

# Y Outdoor School Information Package

**Dear Y Outdoor School Family,**

Welcome to the Y Outdoor School! We are very excited to be opening up our programs in the fall and winter to support children and families through shared outdoor experiences, nature connection and learning support.

**The information in this booklet is vital for your child to have a successful experience. Please read carefully!**

Life at the Y Outdoor School is different from the routines and patterns of home and school. Taking the time to talk with your child about their upcoming experience is an important step in preparing. Setting a positive tone and clarifying expectations can really help your child make the adjustment. In doing this, your child will take the most out of their time at the Y Outdoor School.

If you, or your child have any questions about their upcoming experience, we encourage you to contact our program developers Hana Kucera at [hkucera@vancouverislandy.ca](mailto:hkucera@vancouverislandy.ca) or Fiona Hough at [fhough@vancouverislandy.ca](mailto:fhough@vancouverislandy.ca).

We look forward to having your child join us at the Y Outdoor School this school year.

## **Outdoor School Commitment**

The Y Outdoor School strives to be a fun, safe and nurturing environment where everyone has a chance to be their best. All participants, staff and volunteers pledge to treat each other with dignity and respect. Behavior that prevents others from enjoying a positive experience will not be permitted. If necessary, parents will be required to collect their child early. Inappropriate behavior including the use of offensive language, aggression, or use of prohibited items such as but not limited to tobacco, alcohol, non-prescription drugs or offensive materials will not be permitted.

The Child's Commitment is a very important aspect of our philosophy and speaks to our core values of caring, respect, honest and responsibility. We ask that you take the time to read and discuss the Child's Commitment with your child.

You will be asked to acknowledge and agree to the commitment during registration.

## **Child's Commitment**

I want to be a student at the Y Outdoor School. I agree to behave respectfully. I will do my best to make this a great experience for myself and my fellow students. If I get into conflict with other students I commit to working it out with the other student and staff. I understand that failure to live up to my Commitment may mean that I am sent home early. I also understand that by making this Commitment, I can look forward to fair treatment from my fellow students and staff.

## **Parent/Guardian Commitment**

I have discussed the Child's Commitment with my child and confirm that they agree to cooperate in the outdoor school experience, to follow safety instructions and refrain from behavior that is harmful or disruptive to themselves or other students. I understand that by supporting this Commitment, my child may look forward to fair treatment from their fellow students and the Y Outdoor School staff.

I also understand that the Y Outdoor School prohibits the use of offensive language, inappropriate behavior, and the use of tobacco, alcohol, or non-prescription drugs. I acknowledge that their use, or the failure by my child to abide by this commitment is cause for them to be sent home early without refund of fees.

## **Risk Awareness**

### **Participant Safety and Risk Management**

The YMCA-YWCA of Vancouver Island Outdoor School is committed to providing quality outdoor experiences that support healthy growth and development of young people. The camp environment and programs provide unique opportunities for children, youth and adults to challenge themselves, learn new outdoor and interpersonal skills and make new friends. We invest significant resources to create programs that provide these benefits to our participants without exposing them to unacceptable hazards.

Participants and their families should be aware of the risks involved in participating in outdoor programs and accept that by participating they are taking those risks. Please take the time to review this summary of risks and our risk management approach. Risks will vary for each program, so we ask that you also take the time to review the information provided about each program on our website. We are happy to speak with you should you have any questions or comments.

### **Risk Management, Planning and Safety**

The unique nature of an outdoor education experience comes with risks called “inherent risks”. This means that we cannot eliminate the risk without destroying the unique character of the activity – the aspects that make it beneficial for the participants. Although we cannot eliminate those risks, we actively take steps to reduce or control them, with the intent of bringing them to a tolerable level. For example, riding a bicycle has certain risks, and most people would agree that by wearing a helmet and obeying traffic laws, the risks are tolerable.

At the Y Outdoor School, we manage the risks specific to our environment and programs by being experts in our field, providing thorough staff training, and buying and maintaining quality program and personal protective equipment. While these measures do not guarantee safety, they allow us to offer programs that provide the many documented benefits of outdoor education experiences, such as personal growth, connections to nature and a sense of accomplishment.

### **Risk Encountered at Camp Thunderbird Outdoor Centre**

Activities we encounter in our everyday lives, and those that take place at the Outdoor Centre and Camp Thunderbird involve risks. Risk may vary based on the nature of the activity. Any of the activities at the Y Outdoor School involve certain emotional and physical risks, and many of them include the risk of disability, psychological trauma or even death, in the event of a serious incident.

Some of the hazards encountered as part of Y Outdoor School program may be familiar from our home communities: inclement weather and storms, motor-vehicle accidents, uneven ground, treefall, fire, hot liquids, infectious illnesses such as COVID-19, and equipment failure. For more information of the risk of COVID-19 please see our [COVID – 19 FAQ page](#).

Some hazards may be more unique to the Y Outdoor School program and setting. These hazards include, but are not limited to: lake and ocean water, marine traffic, boat capsizes, wildlife encounters (including bears, cougars, wolves, mice or other rodents, and stinging insects), hypo- or hyperthermia, fall from heights, including falls while hiking in steep terrain, falls or injuries due to equipment failure, error in judgement, or natural rock or tree fall on our real-rock climbing areas or High Ropes challenge courses, remoteness from emergency medical or evacuation services, including the failure of communication technology.

The hazards listed, and other hazards not listed, can pose a risk to even a well-trained and highly certified instructor, leader or guide. Any of the Y Outdoor School programs or activities can, due to an error in judgement or factors beyond the leader's control, become hazardous and potentially life-threatening.

Another hazard inherent in our program is conflict between program participants. It is important to note that we address these challenges through conflict resolution not elimination. What this means is we recognize that conflict is a reality in our work and that there are two stories to each conflict. We take the time to facilitate our participants working out their conflicts with each other in an age appropriate way. We do not simply remove the conflict for our participants. This is a part of our overarching program goal of helping our students learn and develop positive and lasting conflict resolution skill sets that will stay with them for life. The process is more challenging for the students, but the outcomes are most often far more beneficial for the development of both parties. If one of the children involved in the conflict does not live up to the commitments made through conflict resolution, we then will take steps to remove them from the program.

Participants and their families must weigh the risks that may be encountered with the strengths of the Y Outdoor School's Risk Management approach and plan as well as with the benefits of an outdoor education experience.

## Y Outdoor School Program

### A typical day at the Outdoor School at Camp Thunderbird:

8am bus pick up at the DTY

8:45-11am - Groups meet their Outdoor School staff off the bus

Gear check – Staff ensure is everyone dressed and ready for the weather (daily weather report delivered by staff or students), have their day pack, any medications, lunch and any school supplies needed for the day?

Morning circle/check in – at the start of each day students will be guided through a check in activity, an opportunity to see how everyone in the community is doing, and what needs they might have for the day. Activities are hands on, reflective and grounded in nature – e.g., Finding a leaf or natural object from the forest floor that represents their hopes for the day, a short sit spot, a reflection on something they notice today that is different from what they noticed yesterday (leaves changing colour, observations of weather, etc.).

Nature games & exploration – this can include structured sensory awareness activities, sit spots, an exploratory forest hike, newt counts and study on the lake or in the forest (over the winter we can observe the life cycles of certain animals and plants), and/or active games. \*Students will carry a field notebook to keep daily notes, sketches, reflections, measurements and observations.

11am-12:30pm – schoolwork support for those taking this option.

12:30-1:15 – lunch by the fire

1:15-2:30pm – Outdoor activities – Story walks, fires & shelters, song & story writing & telling, canoe/kayak/SUP, orienteering, teambuilding games, etc.

2:30pm – groups gather to debrief their day and get ready for the bus.

Term registration for 1,2, or 3 days a week allows for consistent groups to be formed, but also helps children develop a more long-term relationship to the site and all its non-human inhabitants. Keeping a field log and connecting to specific places at the site allows observation over time – when these are recorded daily students will have a record of their experiences. These can be written, sketched, numbered, etc. and can be used for extension into story and reflective writing, graphing, scientific study and recording.

## What to Bring to the Y Outdoor School

The following checklist is a good guideline for packing for Outdoor School. We encourage you to wear old clothes you won't mind bringing home dirty or getting lost. We do not recommend that you bring expensive clothing to the outdoor centre.

Please pack all these things in a backpack, and be aware that the children will carry their backpack throughout the day.

- Lunch – **MUST be Nut Free** - A large lunch as we are active throughout the day!
- Water Bottle
- Day Pack
- Sunscreen (for warm/sunny weather) (SPF 30 or higher)
- Sunglasses
- Hand Sanitizer
- Clothing:**
  - The weather on the west coast in the fall and winter can be changeable, and we will be spending our days outside whatever the conditions! Dressing in layers, and having waterproof footwear and rain gear will support your child to be comfortable, warm and dry in any conditions. Please take a look at this guide on what to wear for outdoor learning and pack/dress accordingly (special attention should be paid to the 'what to wear in wet weather' section):  
[https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/T.O\\_6\\_EN\\_What-to-Wear-Thrive-Outside.pdf](https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/T.O_6_EN_What-to-Wear-Thrive-Outside.pdf)

### **Please do not bring:**

-Nuts of any kind  
-Cell Phones or Smart Phones  
-Portable music devices  
-E-Readers\*  
-Expensive clothing  
-Hatchets or knives  
-Money

-Tobacco  
-Video games  
-Other valuables

\*Note : if your child requires a laptop for school work, they may bring it to the site for use during the homework support period.

## **Information for Families & Students Contacting Your Child**

### **Telephone**

No phone is available for students to regularly make or receive calls while at the site. If parents want to speak to their child, they are more than welcome to do so they must be organized through our supervisory staff. If you would like to speak with the Program Managers for any reason, please feel free to phone the camp: 250-642-3136.

## **Student Wellness**

### **Preparing Your Child for the Y Outdoor School**

The Y Outdoor School is an exciting and fun filled place: new friends, new adventures, new skills, stories, games and outdoor learning. It is also a very different place: different washroom, different schedule and different people.

Along with the excitement of all these new experiences, there is bound to be some anxiety. Here are a few things you might do to keep the anxiety low and anticipation high.

- Read this package, student and parent together, and talk about preparing
- Talk about what it's like being in a group with other children, and the ways they can go about making new friends
- Talk about ways to solve problems — talking with a staff person
- Focus on the positives like all the new skills they will learn and build confidence in the skills they already have

### **Student Health**

You have provided all necessary medical information during the registration process. Please feel free to provide us with more information if you think it would be beneficial.

### **Medications**

All medications should be signed in and given to the Outdoor School staff at the bus or at camp, however puffers and epi-pens are to be kept with the children (in most cases). Either way the Y Outdoor School staff needs to be given or informed about medication. Please make sure that any medications your child may have are in the original package and are labeled clearly with the child's name and instructions for use.

### **Student Independence**

Children registering for the Outdoor School should be able to dress, eat, stay hydrated and use the toilet independent of direct staff support. While each group leader will be on hand to make

sure there is time, space and prompting for children to meet these basic needs, we will not have the capacity support children who are not able to do these things independently. At this time, we do not have the capacity to support children who require one-on-one supervision and care.

### **Supervision at Camp**

It is our goal to provide a safe, comfortable and supportive environment. Our staff are trained in providing high quality care for our students and ensuring that the needs of each individual are met. An Outdoor School group will always have at least one staff present. Some activities (orienteering, scavenger hunts, etc.) at times involve children being out of direct supervision. During these activities there may not be a staff member in direct line of sight with children, but someone will always be within earshot and children are given clear directions on what to do if they need assistance.

### **Outdoor School Behavior Policy**

If a situation arises where a student threatens the safety or security of another child, or if a student shows disregard for camp guidelines, we will make every effort to encourage appropriate behaviour and contact the parents.

**If we are not successful in encouraging appropriate behaviour, the child will be dismissed from program at the management team's discretion. The Y Outdoor School will not be held responsible for any costs associated with a dismissal on the grounds of disruptive behaviour.**

Parents of students are kept abreast of any concerns and progress. Parents may also be asked to assist in creating a positive environment for all.

## **Miscellaneous**

### **Lost and Found**

Lost and Found items are displayed outside the dining hall during the session and are available for review by parents if they wish to come and check for any items. Lost and Found items are kept at Camp Thunderbird for 14 days and are then donated to charity.

Please fill out our Lost and Found request form (found on our website) and a staff member will check the Lost and Found for you. If the item is found, we will contact you and make arrangements to hold it for you at camp for a limited time. This will give you time to get to camp during our office hours for collection. **We do not transport Lost and Found items.**

The best way to help us reduce the amount of lost and found is to talk to your child about keeping track of their belongings before getting to the Outdoor Centre. Put your child's name on anything brought to the Outdoor Centre.



## **Your Privacy**

The YMCA-YWCA is committed to maintaining the confidentiality, privacy, and accuracy of personal information it collects, uses and discloses about its participant, members, donors, parents/guardians, staff and volunteers. At the YMCA-YWCA of Vancouver Island your privacy is and always has been very important to us. We are dedicated to providing you with superior service, while protecting your privacy and safeguarding your personal information.

## **Camp Thunderbird Outdoor Centre Office**

Camp Thunderbird

5040 Glinz Lake Road, Sooke, BC, V9Z 0E3

250-642-3136

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