



# **Family Handbook Summary**

**2024 - 2025**

## Mission of Airie Forest School

Airie Forest School is an early childhood learning community that empowers children to joyfully explore a holistic education. We strive to inspire a diverse community of learners to cultivate a deep and meaningful connection to the natural world while playfully engaging in the creative process of discovery. We know that confident children become resilient citizens who creatively problem-solve, navigate, and improve their world.

## Children's Rights

- Children have the right to play.
- Children have the right to get messy.
- Children have the right to make mistakes, solve problems, and try again.
- Children have the right to discover their identity.
- Children have the right to explore their ideas.
- Children have the right to be seen, heard, and valued.
- Children have the right to be immersed in nature.

## Cultivating Community

This experience is a milestone for your family. It marks the expansion of your child's life outside the home. To ease the transition from home to Airie, you should talk regularly with your child about his or her new experiences. It is an opportunity to share the excitement of meeting new people and sharing new ideas. Your child will benefit from your support and understanding as he/she begins to grow outside your home.

## Dress Code and Gear

**General Dress.** Children learn through messy play. Due to the nature of outdoor play, please only send your child to forest school in clothes they may get muddy, wet, painted, torn, spotted/dotted and in general...dirty.

**General Gear.** Learning in nature generates a sense of purpose, personal growth, and environmental awareness that research has shown to have lasting effects (Braun & Dierkes, 2017). Making sure your child is dressed appropriately for the outdoors is critical to the success of our program. We adhere to the motto: ***"There is no bad weather here when you wear the proper gear."***

## Discipline Guidance Policies

**Discipline.** The term *discipline* derives from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means to teach, learn, and give instruction. Although we understand it was not the original intention of the word, discipline has become synonymous with punishment. Therefore, Airie Forest School guides children through the process of development rather than punishing them.

**Creating Connections.** The more connected children are to their caregivers, the better the communication of needs. It is the responsibility of all educators at Airie Forest School to develop nurturing relationships with every child. The families and educators must have a respectful and open connection for the good of the child.

- 🌱 Rule of Care:
  - Intentional Language:
    - We care for ourselves.
    - We care for others.
    - We care for our environment.

**Guidance Approach.** Understanding is the key to conflict resolution. AFS educators take the time to build caring connections with the children. These connections enable educators to easily see the good in every child and support the foundation of quality learning relationships. Conflicts allow our teachers to expose the children to developmentally appropriate behavior and emotional regulation strategies.

***Two things are true:***

1. Children are good inside.
2. Children can make mistakes and have hard times.

## **Social and Emotional Safety**

Cultivating a strong connection between educators and students, as well as student to student is the first layer of social and emotional safety. During free play children learn in all areas of development. We place the strongest emphasis on social and emotional development. While physical and academic skills can be mastered in various settings, the only way to learn social skills and develop emotional regulation skills to cope is to experience them. AFS concentrates on social-emotional learning skills to foster bravery within vulnerability. Taking the chance to learn is taking the risk of making a mistake. This risk is difficult for learners to take when they are not able to regulate their emotions or cannot advocate for themselves in social situations.

## **Calendar**

Airie Forest School provides a balanced forest school year. The year is divided into four ten-week sessions, separated by four vacations of varying weeks (e.g., 2 to 5 weeks). This sequence of sessions and vacations repeats four times each year, thus providing the required 36 weeks of traditional school. Additional days each year are allocated as needed (e.g., Thanksgiving). A specific calendar can be found on our website.

## **Educational Resources**

- 🌱 Software
  - *Storypark* for documenting learning.
  - *Brightwheel* for billing and attendance.
- 🌱 Supplies
  - AFS believes in the power of process art; therefore, supplies will be designated as tinker or art. This will allow children to know what they are allowed to tear, cut, glue, or paint versus what can be used for reusable play. AFS will also provide opportunities for the children to learn how to make their own art and supplies from wildlife.

## 🌱 Curricula

- AFS practices an emergent curricula framework. The teacher observes, documents, discuss/reflects, and negotiates learning with the children. The teacher will map play events and develop learning invitations based on this data.
- Educational materials and resources (e.g., books, tools, nets, magnifying glasses, or a tablet) will be used to further the children's interest in a topic.
- Children will participate in agriculture, science, literacy, creative-critical thinking, technology, engineering, math, social-emotional, cultural, physical, artistic, and life skills activities through the forest school experience.
- Academic curricula may be offered as children display signs of developmental readiness and interest. Some pre-established curricula may include, but not limited to:
  - Literacy: *Words Their Way; Jumping into Literacy*
  - Math: *Making Math Real; Jumping into Math*
  - Social-Emotional Learning: *The Kindness Curriculum*
  - Personal Safety: *Keeping Kids Safe*

## 🌱 Assessments

- As children display developmental readiness, they will be screened to assess literacy skills using the spelling inventory from *Words Their Way*.
- Informal checklist and rubrics will be used to assess milestones and progression through the TN-ELDS.

## 🌱 Donations and Collections

- Monies: We are a for-profit educational organization; therefore, donations are welcomed but are not tax-exempt.
- Check out our loose parts collection list to see what AFS needs.
- Your Time: special presenter, mystery reader, and/or helping with a community project.

## Communication Expectations

Families may expect informal communication during the arrival and farewell processes. Spontaneous communication (i.e., daily, or weekly) will occur through stories on *Storypark*. Consistent communication can be expected every three months from AFS's seasonal newsletters. Formal communication and concerns may be shared through email, phone call, scheduling a meeting, or during your child's milestone meetings.

## Weather Policies

**Going Outside.** Research has found that children who play and spend long periods of time outside have improved language development, mathematics, environmental science, social studies, gross motor skills, adaptability, curiosity, creativity, confidence, autonomy, risk assessment knowledge, resiliency, empathy, problem-solving, and leadership skills (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Dankiw, 2020). Children at AFS shall be invited to explore outside

every day for long periods of time. At least three hours of outdoor time will be offered on resiliency days. *Resiliency days*, as defined by this family handbook, means days with rain, above 95°F, below 20°F, or windy weather. Every effort will be made to provide time outside during the most comfortable times of the school day. This excludes the following dangerous, **inclement weather** circumstances:

- ☺ Air quality is 101 ppm or higher.
- ☺ Heat index above 103°F
- ☺ Wind chill below -5°F
- ☺ Lightning strikes and thunder rolls are less than 30 seconds apart.
- ☺ Wind speeds greater than 40 mph
- ☺ Freezing rain, sleet, or snow/rain mix

**Flexible Delays.** Airie Forest School believes in flexible delays to remain open as consistently as possible. *Flexible delays*, as defined by this handbook, are AFS's decision to open and close around the weather conditions predicted. For example, on a cold and snowy day we may operate from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for those who can **safely drive** to the forest.

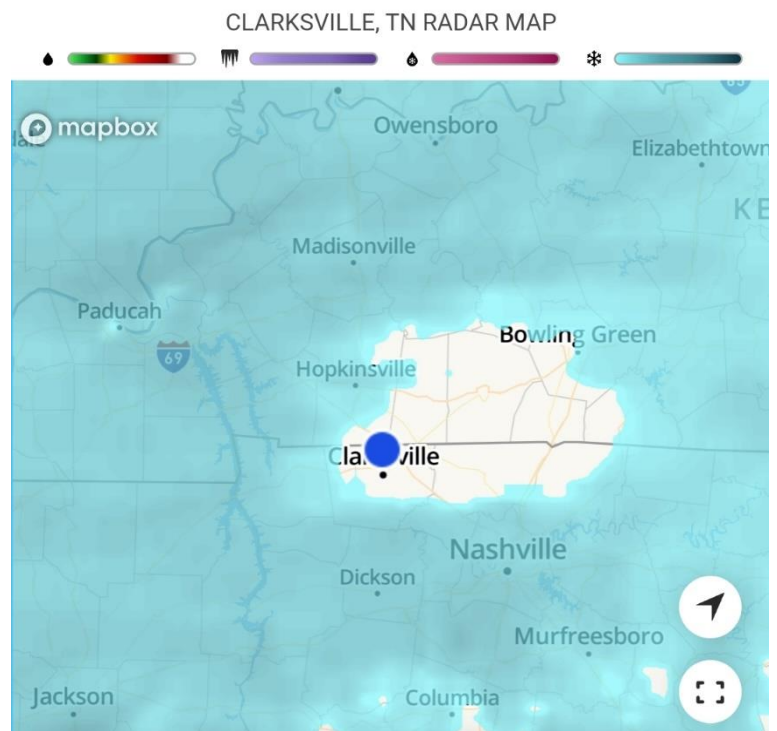
**School Closures.** Due to the unpredictability of Clarksville's weather patterns, closures will most often be issued the morning of school. AFS will not open if conditions are predicted to remain dangerous until **12:00 p.m.** on that specific day.

- ☺ Tornado warnings that are issued for Montgomery County and the Clarksville area will result in AFS being delayed or closed according to the timing of the warnings.

If severe weather warnings are issued during school hours and it is apparent that the dangerous weather will continue for the remainder of the school day, parents will be notified to pick up their children early.

## Illness Policies

- ☺ **General:** Your child must be fever and vomit free for 24 hours before returning to school. As defined by this family handbook, a *fever* is:
  - Forehead: 100.4 °F
  - Oral: 100 °F
  - Armpit: 99 °F



## Immunization

Airie Forest School asks all enrollees to be and remain current with their immunizations. AFS aligns with the Tennessee Department of Health requirements for children attending various schooling environments. *We do honor religious and medical exemptions.*

## Risk Assessment

Airie Forest School will be routinely checked for safety. As we travel to various field trip sites, ongoing risk assessment will be administered. Any hazards will be removed. Any structure deemed hazardous will be closed and scheduled for repairs. If the problem is large enough, we will either choose a different AFS site or school will be delayed and/or closed until the issue is resolved. Every effort will be made to provide children with hazard-free zones. *Hazard*, as defined by this family handbook, means an object, substance, or life form that may or may not be obscured and will cause serious harm to a person.

**Food Safety.** Airie Forest School promotes well-balanced nutritional practices.

### 🌱 Food/Drink:

- Children should drink water from their water bottles throughout the day and during mealtimes.
- Any suitable produce from the learning gardens will periodically be offered to the children to enjoy.
- A day of exuberate play can make children very hungry and having a full belly helps them regulate their body temperature, which will be especially important on resiliency days (see page 18 for more information on resiliency days). Therefore, AFS requires the families to provide their child with a nutritionally dense lunch and snack. These meals should consist of a combination of protein, fruit, and vegetables.
- Meal example:
  - AM Snack: Apple slices and nut butter
  - Lunch: Blueberries, pepper slices, and a bean burrito
  - PM Snack: Cherry tomatoes and cheese stick

*Note:* Sugary treats are allowed for birthday celebrations

**Thank you!**

