

HOWARD COUNTY CONSERVANCY NATURE PRESCHOOL

FAQ

What is Nature Preschool?

Howard County Conservancy's Nature Preschool is a unique, nature-based preschool program. Our school creates a safe, positive and supportive learning environment for all children. Through our engaging hands-on, emergent curriculum, our goal is to foster meaningful, everlasting connections between children and the natural world, while preparing children for their transition into kindergarten. We learn all of the early childhood fundamentals while focusing on the environment and spending most of our time outdoors.

What is your mission/philosophy?

Our philosophy is based in nature pedagogy and child-led discovery. As the seasons transition and children's interest evolve, our program will incorporate these inspiring changes into daily lessons that will meet the developmental needs of our littlest naturalists. Each day will consist of taking learning outdoors, as well as bringing nature into the classroom! Through best practices, our nature preschool seeks to prepare children for kindergarten through exploration, sensorial experiences, hands-on play, and a curriculum that integrates all the wonders of nature. It is our belief that from this experience, young children will hold everlasting connections with the natural world.

What curriculum does your program implement?

The Nature Preschool implements an emergent, nature-based curriculum. As the seasons transition and children's interest evolve, our program will incorporate these inspiring changes into daily lessons that will meet the developmental needs of students. Teachers observe the interests of their students and the changes happening in nature to develop a unique curriculum.

Are you a licensed preschool?

Yes. Our program is licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education - Licence number: 257271. We also go above and beyond our licensing requirements by participating in Maryland EXCELS.

How much is the 2022/2023 session of Nature Preschool?

Full day enrollment is \$1,200/ month.

Half day enrollment is \$600/ month.

How much and when is After Care?

Aftercare is offered for our full day students, Monday - Friday from 3:30pm - 5:00pm. Enrollment in extended care is an additional \$200/month.

What are the hours of preschool?

Full day: 8:30am - 3:30pm, Monday - Friday - Extended care 3:30pm - 5:00pm

Half - day: 9:00am - 12:00pm, Monday - Friday

If your child is arriving late or being picked up early, please inform our staff so that we can make arrangements to meet you.

If I cancel enrollment for the school year, can I get a refund?

No. Upon enrolling, families pay a non-refundable deposit that goes towards their last month's tuition payment. There is no discount, refund, prorate or other allowance for absences, illness, vacation, holidays, school closures and/or withdrawals of students for any reason. Families who wish to unenroll during the school year should follow the terms for withdrawing in our enrollment agreement.

Do you have physical classrooms or are you 100% outdoors?

We have two beautiful, interactive classrooms located in the carriage house at Belmont Manor and Historic Park in Elkridge. We utilize our spacious classrooms as a homebase, though we spend as much time outdoors as possible.

How much time would they spend outside?

We strive to spend a minimum of 50% of each day outdoors. When weather permits, we spend 90%-100% of our day outdoors.

What do you do in inclement or colder weather?

We embrace all weather here at Nature Preschool! Children and teachers gear up in rain or snow suits and explore the outdoors in all conditions. If there is dangerous weather, such as storms, lightning, or high wind warnings, we stay indoors.

Do you serve food at Nature Preschool?

Parents / Guardians should send their child in with a filling, waste-free lunch. We will serve nutritious morning and afternoon snacks around 9:30am and 3:30pm. Parents may send snacks with their child if they wish. Children will be offered their lunch left-overs after rest/quiet time.

What do I need to pack for my child?

-Extra seasonally appropriate clothing(these items will stay in your child's personal bin at school in case they must be changed during the day), "Muddy Buddy" suit (see an example here), size appropriate backpack, masks in labeled ziplock bag (we recommend 3-5 clean masks), zipper pouch with art supplies, "Nature Journal" (can be a notepad, sketchbook, etc.), tools that your child may like to utilize outside (may include trowel, small bucket, wooden mallet, magnifying glass, child size binoculars, etc.), water bottle, a hearty lunch each day, rest time materials, beach, towel, sunscreen.

Can the Conservancy staff administer medications?

Yes. Children who must take medications while at school can be administered medication by a teacher who is trained in medication administration. Parents/guardians must submit a [Medication Administration Authorization Form](#). Teachers will record any administered medication on a medication log.

My child is young. Will you put sunscreen on them?

We highly encourage you to apply sunscreen before arriving for the day. Parents/Guardians must submit a [Medication Authorization Form](#) in order for teachers to apply sunscreen. We will help children reapply sunscreen in the afternoon or after they get wet.

My child has special needs. Can they attend preschool?

Your child may attend nature preschool if they are able to participate in everyday nature preschool activities. However, we are unable to provide constant one-on-one assistance. Please give us as much information as possible to allow staff to most appropriately assist your child's placement. If your child has an IEP, please let us know upon enrolling or joining the waitlist. At the Nature Preschool, children often spend more than 50% of their day outside. With this increased freedom to explore, it is critical that children in this program are able to follow our safety rules and procedures and stay with the group. If you would like to schedule a visit for your child prior to enrolling to help evaluate their readiness for nature preschool, please contact our Director.

Does the Preschool assess children?

Yes. At Nature Preschool, we ask parents to participate in ASQ-3 developmental screenings multiple times per year. Twice per year, in the fall and spring, teachers complete developmental checklists for each student. These screenings and reports help teachers better understand how to best support each individual child.

What is your discipline policy?

Student's enrollment is based on the rules, regulations, conditions and terms contained in the Enrollment Agreement and in the Nature Preschool Parent's Guide, which may be amended from time to time. Parents acknowledge that parents and students will abide by its rules and guidelines. Our foundational rules include: **Using gentle hands**, **using listening ears**, & **sticking with the pack**.

If your child exhibits concerning behaviors repeatedly during their time in our program, the Preschool Director will initiate a behavior conference process to discuss observations, teacher's actions, and develop an action plan. We may require evaluations from the Howard County Care Center or other outside resources, and may ultimately decide that the Nature Preschool is not the safest fit for your child.

Something came up! I need someone to pick up my child who is not on the authorization list. What should I do?

Call and email the director (preschool@howardnature.org or jessica.caylor@howardnature.org) and provide the full name and address of the person who you are authorizing to pick up your child. We will need this information in writing to compare against a drivers license.

How can I contact you during the day?

For important issues while preschool is in session, please use the following methods to contact us: Belmont Office Phone (during business hours) 410-465-8337

Our Preschool Director may not be at their desk while school is in session. Please allow 24 hours for an email reply or call our main office at 410-465-8877 for immediate assistance.

What do you do in inclement or colder weather?

We embrace all weather here at Nature Preschool! Children and teachers gear up in rain or snow suits and explore the outdoors in all conditions. If there is dangerous weather, such as storms, lightning, or high wind warnings, we stay indoors.

How will your program prepare my child for kindergarten?

At Nature Preschool, we focus on learning and developmental domains that contribute to a well-rounded early childhood education. Children inspire the lessons through their own interests, while teachers naturally introduce mathematics, engineering, literacy, writing, music, art, and many other topics through the use of play, outdoor exploration and provocations. Find more on the Nature Preschool and kindergarten readiness [here](#).

What safety measures are being taken when they are out in the park?

While adventuring in the park, staff communicate through the use of motorola radios and cell phones. All staff are CPR/ first aid certified, trained on our indoor and outdoor emergency preparedness plans, and carry first aid kits. Teachers regularly assess areas for any hazards and have communications with park rangers and other staff.

How should I dress my child?

Please dress your child in weather appropriate clothing. We have large cubbies where children can store their layers and other gear, such as snow suits, muddy buddies, accessories, etc. Sturdy, waterproof shoes help children stay comfortable during adventures.

What is the teacher child ratio?

There are two teachers for each class. The class size may fill to 14 students.

Does my child need to be potty trained?

Yes, children are required to be potty trained prior to entering our program. Of course, we understand that accidents happen. Children must be able to request and use the potty independently.

Do the children go outside in all weather conditions?

Nature Preschool is primarily outdoors, unless hazardous weather conditions are present. We are prepared to embrace the elements and encourage children to do the same. Appropriate clothing/gear is critical in our program. If your family needs financial assistance for clothing or other materials, please let our Director know.

What does outdoor exploration consist of?

Outdoor times consist of play, independent exploration and teacher-supported intentional learning moments and lessons. Children have the freedom to explore their own interests, while teachers naturally inspire lessons and discoveries.

What are your teacher credentials?

Lead teachers hold either a degree or certificate in Early Childhood Education. Each year, teachers and assistants are required to complete continuing education courses. Required certifications include Preschool 90 hr. certification, CPR/first aid, ADA training, health and safety training, and COVID-19 safety training. We also dedicate monthly professional development days to updating and growing our nature-based curriculum, as well as participating in various early childhood education workshops and classes. Our teachers have experience with preschool-age children and a personal love and connection with nature.

What is your daily routine?

RHYTHM OF THE DAY HALF DAY	
9:00am—9:30am	Drop-off, check-in Morning Provocations Bathrooms
9:30am—9:45am	Morning Snack
9:45am —10:00am	First Gathering (Circle time)
10:00am—11:45am	Morning hike, forest free-play, outdoor exploration Intentional Learning & Second Gathering
11:45am—12:00pm	Bathrooms Pick-up

RHYTHM OF THE DAY FULL DAY	
8:30—9:30am	Drop-off, check-in Morning Provocations Bathrooms
9:30am—9:45am	Morning Snack
9:45am —10:00am	First Gathering (Circle time)
10:00am—11:45am	Morning hike, forest free-play, outdoor exploration Intentional Learning & Second Gathering
11:45am—12:00pm	Bathrooms
12:00pm—12:30pm	Lunch
12:30pm—2:30pm	Rest time or Quiet & Calm Time
2:30pm—3:00pm	Rest time clean up Bathrooms Afternoon recap
3:00pm—3:30pm	Outdoor nature Play
3:30pm	Pick-up
3:30pm - 3:45pm	Afternoon snack for children enrolled in aftercare
3:45pm - 5:00pm	After Care & Rolling pick-up

COVID-19 Procedures

The Preschool is licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Our policies and procedures for operation of school during the COVID-19 pandemic follow MSDE, Department of Health, and CDC guidelines. With vaccinations now readily available, *guidelines are always evolving*. We will provide updates to families as guidelines evolve.

Unit sizes

During the 2022-2023 school year, unit sizes will consist of 12-14 students and two teachers.

Cleaning

All surfaces commonly touched by students will be sanitized with a CDC approved solution. These surfaces include but are not limited to doorknobs, faucets, tables and lesson materials. More commonly used surfaces such as toys, art materials, tools, tables, chairs, toilets, and rest mats will be sanitized after each use.

Hand washing

Outdoor and indoor hand washing stations will be available throughout the day. Children will wash hands upon arrival, after using the bathroom, before/after eating, and any time hands appear dirty. Hand sanitizer will also be available and may be used when there may be no access to a hand washing station (ex: during hikes on the trails). Hand washing is always preferred to sanitizing.

Masks

Children will be required to wear masks and bring multiple clean masks in a labeled bag each day. Teachers will help your child change their mask throughout the day as needed. Dirty masks will be stored in a bag in your child's backpack. Please empty, clean, and replace masks each day. We thank you and your family in advance for keeping our beloved preschool community safe. Per MSDE guidance, masks are required indoors. Children and their families may make the choice whether to wear a mask outside. Depending on the state's testing positivity rate, the Preschool may require masks outdoors as well.

Daily Health Screenings

A health screening will be done at drop-off each day. Details on the health screening can be found in preschool registration materials. Children will not be permitted to attend school with a temperature greater than 100.4 degrees. Children will be sent home if symptoms of COVID-19 or other illnesses appear during the day. Children will not be permitted to attend school if they or someone in the household are awaiting COVID-19 test results, if they or someone in the household are diagnosed with COVID-19, or if there have been any recent exposures within the past 14 days.

If child or staff becomes ill:

"COVID-19 symptoms are any ONE of the following: fever of 100.4 or higher, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing, diarrhea or vomiting, new onset of severe headache (especially with fever), or new loss of taste or smell. For persons with chronic conditions such as asthma, the symptoms should represent a change from baseline" **We follow guidance from the "Decision Aid: Exclusion and Return" on pages 17 and 18 of this document: [MSDE COVID-19 Guidance for Childcare Facilities](#)**

If a child or teacher has any symptoms during the school day that appear to be related to COVID-19, the Conservancy will take the following steps: (1) safely isolate the person (child's parents will be notified, asked to pick up their child, and asked to schedule a COVID-19 PCR test); (2) clean and disinfect the facility as recommended by the CDC; (3) notify parents and staff that someone became ill and if symptoms appear to be due to COVID-19, and daily monitoring for symptoms will be encouraged; (4) discuss with the school health supervisor/local health department/MDH closure based on level of contact and potential exposure to persons in the building. The child must have a negative COVID test and be symptom/fever free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication.

If positive case:

If a person working in or attending school has a confirmed case of COVID-19, the Conservancy will follow CDC's guidance: (1) contact the local health department and school health supervisor immediately, (2) dismiss children and staff at the affected location for 2-5 days while determining long term course which may include closure for 10 days or more, (3) communicate with staff and parents regarding the confirmed case and exposure, (4) wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure; open doors and windows to increase circulation; clean and disinfect the facility as recommended by the CDC, and (5) determine duration of program closure based on direct guidance plan from the local health department/MDH. The Preschool Director will continue communication with families to monitor if others develop symptoms.

We will always maintain student, family, and health confidentiality.