



Dear Young Naturalist Family,

Welcome to the exciting world of the Young Naturalists! We are looking forward to exploring the wonders of nature with your child and are delighted to have you join us for our 28th year of this unique program.

The Young Naturalist Preschool is an active, hands-on learning experience where children ages 3-5 hone the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills that are crucial to their development - as well as their success in future school experiences and in life beyond - through interaction with the physical spaces, materials, and the wonderful staff of the Hudson Highlands Nature Museum.

A typical day might involve exploring the concept of volume by pouring water in the sensory table, practicing letter-writing with a stick in the mud, learning to respect others - both other humans and other living beings - by taking turns gently holding a millipede found on the trail, and practicing motor skills by moving, stacking, and building with rocks. We write and draw on paper, but we go so far beyond 8.5" x 11".

The children have regular experiences with animals in the classroom and on the property of the Outdoor Discovery Center. We hike in the woods and fields and to the ponds on our site, and happily utilize our one-of-a-kind nature play area, Grasshopper Grove. In addition, each Young Naturalist class makes several trips a year to the Museum's Wildlife Education Center, where the children can try different trails and get an up close look at the Museum's collection of wildlife, including owls, snakes, frogs, and turtles.

This handbook will provide you with the information you will need to get the most out of our preschool program. If you have any questions, however, please feel free to contact me at 845-534-5506 ext. 207 or at [kkopf@hhnm.org](mailto:kkopf@hhnm.org).

We look forward to welcoming your family into our Young Naturalist community.

Sincerely,

Kerry Kopf  
Young Naturalist (YN) Head Teacher and Manager

## Mission Statement

The mission of the Hudson Highlands Nature Museum is to connect children with nature through hands-on education and play, and to inspire active stewards of our shared environment. As part of the Museum, the Young Naturalist program meets this mission through a developmentally appropriate, science- and nature-based early childhood experience. We encourage wonder, and help develop a lifelong appreciation of and relationship with the natural world.



## Educational Philosophy

In the Young Naturalist Preschool we believe that young children are naturally curious and motivated to learn. We facilitate this learning by:

- Providing an enriched environment that encourages exploration, experimentation, and self-discovery
- Developing learning activities that meet individual children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional needs
- Encouraging problem solving by asking open-ended questions
- Offering ample opportunities for children to engage in group activities that foster cooperation
- Providing meaningful active play experiences in the natural world
- Nurturing a child's innate sense of wonder

## The Young Naturalist Staff and Contact Information

The Young Naturalist teaching staff is dedicated, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable. We all share a love of the natural world and are committed to sharing that love with the preschoolers in our care. We are well-versed in developmentally appropriate early childhood classroom practice and have a wealth of experience in working with young children with varying needs and abilities.

There is one lead teacher and one or two teaching assistants in each class, depending on the age of the children, with a maximum of 16 students (the Fox and Dragonfly classes are the exception, with a maximum of 15 students per day). In addition, throughout the year knowledgeable Museum Environmental Educators visit with live animals or other activities and share their expertise with the students and teachers. We also invite our administrative staff, Museum board members, and **you** to come be special guest readers or do an activity with the class (in the past, science experiments, woodworking, garden 'seed bombs' and more have been done thanks to staff, Board, and families).



**All Young Naturalist registration and paperwork is handled by Michelle Mindicino,** the Museum Membership & Registration Coordinator. Her office is the first office on the left as you come up the stairs in the Learning Center Building.

### *Get in Touch*

To contact Michelle with registration/paperwork/tuition questions:

- call the main line to Hudson Highlands Nature Museum, 845-534-5506, and Michelle is ext 204.
- email her at [mmindicino@hhnm.org](mailto:mmindicino@hhnm.org)

To contact Kerry Kopf, Preschool Manager:

- call 845-534-5506, ext 207.
- email her at [kkopf@hhnm.org](mailto:kkopf@hhnm.org)

If you ever need to reach us on a day when your child's class is at the Wildlife Education Center, you may call directly: 845-534-7781.

## Registration Information

### Class Options & Locations

FH = Farm House; FHE = Farm House East; LC = Learning Center

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:45-11:30 in FHE	Fox	Fox	Fox	Fox	Fox
9 - 11:45 in LC	Bluebirds	Turtles	Bluebirds	Turtles	Bluebirds
9 - 11:45 in FH	Owls	Owls	Owls	Owls	Owls
12:15 - 3 in FHE	Dragonflies		Dragonflies		Dragonflies
12:15 - 3 in LC		Frogs		Frogs	
12:15 - 3 in FH	Deer	Deer	Deer	Deer	Deer

### Enrollment Eligibility

Enrollment is for the duration of the Young Naturalist Program: September 8, 2022–June 14, 2023. Eligibility for classes is as follows:

- For all classes, children must be toilet trained
- Must be **three years of age by September 1st** for the three-year-old **Bluebird class**
- Must be **three years of age December 1st** for the three-year-old **Turtle and Frog classes**
- Must be **four years of age December 1st** for the four-year-old **Dragonfly, Owl, and Deer classes** and the mixed-age **Fox class**.

### New Students

To enroll, fill out an application and submit it to the Museum office. If space is available in the requested class, we will provide a contract. Read it thoroughly, complete, sign, and return with a \$65.00 non-refundable registration fee and first payment (10% of the annual tuition). **Museum membership at the Family Plus level is included for the duration of enrollment in the YN program.**

### *Priority enrollment*

We enroll for the school year in three groups:

- Group 1 = current students, their siblings, and siblings of alumni
  - ◆ Submit applications in December; contracts due in January
- Group 2 = Museum members whose children are not current students, siblings of current students, or siblings of alumni
  - ◆ Submit applications in January/February; contracts due in March
- Group 3 = not-yet-members/general public
  - ◆ Submit at any time; placements will be made after Group 1 and Group 2 are completed

### *Wait List*

We make every effort to place your child in the first choice class you select on your application. During registration in December/January, whenever there are more applications for a class than there are spaces, we conduct a lottery using a random number generator. If no space is available in your first choice class we will notify you when we send the contract that your child has been placed in an alternative class and your name will be added to our waiting list for the requested class (if by lottery, then with their waitlist number). If an opening should arise in the requested class we will notify you by phone or email.



### *Tuition payments*

Once enrolled, each family is responsible for tuition payments regardless of their child's attendance; there is no reduction in tuition for days missed due to illness, family vacation, or for days canceled due to inclement weather.

**Ten percent of tuition is paid at the time of enrollment; the remaining balance of the tuition can be paid:**

- in full for a 5% discount if paid by cash or check by June 1st
- in full for a 1.5% discount if paid by credit card by June 1st
- in an additional nine installments from September 1st - April 1st
  - the second installment is due on or before June 1st (or in the month your child is enrolled if after June 1st)
  - **automatic payment is available; see the Museum office to set up automatic credit card payments.**

Cash, check (made out to HHNM), and credit cards are all acceptable forms of payment.

### *Museum Membership*

Enrollment in the Young Naturalist program includes a Family Plus HHNM membership. As a member of the Museum, you receive many additional benefits throughout the year:

- Free admission to the Wildlife Education Center and Grasshopper Grove for children and grandchildren under 18
- Discounted rates for summer camp, birthday parties, Knee High Naturalist and other programs for children residing in the same household
- Early registration for the Young Naturalist Preschool, Knee High Naturalist, Homeschool Naturalist, Summer Camp, Mini-Camp, and select Nature Programs
- Free admission pass (for two people) to a weekend nature program
- 2 additional (4 in total) guest passes to the Wildlife Education Center or Grasshopper Grove
- Free admission pass (upgraded to four people) to a Weekend Nature Program
- Jones Farm coupon for one 12 oz. package of Dean's Beans Fair Trade 100% Organic Coffee
- Discounts at participating local shops and restaurants, Main Street Supporters
- Free admission pass (for two people) for one of the following special events: Butterfly Weekend, Halloween I-Spy, or Maple Sugaring Tours
- Caretaker Card: This additional card is attached to your membership account and allows you to share your Membership benefits with a third adult, such as a babysitter or grandparent. (Please note, this card is intended for use while visiting with the children attached to the original Membership and cannot be used to pass membership benefits on to an unrelated group)

### *Documents*

The following documents must be submitted on or before your child's meet & greet orientation day (September 1 or 2, 2022):

1. A copy of your child's immunization record or medical vaccination waiver
2. [Medical and Emergency Contacts Form](#)
3. Student information form for the classroom: [Bluebirds/Turtles/Frogs, Owls/Deer/Dragonflies, or Foxes](#)

### *Lunch Club: An Extended Day Option*

Four and 5-year old students may enroll in Lunch Club to add 2 hours of nature play to their day. Afternoon students come before class begins (Early Birds) and morning students stay after class ends (Later Gators) to enjoy an overlapping lunch and play time together. Families may sign up for sessions in the fall, winter, spring, or all three. Please note that pricing is slightly different for the Fox class to account for a longer program.

## Why a Science and Nature-based Curriculum?

In contrast to many preschools, the Young Naturalist curriculum is based on the natural world and scientific concepts. This allows the children to explore their world using all of their senses and helps them build a lasting connection to it. Scientific themes and “**dirt time**” (hands-on in nature) allow for exploration, self discovery, and problem solving—all critical skills for early childhood development and beyond. The curriculum below is an outline of various areas of study we use as focal points, but experiences in the natural world lead the class on new and varying adventures daily.

### Curriculum

Bluebirds/Turtles/Frogs (3's)	Owls/Deer/Dragonflies (4's)
Living/Non-living	Ecology
Emotions	Insects
Dinosaurs	Trees/Seeds/Leaves
Animals in Winter	The Winter World
Night & Day	Space Exploration
Shadows/Light	Nature Art
Weather/Water Cycle	Bird Discoveries
Animal Habitats	Life Cycles
Growing/Animal Babies	Ecology Revisited

**Fox** class: you will note that your child's curriculum is not included in the above chart. The Fox class blends elements of the 4's curriculum above, ideas laid out in Blossom & Root, and emergent curriculum - an approach where units of study are scaffolded from the children's interests. (Last year, for example, the Fox class got deep into building and construction with Legos and with recycled materials.)

All classes are ultimately guided by close observation of the children's environments and the questions we - and they - ask about it.

## Our Approach to Discipline

The physical and emotional well-being of every child is of utmost importance to us! We create an environment where every child may feel safe and protected while in our care. We cultivate a peaceful (though often boisterous!) atmosphere with clear expectations.

Whenever a child is having a difficult time, either on their own or involving another child/children, teachers will assist in a calm, helpful manner. We encourage children to understand the connection between their behavior and its consequences. We practice conflict resolution that supports children in identifying and expressing their feelings in order to become capable of self-regulation. This can appear more chaotic in the short-term, but pays long-term dividends as the year progresses.



Positive reinforcement plays a big part in our classroom management. We model appropriate behavior and use literature and dramatization to encourage kindness and caring. At this age, redirection can often be an effective management technique as well, depending on the child and the circumstances.

Parents/guardians will be informed of any ongoing concerns involving their child in the classroom. We will work with you to develop and implement strategies to help every child build on their strengths and flourish in the YNs and beyond.

We know that even in the best classrooms, there are going to be tough moments. Conflict is a part of being human. That's why we created [The Catalogue of Tough Stuff: A Resource Book for Grown-ups About Early Childhood](#). A physical copy also lives in the Learning Center lobby area. The Catalogue contains articles that touch on how we approach conflict, risk in play, general philosophical issues, and developmental milestones for early childhood; so even if you cannot be a fly on the wall, you have an idea of how we handle whatever may come up in our classrooms.



## *The Home-School Connection*

We treat each child as an individual and know that each family's situation is unique. The more information we have, the better we understand and can help each child be their best self. However, **we cannot provide for what we don't know about!** The more you communicate with us, both in the intake paperwork and on an ongoing basis, the more we can have reasonable expectations of your child while at school and can support them (and you). This communication includes any changes at home, and any difficult behaviors that you may see.

If you are not comfortable putting something in writing, we completely understand - but please do talk with us! Nothing families share with us hinders our perception of the children as wholly wonderful and capable. Sharing information with us only helps us to do our jobs better and accommodate the children's needs as much as possible.

That said, in order to be their best thriving self, sometimes a Young Naturalist needs support beyond the resources available to us on a day-to-day basis. Our staff is solution-oriented, and we will do whatever we can to shift our schedules or procedures to help. However, if a child exhibits behaviors that are an ongoing danger to themselves or others in a school environment, we may initiate a conversation with you about securing outside support. This conversation between teacher and parent may also include the director, and will explore options individualized to your child. In cases involving immediate physical safety, we may ask that your child not attend the Young Naturalist program until outside support is in place.

## Arrival and Departure

### Arrival

There are two options for parking when you arrive for school:

- The **upper parking lot**, up the hill to the right, just before you reach the lower lot at the end of Muser Drive
  - **Preferably to be used by grandparents, by families with younger or multiple siblings** – we know what schlepping everybody in and out of the car can be like – **and by those with mobility issues**
- The lower lot, straight ahead when you reach the end of Muser Drive
  - If you are not a grandparent, or do not have mobility issues or an infant/toddler/multiple children with you, please park here and walk up

Your child's teacher will open the classroom door when class is scheduled to begin. If you arrive early, you can wait in the lobby of the Learning Center building, on the porch of the Farm House, or feel free to explore the property with your child.

When the classroom door opens, please:

- walk your child in and help them stow their belongings in their cubby
- initial the class attendance sheet (for classes in the Learning Center, note that the sign-in book is *outside* the classroom)
- take a moment to say goodbye

If your child needs reassurance, let your child know that you will return later to pick him/her up. Once your child's things are stowed, and you've done your good-bye routine, exit the classroom so that everyone can begin their school day. Please feel free to gather with other grown-ups in the lobby or outside to chat with one another. Many younger siblings like to explore the classroom, too, but we encourage you to supervise them at all times and keep their visit to a minimum as well.

### Departure

At pickup time, your child will be waiting at the class's designated pickup spot:

- For **Fox** and **Dragonfly** classes:
  - go into the upper lot and pull straight in along the lawn/sidewalk area. The children will be released to you from the porch.
- For **Bluebird**, **Turtle**, and **Frog** classes:
  - at the beginning of the year, pickup will be in the loop of the upper lot by the stairs into the Learning Center building. You can help us keep the wait time to a minimum by pulling forward to the parking spaces before securing your child in their carseat.
  - once the children are settled and can follow a routine, we will switch the 3's pickup directly to the lawn/sidewalk area.
- For **Owl** and **Deer** classes:

- pickup will be in the lower parking lot

If your child will be going home with someone other than their regular pickup person/people, please message the teachers directly through ClassDojo, email [kkopf@hhnm.org](mailto:kkopf@hhnm.org) or [mmindicino@hhnm.org](mailto:mmindicino@hhnm.org), or send a note with your child. **Be sure to keep your authorized pickup list up to date with the director and your child's teacher; we may only release your child to someone on your pickup list and will need written permission to do so.** Similarly, please let us know promptly if there is anyone who needs to be removed from your authorized pickup list.

### *Tardiness*

We know that life happens. There will be a morning here and there where someone has a doctor's appointment, or something spills and delays you leaving home - and that is absolutely expected. If possible, please let us know in advance or as soon as you can on days like these! Message your child's teacher directly on ClassDojo, or call 845-534-5506 ext 204 or 207.

If, however, you are arriving late on a regular basis, please understand that you are interrupting the flow of the day for your child as well as the other children and the teachers in your child's class. Depending on the weather, we may often go on a hike or begin an activity first thing, and a family arriving 20 minutes late, with no prior communication, keeps everyone (your child included) from having the experiences that comprise a Young Naturalist day.

Similarly, if you or your designated grown-up will be arriving late for pickup, please let us know as soon as possible so that we can communicate this to your child; it can be worrying for them otherwise!

Chronic tardiness at pickup, much like regularly late arrival, interrupts the flow of the day, and has an impact on your Young Naturalist as well as other children and our staff, who have other responsibilities once your child's class ends. While again, we know that life happens (unexpected traffic detours, an appointment that runs over, etc.), please ensure that as a rule you respect everyone's time, including your child's, by arriving punctually.

## Tips for Transitioning to Preschool

### Don't:

- Don't prolong your goodbye. If your child whines or clings to you, staying longer in the classroom will make it more difficult.
- Don't talk about how much you will miss your child or how lonely you will be.
- Don't let your own anxiety get in the way of a positive experience for your child. Focus on the fun that you are sure your child will have in school!
- Don't bring toys from home; beloved toys from home, even when freely shared with other children, are prone to getting lost or mixed in with school toys and not coming home again. Don't let this scenario happen to your child! Toys from home need to be kept safely stowed in backpacks or, better yet... at home.

### Do:

- Be enthusiastic about school. If you are excited and confident about your child entering school, your child will feel it and be confident, too.
- Arrange a playdate with another child in the class. One-on-one play will help your child develop a relationship with a classmate and provide them with a feeling of security in their new class.
- Start a daily routine for school days, including plenty of sleep on school nights so your child is able to handle the day's activities.
- Say goodbye to your child. Be firm but friendly about separating. Establish a goodbye routine in advance and stick to it (example: 2 hugs & 3 kisses).
- If your child gets upset, acknowledge the feeling and find ways together that will help him/her with the adjustment. Some key phrases might be "I know you are upset; let's think about what you'd like to do first at school today" and "I need to leave now but I will be back to pick you up after you have fun playing outside with your friends."
- Ask for help! The teachers are there to assist your child and YOU with the separation. Please let us know if you are having a difficult day with the transition to school and the teachers will help by involving your child in a classroom activity.
- Allow time each day to discuss your child's school day together. If your child doesn't want to talk about it right away, give them the time and space to talk at another time. Lunch, dinner, or bedtime is a great time to discuss your day. It helps to prompt your child by asking them to tell you something they enjoyed at school that day. Share your own daily stories as well; they are great conversation starters.
- Remember that all children deal with separation in their own way. It is perfectly natural for it to take a few weeks for a child to become comfortable with the transition to school. Sick days, vacations, and holidays disrupt the normal routine and can begin separation anxiety all over again. Be patient! This is a big step in your preschool child's life and we will get through it together.

## A Day in the Life of a Young Naturalist

Each Young Naturalist class is just under three hours, and in that time the children are provided with many opportunities to interact with each other and with their environment. They explore and make discoveries as they are introduced to a variety of science and nature topics through self-directed as well as teacher-directed activities. To give you an idea of what might be happening any given day, here are some of the things that your Young Naturalist might participate in:





Circle time inside  
(feeding our classroom  
tortoises)

A science lesson outside  
(eating spinach that we  
planted)



## Nature Play on Our Grounds

We will be doing plenty of outdoor exploration, but we are not the only influence in your child's life, and we encourage you to play with your child in nature. Please enjoy our fields, woods, ponds, wetlands, and even the dirt kitchen safely and be respectful of the plants and animals that inhabit our property. A few guidelines for enjoying your time at the Hudson Highlands Nature Museum and elsewhere outdoors:

- If you use any equipment (items in the dirt kitchen or from the classroom porch), please return them to the bins when finished
- Visit our ponds, but don't throw anything in; many small creatures live here and foreign matter can have an adverse impact on their environment
- Be aware of poison ivy growing on the ground and as vines climbing on trees



- Take the time to appreciate and smell the plants and flowers, but do not pick them; they are here as a habitat and/or food source for the animals that live here (and if you must, follow the Indigenous rule of thumb: **do not pick from the first or second plant you come across - only the third plant or beyond, and take no more than half of what that plant has to offer**)
- Observe, but do not remove any living creature from its natural habitat. This is their home and they are familiar with the shelter, food, and water sources exactly where they are.
  - Snakes (and other animals) have the right of way; if you encounter a snake, give it space to get away
- Children gravitate to sticks like magnets; we encourage you to allow stick play if at all possible. Our rules in class are generally not to run with them and to be aware of where the ends of your stick are (so you don't poke yourself or others)
- Use the sticks, leaves, branches, and bark that are already on the forest floor to create fairy houses and forts. The living trees of the forest need their leaves, seeds, and branches to continue to provide us and the creatures of the forest with fresh air, shade, and shelter
- Check yourself and your child carefully for ticks after playing outdoors!

Experience the joy of playing in nature and recapture your own sense of wonder in the process!

## Clothing & Things From Home

If there is one thing to know about preschool, it is that your child WILL get messy, and that mess is the sign of a good time.

If there is one more thing to know about nature preschool, in particular, it is that there is no such thing as bad weather - only bad clothes!

With that in mind, we have the following requirements and offer the following advice:

- Every child will need to have a full change of clothes at school at all times. That means **socks, underwear, shirt, and pants**
  - a gallon-sized plastic bag is an easy way to store the extra clothes
  - **please make sure to label the bag and everything in it!**
  - this should be brought in on orientation day and checked and replenished as necessary
- Children must wear **close-toed shoes every day**; no flip-flops or shoes that are difficult to run and jump in
  - Many children wear **rain boots** regardless of whether it's raining or not, and we support this, as you'd be surprised how easily they can find a mud puddle or at how often the grass is wet when we go out, even on a sunny day
- Be mindful of the fact that learning independence is part of our curriculum; as much as possible, **send your child in clothing that they can manipulate themselves** (belts, overalls, and costumes can be difficult, for example)
- **Long pants** are encouraged to be worn at all times to help protect from insect bites, ticks, and injuries from falls.



No matter what your child wears, you can expect that he or she will participate in messy projects and fun nature walks and will come home with dirt streaks, grass stains, etc. If your child's clothing becomes very soiled, or wet and uncomfortable, or they have a toileting accident, we will assist them in changing into their spare set of clothes.

Ask the teacher or check the lost & found box or any posts/emails for any missing items throughout the year. And remember:

**things get lost - labeled things get found!**



Below you will find a chart to help you ensure your child has appropriate clothing for exploring as a Young Naturalist.



Item	Fall (Sep - Nov)	Winter (Dec - Feb)	Spring (Mar - Jun)
Spare change of clothes (shirt, pants, socks, underwear)	X	X switch for size & seasonal appropriateness	X switch for size & seasonal appropriateness
Close-toed shoes	X	X	X
Rubber boots	X		X
Hat (cap/sun hat)	X		X
Rain jacket or suit	X		X
Warm hat/toque		X	
Waterproof mittens		X	
Snow boots		X	
Snow pants/suit		X	
Warm jacket		X	

*Toys From Home*

We generally recommend leaving toys from home in the car or in backpacks. **We find that sharing is not an issue but misplacing or losing a beloved item can be!**

## Snacks

During your child's class day they will have the opportunity to sit with their friends and have a snack.

**Students bring their own snacks each day**, except for birthdays or other special occasions which will all be marked on the class's monthly calendar. Please also **send your child with a filled water bottle each day**. We encourage every family to be conscious of eco-friendly and reusable packaging wherever possible. And if you send fruits and veggies, we compost at school!

Try to select nutritious, healthy choices for daily snacks so that your child will have the energy they need for their active day. Since birthdays are not an everyday thing, please feel free to send in a special treat (cupcakes, etc.), especially of your child's choosing! The only things to be aware of are:

- any allergies in the class (we will share this info with you at the beginning of the year; sending in birthday snacks with an ingredients list is helpful for us, so that we can make sure everyone can participate or enjoy an alternate treat)
- the number of children in your child's class; classes max out at 16.

## Allergies

- ★ Please be sure to fill out the allergy and dietary restrictions section on your child's student information form and keep us updated with any new allergies that arise. (Or foods that your child is subsequently cleared to eat.)
- We post a list of all known classroom allergies so that we may cross-check and ensure children only have shared snacks that are safe for them to eat for birthdays or other special occasions.



## Special Occasions

### Holidays

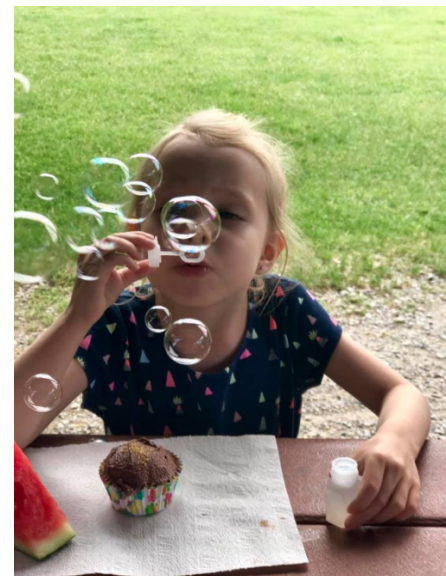
Holidays can be an exciting time for young children. We feel it is best for families to enjoy the celebration with their children at home, so we focus more on the seasonal aspect of holiday celebrations. For instance, around the Halloween season the four year old classes make tree costumes and perform a tree play for their families while the three year olds make critter masks in class and march in a parade for their grown-ups.



During the winter months, we focus on the spirit of giving and create tasty treats for the animals that inhabit the fields and forest of the Outdoor Discovery Center. In the spring we celebrate the season's arrival with bird presentations and egg hunts.

### Birthdays

We are always excited to recognize this special day in your child's life! Classroom birthday traditions may vary slightly by teacher, but all will include a special birthday snack around the time of your child's birthday and the class will sing and celebrate. We welcome special guest readers, too!





## Family Involvement

We are delighted to have your family join us as members of the Young Naturalist program and the Hudson Highlands Nature Museum, and are proud to partner in your child's education. There are plenty of ways to get involved:

- Volunteer! We would love to see you in the classroom (we invite grown-ups to be substitutes as well as coming to share their skills or a special activity) and always have a project to be done in our offices or on the Museum grounds
- Take advantage of your Museum membership. Attend museum functions, special programs, and visit Grasshopper Grove and the Wildlife Education Center. Stay informed of Museum happenings by checking the Museum's [Facebook page](#), and make sure the Museum has a valid email address so you receive up-to-date information on family programs and events
- Attend parent-teacher conferences. Each class has one in the fall, and one in the spring
  - Conferences are designed to focus on how your child has transitioned to school, goals we may wish to set, and to discuss your child's next educational experience
  - If you have questions or concerns, we are happy to have an informal meeting at any time during the year. Please speak to the teacher directly to set up a meeting or phone call outside of classroom hours.

## Illness & Emergencies

### *Illness*

The Young Naturalist Preschool takes precautions to prevent the spread of illness by maintaining a clean environment and setting clear limits on the health of children and staff in attendance. We need your assistance to keep everyone healthy.

Please keep your child at home when any of the following conditions are present:

- Fever of 100 degrees OR when your child had a fever the night prior (fevers tend to rise as the day progresses)
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or stomach upset
- Symptoms of unknown origin (including rash)
- Cuts or wounds with bleeding or oozing
- Lice or other infestation
- Any illness in the contagious stage (pink eye)

If your child is going to be absent due to illness, please call/message and inform us at 845-534-5506 ext 204 or 207, or through ClassDojo. You may also email your child's teacher (first initial, last name @hhnm.org).

Recovering students are more likely to pick up a new illness. Please keep in mind that the students spend time outdoors each class, and if your child is not well enough to be outside they are not well enough to be in school that day. We may notify you if students have been exposed to a contagious illness. Please be advised that teachers and staff cannot administer medication to students. The only exception to this is EpiPens for severe allergies.

If your child becomes ill during class he/she will be isolated from others in order to rest. We will contact you by phone to pick your child up as soon as possible. If we cannot reach you, we will begin calling the other contact numbers on your student information form.

### *Injuries & Emergencies*

**Staff members are trained in First Aid and CPR.** The vast majority of injuries at school are scrapes or bumps that require a band-aid or a "boo boo pack," our term for an ice pack, and we will let the grown-up who comes for pick-up know of these kinds of injuries at that time. In the event of an accident that requires medical attention, we will do one of the following:

- Call parent/guardian or emergency contacts (as needed) immediately to pick up child and seek the proper medical treatment
- If severe and immediate action is deemed necessary, we will call 911 and a staff member will accompany the child to the emergency room until parent/guardian arrives

## Ticks, Poison Ivy, Bees, Mud, Etc.



They are all part of nature... and can be unpleasant! To keep an eye out for ticks, we do a spot check with the students when we return from playing outdoors. This helps the children get in the habit of checking themselves and their friends for ticks. (Our staff also do this for ourselves - we're out there with them!) **Please do your own tick checks on your child every day.** Be sure to check warm spots like armpits, behind the knees, and behind the ears and in the hair. The teachers will notify the grown-up at

pick up time if they found an attached tick on a child.

The teachers identify poison ivy to the students and stay clear of it on the trails and in the woods. It is a natural, native border plant and an important food source for birds and other wildlife. While we work to keep poison ivy out of our common play areas, there is no way for us to eradicate it on every trail we walk. Please call your physician if you are suspicious of any rash on your child.

Bees are wonderful, helpful insects to our world. We encourage children to respect and observe but not touch these buzzing friends. If we stay calm, the bees stay calm. In the unlikely event of a sting, we will monitor the child's condition and notify a grown-up at pickup time.

**If your child requires an EpiPen for bee stings, please give one to the child's teacher at the start of the school year.**

Bug spray and sunscreen should be used at the parent's discretion and should be applied at home or outside of the classroom by the grown-up doing drop-off.

As for mud... we dig into our learning and that includes mud! Children's clothes and bodies will get messy as they experiment and explore the natural world. We encourage whole-hearted, whole-bodied learning so bear that in mind when selecting clothes for the day!

## Inclement Weather

The Young Naturalist Preschool *mostly* follows the calendar of the Cornwall School District for holidays and closings. Please use your class calendar, distributed at the beginning of the year, for scheduled closings. For inclement weather, if the Cornwall School District:

- closes, the Young Naturalist Program will be closed as well
- has a one OR two hour delay, we will have a *one* hour delay of our morning classes (dismissal is at regular time; afternoon classes and both Early Bird and Later Gator Lunch Club are unaffected)
- has more than a two hour delay, we will cancel the morning classes and Lunch Club
- has an early dismissal due to weather, we will cancel afternoon classes and Later Gator Lunch Club that day.



We will post on ClassDojo to let you know of closings or delays. If you are unsure of weather related closings or delays, email [mmindicino@hhnm.org](mailto:mmindicino@hhnm.org).

Please use caution in the parking areas during inclement weather and request assistance from a staff member if you would like help getting a child to the classroom in case of slippery walking conditions.



## One More Thing, or, “Something You Won’t Find in Most Handbooks”

We have noticed over the years that our Young Naturalist families are thoughtful and generous, both with each other – giving rides, supporting local events, lending a hand in emergencies both small and large – as well as with our staff. Especially at the holidays and the end of the year, many families give a gift of some kind to show their appreciation for the teachers. *You are under absolutely no obligation to do so!* However, if you choose to give a gift, it can sometimes feel awkward or overwhelming to figure out what, and so we wanted to note that **it is ok to:**

1. **Ask the teachers what they might like.** This may seem rude (shouldn’t a gift be given from the *heart* and not the *head*?), but we promise it is not. You are busy, you probably have a million other things to do, and if you’re choosing to give something to your child’s teachers, guessing what they might like does not need to be one more thing on your plate. Asking also gives you the confidence that you have chosen your gift well.
2. **Speak with other families and pool your gift.** As an example, our staff often receive gift cards to local stores, and we love them and truly appreciate them! But put yourself in a teacher’s place – would you rather show up to the store with five \$10 gift cards or one \$50 gift card? Choosing to pool also allows families to contribute at a level that is comfortable for everyone; some families’ \$20 is other families’ \$100, and a pooled gift with everybody’s names (no matter what they were able to contribute) makes us feel just as appreciated as individual gifts.
3. **Involve your child in the process.** Obviously we appreciate material or monetary gifts, but cards, drawings, and notes from the Young Naturalists always hit us right in the gut and are never a bad choice. Sometimes, your child also has an idea of what they think we would like, and those are often the best and/or funniest gifts we have ever received. (This has included bacon.)

We want you to feel comfortable reaching out to us about anything, whether it is positive feedback or constructive criticism. In this, as in all things, we strive to be open and transparent with you, the families, as we work together to create the best foundation we can for the most important people – your children.