

HOWARD COUNTY CONSERVANCY NATURE PRESCHOOL

FAQ

What is Nature Preschool?

Howard County Conservancy's Nature Preschool is a unique, nature-based preschool program. Our school creates a safe, positive and supportive learning environment for all children. Through our engaging hands-on, emergent curriculum, our goal is to foster meaningful, everlasting connections between children and the natural world, while preparing children for their transition into kindergarten. We learn all of the early childhood fundamentals while focusing on the environment and spending most of our time outdoors.

What is your mission/philosophy?

Our mission is to provide a nature-based program that creates a safe, positive and supportive learning environment for all children. Through our engaging hands-on, emergent curriculum our goal is to foster meaningful, everlasting connections between children and the natural world, while preparing children for their transition into kindergarten.

Our philosophy is rooted in nature pedagogy and child-led discovery. As the seasons transition and children's interest evolve, our program will incorporate these inspiring changes into daily lessons that will meet the developmental needs of our littlest naturalists. Each day will consist of taking learning outdoors, as well as bringing nature into the classroom! Through best practices, our nature preschool seeks to prepare children for kindergarten through exploration, sensorial experiences, hands-on play and a curriculum that integrates all the wonders of nature. Children are provided with opportunities to engage with friends in a developmentally appropriate environment that welcomes children of all abilities and skills. The Nature Preschool values an emergent curriculum that offers a balance of child-initiated and teacher-directed activities that reflect the current interests of our students, their primary languages and their cultural backgrounds. It is our belief that from this experience, young children will hold everlasting connections with the natural world, develop a sense of community and encompass a lifetime of curiosity and discovery.

How old does my child need to be to attend Nature Preschool?

The Nature Preschool serves children ages three to five. Children are welcome to join us as early as their third birthday and may remain in our program until they turn six. Age requirements are directly related to our MSDE license.

What curriculum does your program implement?

The Nature Preschool curates and implements our own unique, emergent, nature-based curriculum. The foundation of the Nature Preschool's emergent curriculum is guided by Maryland State Department of Education's [Early Learning Standards](#), encompassing personal/social, language, cognitive and physical developmental learning domains. As the seasons transition and children's interest evolve, our program will incorporate inspiring changes

into daily lessons that will meet the developmental needs of students. Teachers will curate a “Seasonal Focus” each month, which will include lessons that reflect natural events happening in our surrounding environment and activities that children have naturally been drawn to. At the end of each month, teachers reflect on daily observations to add individual “emergent” learning moments to the month’s curriculum. Emergent learning encompasses the discoveries, games, and activities that occur naturally during the student’s play and exploration.

Are you a licensed preschool?

Yes. Our program is licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education - License number 257271.

Does the Nature Preschool participate in MD EXCELS?

We also go above and beyond our licensing requirements by participating in Maryland EXCELS, currently at a level 2 rating.

Does the Nature Preschool Accept Child Care Scholarship through the State of Maryland?

Yes, since our program participates in MD EXCELS, we are eligible to enroll families who utilize the Child Care Scholarship through the state.

How much is tuition for the 2026-2027 session of Nature Preschool?

Full day enrollment is \$1,400/month, which includes care from 8:30am - 3:30pm Monday - Friday. Families can enroll in aftercare for an additional charge.

How much and when is After Care?

Aftercare is offered Monday - Thursday from 3:30pm - 5:00pm and Friday from 3:30pm - 4:00pm. Enrollment in extended care is an additional \$250/month.

What are the hours of preschool?

Operational hours are Monday - Thursday from 8:30am - 5:00pm and Friday from 8:30am - 4:00pm.

If I cancel enrollment for the school year, can I get a refund?

No. Upon enrolling, families pay a non-refundable deposit that is applied towards final tuition costs of the school year. There is no discount, refund, prorate or other allowance for absences, illness, vacation, holidays, school closures and/or withdrawals of students for any reason. Families who wish to unenroll during the school year should follow the terms for withdrawing in our enrollment agreement.

Do you have physical classrooms or are you 100% outdoors?

We have two beautiful, interactive classrooms located in the Carriage House at Belmont Manor and Historic Park in Elkridge. We utilize our spacious classrooms as a homebase, though we spend as much time outdoors as possible.

How much time do children spend outside?

We strive to spend a minimum of 50% of each day outdoors. When weather permits, we spend 80% - 90% of our day outdoors.

What happens during inclement or colder weather?

We embrace all weather here at Nature Preschool! Children and teachers gear up in rain or snow suits and explore the outdoors in all conditions. We stay indoors during storms, lightning, or high wind and tornado warnings.

Do you serve food at Nature Preschool?

Parents / Guardians should send their child in with a filling, nutritious, waste-free lunch. We will serve morning and afternoon snacks around 10:00am and 3:45pm. Parents may send snacks with their child if they wish. Children are also offered their lunch left-overs during afternoon snack time.

Can the staff administer medications?

Yes. Children who must take medications while at school can be administered medication by a teacher who is trained in medication administration. Parents/guardians must submit a [Medication Administration Authorization Form](#). Teachers will record any administered medication on a medication log.

My child is young. Will you put sunscreen and bug spray on them?

Sunscreen and bug spray should be applied before arriving for the day. Parents/Guardians must submit a [Topical Authorization Form](#) in order for teachers to apply sunscreen and bug spray. We will help children reapply in the afternoon or after they get wet.

My child has special needs. Can they attend preschool?

Your child may attend nature preschool if they are able to safely participate in everyday nature preschool activities. However, due to staff to child ratios, we are unable to provide continuous one-on-one assistance. At the Nature Preschool, children often spend more than 50% of their day outside. With this increased freedom to explore, it is critical that children are able to follow our safety rules and stay with the group. When enrolling, we ask families to please provide as much information as possible to help us understand your child's needs. If your child has an existing IFSP or IEP, please let us know. If you are interested in an IEP for your child, our school partners with Howard County's Office of Children and Families for support services as needed.

Does the Preschool assess children?

Yes, at Nature Preschool, we ask parents to participate in ASQ-3 developmental screenings. Twice per year, in the fall and spring, teachers complete developmental checklists for each student. These screenings and reports help teachers better understand how to best support each individual child.

What is your discipline policy?

Throughout each school day we embrace positive strategies when practicing behavioral management with children. We provide children with choices and redirect unwanted behaviors to set children up for success during their day. Providing children with choices throughout the day allows them to build their decision making skills, sense of responsibility and their self-esteem! Providing children with choices grants them control, which may lead to increases in engagement and participation in activities. Our school also introduces and implements the foundational skills of self-regulation and socio-emotional wellness. A student's enrollment is based on the rules, regulations, conditions and terms contained in the Enrollment Agreement and in the Nature Preschool Parent's Guide. Should safety or support concerns arise, we will initiate an action plan and decide if Nature Preschool is the safest fit for your child.

Something came up! I need someone to pick up my child who is not on the authorization list. What should I do?

Families can email Preschool staff and provide the full name and address of the person who you are authorizing to pick up your child. We will need this information in writing to compare against a drivers license.

How can I contact you during the day?

For important issues while preschool is in session, please use the following methods to contact us: Belmont Office Phone (during business hours) 410-465-8337

Our Preschool Director may not be at their desk while school is in session. Please allow 24 hours for an email reply or call our main office at 410-465-8877 for immediate assistance.

How will your program prepare my child for kindergarten?

At Nature Preschool, we focus on learning and developmental domains that contribute to a well-rounded early childhood education. Children inspire the lessons through their own interests, while teachers naturally introduce mathematics, engineering, literacy, writing, music, art, and many other topics through the use of play, outdoor exploration and provocations. Find more on the Nature Preschool and kindergarten readiness [here](#).

What safety measures are being taken when they are out in the park?

While adventuring in the park, staff communicate through the use of motorola radios and cell phones. All staff are CPR/ first aid certified, trained on our indoor and outdoor emergency preparedness plans, and carry first aid kits. Teachers regularly assess areas for any hazards and have communications with park rangers and other staff. While in the park, there is a student to teacher ratio of 7:1.

How should I dress my child?

Please dress your child in weather appropriate clothing. We have large cubbies where children can store their layers and other gear, such as snow suits, muddy buddies, accessories, etc. Sturdy, waterproof shoes help children stay comfortable during adventures.

What is the teacher child ratio?

MSDE licensing standards require 1 teacher per 10 students for children ages three to five. Our program ratios are 1 teacher to 7 students. There are two teachers for each class, which hosts 14 students.

Does my child need to be potty trained?

Yes, children are required to be potty trained prior to entering our program. Of course, we understand that accidents happen. Children must be able to request and use the potty independently.

Do the children go outside in all weather conditions?

Nature Preschool is primarily outdoors, unless hazardous weather conditions are present. We are prepared to embrace the elements and encourage children to do the same. Appropriate clothing/gear is critical in our program. If your family needs financial assistance for clothing or other materials, please let our Director know.

What does outdoor exploration consist of?

Outdoor times consist of play, independent exploration and teacher-supported intentional learning moments and lessons. Children have the freedom to explore their own interests, while teachers naturally inspire lessons and discoveries.

What are your teacher credentials?

Teachers hold either a degree or certificate in Early Childhood Education. Each year, teachers and assistants are required to complete continuing education courses. Required certifications include Preschool 90 hr. certification, CPR/first aid, ADA training, and annual health and safety training. We also dedicate monthly professional development days to updating and growing our nature-based curriculum, as well as participating in various early childhood education workshops and classes. Our teachers have experience with preschool-age children and a personal love and connection with nature.