Safety at Chickadee Hollow Outdoor Preschool

Safety is our top priority at Chickadee Hollow Outdoor Preschool.

Supervision

One of the most important things we do to keep kids safe is to keep our teacher to child ratios low. We at Chickadee Hollow Outdoor Preschool believe we can offer a higher quality education by increasing the attention available from our teachers. We staff at least one teacher for every four students, primarily to enhance learning through lots of individual attention. Ample staffing is also the first measure of child safety: Many pairs of adult eyes and hands trained in ACTIVE supervision, meaning kids must remain in teacher’s visual and auditory supervision at all times for instant adult response.

Parent/caregiver identification

Pre-approved photo identification is required for every person picking up your child. Persons not familiar to the teacher will be asked for photo ID upon pick-up.

Safety Equipment

All teachers are trained in first aid and child CPR. In addition to bringing all the first aid and sanitization equipment for typical child care use, our teachers bring emergency equipment to deal with the special situations of an outdoor environment onsite each day, including a cell phone with emergency solar charger, emergency blankets and emergency body warmers, extra water, extra sunscreen, instant ice packs, blister and chafing treatments, energy gels for prevention of shock, treatment for insect stings, tweezers, eye wash equipment, toileting and trash containers, etc.

We are fortunate to have several options for shelters at our location, as well as tree cover for lighter rain conditions and shade. In addition, our teachers utilize activities to harmonize with environmental conditions, i.e., on a cold morning, teachers will begin the day by encouraging games involving movement like squats because warming up the quadriceps, the largest muscles in the body, creates substantial amounts of heat in the body.

***Parents*** *are responsible for outfitting their children with clothing appropriate for current weather conditions.* **We cannot sign in your child for the day if his/her clothing is inadequate for expected weather: this is a safety concern!** For additional details on what to bring each day, please consult the included handout: Daily Items.

Emergency evacuation

There are several procedures for relocating our class in the unlikely event of any situation that makes teachers uncomfortable about safety: In any situation representing possible danger, police will be contacted. In addition to contacting the police, depending on the situation, teachers may quietly gather students for a “surprise hike,” an evacuation technique modeled on those of other outdoor preschools operating in public spaces. We will not leave the Haller Park premises unless it is necessary. We will notify parents via text and/or phone call if we evacuate from the Haller Park premises and leave a note if possible. **Our designated emergency evacuation meeting spot is the parking lot at Grocery Outlet.** Arlington police have the authority to immediately remove any individual from a public park whose behavior presents a concern and we have worked with Arlington police to develop our policies for teacher training and evacuation. Arlington police are committed to maintaining a presence at the Haller Park parking lot as much as available resources allow, as a deterrent from criminal activity in the vicinity. We have also collaborated with the maintenance department of Arlington parks to coordinate their park maintenance schedules with our class times so that staff will be present in the Stormwater Wetland Park as much as possible while we’re having classes. As of 2023, the city of Arlington is moving forward with several measures to discourage criminal uses of public property including drug use and illegal camping. Undergrowth has been removed in the Stormwater Wetland Park area where camping has been a problem in the past, and the boarded-up building is scheduled for removal. A camera will be replaced in that area following the demolition, and there is a camera pointed at Haller Park that is monitored 24/7 and actively used to discourage people from camping in the area. Ultimately there are always risks involved with being in public places and it is the parent’s responsibility to evaluate the risks and benefits of enrollment.

Risk

It’s important for children to explore healthy risk-taking and discover their own limits with their bodies. As their teachers, we try not to get in the way of that process when the outcomes of miscalculation are minor (falling from a low branch and getting a bruise or scrape). Bruises and scrapes are usually a sign your kids have been having fun and have experienced a wonderful opportunity to learn body awareness.

We do not experiment with fire, knives, or sharp tools. We encourage you to explore these things with your kids as a family. Please do not allow your child to bring pocketknives or similar items to school. Sticks and rocks are one of the best parts of playing outside but throwing rocks is limited to beach and water settings and we will set limits for your child if necessary to ensure their safety.

The River

We are lucky to have forest, meadow, and marsh habitats to explore a diverse range of plants, animals, and geographic features, all within a few minutes’ walk of our drop-off shelter. Also within a few minutes’ walk is the Stillaguamish river, providing rocky beaches, opportunities to sight eagles, herons, deer, and beavers, and offering an entry point for conversations on local and regional history including early logging, Native uses of the river, and so much more.

***However,*** the river itself is out-of-bounds to our students at **all times**, and no child will be permitted to enter the river while at school. We also encourage parents to be vigilant in the parking lot, because the boat launch is easily accessible by small children. People are often surprised by how much the river can change throughout the course of the year, and the shallow, slow water of July can be a hazardous torrent in the same spot in November. We love to play near the creeks, wetland cells, and tidepools on the beach. Any water in our outdoor space higher than a child’s ankles, including puddles, is off limits.

Note: Flood warnings are common during the winter season but unlikely to affect the use of our area of the park or of the parking lot.

Dog Park

The shelter we use for drop-off and many school activities is located next to an enclosed dog park. There are often dog owners visiting the area. Please remind and practice with your children to always ASK before petting someone’s dog. Dog bites can be serious.