

# Parent Handbook 2026-27 School Year



## **MISSION**

The mission of the Kalamazoo Nature Center is to create relationships & experiences that welcome and inspire people to discover, enjoy, value, and care for nature. KNC envisions a resilient community where all people have strong interconnections with the natural world.

At Nature's Way Preschool, we envision nature as an integral part of our students' lives. We strive to engage your whole family in the Nature's Way experience, understanding the importance of developing relationships with our school families. Outdoor learning brings numerous benefits for health and well-being, environmental awareness, and creates opportunities for young children to appreciate community. Spending time in nature promotes a sense of wonder and curiosity and helps children develop a sense of responsibility to care for the natural world.

## **EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

At Nature's Way Preschool, we foster a caring and positive atmosphere in which children can learn. As we bridge the gap from home to school, we offer opportunities for children to connect with nature while developing the needs of the whole child.

Through exploration and hands-on activities that are both child-centered and teacher-directed, we introduce social, emotional and physical skills, language and math competencies.

Based on the knowledge that children learn through play, classroom routines encourage active involvement, meaningful experimentation, and reinforcement through repetition. Schedules are designed to balance structure, free choice, and active and quiet times.

We recognize that children advance through developmental stages, and we treat each student as an individual who works through each stage at their own pace. Through the love of learning, we allow children to experience their own stage of development and help them to feel successful without pressure.

We value the involvement and support of our families in the program. The connections that we make with each family member are important links in creating shared experiences which ultimately foster the development of our school community. Nature's Way Preschool welcomes all families with love and respect.

## **STAFF**

The staff at Nature's Way has experience teaching preschool age children and has knowledge and love of the natural world. They are caring, friendly, enthusiastic, and enjoy working and being with the preschool age child. All staff meet state licensing requirements. Please visit the KNC website and click on the preschool link to find the staff section for more information about the NWP staff.

## **ENROLLMENT**

Enrollment for the school year is based on a first-come, first-serve basis. If your child is currently enrolled, you will have priority for the following year. This priority policy also applies to siblings of current and past students. Students enrolled at NWP must be 3 years old by September 1, and potty trained.

## **SCHOOL YEAR DATES**

The school year begins on the Wednesday following Labor Day and ends the last week of May.

### **IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION**

Nature's Way Preschool: 269-343-7342

Holly Morris, Director

### **SCHOOL HOURS**

Monday-Friday 8:00-4:30. The school will be closed during all major holidays. During the spring break and holiday break, the office will be open for limited hours while staff care for animals, etc.

### **LICENSING**

Nature's Way Preschool is licensed by the State of Michigan Bureau of Regulatory Services. The licensing notebook is available to parents during business hours and will contain all licensing inspection reports and related corrective action plans since 2024. Licensing inspection reports from the past 2 years are available on the childcare licensing website at [www.michigan.gov/michildcare](http://www.michigan.gov/michildcare).

### **ARRIVAL**

You will walk your student to the mudroom so they can put their backpack in their cubby. During the first few weeks of school, while students are getting used to saying goodbye, we may begin our school day inside the classroom. It is helpful to develop a goodbye routine with your preschooler to help him/her prepare for a confident goodbye. (example: one big hug and a high five)

### **DISMISSAL**

All adults picking up students must be listed on the *permission to release* section of the emergency card. Adults we do not recognize will be asked to show ID. Please keep your emergency card updated with any changes in who will pick up your child. Parents/caregivers will enter the school and wait in the family area until the teachers open the mudroom doors for dismissal. If you have a sleeping child in the car or any mobility challenges and need a staff person to walk your child up the path to your car, please speak with the director or a teacher to arrange help at dismissal.

### **TYPICAL DAILY SCHEDULE**

8:30 arrival, outdoor exploration on nature playgrounds  
9:30 hike, outdoor free choice and story time in the woods  
10:30 return to school, wash hands, snack  
10:45 whole group time (music, movement, learning activities)  
11:00 free choice/small group time (targeted instruction time with 4 or 8 students)  
11:20 clean up  
11:25 pack backpack, prepare for dismissal  
11:30 dismissal

### **ABSENCES**

If your child is ill or is unable to attend class, please call us that morning or as soon as possible. If you know in advance of an absence, please inform one of the staff. The Health Department requires us to report all illnesses; please identify the reason for your student's absence while reporting.

### **TUITION PAYMENT**

Nature's Way Preschool operates on the money from your monthly tuition fees.

Payments must be made on time to provide a quality experience for your child. Payments are made electronically by the staff at the Kalamazoo Nature Center who will run your credit card or debit card each month during the first week of the month. Please make sure your payment information is kept up to date. The monthly tuition is based on 9-month enrollment and is not affected by absences due to illness, family vacations, school breaks or other days off. You are responsible for all 9 months of the school year.

- If there are 5 or more days of closing for any reason at NWP, we will extend the school year by up to one month (through June 30). We do not reimburse for the first 5 days of closing. If we must close for more than 5 days, we will add days as the calendar allows through the end of June. If we must close school for more days than can be made up in June, we will suspend billing or refund months that were paid in full when applicable.

## **SCHOOL CLOSINGS**

Nature's Way Preschool weather closing information will be posted on the WWMT website in the *Weather Closing* section. We will also send a school email and a Remind using the Remind App.

## **DELINQUENT TUITION PAYMENTS**

If your tuition payment is not received by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month, it will be considered delinquent. If your account is not up to date by the 1<sup>st</sup> of the next month, your child will be withdrawn from the program, and the tuition that you paid to reserve your child's placement will be kept by the Kalamazoo Nature Center. Any unpaid balances will be turned over to a collection agency for possible notification to the Credit Bureau.

## **ILLNESS POLICY**

If a child comes to school when they are not feeling well, they will be more vulnerable to infection. It is in the best interest of your child, and other children attending Nature's Way, to keep your child at home when they are ill. A child needs to feel well to actively participate in our program.

Should your child become ill during the day, we will contact you or others on the emergency list to come and pick up your child from school. Please make sure that all emergency contact information is correct on the information card to ensure that staff can reach a parent or guardian if your child needs to go home from school.

The following guidelines will help prevent illness from spreading and will help you make an informed decision about sending your child to school.

1. After a fever, a child's temperature must be normal (under 100.4) for 24 hours before returning to school.
2. If antibiotics are prescribed, a child must be on the antibiotic 24 hours before returning to school.
3. Excessive coughing spreads germs, and young children often have a difficult time covering their coughs. If your child is experiencing excessive coughing, please keep them at home.
4. Pink eye: children need to be on an antibiotic at least 24 hours before returning to school, unless the infection is determined to be a viral infection.

5. If your child has any contagious illness, it must be reported to us to let other parents know so they can watch their child for symptoms. These would include those listed above, as well as strep, pneumonia, head lice, measles, hepatitis, scarlet fever and flu.
  6. We are required by the Health Department to report any contagious illness occurring at the school.
  7. Vomiting and diarrhea are contagious and should be managed at home. Please keep your child home at least 24 hours after they have experienced either of these symptoms.
- The NWP illness policy for students is applicable to staff and volunteers.

## **MEDICAL FORMS**

The Department of Childcare Licensing requires that each child have a physical every two years. These records must be kept on file at the school. If your child attended NWP last year, they are not required to have another physical. Immunizations need to be updated according to state law and the medical form signed by a physician or health care professional.

Please note: If you choose not to immunize your child, you must sign a waiver form from the Health Department. If you need a waiver form, you must make an appointment with Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services at **269-373-5198**. We do not have the waiver forms at Nature's Way Preschool; you must visit the Health Department in person to sign the waiver.

State law does not allow a child to begin school if these forms are not on file.

Please make sure that NWP staff are aware of any allergies and update our staff regularly with any changes.

## **MEDICINE AT SCHOOL**

No medication shall be given at NWP except on written order by the child's parents/guardians after they have completed the Medication Permission and Information form. This form should be updated annually for medication that needs to be administered on an ongoing basis. All medication must be stored according to label instructions and in its original container. The container must have a pharmacy label indicating the physician's name, child's name, instructions, and the name and strength of the medication. All medication is to be stored out of the reach of children and returned to the child's parent or destroyed when the parent determines it is no longer needed, or it has expired. All medication is to be given according to the label directions.

## **INSURANCE**

The Kalamazoo Nature Center maintains major liability insurance covering all scheduled staff supervised activities at Nature's Way Preschool. Children are covered by this insurance when they are participating in activities put on by Nature's Way. After class periods have ended, while the KNC maintains property liability, it is the responsibility of the parent if staying beyond the class period to ensure their child's safety.

## **FOSTERING CONFIDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE**

The following are some suggestions for fostering confidence in your child and enhancing their preschool experience. Allowing children to do tasks on their own gives them a sense of accomplishment and confidence!

- Let them help pick out their own bag/backpack to bring to school. Show them how to zip/unzip it.

- Let them carry their backpack from the car to the school and then from the school to the car at the end of their class time.
- Encourage them to put their backpack and other belongings away in their cubby.
- Encourage them to walk down to the school and not be carried.
- Encourage your child to walk down with a classmate.
- Encourage your child to at least try to put on their own coat and boots.
- Give your child several choices for what to wear for the day, talk about the weather and what are good choices for outdoor play.
- Set up play dates with other children in their class.

## USING THE BATHROOM

All students need to be fully potty trained and able to use the bathroom independently to attend Nature's Way Preschool. Students who wear diapers or pull ups should wait to begin school when they are fully potty trained. We understand that accidents occur with preschool children. Extra clothing will be kept in the bathrooms or the child's backpack so children can change if they have an accident.

## COMMUNICATIONS

The following are ways in which we will communicate events, progress or general news about your student and the school:

**E-Mail** – Teachers will send a weekly email with reminders for special activities at the preschool, along with photos of our week. The director will send occasional emails with school news.

**Kalamazoo Nature Center News** – A Kalamazoo Nature Center member benefit.

**Conferences** – Parent teacher conferences will take place in late October/early November and in April.

**Daily interaction at arrival and dismissal** - please check in with us often, we love to hear what is going on in your families.

## HOLIDAYS

We do not celebrate the holidays at school. Instead, we celebrate the seasons in nature. We sometimes have pajama days or other fun days and will let you know ahead of time to prepare for those.

## SNACKS & WATER BOTTLES

Students are asked to bring a healthy **nut-free** snack each day they attend school and a filled water bottle. Please consider the environmental impact of single-use snack items, plastic straws, etc. We love to see reusable containers.

## BIRTHDAYS

Birthdays will be celebrated with air-popped popcorn provided by NWP. Birthday students receive a book to take home from the school. If your child would like to bring a birthday treat for their classmates, treats can be placed on top of cubbies to be enjoyed at home. We do not serve birthday treats to the students during school hours. You are welcome to arrange an after-school celebration with your classmates on our deck or outdoor play areas.

## **SCHOOL BREAKS**

Nature's Way Preschool follows the Kalamazoo Public School calendar for the following major breaks: Thanksgiving, Winter Break and Spring Break.

## **FAMILY FIELD TRIPS AT THE KALAMAZOO NATURE CENTER**

We visit the KNC a few times a year during our regular school hours. Transportation is not provided; we meet at the KNC. All family members are invited to stay and enjoy the field trip with their children. This is an excellent opportunity to spend time with your child's classmates and their families. Students must be accompanied by a parent/guardian during the field trip.

## **WEAPONS**

Any sort of toy weapon or action figure is not permitted at Nature's Way Preschool, nor is any kind of weapon play. Children will be redirected in their play and informed that weapon play is not permitted.

## **TOYS**

Toys from home should be left in backpacks or in the family car. These can become distracting or could get lost or broken at school. \* Exception: A special stuffed animal or blanket can come to school if a child is feeling anxious about being at school and needs a special soft toy to feel comforted.

## **SUPPLIES**

- A backpack, labeled with your child's name, and large enough for art projects. It should also be one where your child can open/close it on their own. Please send it with your child each day of school.
- A filled water bottle and healthy, nut-free snack.
- An extra set of clothing (shirt, pants, underwear, socks). We will provide a large zip lock bag with your child's name for the extra clothes.
- Appropriate weather-related clothing such as boots(rain/winter), coat/jacket, snow pants, hat and waterproof mittens
- Reusable grocery bag for transporting wet or muddy gear from school to home
- Indoor shoes to change into after outdoor play.

## **Expectations for Behavior**

To provide a safe learning environment, we work with our students to maintain the following school behaviors:

1. Use kind and respectful words.
2. Only teachers or parents open the doors.
3. Walk behind the lead teacher and in front of the teacher at the back of the line while hiking.
4. Stay with the class during playtime in the woods. Return to the teachers when called.
5. Walking feet are for inside, running feet are for outside.
6. Wash your hands before and after eating snacks, after using the bathroom, and after blowing your nose.
7. Hitting and/or pushing classmates is hurtful and not permitted.

8. Pretend weapon play is not permitted and will be redirected.

## **DISCIPLINE and BEHAVIOR ISSUES**

At Nature's Way Preschool we set clear expectations for classroom and outdoor behaviors. With guidance from teachers, students will learn how to label their emotions. Teachers will give students the language needed to begin solving conflicts with their peers.

A daily opportunity for movement and outdoor nature play allows children appropriate ways to release energy. Conflict situations will be approached with love and understanding. An uncooperative child will be counseled about their behavior by one of the teachers. If necessary, the uncooperative child will be removed from the situation. Examples: hitting, pushing, biting or forcefully taking an object from another child. When the child demonstrates that they are ready to join the group appropriately, they will be encouraged to participate. During group activities, all children are expected to remain as part of the group; however, no pressure is exerted to participate in group activities. Serious problems will be discussed with parents. If corrective actions have been implemented to help rectify the problem behavior and the behaviors are not corrected, parents may be asked to withdraw their child from the program. NWP students spend time hiking and playing in the woods every day. Because of the nature of our programming, children must demonstrate the ability to follow basic safety rules, such as staying with the class, and not running away from teachers. Students unable to follow this safety rule should not attend NWP until they can maintain it.

## **Emergency Procedures for Natural and Man-Made Disasters, Fire and Tornado Drills and Serious Accident/Injury**

### **FIRE DRILLS**

Fire drills are held every other month of the school year. **Procedure**

One teacher sets off the alarm. Children are directed to the mudroom door, where the teacher is waiting. North classroom exits toward the north playground and meets at the bridge. South classroom exits toward the south playground and meets at the fireplace. The teachers help direct the children out of the building while counting each student. A teacher takes the cell phone and parent emergency cards. The children are taken outside to the designated spot.

### **TORNADO DRILLS**

Tornado drills are held in September and April. **Procedure**

The children will be taken to a room with no windows (the storage room in the classroom area). One teacher will count children as they enter the storage room. The other teacher will get a cell phone and parent emergency cards. The children are instructed to sit on the floor while teachers sing songs and tell stories.

### **SERIOUS ACCIDENT/INJURY and OTHER EMERGENCIES**

All of the staff at Nature's Way Preschool have been trained in CPR and basic emergency first aid.

### **Procedure**

During any emergency involving your child, these are the steps that we will take:

1. Assess the situation and if warranted, call 911. Staff will respond as necessary until emergency help arrives.
2. You will be contacted immediately.

3. If the situation requires professional care, a staff member will accompany your child to the hospital you have requested on the emergency information card. Please make sure this information is accurate and updated.
4. If we are unable to reach you, we will call the individual(s) you have designated as your emergency contact.
5. If you have a family emergency that requires your child to be picked up early, please call the school at 269- 343-7342.

### **Fire**

In the event of a fire, we would follow the evacuation procedure and make sure that all the children and teachers got out of the school and then call 911. The director would contact the parents with the cell phone, while the teachers would be responsible for providing comfort to the children and maintaining a safe situation for all children. Parents would pick up children along the fence near the parking lot.

### **Tornado**

In the event of a Tornado, we would follow our emergency procedure and seek shelter in the storage room and bathrooms of the preschool. Parents would be contacted by cell phone. When tornado danger has passed, children will return to the classroom and follow the normal dismissal procedure.

### **Threat of Violence or Gunfire: Lock Down**

Man-made disasters including a person wishing to do harm at the school: teachers will follow the tornado plan and seek shelter in the storage room. Classroom doors will be shut, which locks the doors to anyone who is not a staff member; only staff members know the entry code. Teachers will use cell phones from the storage room to call 911 and wait in the storage room until emergency responders arrive at the school. NWP staff were trained in active assailant training by the Kalamazoo County Sheriff office, April 2018.

### **Power Outage**

In the event of a power outage, staff will determine why power is out. If compliance with licensing rules cannot be maintained, parents will be called to pick up students and the facility will close for the day.

### **Water main break or water outage**

In the event of a water main break or water outage, staff will call parents and close the facility. If it is determined that children can remain in the building until their parents arrive, normal dismissal procedures will be followed. In the case of evacuation, staff will follow the fire emergency procedure.

### **Flood**

In the event of a flood, staff will follow the evacuation procedure and make sure that all the children and teachers get to higher ground and to a safe location away from the floodwaters. The director would contact the parents with the cell phone, while the teachers would be responsible for providing comfort to the children and maintaining a safe situation for all children. Parents would pick up children along the fence near the parking lot or at a determined safe location.

Note: children with special needs will have an individualized emergency plan (including who will help the child and any accommodations that may be needed for that child) for fire, tornado, and all other emergencies.

## **HEALTH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

The staff at Nature's Way Preschool is committed to making sure that the preschool is cleaned and maintained for the health of all the children, parents and staff.

### **HAND WASHING**

Children are instructed to wash with soap, on the front and back of their hands, and to use warm water. A hand washing poster is above each of the sinks.

The children will wash their hands prior to/after the following:

- before snack
- after using the toilet
- after using paint
- after using play dough
- after using a tissue
- after touching classroom animals

### **BODILY FLUIDS**

All staff are trained in dealing with blood borne pathogens. All bodily fluid situations are cleaned with bleach, sprayed with Lysol, and disposed of in a plastic bag and taken immediately to the outside garbage can.

Staff are required to use non-latex gloves in the following situations for the protection of the child and attending staff member:

- Assisting a child who has an abrasion with a Band-Aid
- Assisting a child who has diarrhea at school
- Assisting a child who has vomited
- Assisting a child with a runny nose

### **CLEANING**

The school building is cleaned daily by KNC facilities staff. Bathrooms are cleaned daily; classrooms are swept and mopped daily.

### **TOYS**

Toys are sanitized by the cleaning staff at KNC. Toys that have been in a child's mouth are removed from the classroom and put in the dishwasher.

### **TABLES**

Tables are cleaned several times a day with soap, water and bleach (in spray bottles) after being used for projects, play dough and glue. Tables are washed before and after snacks.

### **CLASSROOM FLOORS AND RUGS**

Floors are swept twice a day as needed and mopped daily by KNC cleaning staff. Classroom rugs are cleaned twice a year with a professional rug cleaner.

## CLOTHING

**We spend most of our school days outside.** During severe weather (thunderstorms, high winds, extreme wind chill and/or temperatures) we will remain indoors. Winter temperature or wind chill below zero will be an inside day. Clothing should be durable, weather appropriate and something you don't mind getting dirty. Expect your child to come home dirty from a great day of exploring!

Please label all snow pants, mittens, hats, boots, coats, etc.

**Warm days:** play clothes, hiking sandals or tennis shoes, bug spray

**Cold days:** layers of warm clothing, snow pants, warm coat, hat that covers ears securely, waterproof gloves or mittens (knit mittens do not keep hands dry)

**Most fall and spring days:** Muddy buddies are highly recommended! Rain boots, sometimes hats and mittens. We have several muddy buddies available to borrow if needed.



