



## **Contact Information**

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**Location:** Blackacre Conservancy (3200 Tucker Station Rd, Louisville, KY 40299)

## **About us**

LEAP stands for Learning Enriched by Adventurous Play and is designed for children to engage in nature-based outdoor play within a supportive community. LEAP offers three classes: Tadpoles (one hour parent/child class), Froglets (two-hour parent/child), and Froggies (drop-off program ages 3-6). Each class offers unique activities that are developmentally appropriate and evidence-based. Our philosophy includes the research-supported idea that child-led exploratory play in nature enhances a child's physical, motor, social, emotional, and cognitive development. We are committed to building an inclusive community that encourages children to bond with nature. Join us in growing curious, confident, and creative children in nature!

## **Froggies Explorers**

This is a drop-off class for children who enjoy exploring in nature and are able to:

- Listen to and follow teacher directions
- Hike at least 0.5 miles over uneven terrain without assistance
- Carry own backpack with water and snacks
- Be outside in all weather (excluding dangerous conditions) for the entire class

**Payment:** Payments must be made in full prior to your child's first class. Also, a separate donation to Blackacre must be made in advance, and confirmation of that payment must be forwarded to LEAP for our records.

**Waiver and Emergency Sheet:** Froggies parents will receive an email with the waiver and a link to fill out an emergency information online document. There will be a signature page sent out as well for parents to acknowledge reading and agreeing to the terms of the waiver, class rules and behavior plan. *Please bring the signed signature page to the first class or e-sign and email it prior to the first class.*

## **Class Cancellations**

This is a rain or shine class, however, in the event of dangerous weather (i.e. temperatures or wind chill below 20 degrees, hazardous driving conditions, thunderstorms, etc.), we will notify you of a canceled class via email at least 30 minutes prior to class (all canceled classes will be made up later).

### **What to Bring to a Froggies Explorers Class**

- **Appropriate Clothing:** Dress for the weather! We follow the popular Scandinavian phrase, "There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes."
  - We will be playing in ponds, creeks, and mud. Please dress your child in quick-dry, breathable fabric and waterproof/resistant footwear (such as rubber rain boots).
  - Include a change of clothes in your child's backpack (such as a t-shirt, shorts, socks, underwear).
  - In colder weather, layers are important. This includes a warm base layer, wind/waterproof outer shell (such as raincoat), hat, gloves, socks, and waterproof/resistant footwear.
  - Since we know it is so important for our children to dress for the elements, we are happy to offer a **25% off code** to use toward purchasing outdoor gear at <https://oaki.com/>; Just enter the code **ForestPreschool25** (minimum purchase of \$29.99 required to use the code).
- **Backpack:** Please have a backpack that can get wet and that your child can comfortably carry. In your child's backpack please include:
  - Water bottle (full)
  - Healthy snack (Please send foods in reusable containers or minimal and/or compostable packaging. Parents should supply wholesome snacks (with little or no sugar, please) such as fruit.)
  - Change of clothes and bag for wet/soiled clothing
- **Before drop-off:** Please apply all bug/tick spray and sunscreen prior to dropping your child off in the mornings. We will not be able to reapply during class. We encourage sun hats and clothing with built-in SPF to further protect your child from the sun.

### **Arrival and Pick-up**

**Arrival:** All classes have sign-in sheets for tracking attendance. An adult will accompany each child on their walk from their car in the morning. No child may be left in the morning until they are signed in and the teacher is aware of their presence.

**Pick-up Policy and Procedures:** No child is ever released to an adult who is not listed on the emergency form. If the adult is not listed on the authorized pickup list, the parent needs to inform the office ahead of time to add that person to the pickup list. Parents or authorized adult must sign out upon departure. Parents who do not pick up their children within 10 minutes of dismissal will need to complete a late pickup form. In the case of recurring late pick-ups, teachers should notify the director who will take further actions to address the issue.

**Late Pick up Fee:** If a parent is consistently more than 10 minutes late picking up their child they will be subject to a \$10 late fee.

### **General Class Guidelines**

We are committed to keeping our children safe. We adhere to the following guidelines to provide consistent boundaries in the name of safety. It is also helpful to reinforce many of these practices at home.

- **Toys:** Nature provides all the materials necessary for playing outdoors, so toys from home are not necessary. If your child does need a comfort toy from home, please be sure it is weather-resistant/washable!
- **Boundaries:** Children are expected to stay within the boundaries that have been established by teachers. They will always be within earshot and eyesight of the teacher.
- **Climbing trees:** Children may climb trees while under adult supervision. A general rule of thumb is they may not climb higher than twice their height, and only after they have demonstrated competence.
- **Sticks:** The children may not play with sticks that are longer than their arm, unless it is clearly and responsibly being used as a walking stick, a tool (digging, for example), or for building, under the supervision of the adults. Running is not permitted while holding a stick.
- **Ingestion:** Children will not eat or drink any substance found in nature without adult permission.

**Social & Emotional Safety:** LEAP is committed to inspiring and teaching respect for the earth and all its creatures and this includes modeling and fostering respect for self and for others at all times. Outdoor learning provides many opportunities for cooperative play and teachers/caregivers are there to guide children into co-creative adventures. There is a zero tolerance policy for hitting, grabbing, pushing, name-calling, aggressiveness or any other demeaning behavior. If these behaviors occur, the teacher will separate the instigating child from the group to a calm place for a one-on-one discussion. An incident report will be written and given to parents and the director. ***Please refer to the Behavior Plan on the last page for next steps.***

**First Aid:** In the case of a minor injury, the teachers may administer basic first aid—wash the injury with soap and water and cover with band-aids—as they see fit. The parents will be notified of any significant injuries at pickup. In the case of a major injury, the teachers will call 911 and the parents/emergency contact and apply basic first aid until medical help arrives. All teachers have easy access to First Aid kits at all times. Children will always be sent to the nearest hospital if such an extreme measure is needed.

**Bathroom Safety:** The bathroom area consists of both outdoor space as well as an indoor toilet facility. If a child needs assistance using the bathroom, a teacher will be within earshot and be able to help the child. The bathroom door is not closed while a teacher is physically assisting a child in that space, but may be closed for privacy when the child is in there alone while the teacher waits outside the door. \*Since this is an exploring class, we may venture away from a toilet, and in this case children are provided the opportunity to use the bathroom outside (we will pack out any solid waste and we carry wipes with us). We will offer a chance to use the indoor toilet facilities prior to going on any hikes, and when we return.

**Example Flow for Froggies Class**

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| 9:25 am  | Parents/caregivers drop off children and sign the attendance sheet.  |
| 9:30 am  | Circle up. Sing Song. Review rules of kindness to self, others, and nature.  |
| 9:40 am  | Begin hike and practice norms of hiking in a group (teacher in front and back). Practice freeze/red light. Destinations: ponds, creek, trees, meadow, barn, garden; keeping in mind that it is the journey not the destination!  |
| 10:30 am | Arrive to “classroom” site to have snack time (if not had on the trail) and free-play time. There may be days where we may arrive back in the classroom just in time for reflection and pick-up and have our free-play on the trail or while exploring, or spend the entire time in the classroom. |
| 11:20 am | Circle up, gather belongings, and reflect by singing Adventure Song and sharing around the circle.   |
| 11:30 am | Parents arrive to pickup site to and sign child out.   |

**The Benefits of Outdoor Play**

Playing in nature has many benefits for child development in these three key areas: physical and motor development, social and emotional development, and cognitive processing skills. During our class, teachers will facilitate a child’s development in these areas by providing evidence-based research methods.

| Child’s development   | Role of teacher   | Evidence/Research  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Physical and motor development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Evaluating risk is a critical thinking skill: child determines if they are ready to take a risk (must know and listen to own body)</li> <li>★ Coordination, balance, core strength is developed by free play on uneven, natural surfaces</li> <li>★ Physically lifting, rolling, or otherwise moving natural materials and then constructing or building with them requires hand-eye coordination</li> <li>★ Immunity is improved through outside play</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Step back and watch carefully, be able to step in but only if needed</li> <li>❑ Hazard vs. Risk: adult assesses the environment by clearing any hazards (broken bottles, be aware of a rotting log or slippery area, etc.) to create a safe space for children to assess risk</li> <li>❑ Use phrases such as “be mindful of the slippery log” instead of “be careful!”</li> <li>❑ Encourage child-led exploratory free-play in nature for your child to develop fine and gross motor skills organically</li> </ul> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ellen Sandseter, Norway (risk-taking leads to confidence and competence);</li> <li>2. Grahn et al, Scandinavian study (nature play leads to better balance, motor skills, strength, concentration, better immune system);</li> <li>3. Richard Louv, <i>Last Child in the Woods</i> (need to be able to assess risk as kids to judge risk as adolescents);</li> <li>4. Dr. Clare McCarthy, “6 reasons children need to play outside,” Harvard Health Publishing (playing outside promotes health benefits)</li> </ol>         |
| <p><b>Social and emotional development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Teamwork</li> <li>★ Leadership</li> <li>★ Confidence</li> <li>★ Mindfulness</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ We model empathy for others, “Our friend fell down, should we see if he is ok? Does he need our help?”</li> <li>❑ Step back and let them work through a problem together</li> <li>❑ Help instill intrinsic motivation (ex: instead of “Good job!” try, “You did it!” or “You should be proud of yourself!”)</li> <li>❑ Help create a calm environment</li> </ul>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. David Sobel (nature play leads to children being able to respect others, work together);</li> <li>2. Florence Williams, “The Nature Fix” (Being in nature rests frontal lobe and as our brains relax, we are able to be more creative and it increases our attention spans);</li> <li>3. Dr. Richard Davidson, Center for Healthy Minds (Healthy lives are enabled by nature: high levels of social-emotional intelligence, an increase in attention span, mindfulness in kids, increased empathy and compassion)</li> </ol> |
| <p><b>Cognitive processing skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Make connections</li> <li>★ See cause and effect</li> <li>★ Compare and contrast based on size, shape, color, etc.</li> <li>★ Sorting and categorizing</li> <li>★ Develop rich language by describing to others what they see, hear, smell, feel</li> <li>★ Problem-solving skills</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Model grit: persevere through a difficult task</li> <li>❑ Ask questions rather than give answers</li> <li>❑ Teach them to notice their environment using all 5 senses, but mostly their sense of smell, sight, sound, and touch</li> <li>❑ Ask them to really describe what they notice and what they think. This encourages</li> </ul>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dr. Clare McCarthy, “6 reasons children need to play outside,” Harvard Health Publishing (problem-solving in executive functioning development in play);</li> <li>2. J.P. Guilford (divergent thinking, or many solutions to a problem);</li> </ol>  |

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| ★ Grit, or “stick-to-it-ness,” an identified 21st century executive functioning skill | rich language development (i.e. “ <i>What do their eyes look like? Why do you think they have those big eyes?</i> ”) | 3. Peter Gray (Creativity nurtured by play and freedom to explore) |
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**LEAP Outside Behavior Plan**

An important part of this experience is helping children learn how to get along in the world, enjoy being with other children, and follow the direction of an adult other than their parent. A caring and positive approach will be taken regarding behavior management and discipline. The teachers will focus on the positive behaviors of the children and reinforce those behaviors as often as possible. Our goal is to help the children develop self-control and responsibility for their actions.

**Discipline Strategies**

1. Encouraging children to use their words when having a disagreement with another child.
2. Facilitating children in their attempts to settle their own disputes.
3. Redirecting behavior when this seems potentially effective.
4. Separating a child from the group
5. Counseling children individually about their behaviors.
6. Making parents aware of disciplinary concerns (Incident Report).

**Disruptive Behaviors**

The following behaviors distract from the full benefit of the program and will result in consequences.

- Requires constant attention from the staff
- Inflicts physical or emotional harm on other children, adults, or self
- Disrespects people and materials provided in the program
- Consistently disobeys the rules of the classroom
- Verbally threatens other students and/or staff
- Uses inappropriate or offensive words repeatedly

**Plan for Disruptive Behavior**

Step One: Incident Report

Disruptive behaviors will be addressed in an incident report. This will be completed by a teacher to document inappropriate behaviors that directly impact other children, staff members, or the group as a whole. This report will be shared with the parent and will explain the behavior and how the behavior has affected others. It will also explain how the situation was resolved. The incident report will be given to the parent at the end of the day to be signed and returned the next day to the teacher.

Step Two: Parent/Teacher/Director Meeting

If two incident reports are written during one session, documenting that the child has difficulty managing his/her behavior on a recurring basis, parents will be asked to meet with the child’s teacher and Program Director(s) to develop a behavior plan.

Step Three: Child may be sent home or be removed from the program

If, after Steps One and Two, the child's behavior continues to be inappropriate, consistently disruptive, and/or dangerous, it may be necessary for the child to be sent home for a time to be determined, or removed from the program altogether.