



Our roots...

Nature's Lab School, LLC was founded in 2018 by Silvia Anderson, inspired by her dream of creating a bilingual preschool grounded in recent research that demonstrates how children learn and develop best through respectful relationships, natural environments, and hands-on experiences. Our nature-based, emergent STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) curriculum was established to nurture these key aspects, fostering children's cognitive, emotional, and motor skills development.

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

The seed of Nature's Lab sprouted during Silvia's master's thesis work, where she explored the profound benefits of outdoor play. Her passion for this approach grew as she coached and evaluated child development programs throughout California, noticing a gap between what research supports and what many schools practice. With years of experience as a preschool and toddler teacher, coach, assessor, professor, and manager of Sacramento County's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Early Learning programs, Silvia has drawn inspiration from her mentors, colleagues, and students to bring her vision to life. Their encouragement and commitment to creating an inclusive, nature-based learning environment continue to inspire her work today.

Nature's Lab reflects a deep passion for learning, nature, discovery, and connection. Each aspect of the school is thoughtfully designed to celebrate children's natural curiosity and love of exploration. Our community is built on the shared values of respect, collaboration, and a dedication to nurturing the whole child through play and discovery.

We are proud to see our dream embraced by so many families. Together, we strive to build a strong community and create meaningful, long-lasting relationships that benefit children and inspire others to prioritize nature-based and hands-on education.



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

Our Mission

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 rooted in our core values of **Community, Kindness, Respect, Understanding, and Curiosity**.

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

We utilize Conscious Discipline as our social-emotional curriculum, guiding children in learning and practicing problem-solving, cooperation, acceptance, self-control, and kindness. This approach helps build a strong, respectful School Family where everyone is valued and supported.



Nature's Lab continues to grow intentionally, with future program expansion communicated to families as plans are finalized and approved.

Our School

Nature's Lab is a bilingual school in Carmichael, California. We offer individualized care for children between the ages of Ages 2–6 (24 months through 1st-grade entry) and operate Monday through Friday from 7:45 am to 4:45 pm. Healthy, organic meals are provided daily and frequently include ingredients grown in our garden and eggs produced by our school's 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, a structured activity each day introduces a new concept/material/opportunity. Participation in this activity is encouraged but not mandatory. We also provide multiple 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 creativity, 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 without 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 combining 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). We offer a Spanish-rich bilingual environment, with Spanish used approximately 70% or more of the day, depending on age group, staffing, and the flow of child-led learning.

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 (Family hikes, pumpkin patch, Gratitude Celebration, U-Pick Veggie, mom's night out, etc.), parent participation, and volunteering opportunities where our families share their unique skills to help make our school and community better every day.

Admission Policies

Families interested in joining the Nature's Lab community are required to tour the facility with their children to determine if it's a good mutual fit. This tour allows children to experience our outdoor classrooms and ensure they feel comfortable in the environment.

Caregivers must review all Nature's Lab policies and procedures, including the parent handbook, to align expectations. Once both parties agree that Nature's Lab is a good fit, all required forms, documentation, and payment must be submitted before the child's first day. This includes the forms listed below and proof that vaccinations are up to date.

Please note that a spot is not fully reserved until payment has been received. After enrollment, families are responsible for updating these forms as necessary. Inform Nature's Lab promptly if personal information changes, and update the relevant forms accordingly.

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 (LIC 702)** 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, 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. **NLS Services Contract/NLS Tuition Fee 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. **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.
11. **Getting to Know Your Child Questionnaire.** Completed to provide us additional information to help make your child feel as comfortable and welcome as possible.
12. **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.
13. **Proof of Vaccinations.** Nature's Lab does NOT accept any exemptions.
14. **Photo Release**
15. **Mosquito repellent application Form**
16. **Baby Sitting Acknowledgement Waiver**
17. **NLS/family Partnership agreement.**



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

Age When Admitted	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 through 5 years	3 Polio, 4 DTaP, 3 Hep B, 1 Varicella On or after 1st birthday: 1 Hib*, 1 MMR

Feedback and Communication

We highly value open communication and always welcome feedback. Our open-door policy emphasizes support, positive intent, and collaboration, allowing us to address any circumstances that may arise together.

We send surveys and other communications throughout the year to gather your insights and feedback. These help us make informed decisions for the school and plan future social events. Please keep an eye out for these emails and share your honest thoughts — your input is essential to our community's growth and success.

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

11:30 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 & Program Options

Nature's Lab tuition supports our outdoor, experiential, Spanish-rich program for children ages **2–6 (24 months through 1st-grade entry)**. Tuition includes staffing, program materials, and daily meals/snacks as outlined below.

Full-Day Program Tuition (Monthly)

Full-day tuition includes breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack.

Early Learners (24–48 months)

- **\$1,490/month**

Possible Future Expansion (Younger Ages)

Nature's Lab may expand to serve younger children in the future. If and when this program becomes available, families will be notified in writing with details about ages served, start dates, schedules, tuition, and enrollment steps.

TK (49–60 months)

- **\$1,395/month**

Kindergarten Full-Day (5–6 years)

- **\$1,395/month**

Meals included (full-day): Breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack are included for children enrolled in the full-day program.

Full-Day TK/Kindergarten at Nature's Lab

This option is for children completing their full TK or Kindergarten experience at Nature's Lab School.

- Schedule: Monday–Friday, 7:45 a.m.–4:45 p.m.
- Tuition: \$1,385 per month
- Meals: Breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack are included.



AM TK/Kindergarten Bridge — Age 4+

This morning program is available for children age four and older.

- Schedule: Monday–Friday, 7:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
- Tuition: \$925 per month
- Meals: Breakfast and lunch are included.

PM TK/Kindergarten Bridge — Age 4+

This option is designed for children age four and older who attend a short morning TK or Kindergarten program at another school and join Nature's Lab for the remainder of the day.

- Schedule: Monday–Friday, 12:00 p.m.–4:45 p.m.
- Tuition: \$965 per month
- Meals: Afternoon snack is included.

PM TK/Kindergarten Bridge With Early Arrival — Age 4+

An early-arrival option may be available for children who need to arrive before the regular PM Bridge program begins.

- Schedule: Monday–Friday, 11:30 a.m.–4:45 p.m.
- Tuition: \$995 per month
- Meals: Lunch and afternoon snack are included.

Enrollment in any bridge program is subject to space availability and approval by Nature's Lab School. Nature's Lab does not provide transportation between schools. Families are responsible for arranging transportation and ensuring that their child arrives within the designated arrival window.

Summer Continuation

Families enrolled in the Full-Day TK/Kindergarten or TK/Kindergarten Bridge program may request to continue during the summer with the same schedule and monthly tuition. Summer participation is subject to program availability and must be confirmed in advance.

Updated 1.10.2026

Tuition and Schedule Changes

Tuition reserves the child's space in the specific program and schedule listed in the enrollment agreement. Families may not move between Full-Day, AM Bridge, PM Bridge, or Early Arrival schedules without prior written approval from Nature's Lab School. Schedule changes are based on availability and may result in a change in tuition.

Monthly Tuition and Proration

Nature's Lab School tuition is an annual program cost divided into equal monthly payments. Monthly tuition remains the same regardless of the number of school days, holidays, scheduled closures, or weekdays occurring in a particular month. Tuition reserves the child's enrollment space and is not calculated as a daily attendance rate.

When Nature's Lab approves a prorated tuition amount, the school uses a standardized 20-day divisor:

Monthly tuition ÷ 20 × number of approved prorated days

The 20-day divisor is used consistently for administrative purposes, even when a particular calendar month contains 19, 21, 22, or another number of weekdays or scheduled school days. It does not represent the actual number of operating days in that month and does not convert monthly tuition into a daily tuition program.

Proration is available only when expressly authorized by Nature's Lab School, such as during an approved partial first month of enrollment. Tuition is not prorated for absences, vacations, illness, holidays, emergency closures, family scheduling decisions, or a child's withdrawal during a billing period.

Example: If monthly tuition is \$1,490 and Nature's Lab approves 8 prorated days, the calculation is:

$$\text{\$1,490} \div 20 \times 8 = \text{\$596}$$

Supplementary Services and Enrichment Activities

At Nature's Lab, we are committed to providing a rich and engaging learning environment for your child. In addition to our STEM curriculum, which is creatively integrated with dramatic and fantasy play, we offer a variety of enrichment activities throughout the month.

-Storytime and Imaginative Play: Regular storytelling sessions that foster creativity and a love for literature.

- Yoga and Movement: Guided yoga sessions that support physical wellness and mindfulness.

- Art Exploration: Visits from a special art educator who inspires creativity through hands-on projects.
- Music: Biweekly music sessions with volunteers, complemented by a monthly partnership with a local music organization.
- Special Guests and Assemblies: Partnerships with local organizations, including a martial arts academy, bring engaging assemblies to the children.
- Community Connections: Visits from the fire department, waste management teams (featuring firetrucks!), and a pet groomer who shares their work while grooming the school's dogs.
- Parent and Volunteer Contributions: Families and volunteers share their unique skills and educational backgrounds with the children, enriching their learning experiences.

We are working to establish a more consistent schedule for these offerings and to expand our programming to meet our families' diverse interests and needs.

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

1. Tuition

- Tuition is charged monthly and remains the same regardless of your child's attendance. This includes absences due to vacation, illness, or any other reason, as well as closures for holidays, staff development, public emergencies, etc (see our annual calendar).
- If the school is required to close due to local, county, or state emergencies, including health-related emergencies, for longer than three weeks, tuition will decrease to 50% starting the 1st of the month following the initial closure. Tuition will return to 100% as soon as the school reopens.
 - **Example:** If the school closes on March 16 and reopens on June 1, tuition for April and May will be 50% of the regular rate. Tuition will return to 100% on June 1.

2. Fees

- **Annual Registration Fee:** \$300 per student. This fee is non-refundable and is due at enrollment and each March to secure your child's space for the following year.
- **Annual Materials Fee:** \$300 per student. This fee is non-refundable and is due at enrollment and each August for the following year.
- **Non-Potty-Trained Fee:** A weekly fee of \$15 applies to students who are not yet toilet trained. Non-potty-trained is defined as not using the toilet independently and without assistance. This applies to all enrolled children regardless of age. For guidance on toilet training, check out our [Toilet Training Guide](https://www.natureslabschool.com/post/toilet-training-guide-for-nature-s-lab-families) that can be found on our website Blog section <https://www.natureslabschool.com/post/toilet-training-guide-for-nature-s-lab-families>

- **Returned Check Fee:** A fee of \$35 will be charged 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.

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 3.5% 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,
- \$25/instance for the first 10 minutes,
- \$35/instance for the first 15 minutes,
- \$45/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 15 minutes. before or after opening hours only.

Contract Termination Policy

At Nature's Lab, our services are provided **at-will**, which means that either party—Nature's Lab or the family—can terminate services at any time with proper notice. This policy is in place to ensure fairness and allow both parties to plan and transition appropriately.

Termination Process:

- A **4-week (31 days) written notice** is required to terminate services. Written notice can be provided via email to **S.Anderson@NaturesLabSchool.com** or submitted in writing directly to an administrator.
- Families are responsible for paying tuition for the **entire 4-week notice period**, even if they choose not to use the services during this time or if the child does not attend.

Why This Policy is Important:

The 4-week notice period allows Nature's Lab to:

1. Maintain stability for the children and families currently enrolled.
2. Transition your child and family out of our program thoughtfully and respectfully.
3. Ensure we have adequate time to adjust staffing and enrollment, as our program is designed to meet specific teacher-to-child ratios.

Special Considerations:

- Immediate termination of services may occur in specific circumstances, as outlined in this handbook's Causes for Termination section.
- If you have any concerns or questions about the termination process, please contact the administration for clarification.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation with this policy, as it helps us maintain a supportive and consistent environment for all families in our care.

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. For example Contigo Stainless Steel Water Bottle with Autospout Straw
<https://amzn.to/45l1VH3>
- 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 or 2 boxes of disposable gloves per child) *These items may vary*
- F. Bedding for our cots like this: All-in-one Nap Mat <https://amzn.to/49KEckM>
- 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 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)

Labeling Personal Items (Required)

Outdoor play and daily transitions mean children's items can easily get mixed up. To support children's independence and help belongings return home, all personal items must be clearly labeled with your child's first and last name. Our team will make a good-faith effort to return labeled items to the correct child, and found/unclaimed items will be placed in the lost and found for 30 days. Even with labeling and our best efforts, Nature's Lab cannot guarantee the return of personal belongings and is not responsible for lost, missing, or misplaced items.

Additional information about 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.
- Please follow the labeling requirements outlined in the *Labeling Personal Items (Required)* section above.
- Do not bring any expensive clothes or items you would be sad to see altered in any way.
- Dirty clothes are sent home daily.
- Replenish clothing that has been sent home.

Personal Box and Lost & Found

Personal Box and Lost & Found

Each child has an assigned personal box (cubby) for storing belongings at Nature's Lab. A lost and found is located by the front door for items that become separated from their owner during the day.

To support children in managing their belongings and to help items return home, **all personal items must be labeled** as outlined in the *Labeling Personal Items (Required)* section of this handbook. Found items will be placed in the lost and found for up to **30 days**.

Due to the developmental age of the children and the nature of outdoor play, **Nature's Lab cannot guarantee the return of personal belongings and is not responsible for lost or misplaced items**, even when labeled.

Attendance Policy

At Nature's Lab, routines are essential for children's development. To ensure everyone has a smooth and engaging start to the day, please review the following attendance guidelines:

1. Arrival Time

- Children must arrive no later than 9:30 am each day to participate in group activities, select their daily job, and engage with peers.
 - On rare occasions, children may arrive as late as 11:00 am, but **no arrivals are permitted after 11:00 am**. Please plan appointments accordingly.
2. Late Arrivals or Absences
- If your child will arrive after 9:00 am or will not attend school, you must notify us by 8:30 am. This helps us:
 - Plan meals, activities, and nap schedules.
 - Ensure the day runs smoothly for all children.
 - If arriving after 9:00 am (but no later than 11:00 am), prior notification by 8:30 am is required.
3. Why This Policy Matters
- Late arrivals disrupt routines for all children and staff.
 - Consistent late arrivals may result in disenrollment to maintain a positive environment for everyone.

We appreciate your cooperation in helping us create a structured and supportive environment for your child and their peers.

Check-In and Check-Out Policy

To ensure your child's safety and compliance with Community Care Licensing, please follow these guidelines for drop-off and pick-up:

1. **Arrival and Departure**
 - Caregivers must accompany their child into the school each day and ensure their teacher is aware of their arrival.
 - Children will only be released to authorized adults listed on the "Authorized to Pick Up" form.
 - No child will be released to anyone under 18 years old.
2. **Using the Online App**
 - The person dropping off or picking up your child **must use their own cell phone** to check in or check out, as this is tied to their individual profile. This ensures accurate records of who dropped off and picked up the child.
 - **Do not let someone else use your cell phone** to check in or out for your child.
 - If someone who does not have the app is authorized to pick up your child for the day, they will need to fill out a paper check-in and check-out form instead.
3. **Notification for Alternate Pick-Up**
 - If someone other than the primary caregiver will pick up your child:
 - Notify us via the app on the same day.
 - Ensure the individual is listed on the "Authorized to Pick Up" form.
 - They must show photo identification at pick-up.
4. **Sign-In and Sign-Out Requirements**
 - All caregivers must sign their child in and out daily using their **full legal signature and time** as required by Community Care Licensing.
 - Attendance must also be recorded in our **online app**. This is critical for safety, emergency evacuations, and attendance records.
 - A \$5 fee per instance will be charged for missing check-ins or check-outs. A correction form must be completed, including the name of the person dropping off or picking up, their signature, date, time, and the reason for correction.

5. Using the Communication App

- Use the app to share any last-minute notes or updates about your child (e.g., sleep concerns, home transitions, illness) to help us support their needs.
- Update contact information and app settings monthly to ensure everything is functioning properly.

6. General Safety

- Daily attendance records are used for headcounts and emergency evacuations. Accurate check-ins and check-outs help us keep your child safe.

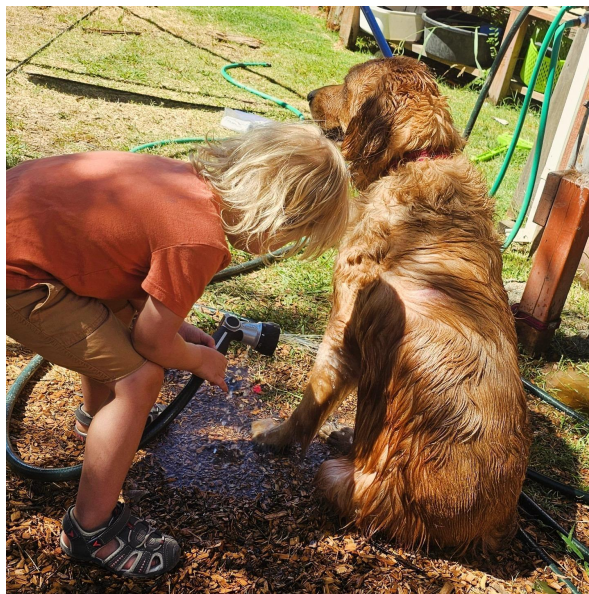
Thank you for cooperating to maintain a safe and organized environment at Nature's Lab!

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; some days, this becomes easier for 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 day's plans, and select their "helper of the day" responsibilities. 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: 11:30 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 on time for breakfast, which is served at 9 am. If your child will arrive after 9:30 am, please be sure he/she has had a healthy, substantial meal at home. Hungry kiddos have difficulty 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, and have a cooking day with the children each Thursday.

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, means no added sugars or coloring food.

Some examples of approved birthday treats include

- Chocolate-covered fruits (bananas, strawberries, etc.)
- Homemade baked goods (such as banana bread).
- Fruit salads
- Healthy Popsicles Without food coloring or added sugars.

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

Here's the updated version:

Student/Family Roster

At the beginning of each school year, we provide a roster of current families at Nature's Lab. This is a valuable tool to help families connect outside of school, build relationships, and create a supportive community. Many families find this helpful for arranging transportation, childcare swaps, or simply fostering friendships.

Please remember that the contact information provided in the roster is confidential and must not be shared with anyone outside the Nature's Lab community.

School Calendar

Nature's Lab operates year-round, with scheduled closures throughout the year. These closures include:

Updated 1.10.2026

- **Teacher In-Service Days:** Dedicated to professional development and continuous growth.
- **Recharge Time:** Ensuring our staff has time to rest, recharge, and spend with their families.

Our full-time staff works hard every day to give their best to our children and are paid during all closures. For this reason, tuition remains consistent and is due monthly, regardless of attendance or school closures.

The Annual School Calendar includes:

- Closure dates for the year.
- Monthly family events.
- Parenting groups and volunteer opportunities.
- Holiday celebrations and more.

The calendar is updated each August and posted on our website for your reference.

Event Planning Committee

We are always looking for more families to join our Event Planning Committee! Your support in organizing school events is crucial to their success and helps us create opportunities that meet the needs of our current families.

By joining the committee, you'll play an important role in planning memorable events, fostering connections within our community, and ensuring that Nature's Lab continues to offer meaningful experiences for everyone.

If you're interested in being a part of this vital team, please contact Silvia Anderson. We'd love to have your help!

Meetings/Get-Together Opportunities

Parent/Teacher Conferences

At Nature's Lab, we hold two scheduled Parent/Teacher Conferences each year—one in the Fall and one in the Spring. These meetings are wonderful opportunities for families and teachers to connect, share insights, and discuss your child's development without the distractions of daily routines.

Timeline:

1. **Caregiver:** Select a meeting time on the Nature's Lab website. When the conference scheduling window opens, you can choose an available time that works best for you.
2. **Teachers:** Complete assessments for each child throughout the year to share during the meeting.
3. **Caregiver:** Completes the following before the meeting:
 - **ASQ-3 and ASQ-SE2:** These forms should reflect your child's current age and provide insights into their development.
 - **10 Descriptive Words:** A list of words that best describe your child.
 - These documents allow us to create personalized plans and foster deeper conversations about your child's growth and engagement at Nature's Lab.

- **Deadline:** Submit completed forms to NLS staff at least **7 days before** your meeting.

Meeting Day: Plan a 30-minute conversation with your child's teacher.

By working together, we can support your child's unique journey and ensure they thrive in our program.

Parenting Group

At Nature's Lab, we host parenting group gatherings throughout the year to share tools and strategies that support families in meeting their child's ever-changing needs. The focus of these groups is typically on **Conscious Discipline**, our core social-emotional curriculum.

Meeting Schedule:

- We typically hold **five Conscious Discipline parenting group meetings** per year.
- There is also **one mandatory Back-to-School Night** at the beginning of the school year (September) to share important information about the program and upcoming events.

Attendance Policy:

- At least **one caregiver per family** must attend these meetings to ensure that key information is shared and relayed to the rest of the family. Not every family member needs to attend, but it's crucial that someone represents your family.
- A **\$40 non-attendance fee** will be charged to any family not represented by a caregiver at mandatory meetings.

Recordings and Participation:

- We strive to record meetings for families who may not be able to attend. However, due to the possibility of personal or sensitive information being shared during discussions, recordings may not always be available. It is best to plan to attend in person whenever possible.
- Active participation is encouraged, as these gatherings provide valuable insights and a chance to engage with other caregivers.

From time to time, guest speakers may facilitate these meetings, offering additional expertise and perspectives. If your schedule cannot accommodate a meeting, please notify us as soon as possible.

Thank you for partnering with us to create a supportive community and enhance your child's experience at Nature's Lab.

Other Get-Togethers

At Nature's Lab, we offer many opportunities for families to connect and for children to build strong, long-lasting relationships with their peers. These events provide a chance to create community bonds and foster relationships outside the school setting.

Some of the gatherings you can look forward to include:

- Mom's Night Out: A relaxing and fun evening for moms to connect and recharge.
- Monthly Hikes: Family-friendly outings to explore nature together.
- Other Gatherings: Various events planned throughout the year, such as potlucks, playdates, or seasonal celebrations.

Participation is optional, but we encourage families to join as many events as possible to strengthen connections with the Nature's Lab community.

We invite families to join the Event Planning Committee to help plan these opportunities. The committee organizes flexible and inclusive events accommodating our families' diverse schedules and needs. Whether it's helping to plan school-wide gatherings or smaller group activities, these efforts ensure there are opportunities for everyone to connect in ways that work for them.

Thank you for helping us create a vibrant and supportive community at Nature's Lab!

Field Trips

At Nature's Lab, we offer three special field trip opportunities throughout the year:

- **October:** A visit to the pumpkin patch.
- **Summer:** A trip to a U-pick vegetable farm.
- **Winter:** A snow tree-cutting outing.

These field trips are designed to create meaningful experiences and lasting memories for families and children in a fun, outdoor setting.



Important Notes:

- These field trips are **family participation only**: Children must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, as we do not take children off-site without their legal guardians.
- Families are responsible for driving their children to the field trip location or arranging transportation with someone they trust.
- Teachers attend these trips to facilitate the experience and support the group, but Nature's Lab staff will not supervise children.
- Nature's Lab will be **closed** on the days these field trips take place to allow everyone to participate.

We hope you can join us for these special outings, as they provide wonderful opportunities to connect with other families and share memorable experiences outside the school environment.

Family Participation Hours

Each year, families are required to complete 15 hours of Family Participation per child enrolled (January-December). These hours restart each January and are distributed across four quarters:

- Quarter 1: January – March (3.75 hours)
- Quarter 2: April – June (3.75 hours)
- Quarter 3: July – September (3.75 hours)
- Quarter 4: October – December (3.75 hours)

Participation hours must be completed quarterly, and any hours not fulfilled by the end of a quarter will result in a charge of \$40 per unfulfilled hour.

Ways to Fulfill Family Participation Hours

There are numerous opportunities to meet your participation requirements, including:

- Outdoor Classroom Support Days.
- Social Committee involvement.
- Classroom maintenance, book cleaning, and repair.
- Other tasks as listed throughout the year.
- Kiwanis Club of Carmichael event (Up to 3 hours per year).

If you have a talent or specialized skill, please let us know so we can find a way for you to contribute meaningfully.

Partnership with the Kiwanis Club of Carmichael

Nature's Lab chose to join the **Kiwanis Club of Carmichael** because of their strong mission to support children and families in the community. This partnership aligns with our values and commitment to making a positive impact.

As part of this partnership, families may use up to **3 hours of their 15 annual participation hours** toward volunteering at an event held by the Kiwanis Club of Carmichael. When participating in these events, families represent Nature's Lab as a **Kiwanis Club member organization**, fostering our shared mission to serve the community.

If you plan to volunteer at a Kiwanis event, please notify us in advance so we can coordinate and track these hours appropriately.

We hope families enjoy volunteering with the Kiwanis Club and find fulfillment in their service. If so, we encourage you to consider joining the Kiwanis Club of Carmichael as an individual member to stay actively engaged in making a difference in our community.

Volunteering During School Hours

Families wishing to volunteer during school hours and interact with children must provide the following:

- TB test results.
- Proof of vaccinations (MMR, Tdap, and Flu).
- A clear LiveScan background check.

Updated 1.10.2026



Purchasing Family Participation Hours

If a family cannot fulfill their participation hours, the hours can be purchased at \$40 per hour. However, we encourage all families to participate actively to foster community and connection.

Thank you for helping us create a vibrant and supportive environment at Nature's Lab!

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. Ensure 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 and any time children present symptoms.

Illness Policies for Children

To maintain a healthy environment for all, please follow these guidelines:

When to Keep Your Child at Home

Your child must stay home if they exhibit any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 100°F or higher.
- Vomiting or diarrhea within the last 24 hours.
- Rash or skin irritation.
- Skin or eye infection.
- Contagious condition or exposure to a contagious condition.
- Discomfort preventing regular participation in activities or requiring consistent one-on-one attention.
- Blisters from any illness.

Children can return to Nature's Lab only after:

1. Being symptom-free for at least **24 hours without medication**.
2. If applicable, blisters have dried completely.
3. Provide a doctor's note stating the child can participate in a group care setting.

Reporting Contagious Conditions

- If your child is diagnosed with a contagious condition, inform us immediately so we can notify other families while maintaining confidentiality.
- A **doctor's note stating the child can participate in a group care setting** is required for the child to return to care.

If a Child Becomes Sick or Injured at School

- **Sickness:** Caregivers will be notified for early pick-up.
- **Minor Injuries:** Parents will be informed at pick-up or through the communication app (Brightwheel).
- **Major Injuries:** In emergencies, we will call 911 and notify parents immediately.

Specific Illnesses

- **Head Lice:**
 - Children with lice will be sent home and can return only after full treatment with no live lice or nits present.
 - Parents must follow up with daily checks for several weeks after treatment.
 - Long hair should be tied back during outbreaks.
 - Families in the affected classroom will be notified to check for lice and nits.
- **Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease:**
 - Return only when the fever is gone, the child can participate in normal activities, and all lesions or rash are completely gone. A doctor's note stating the child can participate in a group care setting is required.
- **Whooping Cough:**
 - Return 5 days after starting appropriate antibiotic treatment. A doctor's note stating the child can participate in a group care setting is required.

Medication Policies

Nature's Lab staff **cannot administer medication** except under the following conditions:

1. **Over-the-Counter Medication:** Requires a doctor's note specifying:
 - The child's name and birthdate.
 - Exact dosage and administration instructions.
2. **Ongoing Medical Plan:**
 - Families must provide a completed **medication form** signed by a doctor.
 - Teachers must be trained in administering the medication.
 - All plans require approval from the Nature's Lab director.

All medication forms and plans must be completed and approved before administration.

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.

Illness Policies for Nature's Lab Staff

At Nature's Lab, staff will not come to work if they are known to have a contagious illness, ensuring the health and safety of the children and families we serve.

To maintain our legal teacher-to-child ratios and uphold a safe learning environment:

- We have a list of substitute teachers available to cover staff absences.

- If we are unable to secure substitute teachers, we will first send a message to families asking for volunteers to keep their children at home in an effort to meet the required ratios.
- If this is not sufficient, we will notify parents as soon as possible and may request early pickups or, if necessary, implement a temporary school closure.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in these situations, as they help us prioritize the safety and well-being of all children in our care.

Incident Reports

At Nature's Lab, the safety and well-being of your child is our top priority. In the event of an injury or emergency, we follow these protocols:

1. **Minor Injuries:**
 - If your child experiences a minor injury, you will be notified either at the end of the day or via our communications app (Brightwheel).
 - The notification will include a description of what happened and how the injury was treated.
 - You will receive a formal accident report via the Brightwheel app.
2. **Emergencies:**
 - In the case of a serious injury or if a call to 911 is needed, you will be notified immediately after 911 has been contacted.
3. **Preparedness:**
 - Nature's Lab maintains a fully stocked first-aid kit for addressing minor injuries.
 - All key staff members are trained in **First Aid and CPR** to ensure immediate and appropriate responses to injuries.
 - Frequent fire drills, etc.

We are committed to maintaining open communication and promptly informing you about any incidents involving your child while in our care.

Emergency Care

In the event of an emergency, Nature's Lab staff will:

1. Attempt to Contact the Parent or Guardian:
 - A staff member will immediately try to reach the child's parent or guardian using the contact information provided.
2. Emergency Medical Attention:
 - If the child requires immediate medical attention, they will be transported to the nearest emergency room via ambulance.
 - Parents will be notified immediately after emergency services have been contacted.
3. Authorization for Emergency Treatment:
 - Caregivers must sign an **Authorization for Emergency Treatment** form for each child attending Nature's Lab. This ensures timely medical care if a parent or guardian cannot be reached.

At Nature's Lab, the safety and well-being of each child are our highest priorities. Please ensure your contact information and emergency forms are kept up to date.

Naps

Sleep is crucial for healthy cognitive development in children and adults. At Nature's Lab, we ensure that all children have a daily opportunity to rest:

Nap Schedule

- Children who nap will rest after lunch, typically from **12:30 pm to 2:30 pm**, or longer if needed.
- We do **not wake children up**, as this can be a violation of their rights. If a child is tired, we believe they need to sleep.

Nighttime Sleep Support

If your child has difficulty sleeping at night, consider the following:

1. **Earlier Bedtime:**
 - While it may be unpopular with some families, research suggests that an earlier bedtime can help children fall asleep more easily.
 - Over-tiredness often leads to difficulty relaxing and falling asleep, as overtired children may become overstimulated or find it harder to wind down.
2. **After-School Wind-Down Routine:**
 - Establishing a calming routine after school can help children transition from a busy day to a more relaxed state.
 - Activities such as quiet play, reading, or gentle stretching before dinner can help set the tone for the evening.
3. **Consistent Nighttime Routine:**
 - A predictable bedtime routine is key to improving sleep. This routine might include:
 - A warm bath.
 - Reading a favorite book.
 - Dimming lights and turning off screens at least an hour before bedtime.
4. **Research-Based Insights:**
 - Studies show that a regular sleep schedule and bedtime routine improve both the quantity and quality of sleep in young children.
 - The National Sleep Foundation recommends preschool-aged children get 10-13 hours of sleep per 24 hours, including naps.

We encourage families to schedule a meeting with us if nighttime sleep is a challenge. Together, we can discuss routines at home and school and brainstorm ways to support your child's healthy sleeping habits.

Licensing Compliance

According to **Title 22, Section 101230** of Community Care Licensing:

- All children under 5 years old must have the opportunity to nap or rest without distractions or disturbances.

- A napping space and cot or mat must be provided for each child.
- No child shall be forced to stay awake or remain in the napping area longer than the normal nap period.

Because of this mandate, we cannot keep children awake by offering toys or distractions. If you prefer your child not to nap, you must pick them up by **12:20 pm**.

Toilet Learning/Diapers

At Nature's Lab, we provide consistent support for children transitioning from diapers to independent toilet use. Learning to use the toilet is a developmental process that occurs at a unique pace for each child.

Our Approach

- We believe that toilet learning, like learning to walk, is a self-motivated process. As parents and caregivers, our role is to observe and support from the sidelines with love and patience.
- It is common for children to take small steps forward and sometimes regress during this process. This is a natural part of their development.

Readiness Resources

To help guide your family through the potty training journey, we recommend reviewing our Signs of Potty Training Readiness document, available on our website blog. This document includes insights from experts and practical tips to support your child.

Diapers

- Families must provide diapers and wipes for their child.
- Please keep a supply of diapers in your child's cubbie and ensure at least two (2) large containers of wipes (200+ count) are provided monthly.

Pull-Ups

- Pull-ups can only be used after discussing a potty-training plan with Nature's Lab staff.
- Pull-ups are introduced when children show regular interest in using the toilet and display multiple readiness signs.

Underwear

- When a child is ready to transition fully to underwear, we will support this process 100% at Nature's Lab.
- If a child has more than three accidents in one day, they will be asked to return to diapers or pull-ups until they are consistently dry for longer periods and show further readiness.

Non-Potty Trained Fee (NPT)

A weekly non-potty training fee applies to children not yet using the toilet independently.

- Independence means the child can:
 - Use the toilet without reminders.
 - Manage clothing and wiping without assistance.

For specific fees, see the Tuition and Fees section of this handbook.

Approaching Conflict with Children

At Nature's Lab, the health and safety of children, families, and staff are our top priorities. We also believe emotional safety is essential for learning. Conflict is not viewed as "bad behavior," but as a moment for teaching skills, especially for young children who are still learning how to communicate, wait, share space, and repair relationships. Using the Conscious Discipline approach, we hold these core community expectations:

- **Open Communication:** We help children express needs and feelings with words, gestures, and supportive prompts, and we encourage families and staff to communicate directly and respectfully.
- **Kindness & Respect:** We practice gentle hands, respectful words, and care for one another, our animals, and the natural environment.
- **Self-Regulation:** We support children (and adults) in calming their bodies and minds through breathing, movement, breaks, and connection, so they can return to play and problem-solving.
- **Community Responsibility:** We care for our shared space, repair what is damaged, and practice making things right when appropriate.
- **Curiosity:** We lead with curiosity instead of blame. We look beneath the behavior to understand the need or skill a child is working on. We ask: *What is this child telling us? What need is underneath? What support or teaching will help next time?* Curiosity helps children feel safe enough to learn, repair, and grow.

Curiosity also helps us assess safety thoughtfully, balancing children's need to explore, take appropriate risks, and build confidence while remaining closely supervised and supported by attentive adults.

Conflict Resolution

When conflicts arise between children, we give the situation our full attention. Our goal is to:

- Support children in finding their own solutions while modeling healthy communication and emotional regulation.
- Validate all feelings while guiding children to connect with others in positive ways.
- Provide language to express emotions (e.g., frustration, excitement, sadness) and offer redirection when necessary.
- Encourage calming strategies like sitting down, taking deep breaths, and revisiting solutions once emotions are more manageable.

Preventive Strategies

Understanding that children can become overstimulated, we provide:

- A balance of active and quiet activities.
- Spaces for individual or small-group play.
- Regular modeling of deep breathing to build self-regulation tools.

For children under six, emotions can feel overwhelming. During these moments, we offer support, understanding, and hugs. Social-emotional growth is a key focus, and we encourage families to reach out for strategies to support this development at home.

Discipline Policy

Nature's Lab ensures a safe, respectful environment for all children, supporting their healthy development in all areas. We adhere to **Community Care Licensing, Title 22, Division 12, Personal Rights**, which guarantees every child the right to:

- Dignity in personal relationships with staff and others.
- Safe, healthful, and comfortable accommodations.
- Freedom from corporal punishment, pain, humiliation, intimidation, mental abuse, or punitive actions.

Our Approach

- Staff members use **Conscious Discipline** to help children build strong relationships, navigate emotions, and handle difficult situations.
- Social-emotional development is integrated into daily routines to minimize the need for traditional discipline scenarios.

Support for Challenging Behaviors

If a child exhibits behaviors beyond our expertise:

1. We will meet with caregivers to discuss the behavior, strategies, and resources.
2. Collaboratively create an action plan to address the issue.
3. Seek support from external organizations as needed to ensure the child's well-being.

At Nature's Lab, we are committed to fostering a community of respect, understanding, and support for every child and family.

Communication with Families

Here's the updated and streamlined Communication with Families, Approaching Conflict with Caregivers, and Conflict Resolution Procedure sections:

Communication with Families

At Nature's Lab, open communication is the foundation of strong relationships and a thriving community. We value each family's input and encourage you to reach out anytime, especially if you have a concern or question.

- We believe respectful, transparent communication leads to better relationships and a stronger program for everyone involved.
- You can email Silvia Anderson at S.Anderson@NaturesLabSchool.com to schedule a time to talk after school hours. Please allow up to 24 hours for a response to your inquiry.

Approaching Conflict with Caregivers: Caregivers as Partners

Nature's Lab School is built on strong relationships between families, staff, and the community. To support children's healthy development, we ask that caregivers partner with us to foster a positive and respectful environment.

Key Considerations:

- **Community Mindset:** Our staff makes decisions based on the well-being of the entire community, and while we strive to honor individual needs, not all requests can be accommodated if they conflict with our mission, vision, or long-term service goals.
- **Open Door Policy:** Enrolled families are welcome to visit on-site at any time, provided it does not disrupt the class, child, or scheduled activities.
- **Expectations for Caregivers:**
 - Follow school rules, policies, and procedures.
 - Treat administrators, teachers, parents, and children with respect.
 - Contribute to a positive school culture and climate.

As a private business, Nature's Lab reserves the right to discontinue services if caregivers engage in conduct that disrupts a positive working relationship, including but not limited to:

- Repeatedly disregarding school rules or policies.
- Disrespectful treatment of staff, families, or children.
- Consistently conflicting with Nature's Lab's mission and vision.

Families who find Nature's Lab's approach does not align with their priorities or expectations may be asked to consider other programs that better fit their needs.

Conflict Resolution Procedure

Nature's Lab is committed to addressing concerns in a fair and respectful manner. The following procedure is in place for resolving conflicts, controversies, or concerns:

1. **Informal Resolution:**
 - Begin with a conversation or submit a concern orally or in writing to a teacher, parent, or school administrator.
 - If the concern cannot be resolved informally, the process will move to a formal meeting.
2. **Family Meeting and Action Plan:**
 - All caregivers involved must participate in an open discussion to share concerns and requests.
 - Nature's Lab will attempt to accommodate family needs whenever possible, but policies and protocols prioritize the entire community.

- If a resolution cannot be reached, further action will be taken.
- 3. Conflict Resolution or Termination of Care:
 - If no resolution is possible, Nature's Lab may provide a 21-day notice to terminate care or, in some cases, immediate termination, depending on the situation.

We are dedicated to creating a respectful, nurturing environment for all families, staff, and children, and we appreciate your cooperation in supporting this goal.

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.

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 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 to, at some point, 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 schedule a meeting so we can find ways to support healthy relationships between all children and adults.

Screen Free and Media Free Policy

Increasingly, outdoor education is recognized as the ideal setting for children's healthy development. These benefits are amplified in environments that engage all the senses, balanced with intentional exposure to technology at the right time.

At Nature's Lab, we offer a thoughtful and deliberate approach that incorporates technology in alignment with **APA recommendations for screen time**. We create a creative learning environment focused on human interaction and avoid marketing trends that encourage dependence on the latest products. Most importantly, we partner with families to support children in developing **creative intelligence, thinking flexibility, and life resilience**.

Insights from *The Anxious Generation* Book and research reinforce the importance of reducing screen time in favor of authentic, real-world interactions. The book highlights how excessive media exposure can lead to increased stress, reduced attention spans, and hindered emotional regulation in children. By prioritizing outdoor play, hands-on experiences, and meaningful relationships, we give children the tools to build confidence, manage anxiety, and engage with their world in healthy ways.

At Nature's Lab, our goal is to nurture a balanced approach that supports children's holistic development and well-being, preparing them for a world that requires both technological understanding and emotional intelligence.

How Does This Look at Nature's Lab?

At Nature's Lab, we believe that young children learn best through **interactions, imitation, imagination, and make-believe**. Here's how this philosophy is reflected in our program:

- **Engaging Storytelling and Learning:**
Our teachers use complex vocabulary and sentence structure during storytelling and book reading, helping children build mental imagery that enhances future reading comprehension and creative thinking.
- **Dynamic Environments:**
We continually adapt our environment to support learning through our emergent, child-led curriculum.
- **Active, Imaginative Play:**
In our outdoor classrooms, children move, create, solve problems, and explore nature. These activities foster creativity, physical development, and social-emotional skills essential for healthy relationships.
- **No Passive Media Consumption:**
Research shows that passive media consumption can hinder learning, language development, and creativity. At Nature's Lab, children are not exposed to fixed media images and instead engage with hands-on activities and interactions that stimulate their imagination.

To further support this, **NO items with media-related logos** (e.g., cartoons, movie characters) are allowed. This includes clothing, shoes, bedding, water bottles, and toys. Please review your child's cubbie and replace any such items with media-free alternatives.

Media at Home

We understand that screens are sometimes necessary in busy family life. However, we encourage families to:

- **Limit Screen Time:** Minimize your child's exposure to TVs, gaming systems, and computers whenever possible.
- **Choose Age-Appropriate Content:** Use resources like *Common Sense Media* to select high-quality, child-friendly programming. <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>
- **Monitor and Co-View Content:** Watch programs with your child to help them understand and connect content to their world.

American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations:

- **Birth to 18 months:** Avoid screen media except for video chatting.
- **18-24 months:** If introducing media, choose high-quality programming and limit it to **less than 30 minutes per day**. Watch with your child.
- **2-5 years:** Limit screen time to **less than 1 hour per day**. Parents should co-view and discuss content.
- **6 years and older:** Set consistent limits on screen time and ensure it does not replace essential activities like sleep and physical play.

Nature's Lab Recommendations:

- Share **media-free time** together (e.g., during meals or car rides).
- Establish **media-free zones** at home, such as bedrooms.
- Avoid commercials and advertisements to reduce consumerism in children.
- Teach **online safety and citizenship**, including treating others respectfully online and offline, and being mindful of online predators.

Cellphone Usage at Nature's Lab

Caregivers

- Caregivers must bring a cellphone or electronic device to sign children in and out using the app.
- **Cellphone use for any other reason is not permitted** on campus. This is your child's special time, and they want to share their day with you—whether it's showing you their artwork, collecting eggs, or playing with friends. Be present and enjoy these moments.

Teachers

- Teachers use cellphones/tablets to:
 - Take pictures and videos of children's activities.
 - Communicate with parents via the app.
- These devices are used minimally to ensure the focus remains on children's safety and engagement.

Closing Remarks

At Nature's Lab, we strive to be an engaging and respectful community where every child, family, and staff member feels safe, supported, and valued. This handbook reflects our core values of **connection, respect, creativity, and growth**, which guide everything we do.

We hope the time you and your child spend at Nature's Lab will create lasting memories filled with joy, discovery, and meaningful relationships. Our goal is to be a place where children develop skills, confidence, and a love for learning while families feel supported and connected within our community.

While we know that one day, your child will graduate from Nature's Lab and your family will move on to other opportunities, we want you to know that you will always remain a part of the Nature's Lab community. We warmly welcome you to:

- Attend future events and celebrations.
- Share updates about your family's journey and accomplishments.
- Stay connected with us and continue to engage in meaningful ways.

We are committed to continuously learning and growing, just as we encourage the children at NLS. Periodically, we may send out surveys or summaries to gather feedback about your experiences at Nature's Lab and how our program influenced your family's development. Your participation in these efforts is invaluable and helps us ensure we provide the best possible environment for all families joining our community.

Graduate Family Feedback and Surveys

Nature's Lab is dedicated to understanding the long-term impact of our program on the children and families we serve. To support this, we occasionally send out **surveys** or requests for updates to learn more about:

- How your experiences at Nature's Lab influenced your child's ongoing development.
- Suggestions for ways we can improve and grow as a community.

Your feedback is invaluable, and we encourage all families—current and alumni—to participate. By sharing your experiences, you help us refine our approach and continue providing the best possible environment for future generations.

Thank you for being an integral part of the Nature's Lab community and entrusting us with the care and education of your child. We look forward to supporting you and your family during your time here and beyond, and we can't wait to see the incredible impact your child will make in the world.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions, suggestions, or thoughts.

With gratitude,
The Nature's Lab Team

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>