



Welcome to

Nature's Lab
A BILINGUAL, EXPERIENTIAL PLAY SCHOOL

Our roots...

Nature's Lab School, LLC was founded in 2018 by Silvia Anderson, based on her dream of creating a bilingual preschool grounded on recent research demonstrating that a child learns and develops best when exposed to respectful relationships, natural environments, and hands-on experiences. Our nature-based, emergent STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) curriculum was established based on this modern research, demonstrating that nature-based programs significantly improve children's cognitive, emotional, and motor skills development.

At Nature's Lab, we aim to create a fun, educational atmosphere where children thrive, foster long-lasting relationships, and engage in a diverse series of dynamic, child-led learning activities that encourage creative thinking and problem-solving.

The seed of Nature's Lab sprouted in Silvia's heart during her master's thesis work, revealing the benefits of outdoor play. This passion grew as she coached and evaluated child development programs throughout California, noticing that many schools didn't take advantage of what the research tells us works best for children. Through her years as a preschool/toddler teacher, coach/assessor, professor, and manager of Sacramento County's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Early Learning programs, Silvia has been greatly inspired by her wonderful mentors, teachers, and colleagues who have been an integral part of her career, and who eagerly encouraged her to bring her dream to fruition, and continue to inspire her to continue her mission and vision.

Silvia's husband, Dr. Johnathon Anderson, a former artist, utilizes his Ph.D. in molecular genetics as a professor at the UC Davis Medical Center. His research lab focuses on developing stem cell-based therapeutics. His passion for teaching and STEAM education became a strong driver that helped Silvia craft Nature's Lab. Their young son, Luke, provided tons of additional inspiration and personally tested out all of the equipment and activities prior to the school opening and continues to be a part of Nature's Lab School as a student, inspiration, and motivation.

Nature's Lab is the culmination of the Anderson Family's love and passion for learning, nature, discovery, positive relationships, education, and connection. We are so excited our dream has been embraced by many families. We work hard daily to build a strong community and long-lasting relationships that have benefited many families and inspired others.

"Every kid starts out as a natural-born scientist." –Carl Sagan

Our Mission

Is to provide a safe, respectful, dynamic, child-focused learning environment where children and families develop a sense of wonder, connection, and community.

Nature's Lab is a bilingual, experiential play school that encourages children's natural curiosity and love for exploration, learning, research, and creativity. Our program exposes children to outdoor play, STEAM opportunities (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math), and age-appropriate activities to meet each child's personal interests. Our Spanish bilingual program allows for advanced language acquisition opportunities and encourages global citizenship.

Our use of *Conscious Discipline** as our social-emotional curriculum helps children learn and practice problem-solving, cooperation, acceptance, self-control, and kindness with one another and themselves, allowing all involved to create a respectful *School Family**.

Our School

Nature's Lab is a bilingual school in Carmichael, California. We offer individualized care for children between the ages of 24 months old to 1st-grade entry and operate Monday through Friday from 7:45 am to 4:45 pm. Organic meals are provided daily and frequently include ingredients grown in our garden and eggs produced by our chickens and ducks.

Nature's Lab provides children with a balance between dynamic and observation-based activities designed to meet each child's current emotional, social, physical, and cognitive developmental stage. Our days are spent mostly in our rich, **outdoor** classrooms featuring a mud kitchen, dry creek, sand /water area, organic vegetable garden, dramatic play, music/stage, science, library, loose parts, arts, math, and engineering areas, and much more. Children are encouraged to explore all areas based on their personal interests. However, there is a structured activity each day that introduces a new concept/material/opportunity. Participation in this activity is encouraged but not mandatory. We also provide multiple peaceful, quiet areas for children to use when they need a break, want some time away to process what they have been experiencing, spend some time with their thoughts and emotions, or simply take time to relax.

Our outdoor classroom is full of loose parts to support invention, divergent thinking, and problem-solving and encourage a sense of wonder. Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart, and put back together in multiple ways. They are materials with no specific directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials.

Our program is inspired by the Waldorf educational philosophy, Scandinavian schools, Reggio Emilia in Italy, Maria Montessori, the Outdoor Classroom Project, Nature Explorer, and the unique experiences of the NLS founder. We support children's healthy, age-appropriate development by using a combination of these philosophies to ensure children engage in meaningful, individualized activities that pique their personal interests in a program oriented towards helping children develop in a fun, supportive, engaging outdoor environment. Our staff

ensures children are engaged in exploration by emphasizing our child-led STEAM curriculum (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math), and we do at least 60% of it in Spanish.

Everyone at Nature’s Lab School strives to build a strong community within and between our families. We model the values of service, support, and cooperation. This includes multiple activities for families to get together (nature walks, mom’s night out, family night, etc.), parent participation, and volunteering unique skills to help make our school and community better each and every day.

Admission Policies

Families interested in joining the Nature’s Lab community must tour the facility with their children and other caregivers to ensure we are a good fit for one another. Caregivers must read all Nature’s Lab policies and procedures, including the parent handbook, to ensure we are all on the same page. Once all parties have determined that Nature’s Lab is a good fit for the new family, all forms, documentation, and payment must be submitted before a child’s first day of attendance. This includes the forms listed below, as well as proof of vaccinations. After enrollment, these forms must be updated as needed. Please note that if personal information changes, you must inform NLS and update the applicable forms.

Forms Due Before Attending Nature’s Lab

1. **Identification & Emergency Information.** This form is required each year to ensure we have the most current information on file in case of an emergency. We encourage you to include an “Out of State Contact” for use in the event of a large-scale natural disaster (i.e., earthquake, etc.). *This form must be updated any time information changes.*
2. **Child’s Preadmission & Health History - Parent’s Report.** This form contains personal information about your child’s health history and personal habits.
3. **Identification and Emergency Information (Child Care Centers)(LIC 700)**
4. **Child’s Preadmission Health History - Parent’s Report (LIC 702)**
5. **Consent for Emergency Medical Treatment & Transportation Agreement (LIC 627).** This form must be filled out and signed by the parent or legal guardian. Please remember to list any medication your child may be allergic to on the top portion of this page.
6. **Physician’s Report - Child Care Centers (LIC 701).** This form is a medical-assessment requirement, including TB skin testing if indicated by the child’s physician.
7. **Notification of Parents’ Rights/Caregiver, Background Check Process (LIC 995).** Please read the information on both pages and sign the Notification of Parent’s Rights page to acknowledge that you have received this information. These copies are for you to keep for your reference.

8. **Personal Rights Form (LIC 613A).** Please read the information on this page and sign the Personal Rights page to acknowledge that you have received this information. This copy is for you to keep for your reference.
9. **Parent Contract/Admission Agreement.** Please review this document very carefully. This document outlines contracted days and times, the participation requirements for the upcoming school year, and other Nature's Lab policies. The participating caregiver(s) must sign, date, and return this contract.
10. **Needs and Services Plan (for infants and children with special needs)** [CCR, Title 22, Section 101419.2]
11. **Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ-3 & ASQ-SE-2).** Completed at enrollment and every 6 months. Your answers will help us better understand your child and how we can support her/him best as we plan our curriculum and environment.
12. **Getting to Know Your Child Questionnaire.** Completed to provide us additional information to help make your child feel as comfortable and welcome as possible.
13. **Photo Release Form.** Allows us to know how we may be able to use any pictures we take of your child engaged in fun, educational activities outside of our internal parent communication app.
14. **Proof of Vaccinations.** Nature's Lab does NOT accept any exemptions.

Immunizations (shots) needed before the first day and at each age checkpoint after entry:

AGE WHEN ADMITTED	TOTAL NUMBER OF DOSES REQUIRED OF EACH IMMUNIZATION				
2 through 3 Months	1 Polio	1 DTaP	1 Hep B	1 Hib	
4 through 5 Months	2 Polio	2 DTaP	2 Hep B	2 Hib	
6 through 14 Months	2 Polio	3 DTaP	2 Hep B	2 Hib	
15 through 17 Months	3 Polio	3 DTaP	2 Hep B		1 Varicella
	On or after 1st birthday:			1 Hib*	1 MMR
18 months through 5 years	3 Polio	4 DTaP	3 Hep B		1 Varicella
	On or after 1st birthday:			1 Hib*	1 MMR

Surveys

Surveys and other emails are sent throughout the year to gather information and make decisions for the school and future social events. Please be on the lookout for these communications and share your honest feedback.

Sample Daily Schedule

Nature's Lab is a Preschool program with extended hours (NLS is not a daycare).

NLS is open from 7:45 am to 4:45 pm, Monday through Friday. We serve children ages 24 months old to first-grade entry.

7:45 am Opening

8:00- 8:00 am: Child-led learning and Discovery Walk

9:00 am: Breakfast

Child-focused STEAM learning

Literacy-focused

11:45 am: Lunch

12:30 pm - 2:30 pm: Nap time (or until child wakes up)

Child-led STEAM learning

Group time

Child-led STEAM learning

3:00 pm Healthy snack

Literacy-focused

4:45 pm: End of the day

**The daily schedule is subject to change based on weather and individual interests.*

Tuition and Fees

Tuition is due on the first day of the month before the start of care. A \$50 late fee will be assessed on the 3rd of the same month if tuition is not paid by the 2nd of the month. If payment has not been received, a child will no longer be able to attend care on the 5th of the month. A family will be disenrolled by the 7th of the month if tuition for the month still has not been received. Each family is responsible for ensuring NLS receives full payment on time. (See Payment Methods section below)

Children 24 months old \$1500

Children 25 months old-36 months old \$1375

Children 37 months-6 years old \$1275

Supplementary Services

We offer Yoga and Storytime with special guests throughout the year. We may offer dance, gymnastics, and other options for an additional fee for interested families soon.

Transportation Services

Nature's Lab does not offer transportation at this time. Families must arrange for transportation of their children to and from Nature's Lab.

Payment Policy

You are responsible for the full monthly tuition even when your child does not attend Nature's Lab due to vacation, illness, or any other reason, including forced closure due to public emergencies. This also applies to school closures for holidays and staff development (*see our annual calendar*). Should the school need to be closed due to local, county, or state emergencies, including health emergencies longer than three weeks, the tuition would decrease to 50% beginning the 1st of the month after the original start of the closure. Tuition would go back to 100% as soon as school reopens. For example: If the school has to close on March 16 and remain closed until June 1st, April and May tuition would be 50% of the regular tuition, and June 1 would return to 100% regular tuition.

The annual registration fee is \$250 for continuing students and \$300.00 for new students. Annual registration is non-refundable and due at enrollment and each March to keep your space for the following year.

The annual materials fee is \$250 for continuing students and \$300.00 for new students. Annual materials are non-refundable and due at enrollment and each August for the following year.

There is a Non-Potty trained (NPT) weekly fee of \$15 for **all** students who are not yet toilet trained. Non-Potty-trained is defined as not yet using the toilet independently, without assistance, and applies to children of all ages enrolled in our program.

There is a returned check fee of \$35.00 for each returned check.

Payment methods

We have a few payment options:

1. If your bank uses Zelle, you can transfer to Nature's Lab School using our email address s.anderson@natureslabschool.com
2. Schedule an ACH payment (your bank may charge you for this option) using our bank account number
3. Check written to Nature's Lab School, LLC.

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In case of emergencies, a family may use:

1. PayPal- however, you would need to add an additional 3.5% to your payment as this is how much PayPal charges business per payment*
2. Venmo- However, you would need to add an additional 3% to your payment as this is how much Venmo charges business per payment*.

***It is your responsibility to ensure FULL tuition is paid to NLS.**

Late Pick-Up Fees

Due at pick up or the next day:

\$15/instance for the first 5 minutes.
 \$20/instance for the first 10 minutes.
 \$25/instance for the first 15 minutes.
 \$40/instance for the first 30 minutes.

\$5 per minute after the first 30 minutes.

Early Drop-Off Fees*

*With prior approval only: \$20/instance for the first 15 minutes. \$30/instance for the first 30 minutes if staffing is available.

Supplies List

The following items are required and will be stored in your child's box at Nature's Lab. Please label **all items*** with your child's name or initials, and consistently check to ensure enough supplies are available for your child at school.

- A. 3 changes of clothes appropriate for the season and child's age (including socks and shoes)
- B. 2-Reusable water bottles that do not have a removable straw and can use them independently.
- C. Sun hat and sunscreen (non-spray)
- D. Rain boots, raincoat, and rain pants, or overall Rain suit (rain boots count as one pair of shoes for item A)
- E. 2-big containers of baby wipes/ gloves per month (average of 200 wipes)
- F. Bedding for our cots like this: All-in-one Nap Mat
https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08YFLQN61/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o09_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1
- G. 3 family pictures to be added to our Family Wall inside the classrooms.
- H. 5 well-fitted masks daily (During the COVID-19 pandemic or any lingering symptoms)

Optional Recommended Items:

- i. A small blanket* that covers the child from shoulder to toe.

- ii. Your child's comfort object (please do not bring toys. One labeled-small, stuffed animal is ok)
- iii. A family photo to help them with feelings of separation

****We cannot be responsible for anything that is not labeled. Any items that are not labeled will be placed in the lost and found but may accidentally be placed in a different child's box.***

Personal Box and Lost & Found

Each child has an assigned personal box, also known as a cubbie. Write your **child's name or initials on all** items, including a water bottle, hat, boots, socks, shoes, rain boots, etc. A lost and found box will be located by the front door. Nature's Lab is not responsible for missing items that are not labeled as children at this age have very similar clothing and personal items. Please note that socks frequently go missing as children love to be barefoot at Nature's Lab.

BE SURE TO LABEL EVERYTHING YOUR CHILD BRINGS IN!

Clothing

Here at Nature's Lab, your child will be engaged in activities that will likely get his/her clothes dirty, muddy, wet, and/or stained with paint. There is also potential for clothing to get snagged on stumps and trees during tree climbing and other activities.

- Keep at least 3-full sets of clothing in your child's cubby.
- Label all items
- Do not bring any expensive clothes or items you would be sad to see altered in any way.
- Dirty clothes are sent home daily using our reusable wet bags.
- Return these reusable bags to Nature's Lab as soon as possible, as these belong to the school and are one of our many attempts to decrease our use of plastic.
- Replenish clothing that has been sent home.

Attendance

Routines are crucial for children. Therefore all children must arrive **no later than 9:30 am** each day as this allows them to be a part of group time when children select their job for the day, hear about special events for the day, and become engaged in activities along with peers.

We understand that emergencies and appointments outside of school are necessary, so we ask that you call or message us by 8:30 am if your child will arrive after 9:00 am or will not be attending school on a scheduled day so we are aware of those changes in the routine. This is important as we care about our families and will worry if you miss a day, and we plan meals, activities, and nap routines with all the children scheduled to attend in mind.

On special occasions, children may arrive as late as 11:00 am; however, **no arrivals are allowed after 11 am**. Please schedule appointments accordingly to arrive by 11 am or plan to take the whole day off.

If any day you will need to arrive after 9 am (and no later than 11:00 am), you must inform Nature's Lab by 8:30 as this will allow us to plan meals, activities, and nap for your child.

Continued late arrivals disturb routines for all children in care and may be the basis for disenrollment/termination.

Check-In and Check-Out

Caregivers must bring their children into Nature's Lab School, accompany them into the school each day, and ensure their teacher is aware of their arrival. Children will not be released to anyone under the age of 18 and will only be released to authorized adults.

- Adults who do not normally pick the child up will be required to show photo identification to staff members and **must be listed in the "Authorized to Pick Up" form.**
- We will only release a child to someone on that list with prior notification from the legal guardian on the day off.
- Primary caregivers must message via the app and let us know during the day if someone different than the primary caregiver will be picking up a child. **We will not release a child to anyone in the Authorize to Pick up form UNLESS the primary caregiver has let us know that person will be picking up on that day.**
- All persons dropping off and picking up a child are required by Community Care Licensing to sign the child in and out each day, with a full legal signature and time.
- All children must be checked in/checked out using our online app. You must bring your cellphone with you and have the app on your phone, as attendance records are mandated per Community Care licensing and are crucial in case of an emergency.

We use daily attendance records for head counts, and the list of children checked in will be used in case we must evacuate the building. Please help us make sure we can do our job to keep your child safe.

- **A \$5/per instance will be charged each time a child is not checked-in at arrival or checked out at departure, and a correction form must be completed to include the name of the person who picked up or dropped off the child, signature, date, time, and reason for correction.**

Please use the app to communicate with Nature's Lab staff as well as include sharing any last-minute notes or information we should know about your child to ensure we can meet their needs and routines daily. For example, lack of sleep, transitions at home, illness, etc. Please inform us of any change in the contact information and include any information necessary for us to support your child best. If the information is personal, please speak with us before leaving the school.

Update the communication app monthly to ensure the proper functioning of all settings.

Student/Family Roster

Each year, we provide you with our current families' roster. This is a great tool for families to connect outside school. We encourage you to build connections with other Nature's Lab families. Families need a support system and can sometimes rely on one another for extra support with transportation and childcare that all families need. Please do not share this contact information with anyone outside of the Nature's Lab community.

Group/Circle Time

Children are strongly encouraged to participate in group/circle time, but it is not mandatory. Generally, as children grow older, they develop a greater interest in participating in group activities, and some days this comes easier to some. Please be sure to arrive at Nature's Lab in time for your child to participate in group time, as this sets the stage for the day. We welcome everyone to sing, dance, talk about the plans for the day, and select what their "helper of the day" responsibilities will be. If one day you will arrive after group time, be sure to let us know so we can plan ahead to help your child engage in the activities at arrival. Please note that late arrivals are highly discouraged and should be limited as much as possible.

Children thrive on routines, and group time is part of it.

Meals and Snacks

We provide breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snacks. We encourage students to try new foods but do not force anyone to eat. However, as part of our routines, we ask all children to sit down for all meals and support them in learning to clean up after themselves.

Breakfast: 9:00 am

Lunch: 11:45 am

Afternoon Snack: 3:00 pm

Children learn best when their tummies are happy. Meals are a crucial part of our routine, so we ask that children arrive in time for breakfast which is served between 8:00 and 8:30. If your child will arrive after 9:00 am, please be sure he/she has had a healthy, substantial meal at home. Hungry kiddos have a hard time engaging in activities and can seem emotional when they are simply hungry and don't know how to express that yet.

Please do **not** bring your child to school with outside food. If you do, please know that outside food will be discarded upon entry.

We do our best to serve foods that appeal to young eaters and generally have great success! We also try to use foods from our organic garden, chickens, and ducks, which the children help to collect and prepare.

Birthday Parties and Celebrations

Feel free to reach out to us if you want to bring a special treat for your child's birthday or other celebrations. However, remember that this special treat will need to be healthy. Which, in our case, translates to no added sugars or food coloring.

Some examples of approved birthday treats include

- Chocolate covered fruits (bananas, strawberries, etc.)
- Homemade baked goods (such as banana bread).

- Fruit salads

Please be sure to check for any potential allergies before bringing any outside food into our school (Dairy, eggs, nuts, Etc...)

School Calendar

Nature's Lab is open year-round with a few closures scheduled throughout the year. The closures include teacher in-service opportunities that support our continuous professional growth and time off for all to recharge batteries and spend time with our families. Our full-time staff gives their best to our kiddos on a daily basis; therefore, they are paid during all closures. Because of this, **tuition is due monthly and does not change regardless of attendance or school closures.**

Please see the attached January - December calendar for school closure dates. The calendar changes yearly and includes dates when NLS will be closed and our monthly family get-together opportunities, parenting groups, school volunteer opportunities, holiday celebrations, and more. The calendar is updated each August and posted on our website for your reference.

Please reach out to Silvia Anderson to be a part of our event planning committee, which helps organize our events.

Meetings/Get-Together Opportunities

Parent/Teacher Meetings

There are two scheduled Parent/Teacher meetings during the year. See the calendar for these, which are scheduled in the Fall and Spring. These are great opportunities for families and teachers to get to know each other better and talk without distractions.

Timeline:

1. Caregiver: Selects meeting time.
2. Teachers: Complete assessments for each child throughout the year.
3. Caregiver: Completed ASQ-3, and ASQ-SE2 appropriate for your child's current age and ten words that best describe your child. These documents allow us to create plans and have deeper conversations about your child's development and engagement at Nature's Lab. Caregivers must provide these ASQ forms to NLS staff at least 7-days before your scheduled meeting.
4. Meeting day: Plan to meet for 30- 45 minutes on average.

Parenting Group

We provide parenting group gatherings throughout the year. The goal of these groups is to share parenting tools and strategies to support each family with their child's ever-changing needs. See the calendar for specific dates. 2022 emphasis is Conscious Discipline as this is NLS Social Emotional core curriculum

Attendance to these groups is **MANDATORY**, which means that at least one caregiver per family must attend. There will be a \$40 non-attendance fee charged to any family that is not

represented by a caregiver. We understand how busy family life is and strive to make the meetings as convenient as possible. In doing so, our meetings are group meetings in which we will provide important information and discuss topics that may benefit all caregivers. We ask that you be an active participant during these meetings.

From time to time, we will have guest speakers facilitate these meetings. If your schedule cannot accommodate these meetings, please let us know as soon as possible.

Other Get-Togethers

We offer many opportunities for families to get to know one another and for the kids to build strong, long-lasting relationships with their peers. Please look for mom's night outs, monthly hikes, and other gatherings scheduled throughout the year. Participation is optional, but we encourage families to participate in as many events as possible.

Field Trips

We do not offer field trips at this time; however, we have monthly opportunities for families to get together outdoors during hikes, play dates, and more.

We will update this section should we decide to offer field trips in the future.

Family Participation Hours

Each year, we require 15 hours of family participation per child, January-December. These hours restart each January. These hours can be fulfilled in a number of ways. If you have a talent or specialized area of interest that you would like to share, please bring that to our attention.

Parent participation hours are listed throughout the year to be completely quarterly. For example, Outdoor Classroom support day, social committee, classroom maintenance, book cleaning, and repair, etc.

If a parent would like to volunteer during school hours and interact with the children, they must provide TB test results, proof of vaccines (MMR, Tdap, and Flu), and have a clear livescan prior to volunteering.

If a family is unable to fulfill their family participation hours, the hours can be purchased at \$35/hour quarterly, however, this is discouraged.

Illness

At Nature's Lab, we take precautions to prevent the spread of major diseases as much as possible in a group care setting. This includes handwashing, sanitizing, and disinfecting our environment as needed. Because we are a mainly outdoor program, the spread of some diseases, such as the common cold and flu, tends to be significantly less than in traditional schools that spend more time indoors. We ask that you help us prevent communicable diseases by

1. Make sure you and your child wash your hands as soon as you arrive at Nature's Lab;
and

2. Keep your child at home as stated in our Illness policies for children.

Policies for Children

Your child must be kept at home if any of these symptoms arise:

- Child has a fever of 100 or more.
- Child has thrown up and/or had diarrhea in the last 24 hours.
- Child has a rash.
- Child presents with skin or eye infection.
- Child has **any** contagious condition or has been exposed to a contagious condition.
- Feel uncomfortable to a degree where he/she cannot engage in regular activities or require consistent one-on-one attention that cannot be provided in a group setting.
- Child has blisters from any illness.

Children can return to Nature's Lab after being free of any of the above symptoms for at least 24 hours **without medication**, and if applicable, once blisters have dried out completely and are deemed non-contagious by a doctor.

If your child is diagnosed with a contagious condition, please inform us right away so we can inform the parents of all children that may have been exposed. Information about the child who has the contagious condition is kept confidential. A doctor's note must be provided prior to returning to care.

If a child gets sick while at Nature's Lab, a caregiver will be notified for early pick-up. If a child has a minor injury at school, such as a scratch, parents will be notified during pick-up and/or via our communication app throughout the day.

We take major precautions to prevent major injuries under our care. Using ongoing supervision and consistent conversations with children about safety and risks, we offer an environment that meets health and safety standards set by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's Public Playground Safety Handbook. However, a major injury could arise as accidents can happen at any time. If so, we will call 911 if necessary, and notify the parent immediately after.

Here are a few examples of potential illnesses and how we handle them:

Head Lice. A child will be sent home to be treated. Children may return after the first treatment is completed and no live lice or nits are present. If we see any live lice or nits, a child will be moved to a place away from other children and must be picked up immediately.

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease. A child may return when the fever is gone, and the child is well enough to participate in normal activities, and lesions or rash are completely gone. A doctor's note stating the child is ready to return and no longer contagious is required.

Whooping Cough. Child may return 5 days after appropriate antibiotic treatment begins. A doctor's note stating the child is ready to return and no longer contagious is required.

COVID-19

NLS follows Sacramento County Department of Health, Community Care Licensing, CalOSHA, and other regulatory agencies that do not always agree with one another, and NLS is mandated by California regulatory agencies to follow the strictest of all regulations (as are all service employers).

At the time of writing this Handbook update we follow SacCounty [INTERIM COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR PRE-SCHOOLS & CHILD CARE SACRAMENTO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH \(SCPH\) | FEBRUARY 1, 2022](#)

When symptoms arise, Children who have not had COVID within the past 90 days must test with a **PCR test** and quarantine until results arrive and alternate diagnosis is given by a medical provider.

When symptoms arise, Children who have had COVID within the past 90 days must test with an antigen test and quarantine until results arrive and alternate diagnosis is given by a medical provider. Proof of official COVID-19 diagnosis must be provided to the NLS administrator to be kept in each child's record to be able to be considered for this option.

Our COVID-19 regulations are ever changing based on the evolution of the pandemic. Please note that changes made to these regulations will be communicated via email to currently enrolled families.

Medication

In general, Nature's Lab staff cannot administer medication for children. Some exceptions may be over the counter medication, or for children with an ongoing medical plan. These over the counter medications can be administered after a caregiver provides a doctor's note that states the child's name, birthdate, specific doses and instructions for administration. A family and doctor must fill out our medication form that explains all the details at length, and ensure teachers are trained on how to administer this medication.

Any medication, including over the counter medication administration, requires approval from Nature's Lab director and a medication plan completed by the family and the child's doctor.

Policies for Nature's Lab Staff

Staff will not be at work anytime they are known to have a contagious illness. We have a few teachers in our substitute teacher list. However, if we are unable to secure substitute teachers

we will contact parents as soon as possible and ask for an early pickup or school closure to ensure our legal teacher/child ratios and children's safety are maintained.

Incident Reports

If your child gets an injury at Nature's Lab, we will notify you at the end of the day, or via our communications app describing what happened and how the injury was treated.

In the case of an emergency, if a call to 911 is needed you will be notified immediately after 911 has been contacted.

Nature's Lab School has a first-aid kit on-hand for minor injuries. All key staff members are trained in first-aid and CPR. The parent will be notified by a staff member if an injury occurs while in care. You will receive an accident report via the Brightwheel app.

Emergency Care

In case of an emergency, a Nature's Lab staff member will try to contact the parent. If a child needs immediate medical attention the child will be taken to the emergency room at the nearest emergency room via ambulance. Caregivers must sign an authorized form for emergency treatment for each child attending Nature's Lab.

Naps

Sleep has been found to be crucial for healthy cognitive development for children and adults. Therefore, **all** children are **required** to lay down and rest daily at Nature's Lab. Naps are provided as follows:

- Preschoolers that take 1 nap only will nap after lunch around 12:30 pm to 2:30 pm, or longer as needed. We do **NOT** wake children up as this can be considered a violation of children's rights and we believe that if a child is tired, they need to sleep. If a child is having difficulties sleeping at night, we encourage families to schedule a meeting to talk about routines at home and ways we can support healthy sleeping habits. We also provide *Healthy Sleeping Habits* training once per year. *See the calendar for the specific date.*
- According to Community Care Licensing, Title 22 Activities/Napping 101230 all children 5 years old and under *"shall be given an opportunity to nap or rest without distraction or disturbance from other activities at the center. (1) A napping space and a cot or mat shall be available for each child under the age of five... (3) No child shall be forced to stay awake or to stay in the napping area longer than the normal napping period.*

Because of this mandate, we are not able to keep children awake by providing toys or distractions. Should you prefer not to have your child nap, you will be asked to pick up your child by 12:30 pm.

Toilet Learning/Diapers

We provide consistent opportunities for your child to become interested in toilet training. We have learning toilets available in addition to our standard toilets and Nature's Lab staff will support you with the potty training process.

Please note that learning to use the toilet comes at different times and in a different manner for each child, and every family has their own unique approach to their children.

We believe that learning to use the toilet is like learning to walk, it is a self-motivated process on the part of the child that we, as parents and caregivers, can observe and support from the sidelines. Often, during this time, children take small steps in this process before they make the big leap, and changes in their world can cause them to revert back. We feel this is a very normal development that calls for love and patience from the adults in their lives.

Prior to embarking in the potty training process please read this article: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/266-potty-training-learning-to-the-use-the-toilet>

Diapers

Families provide diapers and wipes for their children. Place diapers in your child's cubbie and a teacher will move enough diapers for the day to the diaper changing station as needed. Please be sure your child has enough diapers for the day, and preferably leave a larger supply in your child's cubbie for a teacher to be able to restock the diaper station and provide 2-big containers of baby wipes per month (an average of 200 wipes)

Pull-ups

Pull-ups can be used AFTER parents have talked about a potty-training plan with Nature's Lab staff and we are all on the same page. Potty training is really exciting for all of us, and it requires a lot of attention, trips to the bathroom, and reminders, and likely will result in a few soiled clothes AKA "accidents." Since pull-ups tend to be less absorbent than diapers, they create a higher risk for leakage and blowouts, therefore they will be used only when children are showing interest in using the bathroom on a regular basis and are showing all the signs of being ready to become toilet trained.

Underwear

The transition to underwear can be so exciting for some children! Once a child is ready to jump into the toilet training process 100% at home, we will support this effort 100% at Nature's Lab. However, children who have more than **3 accidents** in one day will be asked to go back to wearing diapers or pull-ups until the child is dry for longer periods of time and demonstrates additional signs of being ready to be involved in the potty training process.

Non-Potty Trained Fee (NPT)

A non-potty training fee is assessed weekly for all children who are not yet using the toilet independently. Independently means that they no longer need any assistance with clothing and wiping, as well as being reminded to use the toilet to avoid having accidents. For the specific fees, see the *Tuition and Fees* section of this handbook.

Approaching Conflict with Children

Health and safety are our number one goal. We ensure that all children, families, and staff feel a sense of belonging and appreciation, and feel healthy, both physically and emotionally. To do this, we utilize the Conscious Discipline approach and have established **four basic expectations for our community**:

- We engage in open communication and modeling of how to voice needs, concerns, emotions, and appreciation.
- We are kind to one another, including the pets and nature around us.
- We take time for ourselves when any of us feels like we need to regroup and relax.
- We take good care of our community and take pride in being an active member of it. If something is broken, we find ways to fix it and volunteer to be part of the solution.

When there is a conflict between children, we give full attention to it. Our goal is to support children in finding their own solutions while standing by to offer suggestions and modeling appropriate ways to communicate individual needs. This gives each child the opportunity to learn how to communicate with others under stress and regulate their feelings in ways that are safe and healthy for everyone.

For children of this age, it is developmentally appropriate to be exploring different ways of expressing themselves. For this reason, it is pivotal for their emotional and social development that all of their feelings are validated while at the same time learning how to connect with others in positive ways. We consistently provide language to be able to share their emotions (example feelings of frustration, excitement, sadness, etc.), and redirection as needed. At times, we may need to step in and ask the children to sit down, take a deep breath, and, once emotions have decreased, go back to finding solutions together.

Children at this age can become overstimulated easily. Because of this, our program creates opportunities to engage in a combination of active and passive activities and offers areas to play alone or in small groups. We also model deep breathing on a regular basis. These strategies are used even before they are needed, so they become a tool in each child's "tool-belt" for life. However, toddlers and preschoolers can be very emotional at times, and when those times come, we provide lots of hugs and tissues. Being a child under 6 comes with fun adventures, but it is also an emotional time as children this age have very little control of their emotions and need our support in learning how to manage and understand emotions. Please know this is normal and be sure to reach out to us to talk about strategies on how to support your child's social-emotional development during these early years, as well as how to gain strategies to deal with situations that can be challenging and frustrating at times for all.

Discipline Policy

According to Community Care Licensing, Title 22, Division 12, Personal Rights:

Each child receiving services from a Child Care Center shall have rights which include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. To be accorded dignity in his/her personal relationships with staff and other persons.
2. To be accorded safe, healthful, and comfortable accommodations, furnishings, and equipment to meet his/her needs.
3. To be free from corporal or unusual punishment, infliction of pain, humiliation, intimidation, ridicule, coercion, threats, mental abuse, or other actions of a punitive nature, including but not limited to: interference with daily living functions, including eating, sleeping, or toileting; or withholding of shelter, clothing, medication or aids to physical functioning.

Nature's Lab ensures a safe, respectful environment for all children to help support their healthy development in all aspects. We will work with children to help them become engaged and learn to be respectful of others' belongings and space and will meet with families to develop plans as needed. All our staff members engage children in social-emotional development by utilizing our core social-emotional curriculum Conscious Discipline. In doing so we decrease the need to engage in discipline scenarios because our children build strong relationships with adults that help them navigate strong emotions, difficult situations, and developmentally appropriate behaviors.

Should a situation arise when a child is experiencing behaviors outside of our expertise, we will have conversations with the caregivers, create an action plan, and as needed, reach out to external organizations for support.

Communication with Families

We require our families to engage in open communication with Nature's Lab's staff. We love having you be a part of our community and strive to provide the best program for everyone, so do not hesitate to reach out at any time, especially if you have a concern. It has been our experience that the more respectful, open communication we have with our families the better our program and relationships become.

We are always open to talk about any concerns or issues that might come up. You can email Silvia (S.Anderson@NaturesLabSchool.com) to set up a time to talk after the children have gone home for the day. Please allow 24 hours for a response to your inquiry.

Approaching Conflict with Caregiver- Caregivers as Partners

Nature's Lab School's core foundation is relationships with one another, as such, it is crucial for our program and staff members that everyone involved has a similar mindset to ensure we are all working towards the same goals to support our children's healthy development. Administrators and teachers work diligently each day to create the best environment and group care setting that best supports everyone involved.

Caregivers are encouraged to discuss matters with teachers and administrators keeping in mind that in a group care setting NLS staff decisions must be made keeping the whole community in mind. NLS strives to support, respect, and value each member, however, we are unable to meet every individual request as some may negatively impact other aspects of the

program that caregivers may not always be aware of at the time of the request, or that may negatively affect NLS long-term service to our community, Mission and/or Vision.

Within that construct we have some key expectations from caregivers to ensure we provide quality group care to all involved in the community (Children, teachers, staff, caregivers, and administrators) and maintain a safe and respectful environment for everyone involved:

- NLS has an “Open Door” policy for enrolled families. As such we encourage parents to visit on-site at any time as long as this does not cause a disruption to the class, the individual child, or the activities taking place. During COVID-19 pandemic these visits are limited to outdoor activities away from the children such as observing from the second-floor hallway or conference room.
- As a private business, NLS reserves the right to discontinue or decline service to clients exhibiting conduct not conducive to a positive working relationship including but not limited to:
 - Caregiver(s) who continually disregard school rules, policies, or procedures.
 - Caregivers who present disrespectful treatment towards administrators, teachers, other parents, and/or children.
 - Caregivers who do not participate in systematically creating and maintaining a positive culture and school climate amongst the NatLab community.

We realize that the care of all children is a precious opportunity and we strive to make decisions that best support the entire community. Please consider whether or not Nature’s Lab vision and mission is what best fits your family. Caregivers who consistently experience incongruences in vision, agenda, and standards that have been carefully crafted for NLS, may be asked to consider other opportunities that better fit their family’s needs, priorities, and desires.

Conflict Resolution Procedure

Nature’s Lab has established a procedure for a fair review of concerns related to any school controversy, conflict, or harassment involving caregivers.

1. Informal conversations or submitting a complaint or concern orally or in writing to or by a teacher, parent, and/or school administrator. If concerns are not resolved with a conversation then,
2. Family Meeting and Action Plan Creation:
All caregivers of the family(ies) involved will be required to participate in an open conversation to listen to each side's concerns and requests. Whenever possible, Nature’s Lab will attempt to support families' wishes and needs. However, each NLS policy and protocol is carefully crafted with the whole NLS community in mind and not all requests may be fulfilled as explained above. If after a thoughtful conversation between NLS and caregivers, it is determined that the conflict can not be resolved in order to maintain a respectful, working relationship then,
3. Conflict resolution/ or termination of care:

Depending on the situation, NLS may provide a 21-day notice to terminate care or immediate termination based on each individual situation.

Rights of the Licensing Agency:

The Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing, Title 22, Division 12, Chapter 1 regulation #101200 Inspection Authority of the Department states:

“The Department has the authority to interview children or staff and to inspect and audit child or child care center records, without prior consent. The school shall make provisions for private interviews with any child(ren) or staff member; and for the examination of all records relating to the operation of the childcare center. The Department has the authority to observe the physical condition of the child(ren), including conditions that could indicate abuse, neglect or inappropriate placement

Causes for Termination

Services provided by Nature’s Lab are provided at will which means services can be terminated by both parties at any time by providing a 3-week (21 days) notice in writing. Families are responsible for payment of a 3-week notice even if they choose not to use the services.

Should a situation arise where a child is putting themselves or others in danger, the immediate termination of services will be considered. This includes, but is not limited to

- Running out of the room or outdoor classrooms after a plan has been in place.
- Excessive biting after a plan has been in place (3 instances in a week).
- Excessive hitting after a plan has been in place (3 instances in a week).
- Waking other children during rest times after a plan has been in place (2 instances in a week)

Other reasons for termination include but are not limited to:

- Consistently arriving after 9 am. (3 times in a month)
- Late payment of tuition (two times in 6 months)
- Caregiver being disrespectful to administrators, staff, parents, or children. For example, raising your voice or using inappropriate language, discussing a challenging situation in front of the children, being disrespectful in written communication, disregarding NLS protocols, etc.
- Refusing to update forms for the child's file.
- Caregiver coming into our location under the influence of any legal or illegal drugs.
- Other violations of caregiver expectation listed in our Parent Handbook
- **Knowingly** exposing children and/or staff to a communicable disease, or failing to report exposures to communicable diseases that can affect the health and safety of staff or children at NLS.

Nature's Lab Community

Our multi-age environment allows children to grow together as a “family.” As they grow, they use the space in new ways and develop long lasting relationships that serve them in their healthy development. We also create opportunities for activities to take place outside of the Nature's Lab environment such as, family nature walks, mom's night out, and other special events. These opportunities are listed in the calendar and/or are shared via email or our app.

There are no “Bad Children”

It is inevitable that you may be triggered by another person's child or your own child's behavior or individual temperaments. This is normal and to be expected. However, it's important to realize and convey to your child that this is a place for all of us to learn and grow together. If your child expresses issues with another child, try to remain neutral and express to them that their teachers are there to support and help them communicate when their needs aren't met, or help them find some space if that's what is needed. We have children with various personalities, temperaments, strengths, weaknesses, and needs which allows all of us to learn to be respectful, caring, and understanding of how differences are assets we must learn to appreciate.

Children's “work” at this age is to play, explore, and develop their social and emotional skills. Conflict is a natural part of this process and we need to model for them and convey to them that they are safe and capable of learning how to be together as a community.

If you have any concerns, please talk with Silvia Anderson so we can find ways to support healthy relationships between all children and adults.

Screen Free and Media Free Policy

Increasingly, outdoor education is being recognized as the ideal setting for children's healthy development, and that its benefits can be enhanced by environments that are developed to integrate all of the senses, which in combination with the exposure of some technology can be the perfect balance for children's healthy development.

Here at Nature's Lab, we offer an intentional and highly considered approach that incorporates the right technology at the right time and follows the APA recommendations for screen time.* We provide a creative learning environment based on human interaction, and stay away from marketing that can lead to relying on the latest products in the market. Most importantly, we work in partnership with our families to support each of our children in developing creative intelligence and flexibility of thinking through life.

How does this look at Nature's Lab?

In the early years, children learn through interactions, imitation, imagination, and make-belief . Our teachers tell beautiful stories with complex vocabulary and sentence structure, read books, and continually change our environment to support children's learning following our emergent, child lead curriculum philosophy. Children develop the capacity to form mental pictures that support future reading comprehension and creative thinking.

While at Nature's Lab children are not engaged by the passive consumption of fixed media images, which scientific research confirms are difficult for children to process and can hinder some learning, language development, and creativity. In our outdoor classroom, young children move, play, create, solve problems, explore nature, and learn about the social-emotional tools that will support their healthy relationships now and in the future.

Because of this, **NO clothing, shoes, bedding, water bottles, toys, etc. with media-related logos are allowed at Nature's Lab.** Please take a look at the items in your child's cubbie at school and replace them with items that are 100% media-free (no cartoons or movie characters).

We want to create an environment where our children use their own imagination and creativity during their interactions with us and their peers. We offer plenty of loose parts and engaging activities throughout the day, and screens are very seldom used at Nature's Lab.

Media At Home

We know that life is so busy and screens can be a lifesaver for all of us. However, we encourage you to limit your child's use of TVs, gaming systems, and computers, and when not possible to make choices that are age appropriate. A good resource is <https://www.common sense media.org>.

In our experience, excessive use of media/screens can negatively influence children's natural ability to focus, play creatively, and may increase challenging behaviors. When your child does watch TV and videos, please try to be conscious of the content and messages embedded in the shows.

Also, keep in mind the following recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics for media viewing:

Birth-18 months

Avoid the use of screen media other than video chatting. No media use is recommended.

18-24 months

If media is introduced, choose high-quality programming and watch it with the children to help them understand what they are seeing. Limit the time to less than 30 minutes per day.

2-5 years

Choose high-quality programs to watch. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them. Limit the time to less than 1 hour per day.

6 years and older

Place consistent limits on the time spent using media and the types of media. At your discretion, make sure the media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity, and other behaviors essential to health.

Nature's Lab recommends that:

- Families share media-free time together, such as dinner or driving.
- Have media-free locations at home, such as bedrooms.
- Avoid watching commercials and advertisements as these target children's consumerism.
- Have ongoing communication with children about online citizenship and safety, including treating others with respect online and offline, and be aware of online predators.

NO Cellphone usage while in Nature's Lab! Except to use the app for check-in and check-out

Although caregivers must bring a cellphone or electronic device to sign children in and out of Nature's Lab daily, we ask that you do not use your cell phone while you are inside the campus for any other reason.

This is your child's special place and they will want to share with you about their day, favorite places, art work, collect eggs, or have you observe them playing with their peers. Be respectful of this time with them and enjoy it.

You will see teachers carrying cellphones/tablets at times as they use them to take pictures and videos, and monitor messages received from parents via our app. The pictures and videos are shared with you throughout the day using our app. Rest assured, the use of cellphones by our teachers are kept to a minimum while teachers make children's safety and positive interactions their utmost responsibility.

We are very excited to have you be a part of the Nature's Lab Community. We look forward to getting to know you and your family better, and to watch our relationship grow in the years to come. Please feel free to reach out to Silvia Anderson with any questions or comments to s.anderson@natureslabschool.com.

With much love and appreciation,

Silvia Anderson

Director and Founder

Parenting Resources

- Milestones Tracker and information
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>
- CSEFEL: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html>
- *Conscious Discipline: The Social-emotional curriculum Nature's Lab school uses
<https://consciousdiscipline.com/free-resources/>
- Worried about your child's development? This symptom checker may be a good starting point <https://childmind.org/symptomchecker/>
- Raising Children in Turbulent Times:
- <http://first5association.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Raising-Children-in-Turbulent-Times-Rona-Renner.pdf>
- NAEYC: <https://www.naeyc.org>
- <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/sep2018/reducing-challenging-behaviors-during-transitions>
- Sesame Street in Communities: <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org>
- Zero to Three: Full of wonderful resources for parents about all aspects of children's development <https://www.zerotothree.org>