



Contact Information

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About us

LEAP stands for Learning Enriched by Adventurous Play and is designed for children and their caregivers to engage in nature-based outdoor play within a supportive community. Each class offers activities that are developmentally appropriate and evidence-based. Please note that younger siblings are welcome to attend in a carrier or stroller at no charge until they are old enough to participate themselves!

Caregivers (i.e. a parent, grandparent, nanny, or other adult who is designated by the parent as responsible for the child during this class) are provided with the “why” behind each activity choice as well as ways to further extend their child’s learning at home. Participants are also given access to a LEAP Community Facebook Group where they can find more evidence-based research about the benefits of outdoor play in nature, as well as be in contact with their instructors and other families from class.

LEAP is committed to building a community that encourages parents and children to engage with nature, wherever it is found! In that light, we host LEAP classes in a variety of locations and provide activities that can be replicated in a backyard environment at home as well. We also offer volunteer opportunities for families to attend together to help protect our natural environment, and playdates for families to socialize outside of class.

COVID-19 Precautions

We follow CDC and state guidelines regarding masking and other precautions. Your teacher will announce those at the start of class. If an adult or child is running a fever, has possible exposure to COVID-19, or has other symptoms of COVID-19, they are asked to not attend class until they are symptom-free and/or have been cleared by a health professional. We believe taking these precautions will help keep us safe and healthy.

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 Caregiver+Child Class

- **Blanket, tarp, towel, or yoga mat for your family to sit on during circle time.**
- **Appropriate Clothing:** Dress for the weather! We follow the popular Scandinavian phrase, "There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes."
 - In winter, layers are important. This includes a warm base layer, wind/waterproof outer shell, hat, gloves, socks, and waterproof/resistant footwear. We will get muddy, if not wet, most days!
 - As a caregiver, please remember that in the event of rain or snow, waterproof outer layers, including footwear, are necessary for you and your child.
 - 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).
- **Water/Snacks:** Please bring a water bottle for yourself and your child. If you or your child will need a snack during class, please bring your own and be aware that there is no designated "snack time" during our one-hour class. You may nurse or feed your child as necessary for their comfort.
- **Diaper Bag:** If your child requires diapers, please bring your diapers, wipes, hand-sanitizer, etc., and your own trash bag for packing the diaper out with you. Please note that there are no trash cans or bathrooms in the "classroom" space (but there are trash cans and bathrooms on the grounds).
- **Extras:** bug spray, sunscreen, personal first-aid kit, extra clothing, hand sanitizer/wipes, towel.

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. We ask that parents uphold these same standards while onsite. It is also helpful to reinforce many of these practices at home.

- **Toys:** Nature provides all the materials necessary for playing in the outdoors, so toys from home are not necessary. Art supplies and other learning materials will be provided. 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 should always be within earshot and eyesight of their caregiver.
- **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.

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, we will encourage caregivers to help their child develop in these areas by providing evidence-based research methods.

Child's development	Role as caregiver	Evidence/Research
<p>Physical and motor development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Evaluating risk is a critical thinking skill: child determines if they are ready to take a risk (must know and listen to own body) ★ Coordination, balance, core strength is developed by free play on uneven, natural surfaces ★ Physically lifting, rolling, or otherwise moving natural materials and then constructing or building with them requires hand-eye coordination ★ Immunity is improved through outside play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Step back and watch carefully, be able to step in but only if needed ❑ 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 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ellen Sandseter, Norway (risk-taking leads to confidence and competence); 2. Grahn et al, Scandinavian study (nature play leads to better balance, motor skills, strength, concentration, better immune system); 3. Richard Louv, <i>Last Child in the Woods</i> (need to be able to assess risk as kids to judge risk as adolescents); 4. Dr. Clare McCarthy, "6 reasons children need to play outside," Harvard Health Publishing (playing outside promotes health benefits)
<p>Social and emotional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Teamwork ★ Leadership ★ Confidence ★ Mindfulness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ We model empathy for others, "Our friend fell down, should we see if he is ok? Does he need our help?" ❑ Step back and let them work through a problem together ❑ Help instill intrinsic motivation (ex: instead of "Good job!" try, "You did it!" or "You should be proud of yourself!") ❑ Help create a calm environment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. David Sobel (nature play leads to children being able to respect others, work together); 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); 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)
<p>Cognitive processing skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Make connections ★ See cause and effect ★ Compare and contrast based on size, shape, color, etc. ★ Sorting and categorizing ★ Develop rich language by describing to others what they see, hear, smell, feel ★ Problem-solving skills ★ Grit, or "stick-to-it-ness," an identified 21st century executive functioning skill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Model grit: persevere through a difficult task ❑ Ask questions rather than give answers ❑ Teach them to notice their environment using all 5 senses, but mostly their sense of smell, sight, sound, and touch ❑ Ask them to really describe what they notice and what they think. This encourages rich language development (i.e. "What do their eyes look like? Why do you think they have those big eyes?") 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr. Clare McCarthy, "6 reasons children need to play outside," Harvard Health Publishing (problem-solving in executive functioning development in play); 2. J.P. Guilford (divergent thinking, or many solutions to a problem); 3. Peter Gray (Creativity nurtured by play and freedom to explore)

QUESTIONS AND DESCRIPTORS TO ENGAGE CHILDREN IN NATURE USING OUR 5 SENSES AND DEVELOP RICH LANGUAGE:

SIGHT	WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? WHAT DO YOU SEE? DESCRIBE COLOR (SPECIFIC, SUCH AS A SHINY CHARCOAL GREY, OR DULL DARK GREY-BROWN), SHAPE (CIRCULAR, POINTY, CONICAL, TRIANGULAR, ROUND, RECTANGULAR), SIZE (GIGANTIC, ENORMOUS, HUGE, BIG, MEDIUM, PERSON-SIZE, PEA-SIZE, SMALL, TINY, MICROSCOPIC). PLAY "I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE..."
SOUND	WHAT DOES IT SOUND LIKE? WHAT DO YOU HEAR? IS IT LOUD OR SOFT? WHAT DOES IT MAKE YOU THINK ABOUT? (CRUNCH, SQUISH, RUSTLING LEAVES, WHISTLING WIND, LOW CROAK OF A FROG, HIGH CHIRP OF A BIRD (MIMIC THE BIRD CALL OR ANIMAL SOUND AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE), TAPPING/KNOCKING OF A WOODPECKER) PLAY "I HEAR WITH MY LITTLE EAR..."
SMELL	WHAT DOES IT SMELL LIKE? WHAT DO YOU SMELL? DOES IT REMIND YOU OF SOMETHING ELSE? DO YOU LIKE HOW IT SMELLS? (STENCH, HARSH, INTENSE, PUNGENT, FLORAL, FRESH, EARTHY, SWEET, LIGHT, RANCID, ROTTEN, MUSTY, STALE, FAINT, SUBTLE, FRUITY, DAMPY, PINEY) DOES THIS ANIMAL HAVE A NOSE? IS IT BIGGER OR SMALLER THAN OURS? DO YOU THINK THEY SMELL LIKE WE DO? PLAY "I SMELL WITH MY LITTLE NOSE..."
TASTE	*WE ONLY TASTE WHAT WE KNOW AND HAVE PERMISSION TO TASTE. NO FUNGI, PLANTS, ETC.* CAN TASTE ICE, SNOW. CAN BE GIVEN NATURAL FOODS TO EAT IN NATURE AND DESCRIBE (SUCH AS PAWPAWS, APPLES, BERRIES, CARROTS, ETC) WHAT DOES IT TASTE LIKE? (BITTER, SOUR, SALTY, SWEET, HOT, COOL, UMAMI) PLAY "I TASTE WITH MY LITTLE TONGUE..."
TOUCH	WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE? WHAT DO YOU FEEL? WHY DO YOU THINK IT FEELS LIKE THAT? WHAT ELSE FEELS SIMILAR TO THAT? DESCRIBE TEXTURES, TEMPERATURES. (SOFT, HARD, SQUISHY, BUMPY, ROUGH, SOFT, SMOOTH, SHARP, PRICKLY, SILKY, THICK, STICKY, HEAVY, LIGHT, SPIKY, HOT, WARM, COOL, COLD, FREEZING.) PLAY "I FEEL WITH MY LITTLE FINGERS..."