



## Beacon Learning Centre Outdoor Learning Policy

### *Nature Walks and Outdoor Adventures*

#### **Our Vision**

The Beacon Learning Centre is striving to increase the time spent outdoors to create a community of resilient, active children, empowered by valuing, enjoying and being curious about their natural and social surroundings. This vision directly compliments the Ministry of Education's *Early Learning for Every Child Today* and *How Does Learning Happen?* documents which are guides to support early childhood programs in Ontario.

#### **So far...**

At BLC, we believe in offering children outdoor play in all kinds of weather, unless it is unsafe to do so (i.e. too icy). We encourage children to think about the weather and how to dress for it as well as making choices about what happens when they play in puddles and mud. We truly appreciate parental involvement in encouraging your child's joy of learning in the outdoors by supplying extra clothing and ensuring they have appropriate clothing for all types of weather, typical in Canada.

Our efforts to spend more time in the outdoors has been a huge success and we have seen such a positive change in the children as they become more active in their natural world. We may have circle, art, snack and/or lunch outdoors, when possible. It is wonderful to hear more conversations and questions from the children such as "I hear a bird. I wonder where it is?", "I see no clouds today.", "I feel the wind. It's strong." We encourage you to support these wonderful conversations when you hear them at home!

Whether inside or outside, please make sure you make eye contact with your child's teacher so we know your child has arrived. Your child should have had sunscreen applied, be dressed in weather appropriate clothing, have extra dry clothes, and have recently been to the bathroom.

#### **What to expect**

Each program will take part in Nature Walks and Outdoor Adventure Days. We hope that having an outdoor classroom (an A-frame structure that will be built

next to the swings in the big playground in 2019) will further increase the amount of time we can offer outdoors.

### Nature Walks

Your child may take part in short Nature Walks off the BLC property. The children will typically exit through the back gate in the big yard and walk around BLC or the Colonel By High School field. Although the teacher to child ratio will remain at 1:5 for Toddlers and 1:8 for preschoolers, there will be an extra staff member or a volunteer with the group to ensure proper supervision is in place at all times.

### Outdoor Adventures

Outdoor Adventures may entail a similar route and stopping to play behind BLC in a small area behind the tennis courts. We may also go to other nearby areas where children can explore the brush and natural elements. A variety of loose parts may be brought so that the children can use with the environment (i.e. measuring tape, ropes, containers for collecting). As with the Nature Walks, there will be an extra staff member or a volunteer with the program to ensure proper supervision is in place at all times.

### **Benefits**

Being outdoors gives children the opportunity to explore the natural world on a regular basis. Child-led, inquiry, exploratory and play-based programming raises self-esteem through a series of small achievable tasks. These tasks include learning about making safe choices through risk-taking, staying together as a group, and taking responsibility for their belongings. Outdoor exploration like this develops resilience and emotional intelligence in children. It encourages problem solving and supports risk-taking. Social skills are developed through close interactions with educators and peers and learning to work together as a team. Playing in our natural world gives children the opportunity to run, jump, climb, explore and learn in a developmentally appropriate (and fun!) manner.

### **Goals**

As dedicated Educators we strive to:

- ✓ Cultivate children's early love of nature and interest in all aspects of their local, natural surroundings.

- ✓ Foster our students' competence, self-confidence, and eagerness to safely explore and enjoy the outdoors.
- ✓ Provide children with an opportunity to learn how to operate in a group setting with respect, cooperation, patience, and listening skills.
- ✓ Ensure a relevant and sustainable future for the school through relationships with parents and the broader community.
- ✓ Promote among parents and the broader community the notion that being active and taking supported risks outside is critical to children's social, physical and emotional development and prepares them for learning throughout life.
- ✓ Research, implement, reflect... repeat!

### **Our role in working with your child**

Throughout your child's time in the outdoors we look to achieve many skills by:

- ✓ Asking open ended questions such as "I wonder..." "What do you think about...?" "How can we solve...?" "Why is it not safe to...?"
- ✓ Supporting patience, playing in a group setting, speaking up in front of others, creative problem solving, conflict resolution
- ✓ Supporting a passion for learning
- ✓ Encouraging children to manage skills away from home while developing a sense of place and comfort in the natural world through group dynamics.
- ✓ Supporting group challenges together as a team.
- ✓ Using naturally occurring 'teaching moments' where pre-reading and pre-math skills are reinforced (i.e. count each other, trees, rocks, sticks, animals; compare sizes of sticks, measure the diameter of trees, look for patterns in the natural world; look at the letters around us: in our names, in words, and notice the letters that are formed naturally by trees, branches, grass, etc.)
- ✓ Working on language skills by telling stories, describing our experiences with a variety of adjectives and ongoing word play.
- ✓ Encouraging independence and accountability: support developing a sense of place, interpersonal skills, developing empathy, problem solving skills, creative and critical thinking in different disciplines
- ✓ Promote physical health and fitness, perseverance and the ability to assess risks and take appropriate actions.

