



— ITHACA —
**FOREST
PRESCHOOL**

Parent Handbook

Primitive Pursuits Office
(607)272-2292 ext. 195



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Dear Families,

Welcome to Ithaca Forest Preschool! We are so glad you have joined us. Our preschool program was created to be a place where children can feel a deep sense of belonging, both in the natural world and in a community of people.

We hope the information in this handbook will help you and your family prepare for your time with us. Please take some time to read it don't hesitate to ask questions.

Lyla White

and the Ithaca Forest Preschool Team

Acknowledgments

We thank our program founders Time Drake, Melissa Blake and Jed Jordan for the vision and dedication that brought this beautiful program into being.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the land where we mentor children, and to the people who have stewarded it over the past centuries. This includes the Gayoghó:nq' (Cayuga Nation), whose ancestral territory it is. We recognize it as our privilege to live, work, and play on this land and believe we have a responsibility to teach others how to live in good relation to it. We strive to teach preschoolers this, and over the lifespan of Ithaca Forest Preschool, we believe there has been a synergy between the children and the land. The children's feet have worn-in paths and their hands have harvested native plants from our forest garden. We strive to learn how to be good neighbors to the Gayoghó:nq' by learning about their history and the issues that affect them. We understand that our learning and relationship building is ongoing and welcome guidance and feedback along the way.



Mission, Values & Curriculum

Our Mission is to nurture the seeds of connection that are in every person from birth: connection to self, others, nature, and ancestral skills and knowledge. Because of Ithaca Forest Preschool, more children will feel connected to these things, and feel at home in nature.

Our core values include

Children—as inherently competent, intelligent, creative, and loving beings. They are our future.

Happiness and Joy—we believe these are a child's natural state.

Curiosity—we harness the natural curiosity of young children and try to keep them in a curious state as long as possible, because curiosity drives learning.

Helpfulness—young children love to be helpful and we build on this desire, eventually introducing the concept of service.

Kindness and Respect—our bottom line expectation is that we all treat ourselves, each other, and the Earth with kindness and respect.

Physical Experience—we strive to create a place where children can be fully “in” their bodies, testing their limits and experiencing themselves as strong, confident physical beings. Sensory experiences are an important part of this, too. We know physical strength and sensory experiences are essential for optimal brain development, so we make sure our students get lots of both.

Peacemaking—we create and maintain a culture where peace is honored, and when conflict arises we address it using the concepts of empathy, inner peace, listening and using fine words, and looking for what everyone can agree on.

Ancestors—young children are often surprised to learn that their parents have parents, their grandparents have grandparents, and on and on into the past. We teach respect for past generations, what they discovered, and what we can learn from them. As a corollary, we teach respect for future generations and what we can leave them.

Deep Nature Connection—is the feeling of being truly “at home” in nature, with a deep sense of loving and understanding the natural world of which you are a part. It leads both to an ethic of caring for the Earth and a sense of wholeness.

Our Curriculum

Nature is the teacher. We are mentors and facilitators, helping children:

Connect with themselves

Connect with nature

Connect with others

Connect with what has come before us

We work with children’s natural curiosity and passions. We gently motivate them to push their own comfort zones or “edges”, reading the ability level of each child to provide appropriate challenges. We provide a safe, community-oriented learning environment where each individual’s gifts are honored and children develop positive relationships with themselves and others. Children love it when adults

play, learn, and wonder with them; as mentors we are part of the group, too! We engage their imaginations and help them focus their minds, and incorporate lots of sensory experiences to help make learning stick.

Young children learn through play and mimicry. Most of what we do each day looks and feels like play. Instructors are also role modeling dressing for the weather, being safe around fire, being active learners, being kind and respectful, caring for the land, and more so the children have positive models to mimic. Every day, we use core routines to build the skills and habits of loving to learn, being happy, focusing attention, being physically active, being helpful, caretaking the Earth, being loving, and quieting the mind.

Our Core Routines

Giving Thanks—we often start or end the day with a gratitude circle, and pause at other times as well to acknowledge what we value and think outside ourselves.

Hazard Identification—what every beginner needs to know to stay safe outdoors. We also work to develop common sense— “the least common”.

Sensory Awareness Activities—exercising our senses sharpens them and contributes to sensory integration. Attaching sensory information to a learning experience also makes it more memorable, and focusing on the senses relaxes and quiets the mind and body.

Games—sometimes organized, often not. Many are the wonderful, spontaneous creations of imaginative kids.

Animal Tracking—while we’re wandering, or anytime animal sign is present, we practice the fundamentals of pattern recognition that will later translate into reading

skills. We also like to catch small critters, teaching children how to do so respectfully and safely.

Animal Forms—thinking and moving like specific animals, we exercise our bodies, senses, and imaginations. Imagining being an animal may help a child learn how to empathize.

Navigating and Mapping—as we wander we sometimes practice “songlining”, that is, telling a story using landmarks that will help us find our way back. Other “lost proofing” skills, and an introduction to maps and mapping, improve cognitive development and sense of place.

Group Singing and Storytelling—staples of every day. Songs and stories are used in so many ways: to inspire, teach, set the mood, lighten the workload, practice listening skills, bring a group together, and more.

Children Telling Their Stories—For young children, talking about what they just did is a chance to practice language skills as well as reflect on and integrate new experiences.

Primitive Technology Skills—such as shelter building, fire making, gathering, cooking, basket- and tool-making are hands-on activities that involve experiential problem-solving and creativity; they also give children a boost towards self-sufficiency and feeling “at home” in nature.

Stalking, Hiding, and Camouflage—activities that children adore, and that provide teachable moments for ecological concepts. Learning the skills of “invisibility” also requires quieting the mind and controlling the body.

Celebration—inspires learning and builds community. There is always something to celebrate! Our celebration brings us full circle, back to gratitude.



Daily Schedule

Our program day begins at 9:00am with an opening circle at 9:15am. At 10am we have a snack. We have a second snack or lunch at 11am. Our program ends with a closing circle and we will arrive in our pickup areas no later than 12:00 noon.

Parents are asked to walk children over to meet us at the large oak tree on the 4-H lawn.

We request that children be dropped off as close to 9am as possible and picked up at noon. Until opening circle we will engage children in games or quiet activities; it's also a good time to snack, especially if they didn't eat much breakfast.

If you will be arriving later than 9:15am, please text (or call) Lyla at **503-407-0638**.

We find that, for most children most of the time, a shorter goodbye in the morning is better. However, if you think—or discover—that your child needs you there longer, even into the program time, on the first day(s), we are happy to work with you. Just let us know what you are thinking and together we will make a plan for how to help your child transition successfully into independent attendance at Ithaca Forest Preschool.



What to Bring

Come rain, sun, or snow, we plan to be outside the vast majority of the time. In extreme weather we will sometimes be inside, but on any given day will still go out for a portion of the time, so children should always come dressed for outside.

For your child's safety and enjoyment, it is essential that they have what they need on every day of our program. If one child is unable to stay warm, it can affect the program as we may need to shorten our outside time for safety. Please be aware of weather forecasts and dress your child appropriately. Keep in mind that even on dry days your child may get wet in the creek or from wet grass, and wet can equal cold! If your child arrives at school without the proper gear, our staff may decide it is not safe for them to stay. In this situation you will be asked to return with your child with adequate gear.

We want to be sure your child doesn't associate being outside with being cold and miserable, so it is part of our job to help you learn how to dress your child appropriately. To help us do this, "Dressing Young Children for Winter Fun." Learning to dress your child for winter is so important for the success of our program that we often offer a free workshop in late Fall.

A note about fabrics: Cotton conducts away body heat if it gets wet—even damp with sweat. This makes it great for t-shirts on hot Summer days (and fine on warm days in Fall and Spring), but in general we avoid cotton the rest of the year. **Polyester, silk, and wool all work better than cotton in an outdoor environment that is sometimes wet (from rain, snow, or creek).**

Your child needs a backpack that fits well, is easy to carry, and is big enough to hold their stuff. One of our goals is for your child to work towards self-sufficiency; if the backpack is crammed too full, it will be difficult for them to pack it themselves and if it doesn't fit properly it will be hard for them to carry. The LL Bean "Junior Original Backpack" with a 16 liter capacity (or other similarly sized pack) is a good choice.

At the beginning of each trimester you will leave some extra gear with us to be stored in your child's bin at 4-H Acres. On the first day of the trimester, please bring the required extra gear in a plastic grocery bag with your child's name on it. Anytime you need to replenish the bin, please bring replacement items the same way. The plastic bag is used to send wet gear home. Please send only clothing and footwear that you don't mind getting wet and dirty. Please label all items (backpacks, too!) with your child's name! It really helps us help you get your stuff back.

Note: The required items do NOT need to be purchased new. Check out thrift stores, including Salvation Army and Mama Goose in Ithaca, or let your friends know you're looking for hand-me-downs. We have a few donated items to pass on at our School Year Orientation. But do note that insulated boots lose their warmth over time and with use, so boots that are more than a few years old and have had heavy use will not be warm enough.

Not to Bring:

Please do not send glass containers for snacks or water. Even when covered in plastic mesh, there is too great a risk that these items will break and leave glass shards in our camp.

Sometimes children this age think they need to bring a favorite toy or security object with them to preschool.

Please try to minimize this, as it can be distracting and items may get lost or dirty. Please check in with an instructor if your child IS bringing a toy so we can help keep track of it AND help your child transition to not needing the object during preschool. Please do not send electronic devices or potentially hazardous objects (e.g. knives) without checking in with an instructor first.

Early Fall & Late Spring to Bring

Every day of the program, your child will have three sources of gear: **1) what they are wearing, 2) what's in their backpack, and 3) the extra gear in their storage bin.**

- Short or long-sleeved shirt
- Quick-drying long pants
- Polyester, silk or wool socks
- Close-toed shoes
- Water shoes
- Wool or fleece sweater, or light jacket (one for the bin, plus wearing one on cool days)
- Mittens (gauntlet style is best to go over jacket sleeves (a set for wearing, and extras for bin & backpack)
- Rain gear (rain jacket plus rain pants, or a rain suit)
- Hat (sun hat on sunny days plus a warm hat in the bin)
- Extra shirt, pair of pants, socks, shoes and underwear for storage bin
- Backpack to carry food, water, small cup and rain gear (16 liter capacity)
- A small non-breakable hot cup for wild teas (metal works great)
- Sunscreen and or bug spray (optional)
- Lunch, water and plenty of snacks
- Mask or face covering (optional)

How to dress for early Fall and Late Spring

Dress your child for the weather that is forecast that day. In early fall and late spring, this often means long pants, a short-sleeved shirt, a warm upper body layer like a wool sweater or fleece, and waterproof boots with warm socks.

Mask: Masks are not required, however it is encouraged to wear them if the air quality index is above 100 (all young children are considered a sensitive group), or if there is someone sick in your household.

Long Pants: Instead of shorts, pants are recommended during fall and spring because they offer protection from scrapes, bug bites, poison ivy, and ticks. Even on dry days, your child is likely to get wet in the creek or from sitting on wet ground so denim jeans are never appropriate in our program. Once wet, denim is uncomfortable and restricts movement, and it takes a long time to dry. Quick-drying polyester pants (like jogging pants or, in cooler weather, fleece pants) are much better because they will stay warmer when wet and dry faster than cotton pants, plus they offer good mobility. A good pants system for this time of year is synthetic or wool, long underwear or pants (or even two pairs), under rain pants. In fact, we ask that your child wear or bring rain pants every day.

Socks: Cotton socks are a bad idea. Polyester silk or wool socks are much better. Merino wool is soft, not scratchy, but if your child complains try putting a pair of thin polyester liner socks underneath. On the warmest days, water shoes with no socks are fine.

Shoes: Water shoes (closed-toe preferred; back strap required. "Crocs" do not provide enough support), sneakers, or waterproof boots might all be appropriate depending on the day. The grass is often wet in the morning so it's

good to start in boots. "Muck"-type neoprene boots are warm AND waterproof; we like them a lot! Brands include: muckbootcompany.com and bogsfootwear.com. Other brands we've found to be good for children's boots include Kamik Canada kamik.com and LL Bean llbean.com. Some of these are available locally at Fontana's, Agway or Mama Goose/Gillian's Drawers.

The Backpack for early Fall/Late Spring

Lunch, snacks, and water in easy-to-carry containers. Tupperware works well, as do "thermos"-type insulated containers. Plastic bags also work. Please don't send glass!

A lunch consisting of many small snacks works well. An actual lunchbox is unnecessary and may prove too bulky, plus it is hard to hold on the lap while sitting on a log. There are many kids' water bottles available; check for leak-proofness and ease of use by your child.

A small non-breakable hot cup for drinking wild teas.
Rain pants EVERY day.

Rain gear makes a good wind block even if it's not needed for rain or creek-splashing. We like LL Bean rain gear for its economy and durability; rain pants with stirrups that go under the boot are even better. Many Scandinavian brands include stirrups AND shoulder straps-awesome! Don't leave the rain gear with us (unless it's an extra set) because you may find you need it first thing in the morning.

Be aware that "winter" coats and pants are usually NOT waterproof. Also take note: in this country, children's rain gear (and other outerwear) is sometimes made of PVC, or "vinyl". This chemical is hazardous to the environment and human health, plus in order to make it soft the rain gear will contain phthalates or other plasticizers. Clothing made to be sold in the EU will be vinyl-free.

Optional hat: sun hats (like baseball caps) really help kids to keep cool and protect the face and eyes from the sun. Warm hats (wool or fleece, not cotton) warm the whole body when the weather is cold, or on a cool morning. If sunscreen or bug repellent are necessary, please apply them to your child in the morning. If you want us to re-apply these during the day, please put them in a bag with your child's name on it to be left in her storage bin. Due to skin allergies and preferences, we are unable to supply these products, and we don't want preschoolers handling them on their own.

Mittens: If it's cold enough to need mittens, use non-cotton and preferably waterproof. Mittens are MUCH warmer than gloves.

Extra Gear early Fall/Late Spring

A complete change of: shirt, pants, underwear, and socks. An extra upper body warm layer, NOT MADE OF COTTON! No cotton sweatshirts, please. Even on a hot day, each child needs access to a warm layer in case it rains and she or he gets cold. The one in the bin is in addition to what your child might wear to the program on a cool morning. Extra footwear: if not carried in the backpack, an extra pair of shoes should be left in the bin. These could be sneakers, water shoes, or boots. "Muck"-type neoprene boots are warm AND waterproof. We like them a lot! muckbootsandshoes.com or bogsfootwear.com Other brands we've found to be good for children's boots include Kamik Canada kamik.com and L.L. Bean llbean.com. Some of these are available locally at Fontana's and Agway or Mama Goose/Gillian's Drawers.

Extra mittens—important in case the first pair get wet. If you don't have these yet on the first day of the program that's ok but get them to us as soon as possible.

Late Fall, Winter & Early Spring to Bring

Every day of the program, your child will have three sources of gear: **1) what they are wearing, 2) what's in their backpack, and 3) the extra gear in their storage bin.**

- Base layers for top and bottom
- Insulating layer for top and bottom
- Outer waterproof layer
- Polyester, silk or wool socks
- Warm waterproof boots
- Hat
- Mittens (gauntlet style is best to go over jacket sleeves (a set for wearing, and extras for bin & backpack))
- Scarf
- Backpack to carry food, water, and a small cup
- Extra base and insulating layers, socks, boots, mittens, hat and scarf for storage bin

How to dress for Winter/Early Spring

Dress your child in a base layer (e.g. silk or polyester long underwear and thick wool, polyester, or silk socks), an insulating layer (e.g. wool or polyester fleece) and an outer, weatherproof layer (e.g. rain gear, winter coat and snow pants, or one-piece snow suit). Be aware of the weather forecast; if it is above freezing you may need to dress for wet as well as cold.

One-piece snowsuits can be very warm and keep snow out completely. The disadvantages are that some snowsuits make going to the bathroom difficult, and they aren't as easily adjusted if body temperature changes, for instance with activity level. "Bib"-style snow pants, combined with a warm winter coat, are a great solution. The same goes for one-piece rain suits.

Snowsuits and winter coat/snow pants combos are actually

a combination of insulating and outer layers. Combining layers can be convenient, but has two drawbacks: fewer layers means less total insulating value and a less adjustable system. An alternative is to wear a waterproof shell (rain gear) over one or more insulating layers. Most young children don't sweat much, so breathability is not a big issue.

In very cold weather, consider multiple insulating layers under the weatherproof layer.

Winter socks need to be WARM. Merino wool is soft, not scratchy, but if your child complains, try a thin pair of polyester liner socks underneath. Thick synthetic socks (like polyester or polypropylene) or heavyweight silk are also good options. All of these retain some warmth when wet. Cotton clothing, including socks, is NOT appropriate in winter weather. Cotton holds moisture, either from sweat or the environment, and even damp clothing conducts away body heat and can make you cold.

Footwear: Winter boots must be well-insulated. Neoprene boots that are marketed for winter are needed when it is above about 30 degrees and wet out (from rain or melting snow). For children whose feet tend to stay extra warm, these may be warm enough on even the coldest days. But most children will need a second pair of winter boots that are extra-warm. These will probably be sold as "snow" boots and won't be waterproof. We realize two pairs of boots is a large investment, but having good boots is a key to getting your child out for extended periods in winter. Try buying them a size up so your child can get two winters out of them (the first year perhaps with an extra pair of socks). We recommend: Kamik Canada kamik.com, Sorel sorel.com, Muck Boots muckbootcompany.com, Bogs bogsfootwear.com, and L.L. Bean llbean.com. Some of these are available locally at Fontana's Shoes, Agway or

Mama Goose/Gillian's Drawers.

A warm hat (wool or fleece) really helps warm the whole body and is essential! It is also an easy layer to take on and off as activity level changes. A scarf, neck gaiter, or balaclava is important in very cold or windy weather to cover the neck and face.

Mittens should be "waterproof" (or as close as they get) and insulated. Mittens are much warmer than gloves. You will leave a second pair with us in case the first pair gets wet. Look for mittens that are easy to put on, not too bulky, and have good wrist coverage.

The Backpack Winter/Early Spring

Lunch, snacks, and water bottle the same as in fall and spring. During cold weather, (45° or colder) a thermos of warm water, tea or milk helps children drink more and stay hydrated.

A small non-breakable hot cup is even more important in winter because we sometimes have hot cocoa (vegan available) or warm maple sap as warming treats!

Extra Gear in Winter and Early Spring

A complete change of: base layers (including socks), mittens, hat, and insulating layers (e.g. fleece pants and a fleece sweater). A second pair of winter or neoprene boots, if you have them. For more detail see Early Fall / Late Spring

Snacks

Snacks are important for your child's ability to stay warm and energized. Families are responsible for sending a variety of healthy snacks each day. When in doubt, send more than you think you should! When children open up their food containers, we do not distinguish between "snack" food and "lunch" food; they are free to eat what

they wish during any designated eating time. We try to stick to the designated times so we can keep the group together, but if a child is clearly very hungry in between times we do make exceptions. It's important for children to have snacks that provide long-burning energy (aka low-glycemic foods). Examples include peanut butter, cheese, yogurt, meat, hummus, coconut oil, nuts, fruit, veggies, oatmeal, and whole grain crackers.

Some days we will have a fire; in case we do you might want to include some food that can be stuck on a stick and roasted over the coals (examples: apple slices, bagel chunks, whole bananas.) A banana in its skin is easy to throw on the coals and turns into yummy banana pudding!

We sometimes provide a special snack as part of an activity, such as apples that we roast on the fire or wild foods (which might include domestic ingredients, such as a batter for making flower fritters). Be sure to let us know about any food sensitivities or dietary preferences. Please remember to send a small unbreakable cup each day as we will often make wild tea.

If you want to send a snack to share, such as for a birthday, please let us know (in advance if possible) and give the treat to an instructor. Otherwise, due to allergies and preferences, we only allow children to share fresh fruits and vegetables. We do not allow marshmallows to be roasted on the fire; they present too big a burn hazard for this age group.



Roles and Expectations

What your child can expect from us:

- A positive, friendly learning environment!
- To be loved and nurtured as an individual
- To be taught and mentored patiently in the areas of nature connection, social skills development, and community membership
- To have a lot of fun!

What you can expect from us:

- Physical risks will be managed appropriately
- We will communicate with you if your child is having difficulty meeting our expectations, and together we will make a plan for helping your child succeed
- Regular updates on what we've been doing and "snap shots" (written +/or photographic) of your child

What we need from your child*

- To treat self and others with kindness and respect
- To follow directions
- To stay with the group
- To treat the Earth with kindness and respect

What we need from you:

- To communicate with us any special needs or concerns
- To bring your child to preschool each day prepared for the weather and with plenty of food and water
- Your feedback on how we are doing and your ideas or wishes for the program

*Discuss these with your child as you deem appropriate. We are looking for these behaviors to occur most of the time, but understand that children will be inconsistent in how completely they meet these expectations.



Parent Involvement

We hope you will be excited to get involved in our Ithaca Forest Preschool community. It is our goal to create a culture and community of connection, and we can't do that without you.

We also need your help to support your child's experience, and extend the learning and connections beyond forest preschool. There are many ways you can be supportive, including having a positive attitude yourself about things your child does that might seem "yucky" or scary (getting wet or muddy, touching bugs and slugs, being outside in the cold) and role modeling being relaxed and happy about saying goodbye at drop-off time. We will communicate with you regularly about what we've been up to so you can ask your child questions; telling their stories is an important way for children to integrate their new knowledge. Feel free to ask us for even more information to inform your queries.

There are also opportunities for you to learn more about the mentoring model we use, and become able to use some of the techniques yourself at home. A terrific resource is *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature*, by Jon Young, Ellen Haas, and Evan McGown. At times, Primitive Pursuits offers adult programs, from weekend workshops to more intensive immersion programs.

Details are on the Primitive Pursuits website. We can also recommend similar experiences with other programs around the region, country, and world. Participation in any of these will help bring greater connection into your home and support your preschooler's journey.



Communication

You with Us:

Your primary route for communicating with Ithaca Forest Preschool is through the Primitive Pursuits office, which is housed in the Cornell Cooperative Extension building at 615 Willow Avenue in downtown Ithaca.

Primitive Pursuits Office: (607) 272-2292 ext. 195 (or ask the CCE receptionist for Primitive Pursuits.) Use this number to reach the Primitive Pursuits Director, Primitive Pursuits Youth Programs Director, or Registrar.

Email primitivepursuits@cornell.edu for questions about registration, payment, logistics, lost and found, and basic program information.

Email ithacaforestpreschool@gmail.com to reach the Ithaca Forest Preschool Coordinator for more in-depth program information.

You may also call or text directly with Lyla if that seems appropriate (such as for letting us know you will be late). Texts are generally preferred over calls during program times. **Lyla's cell # 503-407-0638.**

We encourage your feedback. If we don't know about a problem, we can't fix it. Sometimes it is appropriate to give feedback to instructors at the start or end of program time, but if it is of a more general nature it is best given to the office.

Communication: Us with You:

While your child is in the Ithaca Forest Preschool program, we may call you if there are problems or questions. Outside of program hours, email is our main method of communication and we really rely on it to share important, sometimes health- and safety-related, information. If email is not an effective way of reaching you with-in a 48 hour time-frame, please let us know what would be better. Please be aware that some of the software we use will cause our emails not to go into your regular inbox (for instance, in Gmail they may go to your "Promotions" folder).

Among Parents:

We do not give out parent contact information. Yet many parents will want to contact other parents—for carpooling, birthday party invitations, play dates, etc. Parents may wish to create an email list or chat group.



Toileting Policy

Ithaca Forest Preschool is a program for children who are out of diapers and needing only minimal assistance with toileting. This could include help with clothing and coaching on wiping or how to pee outside. We strive to help all children feel comfortable taking care of their needs while outside. They generally have three toilet options: "nature pee" or peeing on the ground out of sight of others; peeing or pooping in a training potty kept at our base camp, or walking to the indoor bathroom. Occasionally we are far enough away that the potty and the toilet are not options. In this case we would dig a "cat hole" for the child to poop into, if needed.



Sick and Injured Child Guidelines

Ithaca Forest Preschool is an active, outdoor program. Your child must feel well enough to participate in order to be out with us. After an illness or injury, your child must be able to keep up with the group and participate safely. If your child becomes unwell and in need of one-on-one attention during program hours we will call and ask that you come pick them up.

Due to COVID-19 our sick child guidelines are more stringent. The safety of our participants, their families and our staff are our highest priority.

If your child has any symptoms associated with COVID-19, not otherwise explained (for example, by allergies, a recent physical injury, etc), then they may be excluded from preschool at the discretion of our preschool instructors.

Our policies regarding COVID-19 may change according to Health Department Guidelines.

Medication Administration

You are required to provide a doctor's written order and information for any medication (prescription or O.T.C.) that your child may be taking during programs. All medication must be in its original container. When you sign your child into a program a designated instructor will sign in any medication and will carry it until needed by your child. When the program is over, be sure to sign out your child's medication.

Weather-Related Closure

If the Ithaca City School District cancels school due to snow or hazardous weather, or if the Tompkins County sheriff declares the roads are closed due to hazardous conditions, the Ithaca Forest Preschool program will be canceled. If ICSD announces a delayed start, we will try to open on time, however please check your email in the morning for any communication letting you know if we will also have a delay at preschool. We will start as close to time as possible. In addition, we encourage families to travel only when it feels safe to do so.

Pandemic-Related Closure

If the Health Department determines that we must cease in-person programming due to COVID-19, we will give you the option of receiving a pro-rated refund (minus deposit), moving funds to a future program, and or donating a portion of remaining funds.



Discipline Philosophy & Practices

Our discipline philosophy is closely aligned with “positive parenting”, “positive discipline”, or “creative constructive discipline”. It’s based on respect for children and a belief in the importance of our relationships with them as individuals.

Our basic expectations are that children stay with the group, follow directions, and treat everyone (and the Earth) with kindness and respect. We recognize that these are skills preschoolers are just beginning to acquire and our goal is to role model, coach for, and facilitate them. We use reminders and logical consequences to teach what we call peacemaking: managing conflict through empathy, inner peace, talking & listening, and seeking agreement.

An example of a logical consequence for us is to remove a child from a specific activity if he or she is having trouble participating appropriately. In this case, we suggest something else for the child to participate in and, depending on the situation, might also suggest some quiet time on the Peace Log—not an enforced “timeout”, but an invitation to the child to take a breath and try to find his or her own inner peace.

If, after some coaching, your child constantly has difficulty meeting any of our basic expectations we will let you know so we can all put our heads together about how best to support your child. We would also inform you—during program hours if appropriate—if your child behaves in a way that could be a danger to your child or others.

If the behavior is extreme or repeated, or the child is unable to discuss it with us, we reserve the right to temporarily separate the child from the program. In some cases we use a written Participation Agreement to clarify problematic behaviors and make a plan together for addressing them.

Preschool Calendar



Fall 2025

Sept 5, 10am – 12pm: New Family Orientation

Sept 15: First day for M/W/F and five-day a week students

Sept 16: First day for T/Th students

Sept 23: No Program (Rosh Hashanah)

Oct 2: No Program (Yom Kippur)

Oct 13: No Program (Indigenous People's Day)

Oct 24: No Program

Nov 11: No Program (Veteran's Day)

Nov. 26-28: No Program (Thanksgiving break)

Dec. 5: No Program

Dec 18: Last day for T/Th students

Dec 19: Last day for M/W/F and five-day a week students

Winter 2026

Jan 5: First day for M/W/F and five-day a week students

Jan 6: First day for T/Th students

Jan 19: No Program (MLK Day)

Feb 16-20: No Program (Mid-Winter break)

March 13: No Program

March 16: Last day for M/W/F students

March 17: Last day for T/Th and five-day a week students

Spring 2025

March 18, 10am – 12pm: New Family Orientation

March 23: First day for M/W/F and five-day a week students

March 24: First day for T/Th students

March 30 – April 3: No Program (Spring break)

May 25: No Program (Memorial Day)

June 9: Last day for T/Th students

June 10: Last day for M/W/F and five-day a week students



Songs

Following are a few songs your child
may come home singing!

The Sun is Shining

(Opening Circle Song)

The sun is shining, shining, shining
The sun is shining down on the land
The trees are growing, growing, growing
The trees are growing tall and grand
The rain is falling, falling, falling
The rain is falling down on the land
The river is filling, filling, filling
The river is filling and flowing on
The snow is falling, falling, falling
The snow is falling down on the land
A blanket is building, building, building
A blanket to cover and keep Earth warm

Motherland (Home I'm going Home)

Home, I'm going home
I need the land to heal my soul
Take me home
Take me home
Over the green, green hills and far away

Home to the motherland
Home to the motherland
Home to the motherland
Over the green, green hills and far away



Songs

The River is Flowing

The river is flowing
Flowing and growing
The river is flowing
Down to the sea

Mother carry me
Your child I will always be
Mother carry me
Down to the sea

Good Morning Dear Earth

Good morning, dear Earth
Good morning, dear Sun
Good morning to the animals
And the flowers every one.
Good morning to the busy bees
And the birds in the trees
Good morning to you
And good morning to me.

Burn Fire Burn

Burn Fire Burn
Burn fire burn
Stoke your inner Fire
Let the Coal inside you rise
Blow that flame to life



Songs

Wind Whispers

We sing to the wind and the wind whispers
We dance to the fire and the fire cracks
We cry to the ocean and the waves echo
We drum to the Earth and the Earth drums back
We drum to the Earth and the Earth drums back

Wood, Stone, Feather and Bone

Wood, stone, feather and bone, roaring of
the ocean guide us home
Wood, stone, feather and bone, roaring of
the ocean guide us home
Wolf and raven, wolf and raven
In my soul, in my soul, HUH
In my soul, in my soul, HUH

River, sea, cedar tree, howling of the wind gonna set us free
River, sea, cedar tree, howling of the wind gonna set us free
Eagle and salmon, eagle and salmon
In my soul, in my soul, HUH
In my soul, in my soul, HUH

Flowers, leaves, roots, and seeds
Medicine Plants gonna bring us ease
Flowers, leaves, roots, and seeds
Medicine Plants gonna bring us ease
Tea and poultice, tea and poultice
In my soul, in my soul, HUH
In my soul, in my soul, HUH



growing wild

A Primitive Pursuits Program in partnership with
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