

Berks Nature Preschool Family Handbook

2023 - 2024





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Family Handbook



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We believe that NATURE IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR QUALITY OF LIFE

BERKS NATURE IS THE LEADING AGENT FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN BERKS COUNTY

We demonstrate our mission through Conservation, Protection, Partnerships, Leadership, Relationships, and Education

What does Berks Nature do?

- Land Conservation programs
- Watershed restoration programs
- Trails creation and maintenance
- Environmental Education
- Eco Camps
- Urban Gardens
- State of the Environment reporting
- Programs for municipal leaders
- Newsletters, e-news, communications
- Advocacy of projects that enhance our mission
- Programs that connect people with nature

We believe that nature is essential to our quality of life. Thank you for sharing that value with your children and choosing Berks Nature Preschool for your child's academic experience.

Berks Nature Preschool is built upon a foundation of past successes that have engaged children from our community and their families through appreciation and understanding of the value of nature.

This handbook will provide you with essential information to ensure your child's nature preschool experience is a success. The policies, procedures and guidelines will ensure a consistent understand and clear communication.

As our plans for the Nature Preschool grow, we will be expanding and updating this family handbook. Please check the footer to be sure you have the most recent edition.

We have a very exciting year planned that is packed with engaging, fun and educational adventures.

We are here to answer questions and guide you through your child's preschool experience.

Anne Muvdi, Preschool Director
Berks Nature Preschool
610-372-4992 x115

Allison Mackley, Vice President for Education
Berks Nature
610-372-4992 x101

Berks Nature Office
610-372-4992

You will be asked to sign and acknowledge that you read this Handbook and understand the policies and procedures.

NATURE PRESCHOOL

Education with a Purpose

MISSION: PROVIDE A HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THAT MEETS THE CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS, WHILE INSTILLING A LASTING APPRECIATION FOR AND MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATURAL WORLD.

THE BERKS NATURE PRESCHOOL WILL EMPOWER CHILDREN BY OFFERING THOSE OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE, CREATE, IMAGINE, LEARN, AND GROW THROUGH HANDS-ON NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES. WE WILL PROMOTE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, SELF-HELP, AND COGNITIVE SKILLS AS WELL AS ENCOURAGE LIFELONG LOVE, RESPECT, AND UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Just like it takes a diversity of species to make our natural environment thrive, Berks Nature recognizes that having a culture of inclusion where all individuals feel respected and are treated fairly will bring us a power of talent to do our work and engage others in the love for and protection of nature. Accordingly, it is Berks Nature's goal to be intentional and inclusive in the involvement, engagement, and empowerment of all groups of people within our community to help Berks Nature achieve its mission. Berks Nature will take the broadest possible view of diversity in order to attract, develop, engage and retain people from all walks of life and backgrounds in our work. Berks Nature endeavors to not see any species become extinct. So to, we desire not to neglect or exclude any audience from our work.

PRESCHOOL LICENSURE

Preschools in Pennsylvania are licensed through the PA Department of Health and Human Services. The regulations for licensure can be found at:
<http://www.pacode.com/secure/data/055/chapter3270/chap3270toc.html>

Berks Nature Preschool is licensed by the State of Pennsylvania. In addition to meeting and exceeding the State regulations, we strive to provide expert faculty and staff in a safe, secure, respectful, and welcoming setting to encourage the best learning opportunities available for your child.

Berks Nature is a non-profit organization. We are proud members of:

- ERAFAN (Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools)
- ANCA (Association of Nature Center Administrators)
- We Conserve PA
- PAEE (Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Education)
- LTA (Land Trust Alliance)

Berks Nature offers its services and admissions without regard to race, color, religious creed, ancestry, sex, handicap, age, and national origin.

The legal entity for the preschool is Berks Nature Educational Programs, LLC. Berks Nature and Berks Nature Education Programs, LLC is not affiliated with Alvernia University.

Our staff leadership is a carefully selected and well-trained group of women and men. All staff members have been chosen for their experience, special talents, creativity, and sensitivity. They have been thoroughly screened through a complete background, and criminal history check.

The Nature Preschool Director provides the primary leadership, along with the Vice President for Education of Berks Nature, for the Nature Preschool program. The director is a working professional who has had extensive experience in formal and/or informal education. They are responsible for the health, safety and engagement of the children and the nature preschool employees through the safe operation of the Berks Nature Preschool.

The nature preschool teachers and assistants are professionals who are responsible for the development and delivery of the Nature Preschool curriculum that is safe, fun and age-appropriate. The activities reflect the Nature Preschool's commitment to stewardship of the natural environment. The teacher to student ratio is no more than 10:1.



ANNE MUVDI

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ALLISON MACKLEY

Vice President for Education

STAFF LEADERSHIP 



WE NURTURE OUR STUDENTS TO REACH THEIR MAXIMUM POTENTIAL.

PHILOSOPHY OF BERKS NATURE PRESCHOOL

The Berks Nature Preschool builds on children's inherent curiosity about the world by using hands-on, nature-based activities to foster social, emotional, physical, and academic skill development. The 90-acre outdoor environment at Angelica Park serves as a natural venue for encouraging children to explore the world with all of their senses, experiment in the environment, and communicate their discoveries to those around them.

"I CAN'T SAY ENOUGH GOOD THINGS ABOUT THE PROGRAM...THE TEACHERS ARE WONDERFUL, ACTIVITIES ARE WELL THOUGHT OUT, AND BOTH ENJOYABLE AND GREAT FOR THE MIND AND BODY."

~ NATURE PRESCHOOL PARENT

Our preschool teachers promote learning by:

- Providing an environment that encourages discovery, experimentation, and the opportunity to see the results of one's actions.
- Developing activities that encourage growth based on children's abilities and interests.
- Encouraging problem-solving and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children's ideas, insights, and concerns.
- Assisting children in their interactions with each other and offering opportunities for conflict resolution and cooperative learning.
- Appreciating the individuality of children and families, and celebrating diversity.
- Engaging the whole family in the nature-based educational process.

THE SCHOOL YEAR

SCHOOL YEAR

First Day: Tuesday after Labor Day (September 5, 2023)

Last Day: Friday before Memorial Day (May 24, 2024)

HOLIDAYS

Our Nature Preschool observes the following holidays and will be closed:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Presidents' Day
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Thanksgiving Day/Day After Thanksgiving
- Day before Christmas through New Year's Day

SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND WEATHER DELAYS

In the event of severe weather conditions that prevent the opening of Berks Nature Preschool, the Director will notify all parents via email and text as soon as a decision is made. Closings will also be posted on the Berks Nature website. Berks Nature Preschool will take into account the decisions made by neighboring school districts, but will ultimately make our own decision on school closings. In the event that severe weather conditions make it necessary for Berks Nature Preschool to close early, parents will be notified by the staff. It is essential to ensure your child's emergency contact information is always up to date for events such as this.

REGISTRATION AND ENROLLMENT

To register your child for the Berks Nature Preschool, complete an online registration form for each child and submit a \$100 non-refundable registration fee per child before the start of school.

Complete the registration form as soon as possible so you can insure your child's space in nature preschool. The additional medical forms etc. can be completed later in the summer.

Parents must complete and submit all required paperwork, including the following:

- Application
- Tuition Agreement
- Family Information Sheet
- Emergency Contact Form
- Health Form
- Immunization Form
- Berks Preschool Family Handbook Acknowledgement

These forms must be kept current throughout your child's enrollment.

TUITION PAYMENT

The first month's tuition is due August 1st, 2023 with subsequent payments due on the first of each month. *No payment will be due in September because of the advanced payment for the first month. Tuition can be paid monthly or in one lump sum. See sample tuition options.

Days Per Week	Per Child Monthly Cost	Annual- 9 Months
5x/week full day	\$1,153.60	\$10,382.40
3x/week full day (M,W,F)	\$886.80	\$7,981.20
2x/ week full day (T, Th)	\$591.22	\$5,320.98
5x/ week am	\$556.20	\$5,005.80
3x/ week am (M,W,F)	\$463.50	\$4,171.50
2x/ week am (T,Th)	\$309.00	\$2,781
5x/ week pm	\$494.40	\$4,449.60
3x/ week pm (M,W,F)	\$333.72	\$3,003.48
2x/ week pm (T, Th)	\$222.48	\$2,002.32
1-time registration fee	\$100	

INCLUSION POLICY & PROCEDURES

We welcome all children and are committed to providing developmentally appropriate early learning experiences that support the full access and participation of each and every child. We believe that each child is unique and work in partnership with families and other professionals involved with the child to provide the support every child needs to reach their full potential.

ADMISSIONS/WAITING LIST

Children of all abilities are accepted into our program. Families interested in having their child attend our program will be given an equal opportunity for admission. A waiting list may be maintained and children will be accepted from the list on a first come first serve basis.

REFUNDS

No refunds will be made for late arrivals or early departures.

CANCELLATIONS

If you choose to withdraw your child, a one-month written notice is required. If a withdrawal is made any time after the first of the month, full payment for the month is required.

The \$100 enrollment fee that was paid at the time of enrollment is non-refundable.

INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Early childhood educators at our program use developmentally appropriate practices and consider the unique needs of all children when planning lessons. Staff will make every attempt to make adaptations or modifications necessary to meet the needs of the children. Any adaptations will be reviewed with families and other professionals supporting the child. Our program acknowledges and respects the priorities each family has for their child. Families are encouraged and supported to collaborate with staff to ensure that each child has an opportunity for optimum success. We will communicate with families daily. Conferences to discuss the child's successes and challenges will occur twice per school year and at any point upon a family's request.

ENROLLMENT





OUR CURRICULUM

Our preschools offer the perfect balance of learning and play in a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment for children.

Our nature preschool uses the Reggio-Emilia inspired emergent curriculum as a holistic approach to learning that addresses the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive needs of the child. This approach provides growth and development of the whole child through active learning experiences constructed by the children, adults, and surrounding environment. It encourages the development for an appreciation and wonder of the natural world that helps the children make discoveries and create connections through experiencing their environment on their own terms and at their own pace.

The Nature Place has a “preschool only” outdoor nature play area, which will provide children with the opportunity to enjoy free play and discovery in a safe and defined natural setting of Angelica Park. In addition, we have a teaching garden on our park campus so children can engage in sustainable agriculture, composting, and the art of growing healthy food.

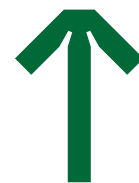
ASSESSMENTS & PROGRESS

Our low student-to-teacher ratio (about 10 to 1) allows us to nurture the individual growth of each child.

Assessment is the process of gathering information about children’s developmental strengths and progress to inform learning goals. Our curriculum promotes the opportunity to gather information about each child’s progress over time. We use developmentally appropriate assessment methods that are embedded within children’s daily activities. Assessment tools may include notes of observations, rubrics, checklists and maintenance of a portfolio for each student.

Teachers plan lessons to meet individual students’ cognitive, physical and emotional needs. They provide materials and activities that encourage children to explore their environment and develop social skills, problem-solving skills and new ways of thinking. Every staff member strives to routinely assess the developmental needs of the children. Teachers and parents formulate a constructive plan to work with the child, consisting of interim goals, along with timelines and follow-up discussions.

Berks Nature Preschool CURRICULUM



THE SCHOOL DAY

SCHOOL DAY: REGULAR HOURS OF OPERATION

Full Day - 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

AM only - 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

PM only - 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

DROP OFF & PICK UP GUIDELINES

When dropping off or picking up your child, please park in the parking lot and walk your child down the path. Enter through the **first back door** in the Nature Preschool using the parent code provided at Back-to-School Night. For safety reasons, the door is always locked from the outside.

Please immediately sign your child in and help them unpack their belongings to get ready for the day.

PICK UP & DROP OFF

All Day and Morning School
Drop off between 8:50 AM - 9:00 AM

Morning Only
Pick up between 12:00 PM - 12:10 PM

Afternoon Only
Drop off between 12:50 PM - 1:00 PM

Afternoon and Full School
Pick up between 4:00 PM - 4:10 PM

EXTENDED CARE / PRE-POST SCHOOL

We are pleased to offer extended care hours to fit caregivers' work schedules. Additional daycare hours are available from 7:00 to 9:00 AM, noon to 1:00 PM, and 4:00 to 6:00 PM. Students must provide a lunch from home when using the lunch hour. (Lunch hour is included in tuition for those students spending a full day with us.)

Prescheduled care is an additional cost of \$10.00 per hour. Drop-in care is available at a cost of \$12.50 per hour.

Pre-scheduled daycare is daycare that has been scheduled through the director and paid for one month in advance, as part of the tuition payment. Drop-in daycare must also be scheduled through the director and paid for at the time of service. Arrangements will be made for drop-in care after staff and child ratios are considered.

EXTENDED PRESCHOOL HOURS

Before and after care activities will take place in and around The Nature Place at Angelica Park, the home base for the Berks Nature Preschool.

When dropping off and/or picking up your child during these times (7:30-8:45 AM and 4:15-5:30 PM), please park in the Angelica Park parking lot and proceed to the Berks Nature Preschool.

A nature preschool staff person will be present to assist you with the sign-in/sign-out process. Please bring a photo ID with you to help us ensure the safety of all the children during the dismissal process.

You will be asked to sign and acknowledge that you read and understand this section.

ABSENCES

If your child will not be attending school on a specific day due to illness or for other reasons, please contact the preschool at 610-898-4600 ext 115. If you get the voicemail system, please leave a message and one of our staff members will make sure the Nature Preschool Director receives the message.

If your child will be absent or arriving late, a notice must be given. Failure to do this within 1/2 hour of your scheduled arrival time will result in a warning. A fee of \$10 per child in addition to full payment of the time missed will be added to your child's tuition after the warning. Only exception will be for emergency situations only. Berks Nature Preschool spends most of the morning outdoors. We must wait for all students to arrive before leaving the building. Therefore, we need to be aware of any students who will be absent in advance.

DEPARTURE

When picking up your child at the end of the day please be sure to sign out using the same system to sign in.

It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that children are picked up by their contracted times and ultimately no later than 4:10pm for full day/half day PM or 12:10pm for half day AM.

If you are unable to pick up your child by the contracted time, alternate arrangements must be made. Berks Nature Preschool offers before care from 7am-9am and after care from 4pm-6pm for parents' convenience. In the event that a parent cannot be contacted, it is our policy to call an emergency contact. If parents or emergency contacts cannot be reached and it is after 6:30pm, authorities will be called to ensure the safety of the child.

CHANGE IN PICK-UP PERSON

Please notify us if an undesignated person will be picking up your child. Photo identification may be necessary for anyone picking up your child who is not notated on the authorization form. If consent and/or proper ID are not received, the child will not be released and the parent will be responsible for any additional fees that are incurred as a result. Please understand this is for your child's safety.



LATE PICK UP CHARGES

Berks Nature provides a 10 min grace period at the end of the school day for student pick-up.

We ask that adults be mindful of the extra burden placed on teachers when students need to be supervised after this grace period.

Pick-up after 4:10 PM for families that have not registered for the extended care program or for children in the morning-only program who pick up after 12:10 PM will result in a \$10.00 late charge for every 10-minute increment.

A late fee of \$10.00 per 10 minutes per child will apply if a child remains in care after contracted hours unless prior arrangements have been made or if it can't be helped due to an emergency or weather situation.

This late fee will be added to the month's normal charges.

If you feel you will need extended care, we recommend you register in advance so we may plan accordingly and guarantee that a staff person will be available to cover the requested extended care time period.

DEPARTURE SAFETY

Your child will not be released to anyone who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If your child is taken, authorities will be notified and your Berks Nature Preschool contract will be terminated immediately.

Arrival & Departure

You will be asked to sign and acknowledge that you read and understand this section.

LUNCH

Children bring their lunch and reusable water bottle every day, which will be stored in an air-conditioned location. Limited refrigeration is available; children can bring their lunch in an insulated lunch box.

Please do not pack any items that need to be microwaved. We do have limited access to a microwave in the case of special situations.

Water bottles can be refilled at The Nature Place.

SNACKS

A healthy school snack is provided every morning and afternoon to all children.

ALLERGIES

Prior to enrollment, a Child Health Assessment form must be completed and signed by the child's health care provider and parent/guardian.

Any known allergies must be noted along with an allergy action plan from your pediatrician. These must be documented allergies as noted by your physician. This form must be updated regularly.

Written instruction regarding the food or items which the child is allergic and steps that need to be taken to avoid that food or item.

For other special health care needs, the Care Plan for a Child With Special Needs in Child Care form must be completed and signed by a parent/guardian and the child's healthcare provider.

ARRIVAL SEPARATION

Due to the emotional nature of leaving a young child, it is normal that your child may cry on arrival. The crying usually stops within seconds of your departure. We ask that when you bring your child you make your goodbye brief. It is much easier on the child when the impending separation is not long and drawn out.

NAP TIME

Children are required to rest after lunch for approx. 1 hour per day. Each child will be assigned their own rest mat provided by Berks Nature Preschool. Please provide a sleeping bag or a Nap Roll labeled with your child's name. Children may bring ONE SMALL rest stuffed animal if needed. Children are not required to sleep. Those children who do not sleep will rest or read books.

The Berks Nature Preschool is not responsible for any items that are misplaced, damaged, and/or stolen. There is a lost and found box.

Prep & Routines

WHAT TO BRING TO SCHOOL

The emergent curriculum encourages children to explore and discover, which can be messy. For this reason, it is important that children come dressed for messy, outside play. Clothing that can be covered in mud, paint, and other materials is a must every day. When your child comes home dirty from exploring, we have done our job. Children will also need comfortable, closed-toed, protective shoes with gripping soles for running, jumping, and climbing. If your child does not come to school in appropriate outdoor clothing and shoes, you will be called and asked to bring in appropriate clothing for your child.

Layers of clothing for changing weather and moving from outdoors to indoors are needed for children to enjoy the variety of activities offered throughout the day. You should expect your child to go outside every day. The only exceptions will be thunderstorms or extreme wind chills and/or temperatures.

Clothing needs for each season include:

Fall

Jacket or Sweatshirt
Rain Jacket with Hood
Rain Pants
Rubber Boots
Water Shoes (early fall)

Winter

Winter Coat
Snow Pants
Snow Boots
Hat
Waterproof Mittens
Wool/Fleece Socks

Spring

Snow Boots (early spring) or Rubber Boots (late spring)
Winter Coat (early spring) or Jacket/Sweatshirt (late spring)
Rain Jacket with Hood
Rain Pants

Additionally, your child should bring the following:

- Backpack with your child's name on it.
- Lunch and a drink kept in an insulated lunch box.
- A reusable water bottle (very important).
- Sunscreen (kept in a locked cabinet at school)
- Spare set of seasonal clothes (required) and will be kept at the preschool in case your child should need to change into a fresh set of clothing.
- Rain boots or snow boots that can be left at school
- A "ready to have lots of fun" attitude

CLEARLY MARK YOUR CHILD'S NAME ON ALL ITEMS THEY BRING TO SCHOOL.

We would appreciate it if children would please leave the following items at home:

- Money (except for designated days)
- iPods and other electronic devices
- Trading cards, stuffed animals, or any other toys

The Berks Nature Preschool is not responsible for any items that are misplaced, damaged, and/or stolen. There is a lost and found box.



Prep & Routines continued

COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PARENT-STAFF COMMUNICATION

We are interested in hearing your suggestions and appreciate your calls! Please let us know of any questions, suggestions, and difficulties so we can provide you and your child with a successful nature preschool experience. You can contact the Berks Nature Preschool directly during school hours. (See page 4 for contact information.)

Contacting Us About Your Child's Classroom Experience

If you have a question or comment about your child's classroom experience, please contact the lead teacher. Communicate directly with the Nature Preschool Director for serious concerns.

Contacting Us About the Preschool Program

If you have questions or comments about the Nature Preschool policies, procedures, or guidelines, please contact the Nature Preschool Director.

PROCARE APP

We use the Procare app to communicate with family members. You will be asked to download the Procare app prior to the beginning of the school year.

DAILY INFORMATION, CONFERENCES & NEWSLETTERS

Please check your child's cubby daily for important information and items to take home.

Conferences will be scheduled in the fall (October) and spring (May) for every Berks Nature Preschool child.

Weekly Newsletters/Calendars will be sent home informing parents/guardians of the week's activities and the upcoming month's important dates. The preschool will also display and update the calendar on a monthly basis.

POLICIES & GUIDELINES

STUDENT- AND STAFF-RELATED POLICIES & GUIDELINES

Confidentiality

Sick Policy

Medicines from Home

Return to School

Emergency Information

Fire Drill and Evacuation Plan

Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Prevention Policy

Reporting Procedure

Employee and Worker Screening and Selection

Field Trip Policy

Weather and Outdoor Play Procedures

Preschool Rules

Special Needs

Individualized Education Plan

Using the Bathroom

Supporting Language Development and Academic Achievement of Children Who are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

Referral to Community Agencies

Behavior Guidance and Discipline Policy

Inclusion Policy (see Enrollment page 7)

Suspension and Expulsion Policy

You will be asked to sign and acknowledge that you read and understand this section.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Our program staff receive ongoing training and agree to follow the ethical responsibilities for maintaining confidentiality when conducting assessments of children. All information contained in your child's records is confidential, and anyone not directly involved with the care of your child or affiliated with state licensing, protective services, or other government agencies will not have access to your child's records without your prior written consent. As a parent or guardian, you have the right to add information, comments, data, or other relevant material to your child's records. Additionally, you may request, in writing, the deletion or amendment of any information contained in your child's record, and we will consider that request in accordance with any applicable court order or signed parental agreement. We are happy to provide you with reasonable access to your child's on-site records.

SICK POLICY

When your child starts school, you need to plan for sick days. We realize that these unpredictable sick days make life complicated for parents. The best approach is to be prepared and create an alternative care plan at the beginning of the year.

If your child is sick, please keep him/her home for their own sake and for the sake of the other preschoolers and staff members. In the event that your child becomes ill during the school day, we will contact the parent/guardian listed on the **HEALTH/ PERMISSION FORM** followed by those listed as emergency contacts. In the event that your child becomes ill during the school day he or she must be picked up within 1 hour of contact in order to reduce the risk of contagion.

Berks Nature Preschool reserves the right to temporarily deny any child admittance to the school for reasons of obvious illness.

CHILDREN ARE REQUIRED TO STAY HOME IF THEY HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ILLNESSES:

- **Fever:** Children will be sent home if their temperature is 100.0 or higher and must stay home the next day for observation. Children must be free of fever at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication. The same policy applies if your child develops a fever at home.
- **Rash:** Children will be sent home to receive an evaluation and diagnosis from their doctor. They may return to school based on a written doctor's evaluation stating that the rash is not contagious.
- **Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye):** Children will be sent home if they appear to have pink eye. They may return to school based on a written doctor's evaluation stating that the child is not contagious. If the diagnosis is BACTERIAL CONJUNCTIVITIS children must have received at least 24 hours of treatment.
- **Diarrhea:** Children will be sent home if they have more than two loose bowel movements on a particular day. Before returning to school children must be free from diarrhea for at least 24 hours.
- **Vomiting:** Children will be sent home if they vomit and must stay home the following day for observation. Before returning to school children must be symptom-free for at least 24 hours.
- **Thick White, Green, or Yellow Discharge:** This often indicates an infection. Children may return to school based on a written doctor's evaluation and diagnosis. If they do not have an infection they may return to school (with a doctor's note). If they do have an infection they need at least 24 hours of treatment along with a doctor's note to return. Most doctors suggest that once on medication for 24 hours the infection is no longer contagious.

MEDICATIONS FROM HOME

Medication that needs to be administered to a child should:

- Be brought directly to the Nature Preschool Director by the parent or caregiver in the original medicine container and with specific directions for dispensing the medication
- Be accompanied by a written note containing permission for the preschool staff to administer the medication, dosage information, time, and dates to be given to the child, parent's name, phone number, and physician's name and phone number for reference.

RETURN TO SCHOOL

Berks Nature Preschool children will be spending a large portion of their days outside. We ask that parents use their own judgement when sending their children back to school after being sick. Make sure your child will feel up to participating comfortably in our usual program activities, including all outdoor time.

MEDICAL ↑

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

In the event of an emergency, every effort will be made to reach you or other contacts on your child's registration form. If we are unable to reach any of the persons listed, we will take the necessary actions for the health of your child. Should there be any changes in the emergency contact information, please notify Berks Nature in writing so that we may update your child's file.

FIRE DRILLS

- A fire drill shall be held at least every 60 days. Facility persons and children in attendance shall participate in the fire drill. Facility persons and children shall exit the building.
- A written record shall be kept of the date, the time of day, the hypothetical location of the fire, the evacuation time, the names of facility persons and the number of children participating in the fire drill.
- Fire drills shall be held at different times of the day or night, or both, if applicable.
- Fire drills shall be held during various program activity times.
- Hypothetical locations of the fire shall be changed for each drill.
- Evacuation routes shall be posted.
- Evacuation plans shall provide for removal of all persons from the facility in a single trip.

FIRE DRILL PROCEDURES

The basis of fire safety is risk assessment. These are carried out by the Preschool Director or the President of Berks Nature.

Fire doors are clearly marked, never obstructed, and easily opened from the inside. These doors are kept locked or bolted during preschool sessions for the safeguarding of children but all staff and volunteers are aware of this and can easily open the doors by disengaging the lock or bolts.

Smoke detectors/alarms and firefighting appliances conform to PA standards, are fitted in appropriate high-risk areas of the building, and are checked once per month as recommended by the U.S. Fire Administration.

Our emergency evacuation procedures are approved by the Preschool Director/Fire Safety Officer and are:

- clearly displayed on the premises
- explained to new members of staff, volunteers and parents
- practiced regularly at least once every 30 days.

Records are kept of fire drills and the servicing of fire safety equipment.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire or fire drill or the need to evacuate the building for any other reason, the following procedure will be adhered to.

- The fire alarm will sound to alert children and adults present in the building.
- The fire exits are clearly labeled. The Director or Lead Teacher for that session will collect the clipboard containing emergency contact information of all children and staff as well as attendance for that particular day. The emergency contact information along with the attendance sheet will be updated on a regular basis at any point when the attendance changes.
- Children and staff will evacuate the building in a calm and orderly manner taking the exit furthest away from the fire and meeting at the assembly point.
- The Director or Lead Teacher will check the bathrooms and storage areas before leaving the building. Children and adults will be assembled in a safe area where the attendance will be collected by the Director or Lead Teacher. The evacuation is timed for recording in the Fire Drill Log Book.
- The Director or Lead Teacher will contact the emergency services in the event of a real fire. Parents are contacted by telephone in a real emergency and will be told where to collect their children from.
- Children will be taken to the Alvernia Alumni House located at the intersection of St. Bernardine Street and Greenway Terrace in the event of a real fire or other emergencies.
- The meeting place for the scheduled drills will be the Nature Play Area outside of the Nature Place.

You will be asked to sign and acknowledge that you read and understand this section.

Emergency & Fire



SEXUAL ABUSE AND MISCONDUCT PREVENTION POLICY

Berks Nature Preschool prohibits and does not tolerate sexual abuse or misconduct in the workplace or during any organization-related activity. Berks Nature Preschool provides procedures for employees, volunteers, board members or any other victims of sexual abuse or misconduct to report such acts. Those reasonably suspected or believed to have committed sexual abuse or misconduct will be appropriately disciplined, up to and including termination of employment or membership, as well as criminally prosecuted. No employee, volunteer, board member or other person, regardless of his or her title or position has the authority to commit or allow sexual abuse or misconduct.

MANDATED REPORTERS

Our school teachers and staff are considered mandated reporters and are required by law to immediately report suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse.

DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

The following definitions or examples of sexual abuse, misconduct, or harassment, may apply to any and/or all of the following persons – employees, volunteers, or other third parties.

Sexual abuse or misconduct may include, but is not limited to:

- Child sexual abuse – any sexual activity, involvement, or attempt of sexual contact with a person who is a minor (under 18 years old).
- Sexual activity with another who is legally incompetent or otherwise unable to give consent.
- Physical assaults or violence, such as rape, sexual battery, abuse, molestation, or any attempt to commit such acts.
- Unwanted and intentional physical conduct that is sexual in nature, such as touching, pinching, patting, brushing, massaging someone's neck or shoulders, and/or pulling against another's body or clothes.
- Material such as pornographic or sexually explicit images, posters, calendars, or objects.
- Unwelcome and inappropriate sexual activities, advances, comments, innuendoes, bullying, jokes, gestures, electronic communications or messages (e.g. email, text, social media, voicemail), exploitation, exposure, leering, stalking, or invasion of sexual privacy.
- A sexually hostile environment is characterized as comments or conduct that unreasonably interferes with one's work performance or ability to do the job or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.
- Direct or implied threats that submission to sexual advances will be a condition of employment or affiliation with the organization.

You will be asked to sign and acknowledge that you read and understand this section.

Prevention 

REPORTING PROCEDURE

By law, mandated reporters are required to make a report of suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse under any of the following circumstances:

- They come into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation, and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity, or service.
- They are directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance, or training of the child, or are affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church, or religious organization, or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance, or training of the child.
- A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse.
- An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.

It is not required that the child come before the mandated reporter in order to make a report of suspected child abuse nor are they required to identify the person responsible for the child abuse to make a report of suspected child abuse.

Mandated reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313.

It is not required to directly confront the person who is the source of the report, question, or complaint before notifying ChildLine.

ANTI-RETALIATION AND FALSE ALLEGATIONS

Berks Nature Preschool prohibits retaliation made against any employee, volunteer, board member or other person who lodges a good faith complaint of sexual abuse or misconduct or who participates in any related investigation. Making knowingly false or malicious accusations of sexual abuse or misconduct can have serious consequences for those who are wrongly accused. Berks Nature Preschool prohibits making false or malicious sexual misconduct allegations, as well as deliberately providing false information during an investigation. Anyone who violates this rule is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or membership and criminal prosecution.

INVESTIGATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Berks Nature Preschool will take all allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct seriously and will cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by law enforcement or other regulatory/protective services agencies. Berks Nature Preschool will make every reasonable effort to keep the matters involved in the allegation as confidential as possible while still allowing for a prompt and thorough investigation.

Berks Nature Preschool will not attempt to investigate or assess the validity or credibility of an allegation of sexual or physical abuse as a condition before reporting the allegation to proper law enforcement authorities or protective services organizations.

All Berks Nature Preschool employees are required to go through the training to become a Mandated Reporter.



Prevention continued

EMPLOYEE AND WORKER SCREENING AND SELECTION

As part of its sexual abuse and misconduct prevention program, Berks Nature Preschool is committed to maintaining a diligent screening program for prospective and existing employees, volunteers and others that may have interaction with those employed by, associating with or serviced by Berks Nature Preschool.

The organization may utilize a variety of methods of screening and selection, including but not limited to applications, personal interviews, criminal background checks and personal and professional references.

FIELD TRIP POLICY

Because we are a nature preschool, any time we are outside of the school building we are considered to be on a field trip/excursion. It is important to make our outings as safe as possible while also allowing children to learn in a variety of settings. Berks Nature Preschool has created a list of procedures and practices to ensure our off-site outings are safe and enjoyable.

Procedures and Practices:

- Berks Nature Preschool Director will notify parents of all off-site upcoming field trips requiring transportation one month in advance.
- Parents will sign a permission slip agreeing with the details of the field trip including added fees.
- A first aid kit along with all emergency contact information for all children will be taken.
- A First Aid and CPR-certified staff member will accompany the children for the duration of the trip.
- Additional staffing will be provided for adequate supervision when necessary.
- Children will be counted numerous times throughout the trip to ensure the group stays together and everyone is continuously accounted for.
- Children will wear name tags with Berks Nature information including name and phone number.

SUPERVISION OF YOUTH

To provide a safe environment for minors, Berks Nature Preschool strives that a minimum of two adult workers supervise or be in attendance with minors during organization-related activities. The purpose is to avoid one-on-one interactions between adults and minors that are not easily observable by others. If individual meetings with a minor must be held in an office, we keep the door open and only conduct closed-door meetings when another adult is put on notice of the meeting and the door remains unlocked.

SUPERVISION OF YOUTH



PROCEDURES FOR WEATHER AND OUTDOOR PLAY

School will be held rain, shine, and on cold winter days. The Nature Place is heated/air-conditioned, which will provide us with enough indoor space to keep the students engaged, happy, and comfortable.

OUTDOOR PLAY OBJECTIVES

To ensure that children are safe at all times. Staff on outside duty must check all areas before allowing the children to go outdoors.

- To provide varied activities that support inclusion and individual needs.
- To support children's participation in decision-making and actions affecting their outdoor play.
- To promote social skills such as sharing, turn-taking, decision making, co-operation with others, negotiation, and fairness.
- To encourage children to initiate and develop ideas for themselves.
- To provide opportunities for children to take risks, and build ideas, concepts and skills.
- To provide opportunities for children to practice their fine motor and gross motor skills.
- To provide opportunities to be boisterous, active, noisy, and messy.
- To allow children sufficient time and space to explore and engage in free play in their outdoor environment.

OUTDOOR PLAY SAFETY MEASURES

Staff members have been trained in Pediatric First Aid and CPR.

- A visual daily risk assessment of the nature play area will be conducted every morning before the children go out to play.
- If any inappropriate materials are found in the outdoor environment, they will be reported immediately to a staff person who will then inform the director.
- Staff must always maintain the recommended staff: child ratio at all times. Volunteers or parent helpers cannot supervise children on their own without another staff member.
- Although minimal, there will be a few rules regarding outdoor play. Children will have an understanding of the rules and be expected to follow them accordingly.
- At least one staff member with the children outdoors will be in contact with a staff person indoors via radio.
- Staff must always carry a radio and a safety bag at all times when taking children outdoors. The safety bag includes an emergency safety kit, water, sunscreen, and tissues.
- We have a partnership with Alvernia University to use their facilities when needed if we get stuck outside in bad weather and are closer in proximity to their facilities than Berks Nature Preschool.

Weather Exceptions

- During the Spring and Summer months when the weather is hot, parents are asked to apply sunscreen before coming to school and to wear sunhats and appropriate clothing. See list of appropriate dress in *Berks Nature Preschool Family Handbook*.
- In winter and rain, the children will continue with outdoor activities. Parents are requested to provide appropriate clothing, e.g. hats, coats, snow pants, snow boots, etc.
- In the event of extreme weather conditions, children will not be allowed to play outside or if there are possible potential hazards that can compromise the health and safety of the children.
- Children will have access to the outdoor environment frequently and on a daily basis. Outdoor activities will continue throughout all seasons.



OUTDOOR PLAY & WEATHER

PRESCHOOL RULES

Preschool is the perfect environment to promote social skills and self-esteem in children. To achieve this, we include age-specific groups and activities, low teacher-student ratios, positive reinforcement, group and individual decision-making, and attention to the individual needs of each child. You are your child's own best advocate and so we encourage you to share any special information about your child that you feel will help ensure that he or she has a successful school experience.

All students are expected to follow basic rules of behavior. These rules will be explained at the beginning of each school year and reviewed regularly. The Berks Nature Preschool Director and teachers will be constantly supervising students over the course of the day.

SCHOOL RULES

1. All students must be with a nature preschool staff member at all times.
2. Students should be respectful of self, peers, and nature preschool staff at all times.
3. Play safely and fairly (no fighting or threatening behavior will be tolerated).

SPECIAL NEEDS

We strive to meet the needs of all children. In order for us to be able to help your child have an enjoyable experience at preschool, we ask that you notify us of your child's special needs prior to your child's first day of school. This may include information on allergies, accessibility concerns, behavioral, psychological or emotional conditions or other special needs. While we offer our school to as wide a range of children as possible, it is not possible for us to offer one-on-one care. Students requiring more attention than the prescribed teacher-to-student ratio provides (1:10) must be accompanied by a parent-provided Therapeutic Staff Support at all times at school. If your child has special issues or requires a TSS, please contact Berks Nature at 610-372-4992 to provide additional information to help us meet your child's individual needs.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN

We want to provide the greatest amount of support for your child while they are in our care. It is important that we are aware of all of your child's needs. If your child is currently being supported through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Specialized Plan (IFSP), we want to be able to support those practices. We would like for you to provide us with a copy of the plan for our records and consider including us in meetings with your support team. We are here to support your child and family.

USING THE BATHROOM

All students need to be fully potty trained and able to use the bathroom independently to attend the Berks Nature Preschool. We understand accidents occur with preschool children. The extra set of clothing you provide will be used if an accident does occur.

You will be asked to sign and acknowledge that you read and understand this section.

RULES & SUPPORT



SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN WHO ARE CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE

Purpose:

Program policies & practices are in place to support language development and academic achievement of children who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Procedure:

Developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate learning experiences will be delivered in all of our classrooms. Collaborative relationships are built with families to support academic achievement and social-emotional development. For children whose first language is not English, they are supported using gestures, communication devices, sign language, etc. when needed.

- Recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as a strength.
- Incorporate the home language into the classroom environment using common words and phrases in the native language.
- Incorporate teaching practices that focus on English language acquisition and the continued development of the home language.
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate materials and activities are used in the classrooms.
- Include equipment, materials, and supplies that support diversity.
- Interpreters can be used for communication and the translation of program documents. These interpreters must be organized by the family.

REFERRAL TO COMMUNITY AGENCIES

After observations, assessments and conferences are conducted along with personal discussions with you, your child's parent. If it is necessary to refer a child for additional services than Berks Nature Preschool can provide, there is a list of community resources that we can consult to make a recommendation for appropriate social, mental health, education, wellness, or medical services including early intervention.



We believe children learn self-control when adults treat them with dignity and use discipline techniques such as the following:

1. Guiding children by setting clear consistent limits for group behavior.
2. Visualizing mistakes as learning opportunities.
3. Redirecting children to a more acceptable behavior or activity.
4. Listening when children talk about their feelings and frustrations.
5. Guiding children to resolve conflicts and modeling skills that help them solve their own problems.
6. Patiently reminding children of the rules and their rationale as needed.

BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE

Praise and positive reinforcement are effective methods of behavior management for children. When children receive positive, nonviolent, and understanding interactions from adults and others, they develop good self-concepts, problem-solving abilities, and self-discipline. Based on this belief, Berks Nature Preschool uses a positive approach to discipline and practices the following discipline and behavior management techniques.

Preventive Actions

- Berks Nature Preschool staff members will work to prevent unacceptable behavior rather than dealing with it after the fact. We will conduct the following intervention strategies to prevent challenging behaviors: arranging the classroom environment, consistent scheduling and effectively implementing rules, rituals and routines. We will redirect children to steer their behavior in a positive healthy direction.

Expectations and Consequences

- Berks Nature staff members will provide children with concrete expectations for every action.
- Consequences are not about punishment. Consequences are a way to guide and manage children's behavior.

Positive Guidance

- Berks Nature staff members will teach children how to make safe and healthy choices by encouraging children to behave appropriately.
- Positive guidance also involves giving effective praise to children behaving appropriately. Effective praise is selective, specific, encouraging, and positive while avoiding competition. It compares a child's progress with their past performance rather than with other children. It is delivered in a caring, natural tone of voice.

Redirection

- Berks Nature staff members will redirect inappropriate behavior by reducing the child's frustration and empowering them to make the right choice.
- Strategies used at Berks Nature Preschool to redirect inappropriate behavior are as follows: request desirable behavior, model appropriate behavior, provide substitutions, and relocate to allow children to focus on a different task.

Brain Breaks

- At Berks Nature Preschool Brain Breaks are used as short breaks (on a case-by-case basis) to allow children the opportunity to pause and start over. This may enable them to take charge of their own behavior or at least to hear and understand what the adult is saying.
- When in a Brain Break children will sit for one minute per their age in years. For example, a child who is three will sit for three minutes.
- Before being reintroduced to the group the teacher will get on the child's level and discuss the behaviors that put them in the time out followed by what would be considered a more appropriate reaction.



Behavior & Discipline

Communication

Parents will be contacted throughout the day with frequent updates on a case-by-case basis. The Berks Nature Preschool Director will immediately notify parents of any reoccurring or major behavior challenges.

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION POLICY

Our goal is to solve behavioral issues that could lead to expulsion or suspension.

At Berks Nature Preschool we implement preventative strategies such as:

- .Training staff to be culturally sustaining and linguistically responsive.
- .Strategically analyzing the effects of implicit biases within our program.
- .Utilizing support from community partners when necessary.

These strategies promote an inclusive and well-prepared environment for all of our children and avoid suspension or expulsion when possible.

If a behavioral issue is identified, caregivers and program leadership will examine patterns of behavior, how staff and families are engaged, and request assistance from state or community resources.

Support will be provided in order for staff to engage in two-way communication with the child's family on challenges and successes. Conference time will be set aside to discuss current observations as well as strategies being implemented in the classroom.

A list of resources will be provided to support families and caregivers during this process. If a referral is necessary, the caregiver and program leadership will discuss recommendations with the family and support them through the process.

Our goal is to avoid suspension or expulsion but we expect families to partner with us to provide the necessary support for the child's success in the classroom. If the family is unable or unwilling to partner, suspension or expulsion may be necessary.

**Berks Nature Preschool reserves the right to suspend or expel any child who is engaging in unsafe outdoor behavior. We spend the majority of our day in an uncontained outdoor environment. With the assistance of teachers, children must be able to follow basic safety rules on a consistent basis in order to participate in our program*



Discipline

continued

Berks Nature | The Nature Place
575 St. Bernardine Street
Reading, PA 19607
610-372-4994
GPS Coordinates: Lat/Long 40.3111367, -75.92636222222222



LOCAL DIRECTIONS (VIA ROUTES 422, 222 AND 61)

From the North (Schuylkill County, Lehigh Valley)

Follow Routes 61 or 222 South to Reading/Lancaster until you reach Rt. 422 East. Follow Rt 422 East (towards Pottstown) until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit--this will be a left-lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a right onto Lancaster Ave *continued below

From the West (Lebanon)

Follow Rt. 422 East to Reading until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit--this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a right onto Lancaster Ave. *continued below

From the East (Pottstown, Norristown)

Follow Rt 422 West to Reading until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit--this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a left onto Lancaster Ave. *continued below

From the South (Lancaster)

Follow Rt 222 North to Reading. Take Rt 422 East towards Pottstown until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit--this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp. make a right onto Lancaster Ave. *continued below

REGIONAL DIRECTIONS

From the East (via Philadelphia and the PA Turnpike)

Follow Rt 76 West (Schuylkill Expressway) towards Valley Forge and enter the PA Turnpike (Rt. 76 West). Continue West on the Turnpike towards Harrisburg for approximately 28 miles. Take Exit 298 (Morgantown/Reading) and proceed on I-176 North toward Reading for approximately 8 miles. Take Exit 7 (Green Hills/Rt 10) and turn left onto Rt 10 toward Reading. Follow Rt. 10 North for 4.5 miles and make a left onto Saint Bernardine Street. The entrance is marked Alvernia University. You will be entering Angelica Creek Park. You will see The Nature Place on your right. Continue driving past The Nature Place to the parking lot on the right. Park and follow the Angelica Creek Trail a short distance by foot to The Nature Place.

From the West (via Harrisburg and the PA Turnpike)

Follow the PA Turnpike East toward Reading and take Exit 286 (Lancaster/Reading). Then take Rt 222 North toward Reading and follow for approximately 11 miles. Take Rt 422 East toward Pottstown until you reach the BUS 222 (Lancaster Ave) exit--this will be a left lane exit. At the bottom of the ramp, make a right onto Lancaster Ave. *continued below

***from LANCASTER AVENUE**

From the East (via Philadelphia and the PA Turnpike)

Make an immediate left onto Rt 10 (Morgantown Rd). You will see the Queen City Diner at the intersection. Proceed for 1.2 miles and make a right onto Saint Bernardine Street. The entrance is marked Alvernia University. You will be entering Angelica Creek Park. You will see The Nature Place on your right. Continue driving past The Nature Place to the parking lot on the right. Park and follow the Angelica Creek Trail a short distance by foot to The Nature Place.

There is no public vehicle access directly to The Nature Place building. If you have accessibility concerns, please call us in advance of your visit. We will accommodate you. **The parking lot and trail comply with ADA Standards.**



BERKS NATURE PRESCHOOL
THE NATURE PLACE
575 ST. BERNARDINE STREET
READING, PA 19607
610-372-4992 EXT 115 (PHONE) • 610-372-2917 (FAX)
WWW.BERKSNATURE.ORG/PRESCHOOL

2022 - 2023 BERKS NATURE PRESCHOOL FAMILY HANDBOOK