will contact parents by 8 am at the email and/or phone number listed on your emergency contact form.

You can also find the latest information for weather related closures from the Park Authority as a whole the following ways:

Online: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks)

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/fairfaxcountyparks>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fairfaxcountyparks>

### *Generally:*

If Fairfax County Government is closed all day: preschool is canceled.

If Fairfax County Government opens late: Preschool programs will start at 11:30 am and end at 1:30 pm.

If Fairfax County Government closes early: Preschool is not affected.

*\*If there are any changes to the regular preschool schedule, staff will contact families by 8 am or as soon as possible. You will be contacted at the email and/or phone number listed on your emergency contact form.*

## **Family Days**

Family days are designed as a way for families in the program to connect with each other and the teaching team. It also allows preschoolers to share a bit of the forest school experience with their family. Our hope is that family day will be a day that you and your preschooler look forward to. There is no extra fee to attend family day and everyone from siblings to aunts and uncles are welcome. Parents are responsible for the supervision of their children during family day. At times, family day may also serve as an open house for prospective parents.

## **Signing In/Out**

A parent/guardian must sign the child in and out each day. Any person picking up a child from this program must provide identification and be listed on the pickup authorization form. Children will not be released to anyone who is not listed on the pickup authorization form. The authorized parent/guardian may update the form at any time by contacting the staff in person or in writing. If necessary, changes can be made by filling out a new form. Custody issues require special attention.

## **Releasing Children to Non-Custodial Parent**

Staff members are not permitted to release children to anyone who is not authorized by the custodial parent. If the custodial parent is unwilling to give blanket permission to the non-custodial parent, permission for any granted, specific occasion will be required. A custodial parent denying blanket release MUST provide legal documentation regarding custody.

## **Late Pickup Fees**

Parents are expected to pick up their children from preschool on time. Being on time also helps to build trust between the child and parent regarding separation. Children become upset when parents are not on time, so please let the teaching team know if you will be late by calling/texting 703-638-4943.

A late fee of \$1 per minute will be applied to any child picked up after 1:30 pm. If a child is consistently picked up late, the center may choose to terminate the child's enrollment. Staff members are never allowed to transport children home, nor are they allowed to accept children before class is scheduled to begin.

### **Potty Training**

Children must be completely potty trained by the first day of school. Preschool teachers understand accidents will happen. Those instances will be handled in a sensitive manner. A spare set of clothing will be kept in your child's cubby. Please ensure these items are updated as the seasons change to ensure they are appropriate for the weather.

### **Separation Anxiety**

For some children, preschool is their first separation from mom or dad, and the experience is often difficult for youngsters. It is important to tell your child that you are leaving and to assure them that you will be back to pick them up after school. Refer to the tip sheet on separation for specific strategies.

### **Behavior Management**

If children have difficulty controlling their behavior, staff members will try to redirect the inappropriate behavior by providing positive alternatives. The teacher will talk to the child privately to explain the behavior problem. Children may be directed to an individual activity (i.e., reading, puzzles) if the inappropriate behavior persists. In the event of a continued behavior problem, parents will be notified. Repetitive behavior such as extreme tantrums/crying, kicking, or biting will be reported to the parents immediately. Parents and teachers will work together to problem solve strategies and create a behavior plan for the child. Depending on the severity of the behavior, the child may be dismissed from the program.

Preschool staff reserve the right to make judgement calls based on their professional findings. Suspension is at the discretion of the teachers, site management and FCPA Youth Services.

### **Sick Children**

A child who arrives with symptoms of illness will not be permitted to stay. If your child has a temperature of over 100 degrees or shows signs of illness, you will be notified to pick up the child. If your child becomes ill prior to the school day, please notify the site that your child will be absent that day. If a child has vomited or had diarrhea within the previous 24 hours, he/she is not permitted to attend class.

By enrolling in our preschool, parents must agree to notify the center within 24 hours if any household members develop a reportable communicable disease as defined by the Board of Health. Life-threatening diseases must be reported immediately. The site will notify parents about any

communicable disease outbreaks. Please note, there are no refunds or credits for missed days due to illness.

### **Medication**

We strongly suggest medications be given at home whenever possible. If your child requires medication at school, you must submit the Medication Authorization Form. Medications to be taken or kept 10 days or longer require a physician's signature on the form. You can obtain this form from the preschool staff. All medication including EpiPens and inhalers must be in the original box with the child's name and date issued and the appropriate signatures.

### **Sunscreen, Bug Spray, and Lotion**

Staff members are not permitted to apply lotion sunscreen, repellents, or other lotions to children. Please apply these items before school. You may send stick-sunscreen with children to school and teachers will help them to self-apply.

### **Head Lice**

The symptoms of head lice include severe itching and scratching on the head and/or visible live lice or eggs (nits). Eggs of head lice attach to hairs as small, round gray lumps. If you suspect your child has head lice, contact your child's teacher immediately. Treatment includes special shampoo to kill lice and combing to remove nits. Children may return to school only after thorough treatment and removal of lice and nits. Multiple treatments might be necessary.

### **Tick Check**

Your child will be exploring in the forest so a tick check will be necessary. Please see the tick check information sheet for more information.

### **Children's Belongings**

Children should come dressed in comfortable play clothes and shoes that are ok to get dirty. Wearing layers is important. Children should be dressed for the weather. You may choose to leave rain jackets, rain boots, or extra shoes at preschool for wet days. We strongly encourage you to label all children's belongings.

Fairfax County Park Authority and the center staff are not responsible for lost items. Toys, electronics, and other special items should be left at home. Refer to the seasonal supply list to see types of recommended clothing.

### **Food**

We will have snack and lunch time. To avoid any known or unknown allergy issues as well as reducing the chance to share germs, we have a firm no sharing food policy. Please pack lunch and snack in separate containers so that we can opt to leave lunch behind when we go on a hike. All items must be labeled with your child's name. There is no refrigeration available. Food left at the center will be thrown away at the end of each day.

Fairfax County Park Authority encourages healthy choices consistent with USDA guidelines. These include fruits and vegetables, sandwiches, biscuits/muffins, cereal and 100% juice. Pack foods that will provide your child with energy for the day. Consider using food and beverage containers that help keep food cold/hot depending on the temperature outside as there is no refrigeration available.

### **Parent/ Teacher Communication**

Teachers will send home a school calendar. You will also receive information about the next month's curriculum. During the school day your teaching team will be focused on the class and unable to consistently communicate with you except in cases of emergencies. You can expect a group text towards the end of most school days with conversation starters.

### **Licensing Information**

Fairfax County Park Authority preschools are licensed by the Virginia Department of Education. Standards for licensed programs address certain issues such as health precautions, play space, staff-child ratios, program guidelines, recordkeeping and building codes. Compliance with standards is determined by periodic visits to the site by a licensing agent. A birth certificate or passport is required to be shown upon enrollment. For more information contact the Fairfax Licensing Office, 3701 Pender Dr., Suite 125, Fairfax, Va. 22030.

### **Physical Examination and Immunization Record**

An immunization record and a completed physical examination form signed by a physician are required prior to a child's admittance. Records for children aged 5 and younger must be dated within one year of enrollment. This is a licensing requirement.

### **Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect**

Virginia law mandates government staff, including Park Authority staff, to report any cases of suspected child abuse, neglect or exploitation to the Youth Services Office and Child Protective Services. Confidentiality will be maintained.

### **Contact Information/Phone Numbers**

- Riverbend Preschool: 703-324-3211
- Riverbend Park Main Office: 703-759-9018
- FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks)

To request reasonable ADA accommodations, call (703) 324-8563 • TTY: Va. Relay 711