



***New Canaan Nature Center Preschool***

# ***Family Handbook***

***2023 – 2024***



We are looking forward to sharing your child's journey through these amazing early learning years with you. We appreciate the time you will spend becoming familiar with the many details described in this Parent Handbook. We encourage you to ask any of us at any time for additional information about our programs and policies.

*The NCNC Preschool Staff*

## ***New Canaan Nature Center Contact Information***

**NCNC Main Number:** 203 966 9577

**NCNC website:** [www.newcanaannature.org](http://www.newcanaannature.org)

**Mailing address:** 144 Oenoke Ridge, New Canaan, CT 06840

**Emails** are first initial and last name @NewCanaanNature.org

Please remember, preschool teachers only check their emails after their school day is over. Urgent messages, including changes in pickup plans, should be delivered by telephone

**Messages should always be left on classroom extensions**, or with Anna Zielinski, ext. 1028. If you need to reach someone in person, also try the Front Desk at Ext 1010 or 1011.

## ***New Canaan Nature Center Preschool Staff***

Our preschool staff includes 15 preschool teachers, the Assistant Director, Preschool Director and the additional support of 3 buddy naturalists. Our preschool teachers are college-trained professionals with extensive experience in early childhood and environmental/nature education.

**Preschool Director:** Anna Zielinski, 203 966 9577 Ext 1028, [preschool@NewCanaanNature.org](mailto:preschool@NewCanaanNature.org)

The Preschool Director is available on a drop-in basis to meet with parents for informal conversations, or by appointment from 8:30 am-4:00 pm. Please drop in, call or email at any time.

**Preschool Assistant Director:** Emily Kerchoff, Ext 1041, [preschool@NewCanaanNature.org](mailto:preschool@NewCanaanNature.org)

**NCNC Registrar:** Debbie Jaeger, Ext 1020, [djaeger@NewCanaanNature.org](mailto:djaeger@NewCanaanNature.org)

**NCNC Front Desk:** Ext 1010 or Ext 1011

**2 Year Old Preschool Class, Salamander Room, Ext.1031** –T/Th 9:15 – 11:45

**2 Year Old Preschool Class, Marsh Room, Ext.1032** –T/Th 9:15 – 11:45

**2 Year Old Preschool Class, Marsh Room, Ext.1032** –MWF 9:15 – 11:45

**3 Year Old Preschool Class, Discovery Room, Ext.1011** –MTWTH 9:00 – 12:00

**3 Year Old Preschool Class, Salamander Room, Ext.1031** –MWF 9:00 – 12:00

**3 Year Old Preschool Class, Meadow Room, Ext.1035** –MTWTH 9:00 – 12:00

**4 Year Old Preschool Class, Lake Room, Ext. 1029** – M-Th 9:00 – 12:00, optional Tuesday/Thursday extended days

**4 Year Old Preschool Class, Forest Room, Ext.1029** –M - F 9:00 – 12:00, optional Tuesday/Thursday extended days

**PreK Preschool Class Tree Room, Ext. 1033** – M & F 9:00 – 12:00, Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 9:00 – 1:55

**Lunch Bunch** – 3-5 y/o Mondays -Thursday 12:00-1:55pm

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## ***The New Canaan Nature Center***

Founded in 1960, the New Canaan Nature Center (NCNC) is a non-profit environmental education center and sanctuary dedicated to helping people of all ages better understand, appreciate and care for the world of nature.

The New Canaan Nature Center (NCNC) serves as a center for nature study and related activities. Its forty acres of meadows, woodlands, streams, ponds and marshes provide sanctuary for plants as well as animals and comprise an outdoor classroom for all. Over the last 55 years, the Nature Center has developed many educational facilities and programs for the benefit of area residents. Our Preschool is at the forefront of this vision.

### ***NCNC Preschool Overview***

Since 1967, the New Canaan Nature Center's Preschool (formerly the Beginner's Nature Program, or BNP) emphasizes hands-on, indoor and outdoor sensory experiences, using the natural world and thoughtfully balanced themes, lessons and activities that grow your child's skills in all developmental areas. Our unique nature-based curriculum will allow your child's cognitive, creative, social and physical skills to be nurtured and challenged, guided and grown. In addition to simply being well prepared for kindergarten and beyond, your child's innate curiosity about and connection with nature will be enriched.

### ***NCNC Preschool Philosophy***

We believe children learn best through play and when they are in an environment that is suited to their age and developmental needs. Nature is the best venue the world can offer young children, and these experiences in their early years will last a lifetime.

We integrate environmental and nature education into our curriculum – not as a separate subject, but as a pivotal element of language and literacy, math, and other areas of the curriculum. The nature-based curriculum addresses social, emotional, cognitive, creative, and physical skills. Most of all, we strive to teach children to love and value themselves and the world around them.

We believe:

- In the importance of experiential learning, offering opportunities for concrete, meaningful experiences.
- That the emotional life of children cannot be separated from their learning, interests, and motivation.
- In using hands-on experiences with the natural world.
- That compassionate, nurturing and caring professionals are crucial to young learners.

### ***NCNC Preschool Program Objectives***

1. Develop within each child a positive feeling about him/herself.
2. Develop each child's self-discipline and ability to identify, pursue and complete self-chosen goals and tasks with originality and responsibility.
3. Develop each child's socialization skills: the ability to work with other children and adults in group planning, cooperative efforts and shared leadership.
4. Develop each child's knowledge of objects, skill in the arts and comfort with physical movement.

5. Develop each child’s ability to express thoughts, ideas and feelings; to speak about, dramatize and graphically represent experiences in order to communicate them to others.
6. Develop each child’s ability to comprehend spoken, written, dramatic and graphic representations.
7. Develop each child’s ability to apply his/her reasoning abilities to a wide range of situations, using a variety of materials.
8. Develop each child’s creativity, initiative, spirit of inquiry and openness to knowledge.
9. Develop each child’s awareness and appreciation of the natural world and how our lives are interdependent with it.
10. Provide a setting in which each child will feel safe and happy, as well as thrive individually.

We honor the traditions of all the children and families in our program. We believe that these traditions, when shared in the classroom by our families, can strengthen the connection between home and school. We invite families to share stories, customs, recipes and traditions with us. We encourage each of you to join us in our celebrations, whether it is your child’s birthday, the sharing of a family recipe, or any special activity that reflects your heritage and family history.

We also use guidelines and benchmarks as outlined in the Preschool Curriculum Framework provided by the State of Connecticut. We use this framework as we plan experiences for the children. Our curriculum is neither totally inclusive of, nor limited to, the curriculum framework provided by the state. We are fortunate in having the Nature Center facility as our educational environment, and therefore have expanded the curriculum to include a much broader, nature-based focus. Our staff is encouraged to explore new ideas manifested from their continuing studies, parents’ input, and other sources.

### ***NCNC Preschool Campus Experience***

Throughout your child’s experience at the NCNC Preschool, he/she will be exposed to and interact with many areas and people at the New Canaan Nature Center. We feel these opportunities and special offerings enhance each child’s experience at our school. Our preschool program is unique because of the rich diversity of our buildings, grounds, natural setting, people, and programs.

***Environmental Educators/Naturalists***  
Guide programs, walks and classroom visits

***Grounds/Trails***  
Ponds, meadows, fields, forests, gardens, wetlands, beehives, chicken coop, sugar shack, cider house, wild animals

***Greenhouse/ Gardens***  
Planting projects, plant observation, analysis and exploration

***Visitor Center & Exhibits***  
Season Exhibits- like egg hatching, rabbit, bee hive, live snakes, turtles, frogs and toads



***Ambassador Animals***  
Live hawks, owls, bald eagle, turkey vulture, snakes, turtles and mammals used for classroom visits

***Special Programs***  
Apple cidering, maple sugaring, honey bees, egg laying chickens, birds, insects and pond studies

***Other NCNC Staff and Consultants***  
Visits to Visitor Center, front desk, administrative offices, music and movement specialists

## ***NCNC Preschool Daily Schedule***

Each day's schedule provides opportunities for children to explore and express themselves through art, music and movement, language, math, dramatic play, and hands-on science and creative activities. The day also includes a nature walk and guided hike on the grounds of the Nature Center. Themes reflecting seasonal changes in nature provide the basis for daily activities.

A pre-established routine is followed each day. We try to follow a similar schedule day after day so that children can easily anticipate what will happen next. We want them to feel secure and independent, able to move from one activity to another with maximum ease and confidence. When changes to these routines are made, the children will be part of the considerations of how schedule adjustments will be made.

A typical day for all ages involves arrival followed by indoor free choice time where there are multiple areas that children can choose from (e.g. manipulatives, art experience, blocks, sensory, quiet area, etc.). Clean-up happens prior to meeting time where the class engages in story time, singing, animal ambassador visiting, and other group activities. A nutritious snack prepares them for their outdoor adventure that ranges from 30 minutes to 90 minutes typically before the end of the day and pick-up time. All daily activities are age appropriate and engages the young learner in fun and exciting ways.

## ***Use of Technology***

Technology is broadly defined as the application of science. Magnifying lenses, measuring devices and other discovery devices are used in play. The New Canaan Nature Center Preschool does not employ computers or other screens in the classrooms. Additionally, because they are at the Nature Center for only three hours per day computer use would limit their opportunities for interactive play and exploration. There is increasing evidence showing that a preponderance of screen time in young learners will hinder their development rather than enhance it.

## ***NCNC Preschool Parent Committee***

The purpose of the Preschool Parent Committee is to create and foster community within the NCNC Preschool and the larger organization. The committee will work with the Preschool Director, Assistant Director and Executive Director to plan events, fundraisers and communicate with the families of the preschool. A representative of the committee will also be included in the monthly NCNC board meetings.

In addition to the Parent Committee, parent representatives from each class help make sure all parents are informed about class and preschool news, as well as giving feedback to the Director if more information and follow up is needed.

**Class Parents:** Class parents serve as a link between the NCNC preschool, its staff, and the parents of our school. They are also an integral part of our Preschool Parent Meetings.

Specific duties that the job entails include the following:

- Send an introductory email to all parents in your child's class.
- Organize a parent coffee in the beginning of the school year.
- Attend New Canaan Nature Center Preschool Parent Meetings, encourage parents to attend and communicate information to those unable to attend.
- Assist in recruiting parent volunteers for special events and fundraising activities for Preschool and Nature Center events. This includes: spreading the word and generating excitement and asking the larger parent community for help in making events a success.

- Periodically check in with teachers for classroom updates and classroom needs.
- Act as a contact person for school closings and other emergent announcements.
- Coordinate end of year class gifts.
- Help in communicating with Preschool teachers and Director on parent concerns, questions and/or issues.

**Other Volunteer Opportunities:** Parents are welcomed and encouraged to participate in the NCNC Preschool through a variety of volunteer activities both within the preschool classroom as well as the greater Nature Center. Classroom volunteer opportunities include lending a hand with classroom activities, sharing family traditions, stories, recipes, etc., field trip transportation and assistance, and special enrichment projects. Parents are welcome to visit their child’s preschool class at any time. Please speak with your child’s teachers ahead of time to make sure other parents are not planning to visit at the same time.

### ***Parent and Preschool Communication***

We encourage parents to read emails and brightwheel notices from our school. Brightwheel is the software we use to increase communication with families, to manage enrollment and tuition billing. We will send all new families a link and instructions to sign up with brightwheel. ***It is the parents’ responsibility to ensure their children’s profiles are fully updated. Brightwheel messaging will be the primary method for communication between teachers/ admin and families.*** Parent messages sent to teachers are only seen by their child’s teachers and the Preschool Directors. Class newsletters including detailed descriptions of your child’s activities and upcoming events and more are featured in weekly newsletter updates that are sent via brightwheel messaging. Important information is also posted in each cubby room.

We have established many avenues of open communication between parents and our school. Parent coffees are held to informally discuss topics relating to early childhood development and the NCNCPS.

Parents are also encouraged to participate in the Nature Center’s annual events, including our Fall Fair in October and Winter Wonderland in December. Participation in these events is a wonderful way to get to know the Nature Center and its staff and volunteers.

### ***NCNC Complaint Procedure:***

If a parent in the New Canaan Nature Center Preschool has a concern, a conference should be set up with the parent(s) and the teacher(s) involved. If the parent/teacher conference does not solve the problem, another conference will be set up with the parent(s), the teachers, and the Preschool Director. If the problem still persists, the Executive Director can be called in to meet with the parents, teachers and the Preschool Director. A meeting with members of the Board of Trustees of the New Canaan Nature Center and the parties involved would be the final recourse.

When appropriate, please direct concerns directly to your child’s teachers or to the Director depending on the circumstance. This is important for our program to best serve families. This direct, respectful communication ensures that we can address concerns or issues straight on before they potentially become bigger. It is our goal to work through any problems collaboratively and with attention and care to the children.

### ***Parent Code of Conduct***

Part of ensuring our Preschool community is thriving means that everyone is working together for the benefit of the children, families, staff and NCNC organization. Respectful, kind and compassionate communication is essential. If a parent’s (or guardian’s) or other family member’s behavior, communications, or interactions on

or off property is disruptive, intimidating, overly aggressive, or reflects a loss of confidence or a disagreement with the Preschool's policies, methods of instruction, or discipline, or otherwise interferes with safety procedures, responsibilities, or accomplishment of our educational purpose or program, the Nature Center reserves the right to dismiss the family or family member from the community.

### ***Babysitting Policy***

Teachers at the NCNC preschool are strongly discouraged from babysitting any enrolled preschool student. This type of arrangement is a conflict of interest regarding the role that the staff person has as an NCNC preschool teacher and the role as a caretaker outside of the school. It can also set up a difficult dynamic within the class if one student has their teacher as a babysitter and the others do not. The children are not always able to differentiate between the two positions. We ask that you please respect this policy.

### ***Getting Ready for School***

Most children are eager and enthusiastic about preschool. They look forward to being with other children, making friends and enjoying classroom activities. Share in your child's enthusiasm and support his/her school experiences. For those that this is a first-time experience, talk to them about the fun to come and mentally prepare them for what it will look and feel like. The more you do this, the easier the transition will be. Communicate with your teachers to come up with the most effective transition for you and your child, especially if either of you are feeling nervous regarding separation.

During the first few weeks, young children sometimes react against the new routine of going to school. These "second thoughts" can take as many forms as there are children, but the most common is resistance to going to school and separation anxiety. If you do not waiver in your enthusiastic and positive support, your child will soon be over this first hurdle, gaining renewed security in school and increased self-esteem.

### ***Drop-Off and Pick-Up***

Classes begin at 9:00am or 9:15 for the 2 year old classes. The classroom doors remain closed until these times in order to provide the teachers with time for classroom preparation. Should you arrive prior to scheduled start of school, please respect this time and wait in the cubby area for class to begin. Do not leave children unattended – we cannot be responsible for the safety of children dropped off before their classroom opens for the day.

Please park in the designated parking area for your child's class and walk your child to their classroom each day. Please do not leave vehicles idling in the parking lot while you drop off or pick up, unless it's necessary due to extreme temperatures. It is important for children to arrive on time to fully experience the regular routine in their classroom, and to not disrupt class already in session. All children must be signed in at the beginning of the day and signed out at the end of the day. Please provide daily contact information on the sign in/out sheet. Connecting with one of the teachers in some brief way enables the teachers to ascertain which children are in their care for the day. It is also extremely important that you say good-bye to your child before you leave. This signals that he/she is now in the care of the classroom teachers and alleviates separation anxiety.

Please pick up your child promptly at 11:45 for the 2's, 12:00pm or 1:55pm, and sign the class attendance book. The children are eager to see their parents waiting for them at the end of their day so they can share their experiences, discoveries and accomplishments. It is hard to wait, even for a few minutes, for that happy hug from a family member.



According to Connecticut State Law, if someone other than a parent, guardian or regular baby-sitter will pick up your child from preschool, we must have a written note when your child is brought to school. The person picking up must present a photo I.D. Again, for your child's safety, we cannot release your child to anyone without your written consent.

**\*\*Late Pick-up Policy:** The NCNC staff recognizes that occasional excused lateness due to traffic or personal reasons may occur. However, repetitive unexcused lateness will result in a financial penalty. Children remaining on the premises 15 minutes past the end of class will be brought to the Preschool Director's office for pick-up. Children will always be supervised and cared for by our staff, who are over 21 years old.

When an hour has lapsed and a child is not picked up as planned and all emergency contacts have been called, the local police department will be notified.

### ***NCNC Safety Speed Limit***

The posted speed limit is 5 mph. This protects children and families from being injured due to speeding cars. Classes often must cross the road or walk through the parking lot, so please respect this speed limit. It is easy to come down the hill and pick up speed, but please remember the safety of your child and others are at risk. In addition, our parking lot is a one way travel route. Please respect this rule and do not cut across to get a parking spot.

### ***Required Medical Forms***

According to Connecticut State Child Care Regulations, we are required to have two current forms on file at all times for every student or else a religious or medical exemption form. **These forms must be handed in prior to the first day of school as they are mandatory for your child to attend the Preschool.**

1. The Emergency Contact Form – This form provides NCNC Staff with contact names and numbers in case of emergency. Please keep NCNC Staff updated with any changes to this information.
2. The Medical Health Form: this form must show that your child has had a complete physical exam within the past year and indicate that he/she has had all the required immunizations (or a form indicating medical exemptions) as described here:

#### **2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR**

**For 2-4 year olds:** (Children entering after age 2 but before age 5)

DTaP: 4 doses

Polio: 3 doses

MMR: 1 dose on or after the 1st birthday

Hep B: 3 doses, last one on or after 24 weeks of age

Varicella: 1 dose on or after the 1st birthday or verification of disease

Hib: 1 dose on or after the 1st birthday

Pneumococcal: 1 dose on or after the 1st birthday

Influenza: 1 dose administered each year between August 1 - December 31st

(2 doses separated by at least 28 days required for those receiving flu for the first time)

Hepatitis A: 2 doses given six months apart, 1st dose on or after 1st birthday

#### **For 5 year olds:**

DTaP: At least 4 doses. The last dose must be given on or after 4th birthday

Polio: At least 3 doses. The last dose must be given on or after 4th birthday

MMR: 2 doses separated by at least 28 days, 1st dose on or after the 1st birthday

Hep B: 3 doses, last dose on or after 24 weeks of age

Varicella: 2 doses separated by at least 3 months-1st dose on or after the 1st birthday; or verification of disease

Hib: 1 dose on or after 1st birthday for children less than 5 years old

3. Pertinent information from this paperwork is collected in a student database detailing relevant expiration dates for paperwork and medications. As paperwork expires, parents receive reminders that the forms must be updated. The actual documents are filed by class in the classroom at all times. It is our goal that teachers always have the students' health and safety information on hand in case of an emergency. All health and safety information is confidential, however assessable to teachers and administrators in the event that parents need to be contacted or in an emergency. Parents also have the right to see their own paperwork, however other students' paperwork is confidential. State Licensing Inspectors have the right to check that all paperwork is current and that the paperwork is approved by the state.
4. Medication Administration Policies: NCNCPS will only administer medications that have been submitted with the proper paperwork and physician signature. Examples of medication that we will administer include emergency medications such as Epi Pens, Benadryl, Inhalers, Insulin, and other lifesaving medicines. All of these must be submitted to us in accordance with the Office of Early Education requirements.

### ***Sick Time Policy and Absences***

#### ***When Should My Child Stay Home from School?***

Please do not send your child to school if he/she shows any signs of illness or seems overly tired. A day of caution at the beginning may forestall a more lengthy illness. When your child will be out of school, please call his/her classroom and leave a message, as well as call the Preschool Director. **In cases of common childhood disease (i.e., chicken pox, strep, flu, covid, conjunctivitis, lice, pink eye, impetigo, hand-foot-and-mouth disease, fifth disease, etc.) please call/email us at once. When there has been such an exposure at school, we promptly notify all parents, with details about symptoms and incubation periods, etc., as appropriate, excluding the identity of the child. Please be on the look-out for early signs and symptoms. The sooner we catch an illness, the easier it is to prevent it from spreading in school.** All sick time policies and procedures apply to staff as well as children.

- If your child has a temperature over 99.6 degrees in the morning, the child should not come to school again until being fever free for 24 hours.
- If your child is vomiting, has diarrhea or feels nauseous, the child should not come to school again until symptom-free for 24 hours.
- If your child has a cough that cannot be subdued.
- If your child has had a sore throat for 3 days and it hasn't improved, the child should not come to school again until being symptom free for 24 hours.
- If your child has yellow or green phlegm or nasal discharge, the child should stay home with these symptoms as young children are generally unable to care for themselves or prevent the spread of illness.
- If your child goes to bed with a stomach ache, and wakes up with a stomach ache, the child should stay home until feeling better.
- Remember that NCNC staff are not permitted to administer prescription or over the counter medications without written permission from a doctor.
- NCNC Staff follow these same guidelines when deciding if they are healthy enough to come to work.

If your child becomes sick at school, we will notify you as soon as possible to discuss early pick-up. If a parent cannot be reached, we will call the names listed on your emergency contacts form. If no adult can be reached to pick-up the sick child, and the staff believe that the child is contagious, the child will be made to feel comfortable by offering a warm, quiet spot to sit, typically in the Preschool Director's office, until an authorized caregiver arrives for pick-up.

If the family of a sick child disagrees with any of these policies, they may consult with our nurse consultant.

### ***School Closing Information***

In the event of inclement weather, the New Canaan Nature Center Preschool always follows the lead of the New Canaan Public Schools.

- If New Canaan Public Schools are closed, the NCNC Preschool is closed.
- If the New Canaan Public Schools have a delayed opening, the NCNC preschool will open at 10:00. (Please note, this may be slightly earlier than the NCPS opening time.) *Dismissal times always remain the same as normal*, unless an early dismissal is also announced. However, with the uncertainty of weather and road conditions, please refer to the most up to date announcement from the NCNC Preschool via email or brightwheel message.
- If NCPS closes early, we will initiate an email and brightwheel message until all families are contacted. Teachers will remain here until all children are safely dismissed from school. ***Please make arrangements for early dismissals*** in the event you are unable to get here quickly so that our teachers are not made to drive in worsening weather conditions.
- The NCNC Preschool does ***not*** make up snow days.

### ***Additional ways to learn about the status of schools being opened/closed/delayed:***

- New Canaan Public Schools: <http://www2.newcanaan.k12.ct.us>
- Register for e-Notifications at [www.ctweather.com](http://www.ctweather.com) for emails/texts from IAN – Internet Access Notification service. Individuals can sign up to have information on school closings and delays sent via email or by text to a cell phone. Go to the [www.CTWeather.com](http://www.CTWeather.com) website and click on e-notifications. First, create an account, then log into your account, select the box for NCNC Preschool, and press “submit.”
- The NCNC general website ([www.newcanaannature.org](http://www.newcanaannature.org)) will ***not*** have up to date preschool weather related information.

### ***Snacks & Packed Lunches***

Preschool parents are expected to provide healthy snacks (and lunches if applicable) and a water bottle for their child daily. Please send snacks and lunches in reusable containers with minimal packaging. By reducing packaging and using reusable containers, we are decreasing waste and our environmental impact.

We encourage healthy options like a fresh fruit and/or vegetable with cheese or spread and crackers, pretzels or bread. Snacks should include items from at least two food groups, be as minimally processed as possible, and **low in sugar**. Please do not bring chocolate, nuts or candy. We prefer our children drink water, as it is the most refreshing and healthy drink for their active bodies while here at school. Some snack suggestions are:

- Sliced local, in season fruit or vegetables
- Organic graham crackers, crackers, pretzel sticks, bunnies, etc.
- Organic nacho chips and organic salsa
- Organic bread or bagels & cream cheese or fruit spread

Lunches should be packed with equal care and attention to healthy eating habits and including foods from various food groups.

Our teachers do not offer children younger than 4 years the following foods due to choking hazards: hot dogs, whole or sliced into rounds; whole grapes; nuts; popcorn; raw peas; hard pretzels; peanut butter; or chunks of raw carrots or meat larger than can be swallowed whole.

**PLEASE NOTE: No peanuts, peanut butter, peanut oil or any other nuts should be packed in lunches or served for snacks. NCNC is a nut-aware facility.**

#### **Nut Aware Policy for the New Canaan Nature Center:**

Because of the increasing occurrence of peanut/ nut allergies among children, the New Canaan Nature Center enforces a no-peanut/ nut policy. Peanuts, peanut butter, peanut oil, or even residue from nut products can cause severe allergic reactions in children with nut allergies, including anaphylactic shock. Please help us keep our facility peanut-free by not bringing snacks or lunches containing any nut products. Many “nut-free” foods contain peanut products or peanut residue. Please check the manufacturer’s ingredients before bringing these to the Nature Center.)

Please be mindful of children with food allergies in your child’s class and make every effort to avoid snacks with known allergens in them. Your teachers will tell parents in your class which foods to avoid. Parents of children with food allergies should provide teachers with a list of safe alternatives, as well as a supply of safe snacks/ lunches for their child.

### ***Toileting and Diapering***

While we understand that every child has a different journey to being fully confident in using the toilet, it is our preference that ***incoming 3 year olds are experienced in using the toilet.*** If your child has any physical or developmental delays that prevent them from being potty trained before the start of school, please communicate that with the Director prior to the start of school.

For children entering the 2 year old classes, please provide extra diapers, wipes and a change of clothes. When your family decides to begin the potty training process, please communicate your plan with your child’s teachers. We recommend beginning the process during a vacation break or when you have enough time to get a few days of potty training in at home.

### ***Birthday Celebrations***

Birthday celebrations are important to children, and we love to share them too! If your child wants to share a special snack with the class, please plan ahead with your teachers. Please do not bring chocolate, candy, party favors, balloons or candles to school. We encourage healthy birthday snacks, such as fruit muffins or fruit pops. Parents are asked not to use the cubbies to deliver invitations to any parties. Parents are welcome to come and read a favorite story with the class to celebrate their child’s birthday.

### ***Holidays and Celebrations***

At the Nature Center, our curriculum is based on environmental and nature education. We celebrate the changing seasons. We thereby do not center our curriculum on the calendar holidays but rather the natural seasons.

We do, however, like to celebrate! We might celebrate the falling leaves, the first snow, or the new buds on the trees in spring. We also may celebrate the birth of a new sibling or a child's first lost tooth. Our holiday and celebration policy is to use activities that are concrete and meaningful to young children and in the context of their daily living. We acknowledge, but do not celebrate, major religious holidays, (Christmas, Chanukah, Easter, Passover, St. Patrick's Day, etc.) within the classroom. We acknowledge Halloween and Thanksgiving through the exploration of seasonal symbols such as pumpkins and gourds, as well as the autumn harvest. Also, on Valentine's Day, we believe it is more developmentally appropriate for young children to discuss love, friendship, and kindness than to exchange valentines or candy with their classmates.

### ***Fire Drills and other Emergency Drills***

Practice evacuations of the buildings are held regularly. Children and teachers practice evacuating the building in a quiet, orderly fashion, and meeting in our designated safe location, to help assure our safety in the event of any real emergency.

### ***Field Trips***

To supplement the learning our nature based curriculum provides, field trips may be scheduled, and/or special visitors may be invited into our classrooms. Parents will be notified in advance, in writing of all field trips. Children are transported by their parents and/or caregivers in car seats that meet Connecticut Child Restraint standards.

### ***Proper Preschool Clothing***

Children should be dressed for active indoor **and** outdoor play in washable and comfortable clothes. For younger children, please have clothing and footwear that are easy for them to take on and off. In choosing clothes for preschool, keep in mind that each day may include messy activities inside and outside. There is nothing more frustrating for your child than having to worry about getting special clothes dirty.

One of the most important parts of our program is our daily explorations outside on the Nature Center's trails. These expeditions take place in all kinds of weather. Please consider warmth, comfort and manageability when choosing clothing for rain or snow. Snow pants and a warm jacket will be needed for colder months, as well as mittens (not gloves) that should be securely fit. Make sure hats or hoods are brought to school on colder days; much of our body heat escapes through our head and it doesn't take long for a small child to feel the effects. Snow boots should slip on easily and should keep your child's feet warm and dry. Please, no drawstrings near the neck area.

For rainy days, a raincoat with rain hat or hood is essential, as are waterproof puddle boots. In the fall and spring, it is common to encounter mud on our trails and mud boots should be considered daily. No umbrellas are permitted on our trail walks for safety.

Sturdy shoes and sneakers with nonskid soles are safest for active outdoor play. Velcro closures are easiest for children to manage themselves. High top shoes are impractical and time-consuming to put on and frequently have long laces which may trip your child. Also, please do not send your child to school in flip-flops, sandals, crocs, or party shoes. These can be dangerous as we walk along our trails.

Buttons, zippers and Velcro closures that children can handle by themselves give them a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence.

Please also pack a full change of clothes (underwear, socks, pants, shirt) for all occasions that will be kept either at school or in your child’s backpack.

### **Items Brought from Home**

Please discourage your child from bringing toys to school. Frequently, toys that are designed for home play are inappropriate and unsafe for classroom play. Super-hero toys and cartoon-inspired toys encourage specific kinds of play and may keep children from the open-ended activities that we offer and encourage. Preschool age children also have a sense of ownership for their toys and are very protective of them. They have difficulty sharing them. There is also the possibility of the toys getting misplaced or broken and this is obviously upsetting for children. Please leave personal treasures at home or in the car. Bringing in a special book to share with the class is welcomed and encouraged.

For children’s transition at the start of school it is acceptable to have them bring a special object that brings comfort (e.g., a well loved teddy bear, blanket or something from a family member).

<b>Fall/Spring Clothing Guide</b>	<b>Winter Clothing Guide What</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>What to wear:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long sleeved shirt</li> <li>• Long pants</li> <li>• Fleece or wool sweater</li> <li>• Sun hat</li> <li>• Study walking shoes</li> <li>• Water proof rain gear (mud pants or puddle pants) and lined rubber boots should be worn if it has rained in the last three days</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;"><b>Backpack:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>In labeled zip top bags:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 extra pairs of underwear</li> <li>• 2 extra pairs of socks</li> <li>• 2 extra long sleeved shirts</li> <li>• 1 extra pair of long pants</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>to wear:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insulated, waterproof boots</li> <li>• Base layer: long underwear top and bottom and wool socks,</li> <li>• Mid-layer: long sleeve wool or fleece sweater, fleece pants</li> <li>• Over-layer: insulated waterproof jacket with hood and insulated waterproof pants. Gloves-waterproof, insulated liners are a plus</li> <li>• Fleece or wool hat</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;"><b>Backpack: In labeled zip top bags:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 extra pairs.of underwear</li> <li>• 2 extra pairs of WOOL socks</li> <li>• 1 pair of long underwear</li> <li>• 2 extra long sleeved shirts</li> <li>• 1 extra pair of long pants</li> <li>• 1 extra fleece /wool hat</li> <li>• 1 extra pair insulated gloves</li> </ul>

### **Substitute Teacher Policy**

There are times during the school year when it is necessary for a substitute teacher to be in the classroom and take the place of one of the regular teachers. These substitutes may be current or past Preschool staff, NCNC current environmental educator/teacher naturalists, or professional substitute teachers.

All substitutes that work in the classroom will follow all Preschool and NCNC policies, which include, but are not limited to:

- Preschool and Nature Center philosophies
- State Regulations & Accreditation
- Working with Children Policy/Confidentiality Policies (includes behavior/ classroom management techniques and child abuse and neglect reporting procedures)
- New Canaan Nature Center Employee and Preschool Staff Handbooks
- Code of Ethical Conduct
- Snack policy, including allergy awareness
- Health and Safety Policies and Procedures/Emergency Management Plan
- OEC background check and fingerprinting

Before substituting in our classrooms, these potential substitutes will have passed a background check and completed training in the above policies and orientation to our unique program.

### ***Child Assessments***

Assessment is the basic process of finding out what the children in our classrooms, individually and as a group, know and are able to do in relation to their optimum development and to the goals of the program. With that knowledge, we can plan appropriate curriculum and effective instructional strategies to help them develop and learn, monitoring their progress along the way.

A basic definition of assessment is the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information.

Meaningful child assessment always involves looking at information from multiple sources gathered over time before drawing conclusions about a young child's development and learning. Assessment is ongoing. We begin observing children in September and continue throughout the school year, keeping track of their growth and development at various stages of their year with us.

To assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, at the New Canaan Nature Center Preschool, we use methods that are:

- Developmentally appropriate,
- Culturally and linguistically responsive,
- Tied to children's daily activities,
- Supported by professional development,
- Inclusive of families,
- And connected to specific, beneficial purposes, such as:
  - Making sound decisions about teaching and learning
    - Identifying concerns that may require focused intervention
  - Helping us improve our educational and developmental interventions.

#### ***Why we assess young children:***

- To monitor children's development and learning.
- To guide our planning and decision making.
- To identify children who might benefit from special services.
- To effectively communicate with families, staff and others where appropriate.

There are many different ways that we gather information about children at the New Canaan Nature Center Preschool. There are advantages and challenges to each. Some of these methods of documentation are:

- Narrative records and anecdotal notes

- Samples of children’s work (writing, art, drawings, dictation)
- Photographs
- Checklists
- Rating scales
- Frequency counts (areas in the classroom, spending time with special friends)
- Participation charts
- Elicited responses from children

Finally, after we gather all this evidence about the children, our last step is organizing and interpreting it. At this point we compare our findings with our goals and expectations, as well as the families’ goals and expectations.

Because parents are such an important part of the assessment process, we include them as much as we can. Parents have the opportunity to see the developmental areas the teachers observe in the classroom and make comments regarding how their child meets these at home. IF parents have concerns regarding the assessment methods used and how those will meet their child’s needs, we encourage them to communicate with the teachers and Director. During conferences, parents can share their observations regarding these developmental milestones. Due to both parents and teachers providing input during conferences, we are able to work as a team to discuss the best possible assessment plans and implementations as well as goal setting. During October, February and April conferences, all parents receive a Connecticut Preschool Assessment Narrative Summary of their child or a written report of the conversation.

**Using student assessments to plan for Preschool program improvement:**

We use student assessments in many ways. In addition to using them to help guide curriculum, we also use assessments to help assess our own programming. Based on the assessment results we are able to analyze the areas of our program that may need improvement. The Preschool Director meets with teaching teams to discuss and evaluate all the assessments of the students. In doing this we are able to see if there is an area in which the majority of the students need growth and how the teachers can meet these needs.

**All assessment information is confidential and kept in a secure place.** Information about your child is only discussed and shared with your child’s family, co-teachers, the Preschool Director and/or Assistant Director. The Director or Assistant Director may be called in to observe and help assess a child if the teachers feel they would like an additional perspective.

Information about a child is never shared without a parent’s written permission. If both the teachers and the family agree that outside professional help might be beneficial, then teachers first write their concerns and share them with the family, who must give written permission for any outside referral. All written information about any child (including the kindergarten entry forms), must be signed by the parents before it is released. By law, parents have the right to see their own child’s files.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP’s) or other individualized learning plans.** If a child has an IEP or other individualized learning plan that addresses disabilities or other special learning needs, our policy is that the child’s parents and teachers meet, prior to the beginning of the school year, to determine how our school can support the child’s learning and how to attain the goals set forth in the IEP.



## ***NCNC Preschool Parent-Teacher Conferences***

We conduct parent-teacher phone conferences early in the year (October). We schedule parent-teacher conferences in February to discuss each child's individual growth and progress in the classroom. Conference dates are marked on the NCNCP calendar and times will be made available to you through your child's teachers. A spring parent-teacher phone conference will also be held in April/May. In addition to designated conferences, teachers are available for individual conferences by appointment at any time.

## ***Resource Specialists and Consultants***

Throughout the preschool year, the NCNCPS staff frequently confer with other professional early childhood consultants. These include the following:

Nurse and Health Consultant – answers health questions from the staff and parents concerning students. Our Nurse consultant is Maria Magliacano, RN.

Early Childhood Education Consultant – provides professional development, advice and guidance for our developmentally appropriate curriculum and program. Our Education consultant is Kathleen Coppola, M.Ed

Social Service Consultant – provides social service advice and support for our program. Our Social Service consultant is Jaqueline D'Louhy, LCSW.

The New Canaan Early Childhood Opportunity Center – provides a transdisciplinary team of consultants in the area of early childhood development.

Cooperative Educational Services, Early Childhood Network – regional coordinator available to professionally assist our NCNCPS staff through on-site visitation and consultation; the Network is also a source of current research information in the area of early childhood education.

Consultants are not members of our staff, and parents may feel free to speak with our staff as their first resource for advice or help.

## ***Family Resources***

In addition to the resource specialists listed above, other community agencies available to the preschool are:

- New Canaan Youth Services: (594-3080) offers free counseling and crisis intervention for young people and families, as well as short-term counseling to parents.
- New Canaan CARES (Community Awareness Responsibility Education) is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting community wellness by providing preventive education and supportive programming. Contact is Ellen Brezovsky, LCSW, Executive Director, 966-7862.
- Speech and language consultant, available for screenings is Teresa Morganti, 594-4438.
- Special Education Department of the New Canaan Public Schools: Darlene Pianka, Director of Special Education, 594-4020. For more information (definitions, rights, referrals, meetings), go to the New Canaan Public Schools web site, Special Education Department.
- Opportunity Center Preschool: Robert Rousseau (594-4598).
- Child Guidance Center of Southern Connecticut (324-6127 or 966-3967): is an independent non-profit agency that offers a full array of outpatient mental health services to children, adolescents, and their families. The agency's focus is to thoroughly evaluate each child and family so that treatment services can be matched to specific developmental, dynamic, systemic and behavioral needs; The Center also provides consultative services to day care providers, Head Start and Early Head Start, public and private schools, and the local police departments. Community education is offered to community groups, parent groups and other professionals in the area. [www.childguidancect.org](http://www.childguidancect.org).

## **Family support services and specialized consultants who are able to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services:**

The New Canaan Nature Center Preschool staff can guide families to services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate through the 211 Info Line.

2-1-1 is an integrated system of help via the telephone – a single source for information about community services, referrals to human services, and crisis intervention. It is accessed toll-free from anywhere in Connecticut by simply dialing 2-1-1. It operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Multilingual call specialists and TDD access is available.

Professional call specialists help callers with such complex issues as substance abuse, gambling, domestic violence programs, suicide prevention, financial problems, and much more. Other callers may simply be looking for volunteer opportunities. By dialing 2-1-1, a caller is connected with a 2-1-1 call specialist who helps the caller assess their situation and find the community services in their area that can assist them.

### ***Safety Policy and Procedure at NCNC***

In addition to nurturing your child’s growth and development, the safety of your child is our highest priority. Our standard safety practices include but are not limited to:

- Two teachers with children at all times
- We are a “nut aware” campus, and ask that all families avoid bringing food with tree nuts as ingredients onto campus
- All our teachers hold current training in first aid, CPR and EpiPen response
- We are in constant radio contact with teachers, even when they are out exploring our campus with the children
- We regularly practice and improve our emergency response procedures
- We have a registered nurse on call and available to us at all times for further consultation and guidance
- Building security: After drop-off, staff will lock the outside classroom doors each day. Visitors or workmen are asked to register at the front desk and get authorization before entering any of the preschool classes. All other volunteers are asked to sign in and out in the classroom visitor/substitute/volunteer notebook.
- Teachers are expected to constantly be aware of equipment where injury could occur. Inside, this includes all play structures and tables. Outside, includes natural objects such as tree stumps and on the natural structures in the Children’s Play Garden. One teacher is always assigned to be a spotter on equipment that could cause injury.
- Our policy is that children play outdoors in all kinds of weather, including snow and rain. However, if the weather conditions are dangerous for the safety of children or adults (lightning, heavy winds, torrential rain, smog or other high doses of air pollution), classes will remain indoors.

### ***NCNC Working with Children Policy Staff Document (selected portions)***

The safety of the children and the staff are paramount and protected through this document. This pertains to all NCNC teachers, educators, staff members, Board members, volunteers and interns associated with the organization. Any individual with any contact with children must submit a background check.

A copy of the New Canaan Nature Center Working with Children Staff Policy is provided to all staff in addition to the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s Code of Ethical Conduct. This document is

available to all at: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSETH05.pdf>. Copies of the NCNC Working with Children Staff Policy and the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct are posted in the entry area to every classroom, and are available on our preschool website as well.

## **Staff Code of Conduct (Excerpts)**

### **Privacy**

Adults must respect the privacy of children in situations including bathroom use and changing of clothes. Adults should only intrude to the extent that health and safety require. Adults should protect their own privacy in similar situations. For children under age eleven, an adult must accompany children to the restroom area as needed. The adult will ensure that the facility and hallway are safe, and is responsible for children returning from the restroom. An adult may assist any child under age six in the restroom. No caregiver may touch a child's private areas unless necessary to change a diaper or take another therapeutic measure. At all times that this help is needed, a second adult must be present.

### **Injury or illness**

All persons supervising children are expected to take reasonable steps to prevent any person from coming into contact with any body fluids. If a child receives a minor injury, an adult will provide first aid as needed at the time of injury, to the extent that they have been trained to administer first aid. The adult will notify the injured child's parent or guardian. A well-equipped and fully stocked first aid kit, with incident report forms, must be available at all times. An incident report form must be completed after any and each minor or major injury.

If a child receives an injury that requires medical treatment beyond simple first aid, an adult should provide immediate attention to the injured child, and contact one of the NCNC medical administrators. As soon as possible during or after treatment and/or evaluation by one of the NCNC medical administrators, notify the child's parent or guardian will be notified. 911 will be called only if the NCNC medical administrator deems this necessary or cannot be reached.

## **Student Behavior Management Philosophy and Policies (Excerpts)**

Teachers at the New Canaan Nature Center guide, nurture and direct the children to help them learn to cooperate with their peers and have positive, educational experiences. Most behavioral issues with a child can be minimized and perhaps even avoided altogether through proactive, flexible and responsive classroom management techniques and actions. We best support children by using positive facilitation techniques. Behavior management with a child should be constructive. Corporal punishment and verbal reprimands are not acceptable. Adults do not physically restrain any child, unless they deem it necessary to protect the health and safety of the child or other people.

## ***Overview of Child Abuse and Neglect (Excerpts)***

### **Policy for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse**

All NCNC staff are mandated by Connecticut State Law to report any suspicion or observation that a child is being abused, neglected or is at risk.

All NCNC staff are mandatory reporters and if a report or suspicion of child abuse/neglect comes to any staff member's attention, they must ensure that a report is made to the Department of Children and Families (DCF), before or after consultation with the Preschool Director, Director of Education or Executive Director,. The filing of a child abuse report must be done orally within 12 hours of the incident or first knowledge of an

incident, and followed by a written report within 24 hours of the oral report. This form can be faxed or mailed to DCF. Copies of all documents should be kept for confidential NCNC records as well.

Once the appropriate NCNC staff and/or supervisors (Executive Director, Preschool Director and/or the Director of Education) have deemed that a report will be made, the process of reporting a case of suspected or observed child abuse/neglect follows standard protocol for the Department of Children and Families (DCF). A copy of our procedure is available upon request.

Failure by any teacher, educator, staff member, Board member, volunteer or intern to make a timely report to a supervisor about a suspected incidence of child abuse shall be considered a procedural violation of the NCNC Working with Children Staff Policy and shall be grounds for disciplinary actions up to dismissal.

### **Privacy Protection**

At all times, the administration will take precautions to ensure that the privacy of the child and family are protected, as well as the privacy of the accused. An allegation of child abuse is a serious issue. It is essential that all parties maintain confidentiality. Sharing of information, which could identify a child or alleged perpetrator should be purely on a need-to-know basis and is not for public knowledge. This information should not be shared with staff, other than the Executive Director, Director of Education, and the Director reporting the abuse (if this is not the Executive Director.) Until abuse has been proven to have occurred by a state investigation, one must always refer to 'alleged abuse.'

### **Procedures in the Event of Accusations of Abuse/Neglect**

Any teacher, educator, staff member, Board member, volunteer or intern accused of child abuse will immediately be notified, will be asked to provide all pertinent information, and suspended from participation with NCNC children's programs until an internal investigation takes place. After the internal investigation is completed, the administrative team (including the Preschool Director, Director of Education and Executive Director) will determine the appropriate organizational course of action.

If an accusation of abuse or neglect by a parent is made, the Director will immediately inform the parents or guardians that a report has been made to DCF. Health care officials may need to talk to a child's parents to access the cause of the child's injuries and offer support and guidance.

### **Status during Investigation**

During both an NCNC internal investigation (conducted by Preschool Director and/or Director of Education and/or Executive Director) and a DCF led investigation, the following possible actions may be taken for staff accused of abuse/neglect are:

1. Suspend the individual without pay during the course of investigation;
2. Provide a leave of absence, with or without pay, during the investigation;
3. Remove teacher/educator from any child interactions but maintain employment on grounds;
4. Place individual under close supervision in a teaching setting during the investigation.

The NCNC Director(s) shall follow the guidelines of the Department of Children and Families during the investigation of any charges of abuse. The accused staff member shall be entitled to notice of the investigation and shall have the right to respond to all charges.

## Conclusion

Upon conclusion of the investigation by the state agencies, the NCNC supervising Director (in consultation with the administrative team) shall take whatever personnel action deemed appropriate, including discharge. If the result of the investigation shows that the charges are without merit/unsubstantiated, the fact will be noted in the individual's personnel file.

When an accusation of abuse or neglect by a staff member is made, the program's director must immediately inform parents or guardians of the child in question that a report has been made to DCF. Health care officials may need to talk to a child's parents or guardians to assess the cause of the child's injuries and offer support and guidance.

The Hot Line phone number (**1-800-842-2288**) for child abuse is posted near the teachers' and director's phones. Directors have the names and phone numbers of local resources and referral consultants available for all staff or parents.

## ***NCNC Preschool Licensing & Accreditation***

Our preschool is fully licensed by the Office of Early Childhood under Connecticut's Day Care Regulations ([www.ctdph.gov](http://www.ctdph.gov)) and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children ([www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org).) Statutes and Regulations for licensing Child Care Centers are determined by the State of Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, Department of Public Health and the Child Day Care Licensing Program. There is a copy of these regulations in the parent library in each of our classroom cubby rooms for you to borrow. These regulations can also be found on the Office of Early Childhood, Child Day Care Licensing Homepage: [http://www.dph.state.ct.us/BRS/Day\\_Care/day\\_care.htm](http://www.dph.state.ct.us/BRS/Day_Care/day_care.htm). Preschool Director, Anna Zielinski is also completed coursework in her Connecticut Director's Credential.

