



2018-2019 Parent Handbook

Dear Parents,

The Darien Nature Center is a not for profit organization dedicated to providing quality educational programs to the families in our community, for the purpose of fostering a better understanding and appreciation of the natural world.

Our programs at the preschool level strive to develop environmental literacy in the youngest members of our community through immersing our students in nature. At the toddler level, our primary focus is on exposure. By letting our littlest students experience nature with all of their senses and by encouraging their observation skills, we introduce them to the wonders of the natural world. At the preschool level, we continue to build awareness while also adding content. Preschoolers innately have many questions about the things they are seeing and experiencing. Our job is to be there to help them find the answers and encourage experimentation.

We want to help our students develop a sense of comfort when they are in and around nature. In order to do this, they need to spend time outdoors, to feel free to explore their surroundings in a stress-free way, to be allowed to take risks and to be allowed to go at their own pace. At the Darien Nature Center, our goal is to provide these experiences and much more!

Sincerely,

Leila Wetmore
Executive Director

Emily Ciffone
Program Director

Policies and Procedures 2018-2019

Arrival and Dismissal

Upon arrival, children should use the bathroom and wash hands. Children should be walked to their classroom and signed in by their adult.

Nature Time for Twos students will bring their coats and bags into the classroom to be hung on their hook. Nature's Playroom and Critters students will hang their belongings on the hooks outside the classroom. Water bottles and lunches should be brought into the classroom.

Children will be dismissed from their classroom to awaiting parents/caregivers in the downstairs common room. This allows for less classroom confusion. Please wait for your child's teacher to dismiss your child to you. Children will only be released to their parents or those adults authorized by parents in writing.

Late Policy: If a child is not picked up within 15 minutes of class end time, a staff person will attempt to call the child's parents at their home and work numbers. If they cannot be reached, the staff person will attempt to call the emergency and alternate people listed on the emergency forms. A late pick up fee of \$20 will be applied after 20 minutes has passed from the scheduled pick up time. The police will be called after one hour if parents or other adults specified on the permission to release forms cannot be reached. At that time the child will be released to the police.

If you know that a late pick up may occur, please inform the Nature Center by phone.

Class Composition

All children will be placed in classes based on age. No child is to be moved by a teacher to another class without first consulting with the office. All parental requests to change a child's class assignment should be referred to the office. Student to teacher ratio is 9 to 2 for the threes, fours and fives and 6 to 2 for the twos. No child will be left unattended.

Clothing

Outdoor discovery requires freedom of movement in non-restrictive clothing. Tight clothing, fancy dresses and costumes can get in the way during active play. For independence in toileting, children need clothing that is easy to take on and off.

Please dress your child in clothing that is ok to get dirty so they will feel free to participate fully in messy projects and outdoor exploration. You should expect your child's clothing (and your child!) to get dirty.

Children need comfortable, protective shoes with gripping soles for running, jumping and climbing. Sneakers or well-fitting hiking boots are best. Rain boots are encouraged every day for puddle jumping opportunities.

Please provide an extra set of labeled clothing in your child's bag each day. This should include shirt, pants, underwear and socks.

Please prepare your child with weather appropriate clothing. **We go outdoors every day.** On rainy days, please send in rain boots and rain jackets. During winter months, please provide mittens, hats, snowsuits/pants and snow boots.

Communication

To contact the school or a teacher, please call the school at 203-655-7459. Please feel free to talk to your child's teacher, the Program Director and/or the Director about any concern you may have, big or small. While the Director can be reached at any time, it is best to arrange to speak to your child's teacher after pick-up. Drop-off is only for conveying information pertinent to that day (difficult night's sleep, change in pick-up, etc.). Open and comfortable communication between home and school is essential to good child care. Please do not discuss problems in front of your child.

Curriculum

Our curriculum is developed collaboratively by all teachers under the leadership of the Program Director.

Discipline Policy

Discipline is not about punishment or control. Discipline is about guiding and teaching children, helping them to make wise decisions about their behavior and allowing them to gradually accept responsibility for their choices and actions. Our goal is to work toward helping each child to feel encouraged.

We are a child-centered environment. Simple, clear-cut classroom rules will be established at the beginning of the school year with the children. Our teachers try to anticipate inappropriate behavior. Distraction and redirection are appropriate methods to help children keep control. Praising appropriate behavior helps to reinforce positive actions.

If a child has demonstrated unacceptable behavior and does not respond to the teacher, it may be necessary for the child to be removed from the situation. The child will be brought to the Director's office. This gives the child time to calm down and talk about his/her feelings. If a child has ongoing behavior problems, a conference will be requested with the parents.

Corporal punishment is never used to discipline a child. It is against the law and will result in the immediate dismissal of a staff person.

Health Policies

The Darien Nature Center takes precautions to prevent the spread of illness by maintaining a clean environment, providing substitutes for staff and setting clear limits on the health of children in attendance. Frequent handwashing is also an important habit that prevents the spread of illness.

To keep all children and staff healthy, we need your cooperation! Please give a courtesy call if your child is out sick. Recovering children are more likely to pick up a new illness. Keep in mind that we spend time outdoors daily, so if your child is not well enough to go outside, please keep him/her at home. If students are exposed to a contagious illness such as chicken pox or strep, notices will be posted and sent home within 24 hours of us being notified.

Allergies: Darien Nature Center is a NUT AND PEANUT-FREE SCHOOL. We do not allow ANY nuts, peanuts, peanut butter or projects/food containing peanut oil in the school or on the playground. This policy is strictly enforced.

Illness:

Please keep your child home if he or she

1. is overtired or overexcited
2. is unable to participate in usual daily activities
3. has nasal discharge (yellow or green)
4. has an elevated temperature within 24 hours of school
5. has a communicable disease
6. has a rash that may be infectious
7. has infectious conjunctivitis
8. has a sore throat
9. has nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

Return dates:

Your child may return to school when

1. Fever is absent for 24 hours
2. Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea is absent for 24 hours
3. 24 hours have passed after start of treatment for strep or conjunctivitis
4. the stage of contagion for communicable disease has passed
5. the child, under doctor's care, has received permission to return
6. the child feels well enough to participate in activities

When a child becomes ill at school

1. Parent (or alternate person specified by the parent) is notified by phone to pick up the child.
2. Sick child is cared for in the Administrative Office thus protecting well children.

Refunds

The Darien Nature Center must be notified of a cancellation two (2) weeks prior to the start of a program to receive a 50% refund. If and when your child's space CAN be filled, then 75% of the program fee will be refunded. If the space CANNOT be filled, then 50% of the program fee will be refunded. There are no refunds for cancellations made within two (2) weeks of a program start date.

Safety Precautions

Key staff members are trained in First Aid and CPR. In the event of an accident or event that requires medical attention, we will do one of the following:

- Call parents/guardians and emergency contacts to collect the child immediately and seek medical attention
- If immediate help is deemed necessary, we will call 911 and a staff member will accompany the child to the emergency room.

When outside, all teachers will carry their personal cell phones. If an emergency develops, these can be used to contact the office immediately. Teachers will perform a head count before exiting the building, while on the trails or in the play space and again before they enter the building.

School Cancellation, Early Dismissal & Delays

Our closings/delays will be posted on our home page and Channel 12 News CT. If the Darien Public Schools are closed, have a delayed start or an early dismissal due to inclement weather; please use the following schedule for Darien Nature Center classes.

- Darien Public Schools are closed, Darien Nature Center is closed.
- Darien Public Schools have a delayed opening, the Darien Nature Center will begin all classes at 10:15am (includes Knee-High to Nature).
- Darien Public Schools have an early dismissal, morning classes follow their normal dismissal time. Lunch bunch is cancelled. There will be no afternoon classes.

There are no make-up classes for any type of delay or cancellation.

Snack and Lunch Policy

Snack is served to all children enrolled in our morning programs. State law requires two food groups be served. The Darien Nature Center provides organic fresh fruit and organic, nut-free grains.

All students should come with a reusable water bottle.

For those students staying for lunch, we encourage a zero-waste approach to food. Please pack food in reusable or recyclable containers. Composting is available in our classroom. Please do not bring nut products.

Special Occasions

Holidays are an exciting time for everyone. In our programming, we downplay commercial aspects of holidays and focus on seasonal aspects of celebrations.

Due to our restrictive snack policy, we cannot celebrate birthdays with sugary treats. If you would like to acknowledge your child's birthday in the classroom, we suggest you bring in their favorite fruit to share.

We invite parents to participate in a Birthday Book Donation program where a book from the Darien Nature Center Birthday Book collection is purchased and read in school that day to acknowledge a child's birthday. A book plaque will be placed in the front of the book to commemorate your child's birthday before it is added to our library as a permanent gift to the collection.

Security

Access to our preschool classrooms is secured by a key-operated elevator and a passcode-operated door. Only teachers and administrators have access to the elevator key and the access code. During drop off and pick up times, access to the preschool classrooms is open to parents and caregivers.

At 9:40, access to the elevator and the preschool classrooms downstairs is locked to the public. Students and their teachers can move freely throughout the building at this time, but visitors and late arrivals must check in at the front desk and be escorted to the classroom.

Ten minutes prior to pick up, the elevator and door to the preschool area will be unlocked for parents and caregivers to pick up the children.

Child Abuse

As childcare providers all staff are mandated by law to report any suspicion that a child is being abused, neglected or at risk.

Mandated reporters must report orally to DCF or a law enforcement agency within 12 hours of suspecting that a child has been abused or neglected. Within 48 hours of making the report, the mandated reporter must submit a written report (DCF – 136) to DCF.

Staff are protected by law from discrimination or retaliation for reporting suspected abuse or neglect (CT General Statutes, Section 17a-101e). All phone calls to DCF shall be documented and kept on file at the Center. A copy of all statements from staff and the DCF-136 shall also be kept on file.

Staff will be required to attend annual staff meetings, before the start of the school year, focusing on the steps for reporting suspected abuse and neglect and the role of a mandated reporter. All new staff will be trained in these procedures prior to their start in the classroom.

To report a suspected case of abuse or neglect:

- Call the Department of Children and Families (open 24 hours a day) at 1-800- 842-2288.
- Call the Department of Public Health at 1-800-282-6063, 1-800-439-0437 or 1- 860-509-8045.

The Darien Nature Center supports a zero tolerance for abuse and neglect and will implement immediate action should there be an allegation that a staff member abused or neglected a child. The administration will protect the child, including immediate notification of a parent or guardian, once there is an allegation of abuse or neglect of a child in our program. Any staff member accused of abuse or neglect may be immediately removed from his or her position until DCF's investigation is completed. Based on whether the allegations were substantiated or not, the employee would either be dismissed from his/her position or allowed to return to work.