

# Program Handbook 2024

*Revised and Updated January 2024*



TRURO FOREST SCHOOL



A place to discover, connect, and grow!



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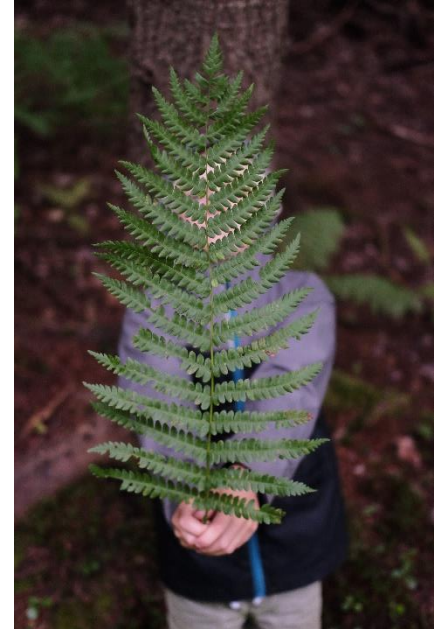
# Philosophy and Vision

## What is the Truro Forest School?

Founded in 2023, the Truro Forest School is a long-term nature connection process that centres the child-at-play in a natural setting. Our sessions take place on a regular and repeating basis, in the same outdoor space, over an extended period of time. We focus on small child-to-adult ratios, using loose, natural materials to support children in developing a relationship with their outdoor space. This relationship supports holistic development with marked benefits in physical health, confidence, self-esteem, and resilience.

This relationship is reciprocal, so the benefits of Forest School become benefits for the Land as well! Children develop compassion, respect and awe for the natural world, growing to become individuals who advocate for the preservation and sustainability of our shared natural spaces. We aim to have a global impact by inspiring and encouraging a generation of land stewards, scientists, activists, artists and thinkers.

The well-being of each child is the foundation of Forest School. We provide guidance and facilitation to individuals based on their unique social, emotional and physical needs. We believe that children are inherently curious about the world, and we nurture this curiosity by guiding them in their own experiential learning that can only be had in nature. Child-led play (including responsible risky play) is an integral part of The Truro Forest School, with outdoor skills and knowledge providing the foundation of learning. We have fun, get dirty, experiment, explore, create, connect, learn, and grow!



## Foundational Pillars

### Connection

At the Truro Forest School we build connections with the Land, with each other, with the broader community, and with ourselves. This connection fosters a deep sense of belonging, responsibility and admiration for the natural world.

### Discovery

Through play-based, inquiry-driven experiential learning, we discover the magic that a reciprocal relationship with nature can bring! We discover our capabilities, interests and potential. These discoveries have a lasting impact that inspire us for a lifetime.

### Growth

There are endless opportunities for growth in Forest School! From learning to take responsible risks, to taking ownership of our place in the world, to having formative experiences, we expand our horizons and grow our unique character

# The Land and Location

The Truro Forest School operates in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq, who have been here, learning and teaching on the Land, since time immemorial. We believe a holistic connection with nature must include a strong relationship with local Indigenous communities because we cannot do Forest School without including their voices. To truly connect with an outdoor space, you need to know its story. The story of this land is rooted in Mi'kmaw history and culture. Our programs aim to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing as well as learner experiences facilitated by Indigenous leaders.

The site we use for our programs is in Victoria Park, a 3,000-acre natural public space in the heart of Truro, Nova Scotia. Established in 1887, the park has grown to become one of Truro's most beloved treasures. Its natural features include Lepper Brook, cascading waterfalls, an old-growth Eastern Hemlock stand, a steep-sided gorge, and an expanse of forested walking trails.

## Environmental Stewardship

The aim of the Truro Forest School is to foster environmental stewardship in children by helping them build a relationship with the natural world. We believe the best way to achieve this is to repeatedly spend extended periods of time in the same outdoor space. For this reason, we are committed to minimizing our potential impacts of the site we use. Our mitigation strategies include:

- Following the "leave no trace" principals
- Sticking to established trail systems
- Shifting our gathering spots
- Limiting the use of single use items
- Using biodegradable/environmentally friendly products (paint, glue, soap, etc.)
- Conducting regular Environmental Impact Assessments

We acknowledge that our programs operate in a shared public space frequented by other people as well as wildlife. We remove all our tools, gear and supplies from site daily.



# Our Programs

## Program Overview

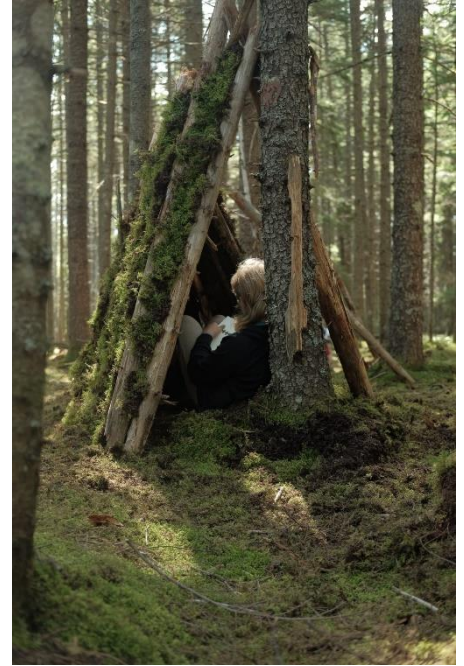
We offer regular Forest School sessions and summer camps. For our current schedule, please visit our website: [www.truroforestschoo.ca](http://www.truroforestschoo.ca).

### Forest School Sessions

Our Forest School sessions are the heart of the Forest School experience. Running during the spring and fall, these sessions normalize being outdoors during the colder months. They are meant to compliment conventional learning by supporting children in developing the tools they need to succeed in the classroom.

### Summer Camps

Our summer camps run on a weekly basis, with children attending Monday to Friday. They're a great way to connect, discover, and grow in a short period of time. They're also an excellent way to prepare for our regular sessions by introducing you and your child to Forest School.



Typical Forest School activities include:

- Sharing circles
- Story telling
- Nature journaling
- Arts and craft
- Knot tying
- Sit spots/quiet time
- Mud kitchens
- Orienteering
- Minibeast hunts
- Whittling
- Shelter building
- Basic first aid
- Bird watching
- Expeditions
- Pond visits
- Tree planting
- Flora and fauna identification
- Soil studies
- Wildflower and mushroom hunts
- Outdoor cooking
- Nature walks
- Free play
- And much more!

## Base Camps

Our base camp for Sprouts is along Victoria Park's Hemlock Trail. Base Camp for all other age groups is in the upper park behind the Truro Middle School. Areas of the park we avoid running our sessions include the Railyard bike park, the waterfalls, Jacob's Ladder, and high-traffic areas (playground, pool, splash pad, parking lots).

# Age Groups

We offer programs for children aged 3-14. During the spring and fall sessions, each age group attends on a different day of the week and weekly summer camps are offered by age group. There is overlap in the age groups to allow parents/guardians to place their child in the program that best suits their needs, expectations and experience.

## **Sprouts (ages 3-5)**

Heavily guided by Forest School pedagogy, our Sprouts program is child-led, inquiry based and emergent. Children have the freedom to connect, discover and grow without a set of expectations or learning outcomes. They are introduced to the Forest School Rhythm, which is our alternative to a structured schedule as it develops a habit of nature awareness and connection through a flexible form of time management. These half-day sessions will include a nature walk, nature journaling, hammocking, art prompts, free play and exploration around base camp.

## **Seedlings (ages 5-7)**

Continuing with the Forest School Rhythm and pedagogy, Seedlings spend a full day at Forest School. This extra time outdoors gives them the opportunity to immerse themselves into uninterrupted imaginative play. They are introduced to sit spots and continue to build the habit of nature awareness and connection through nature journaling. Sensory awareness games are introduced, fort building begins and bushcraft skills take root. Flora and fauna identification, mapping and longer nature walks provide endless opportunities for discovery.

## **Saplings (ages 6-9)**

Building on the Seedlings program, Saplings go deeper into their knowledge and refine their skills. We encourage and support their growth by meeting them at their edges and gently coaxing them a bit further. We prompt them with more challenges, including a day-long expedition through Victoria Park. These programs are enriched with occasional visits from members of our community who have expertise in some aspect of environmentalism, our bioregion and/or Mi'kmaw culture.

## **Heartwoods (ages 8-12)**

Heartwoods solidify their foundations of nature connection and awareness. The reciprocal relationship with the natural world they strive to cultivate comes to fruition as they develop a strong sense of environmental stewardship. Mentorship with our program facilitators grows organically while Heartwoods begin orienting themselves with their internal compass. Heartwoods ask big questions and apply their Forest School experiences to every day life.



# Preparing for Forest School

Our programs operate rain or shine (except in extreme weather conditions; see below). Therefore, to ensure your child gets the most of their experience at Forest School, they need to be well prepared each day. This starts with a nutritious diet and lots of rest the night before. Since there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing, it is important children are dressed appropriately for the weather. They will also need a healthy lunch and snacks to be well equipped for the day. Your child will eat more and burn more calories in Forest School than they normally would on a day spent indoors, so be sure to pack lots of food!

For clothing we recommend:

Hot Days	Cold Days	Wet Days	Windy Days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sun hat</li> <li>- Light coloured clothing</li> <li>- Close toed footwear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wool base layer</li> <li>- Wool socks</li> <li>- Warm coat</li> <li>- Warm hat</li> <li>- Insulated boots</li> <li>- Gloves or mittens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wool base layer</li> <li>- Wool socks</li> <li>- Rain suit</li> <li>- Rain jacket and pants</li> <li>- Rubber boots</li> <li>- Gloves or mittens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wool base layer</li> <li>- Warm windproof coat</li> <li>- Insulated footwear</li> <li>- Warm hat</li> <li>- Gloves or mittens</li> </ul>

**\* We also ask that children have a full set of spare clothes, including extra socks and gloves/mittens for wet and cold days.**

Other items to pack in your child's day bag include:

- Plastic bag to keep spare clothes dry
- Lunch and snack (preferably litter less)
- Water bottle
- Medications
- Sunscreen and deet-free natural bug spray if needed

We encourage children to leave unnecessary items at home including electronic devices, toys and tools/knives. Aside from causing a distraction or potentially breaking/getting lost, these unnecessary items will add weight to your child's day bag, which they need to be able to carry to and from base camp.

## Participant/Staff Ratios

We aim to deliver high quality forest school by engaging with individual students to provide tailored pathways for their learning experiences. Each child's process and holistic development is observed and supported by trained leaders. For this reason, our programs are enriched by low child-to-adult ratios. The ratio for Sprouts and Seedlings is 6:1, while the ratios for Saplings and Heartwoods are about 8:1, depending on the group dynamic.





# Inclusion and Accessibility

At the Truro Forest School, we believe every child has the right to build a relationship with the natural world. Our programs are for everyone, regardless of their language, physical abilities, learning abilities, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, political affiliation, or socioeconomic status

We aim to remove the barriers to participation by being financially accessible to everyone. Avenues for support are available in the community so if registration fees or purchasing gear is a barrier, please reach out to discuss options.

# Planning, Observing and Documentation

Our session planning is unique in that we don't arrive on site with a set of specific learning outcomes we're targeting. Instead, our sessions are planned around the interests of each child. Practitioners observe and document their individual interests and the result is a tailored pathway of learning that is child-led, inquiry driven and emergent. This observation and documentation - using photos, videos, art, journaling, and note taking - allow their experience to be visible to parents and educators, which can provide a better understanding of the learning that takes place in Forest School.

We believe that children are inherently curious about the world, and we encourage complex questions, self-expression, and autonomy. We believe children learn best through play and that play is their primary occupation. Children have everything they need to thrive already inside of them. Time spent in nature playing and being curious brings this out. It is our goal to help facilitate this growth in everyone.

# Behaviour Management Policy

At the Truro Forest School we aim to build children up by supporting their growth holistically. This includes building their self-esteem, independence, autonomy, and resilience, as well as promoting awareness, respect and kindness for others and the natural world. We also aim to reinforce independent and collaborative behaviour. For these accomplishments to be realized, and for everyone to enjoy their Forest School experience, a standard of behaviour must be met. It is the responsibility of all program participants – staff, children, and parents/guardians – to meet this expectation by demonstrating trust, respect, kindness, and acceptance.

Forest School practitioners manage behaviour by:

- Modeling the behaviour they expect from others
- Considering the child's needs and developmental level
- Setting clear rules and boundaries that are fair and consistent
- Encouraging self-learning, communication, and decision making
- Showing patience, empathy and understanding
- Having group discussions on what works/what doesn't

We communicate clear boundaries, instructions, expectations and rules. If a child acts outside of the communication given to them, they do so at their own risk and they may be instructed to leave the program or activity if their actions and/or behaviour compromise the safety of themselves or others.

# Policies and Procedures

## Terms and Conditions

To register for the Truro Forest School, visit [www.truroforestschool.ca](http://www.truroforestschool.ca), select your program and fill out the online registration form. Registration is on a first come first served basis and space in our programs is limited so you are encouraged to register early! Prior to registering for our programs, please read through our website, program handbook and refund policy.

### After You Register

Payments are due upon registration and can be sent via e-transfer to [thetruroforestschool@gmail.com](mailto:thetruroforestschool@gmail.com). \$50.00 of the registration fee is considered a deposit and is non-refundable.

### Refund Policy

- Refunds of \$50.00 less than the registration fee will be given if they are requested 28 days or more before the session start date. We reserve the right to withhold all funds 28 days or less before the program start date as well as during the program.
- Because space in our programs is limited, you will not be refunded during the session for days your child does not attend.
- Refunds are not issued for weather-related closures, but we will do our best to accommodate a make-up session.
- Full refunds will be given if we need to cancel a program due to insufficient registration.

### Switching Programs

In the event that you wish to switch from one program to another, 14 days notice is required along with a \$15.00 administration fee.



# Privacy Policy

We recognize that we hold sensitive and confidential information about you and your child(ren) as well as our staff. This information is used for registration, emergency procedures, and to meet children's needs. All information is stored digitally and securely in accordance with the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act. Some information (allergies, medication, emergency contacts) is stored physically in the Forest School practitioner's field binder, which is taken to site daily for use in an emergency. We will not share information with third parties without your consent, except when we are legally required to do so.

# Social Media Policy

We rely on Facebook, Instagram, and our website to share our program details and experiences with families, staff, collaborators and the community. With parents/guardian consent, we will use photos and videos of children engaged in our program activities on these platforms. Occasionally, we use photos of your children in our documentation, handbook and when working with collaborators, and will ask permission for these uses on a case-by-case basis.

To protect the identity of program participants, photo and video captions will not include their names or personal information.

# Illness Policy

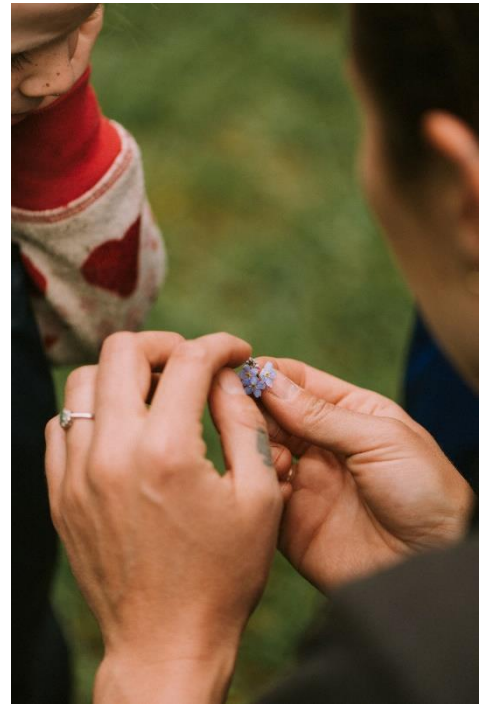
Our programs require children to be outdoors for extended periods of time (up to 7 hours). If they are unable to fully participate in the program due to illness, they should be kept home where they will be more comfortable. We ask that children stay home for at least 24 hours or until the condition clears up if they have any of the following symptoms:

- Fever above 38.3°C/101°F
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Persistent cough
- Unidentifiable rash

If your child has a communicable disease (measles, flu, pink eye, strep throat, Covid-19, etc.) they can return to our programs once their doctor has determined it is safe for them to do so.

The Truro Forest School will follow public health restrictions and/or mandates when they are in place. This may include daily screening, canceling our programs, and practicing social distancing. If new restrictions and/or mandates are introduced, we will update our policy accordingly.

\*This policy also applies to staff and volunteers



# Food/Allergies Policy

At the Truro Forest School, children are required to bring their own lunch, snacks and water bottle. This ensures they are receiving adequate nutrition while meeting their own dietary preferences and restrictions. We encourage families to consider whole foods with high nutritional value as children will require more fuel at Forest School than they normally would on a day spent indoors. Normalizing eating whole foods when you're able is also good practice in developing an environmental mindset.

Foods will be prohibited in our programs on a case-by-case basis if there is/are participants with specific food allergies, such as nuts. Please let us know upon registration and we will make the appropriate accommodations to ensure our programs are safe for your child. However, given that the Truro Forest School operates in a public space, we cannot guarantee a completely nut-free environment. Students with severe nut allergies should have their EpiPen on them and an additional EpiPen with staff at all times.

# Toileting and Handwashing Procedures

There are no washroom facilities on site, so children are encouraged to pee and poop on the forest floor in a private area. Toilet paper and waste is picked up with a doggy bag and removed from site daily. Hands must be washed after each bathroom use, followed by hand sanitizer.

We believe using the washroom outside is a skill that everyone will need at some point in their life. This will be a new experience for many kids, so we do our best to ensure they're confident and capable while maintaining their privacy, dignity and comfort.

All children must be toilet trained and out of diapers/pull-ups to participate in our programs. Please discuss these toileting expectations with your child(ren) prior to the first day of the program.

# Weather and Closure Policies

While we aim to build resilience by being outdoors rain or shine, there may be times when this is neither comfortable nor safe, regardless of how well we prepare. Weather conditions are monitored daily and regularly throughout the session to ensure the safety of program participants. We will close if there are weather related school closures and under any of these conditions:

- Excessive rainfall amounts sustained throughout the day combined with temperatures below 10°C
- High winds (sustained at or above 40kms/hr or gusting at or above 70kms/hr)
- Extreme heat (at or above 36°C) and low temperatures (at or below -10°C with the windchill)
- Thunder and lightning

In the event of a closure, we will give parents/guardians as much notice as possible and we will do our best to accommodate a make-up session.



# Risk Management Policies and Procedures

At the Truro Forest School we recognize that our programs include an element of risk. This is what makes our programs holistic and valuable because we believe that risk management and assessment is an important life skill that is best learned through practice. We encourage children to be children by providing them with opportunities to take supported responsible risks like running, puddle jumping, sliding, building structures, piling rocks, log walking, climbing, laying in hammocks, whittling, crossing streams, playing with sticks, digging and more. Each student will come to the program having their own comfort levels and are free to choose which activities and forms of risky play to engage in.

Some of the risks involved in our programs include, but are not limited to:

- Injuries from slips, trips, and falls
- Exposure to or contact with wildlife (including ticks, bug bites, and stings)
- Weather conditions (extreme heat or cold)
- Reactions from plants (rash, stings, scrapes)
- Exposure to or ingestion of poisonous plants (poison ivy)
- Injuries from tools (saws, hammers, drills, knives)

Although we encourage unstructured risky play, safety is our top priority and responsibility. We continually assess the risks and benefits of our activities, and each activity is subject to a formal Risk Benefit Assessment. We conduct Daily Risk Assessments, Site Risk Assessments, and daily safety meetings prior to children arriving on site.

## Tool Use Procedures

Planned and documented properly to manage risk, tool use can be a valuable part of Forest School. Tools help children develop a sense of responsibility for their safety, as well as the safety of the group. They also give children the opportunity to assess and manage risk. Both of these skill sets are transferable to other aspects of life and best learned at a young age. Tools we may use include saws, hammers, nails, drills, measuring tapes, and knives (for whittling).

At the Truro Forest School, tools are only used under the supervision of a practitioner and are only introduced into the program once practitioners assess each individual for their:

- Skill level and experience with tools
- Responsiveness to instruction
- Age and maturity
- Awareness of their surroundings
- Their ability to assess and manage risk

Practitioners will demonstrate tool use and engage children in discussions regarding proper tool use techniques and safety prior to use. If children are not demonstrating proper tool use, the tools will be put away for the remainder of the day. If tools are consistently being used improperly, tool use privileges will be taken away.

All tools are inspected prior to the beginning to each session. If they are broken or non-operational, they are removed from site and replaced. When not in use, tools are returned to the practitioner and stored safely.

# Emergency Procedure and First Aid Policies

All staff hold, at minimum, a valid standard first aid/CPR certification. They are required to know all of our emergency procedures, which are described in full detail in our Emergency Response Plan. This document also contains emergency phone numbers, medical information for each participant, and maps/directions to the nearest hospital. A copy of the Emergency Response Plan is carried by all staff members, as well as a stocked first aid kit and cell phone.

In the event of an emergency, staff will:

- 1) Identify the cause of the emergency
- 2) Account for and ensure the safety of all program participants, both children and staff
- 3) Deliver first aid to the individual(s) and call 911 if necessary
- 4) Notify the parent(s) of the injured individual
- 5) Follow up with an Emergency Incident Report

If a child needs immediate medical attention, they will be transported by ambulance to the nearest hospital accompanied by one of the Forest School practitioners. Their parent/guardian will be notified immediately, and the other Forest School practitioner(s) will remain on site with the rest of the group.

In the event of a site-wide emergency (evacuation, extreme weather, wildlife threat) participants and facilitators will relocate to the pick-up/drop-off location. If this location is unsafe, we will relocate depending on the situation. Parents will be notified once it is safe to do so.

It is common for children to sustain very minor injuries at Forest School such as bumps, scrapes, bruises, bug bites, and splinters. We treat these appropriately on site and notify parents/guardians at the end of the session. Head injuries (regardless of how minor) will be reported to parents immediately.

Our first aid kits are equipped with bandages, slings, tweezers, tick removers, antibiotic ointment, antiseptic wipes, hand sanitizer, eye wash, gauze, medical tape, scissors, face shield, disposable gloves, a tourniquet, and other essential equipment.



## Tick Procedure

Due to the nature of our programs, exposure to ticks is very likely. If we notice a tick on your child, we brush it off. If we notice a tick attached to your child, we will remove it with tweezers or tick removers, bag it with a label stating the date and where on the body it was removed from, and send this home with your child at the end of the day if parents/guardians need to have it identified and/or tested.

The Truro Forest School is not responsible for conducting full tick checks on children. Parents/guardians must do this themselves at the end of each session. For information on how to perform a thorough tick check, visit the Nova Scotia Tick Safety website at: <https://novascotia.ca/ticksafety>.

We also recommend reading this blog post by the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada for information on being outdoors during tick season: <https://childnature.ca/what-can-we-do-about-ticks/>.

# Child Protection Policy

Every person in Nova Scotia has the duty to immediately report child abuse or neglect, even a suspicion, to a child welfare agency. This includes a person who acts in professional or official duties with respect to children. Children under 16 may need protective services due to physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect.

At the Truro Forest School all forms of corporal punishment are prohibited. This includes hitting, pushing, pinching, slapping, grabbing, etc. We also prohibit sexual abuse, emotional abuse, harassment, molestation, neglect, and the deprivation of food, water, or shelter.

## Pick-Up/Drop-Off Procedures

The Truro Forest School will not release children to anyone other than the child's parents/guardians, emergency contact, or anyone who has previously received written consent to do so. We recognize that under certain circumstances, children may need to be picked-up by someone who has not received written consent. In these situations, it is possible for a parent/guardian to give us verbal consent. We reserve the right to ask anyone, including parents/guardians, for photo identification.

We will have a designated off-site drop-off location. At least 1 Forest School practitioner will be at the drop-off location to meet children when they arrive. Once all children have arrived, they will walk to the Forest School site accompanied by the Forest School practitioner.



# Communication Strategy

## Communication Policy

Our primary form of communication with families is email. You can expect to receive an email at the beginning of each week with comments on the weather forecast, how to prepare and what to expect in the program. Highlights will be shared with families via email at the end of each program. While we post on social media, the bulk of our sharing is with families directly.

You can expect to receive emails from [thetruroforestschool@gmail.com](mailto:thetruroforestschool@gmail.com) as well as our website host. Please keep an eye on your junk mail folder!

On the first day of your program, you will receive the personal contact information for that program's facilitator(s). Please use this to inform us of your child's absence on days they will not be attending.

In the event of an emergency at Forest School, parents/guardians will be contacted by phone after emergency personnel have been reached (if needed).

## Questions, Concerns and Grievances

If you have any questions or concerns regarding our programs, please don't hesitate to reach out. Staff are available before and after our programs to answer questions and address any concerns you may have. If you need time for a longer conversation, please contact Natalie Jess-Fiene at [thetruroforestschool@gmail.com](mailto:thetruroforestschool@gmail.com) or (902)293-9618.

