

little
sprouts
come grow with us!

2017 – 2018 Parent Handbook



Pilcher Park Nature Center
2501 Highland Park Drive, Joliet, Illinois 60432
Call 815.741.7277/Email littlestroutsmail@yahoo.com

Welcome to Little Sprouts!



We are committed to fostering your child's excitement about learning as well as exploring and caring for the world around him/her. Little Sprouts is a play-based learning center. Our program will teach your child to love the natural world — and have lots of fun in the process!

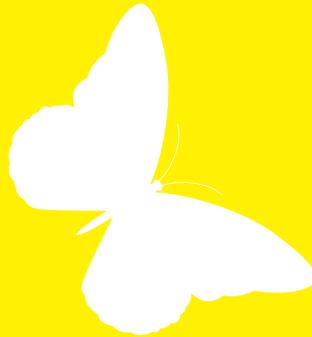
Based upon seasonal changes, the broad-based curriculum includes art, music, perceptual and cognitive skill development, large and small motor-skill development, natural science exploration and, most important, daily outdoor discovery.

Our goal is to develop your child's ability to work independently and cooperatively, and to act in a caring and responsible way toward his/her environment and that of others.



We hope this handbook will answer questions throughout the year regarding our policies and procedures. Please read it thoroughly, sign, and return the last page. Contact us with any questions.

With warm regards,
The Little Sprouts Staff



"In all things nature there is something of the marvelous."

— Aristotle

What does it mean to be a Nature-Based Learning Center?

At Little Sprouts your children will have special opportunities to learn about themselves, the world, and life.

We will offer the experiences typically found in child-centered early childhood education programs.

Children will have opportunities to:

- Make discoveries and learn through play;
- Make choices and follow their own interests and agenda;
- Use their senses, and large and small muscles;
- Express themselves creatively and use language in its many forms;
- Make friends and learn about the social world;
- Problem-solve and find solutions to what puzzles them.

So many of these experiences can happen largely through interaction with nature.

Nature permeates the children's experiences here.

Nature-based activities happen indoors and outdoors; in whole group activities, small group activities, and individual activities; in teacher-driven activities, child-initiated activities, and spontaneous activities.

Children can look at experiences through the lens of a naturalist as they are encouraged to:

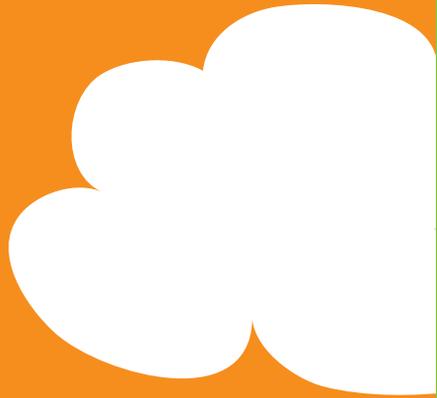
- Make observations;
- Satisfy their natural curiosity;
- Make discoveries;
- Appreciate the beauty of nature;
- Build understanding of themselves as they relate to the natural world;
- Communicate about nature through art and writing activities, as well as verbally.

We will offer experiences that may be different from other child-centered learning centers.

Children will have daily experiences with animals. These can take the form of visiting our animals up close in the nature center, or observing animals in their natural habitat: the woods, meadow, creek, and trails of Pilcher Park.

Children will have daily experiences with plant life. We will grow plants in the classroom and in our garden area and, of course, play in the woods!

Children will enjoy the expertise of naturalists who are experienced in introducing children to the natural world. The children will be introduced to nature by people trained in nature education who are experienced in sharing with children their enthusiasm and joy of the natural world.



Is Little Sprouts the right choice for my child?

It is a more appropriate program for children who do not suffer from severe environmental allergies. Children will be exposed to hay, pollen, seeds, and other potential allergens. Children need to feel well enough for vigorous, active, outdoor experiences.

It is a more appropriate program for children whose families support discovery-based learning than for those whose families are interested in a direct-instruction, skill-and-drill, or *academic* preschool. There won't always be worksheets provided. Children are building knowledge from their firsthand experiences with nature, classroom materials, and their relationships with peers and adults.

It is a more appropriate program for children whose families understand that discovery-based learning can be a messy business! Children need to come dressed for messy, outdoor play. Layers of clothing for changing weather, and for moving from indoors to outdoors, are needed for children to take part in the variety of activities we offer. Shoes good for hiking, climbing, and walking through mud, snow, and uneven surfaces are needed for our ventures outdoors. Clothing that can be covered in mud, paint, and clay is a must everyday!



Enrolling Your Child

Children must be three years old by September 1 of the year they begin Little Sprouts. We also expect children to be toilet-trained. Diapers may not be worn to class. To enroll your child, you will need to fill out a registration form and agreement and submit it with one month tuition to be applied to last month's (May) tuition. Registrations will be considered in the order received.

Tuition payments are non-refundable. We do not issue credit for absence for any reason. Payments are due by the 5th of each month. Late payments are subject to an additional \$10 per month late fee and may jeopardize participant's place in class. Auto withdrawal forms are located in parent packets which must be filled out.

An Open House will be scheduled the week before class starts. This will allow each child an opportunity to examine his/her classroom with the comfort of the parents' presence.



Arrival and Departures

Classes begin promptly at 9:15 am or 12:30 pm. Children must be accompanied to their class by an adult who must sign the child in and out each day inside the classroom. At the end of the class period, children want to see their grown-up(s) arrive as soon as they see other adults come, and often become anxious when waiting for a late parent or caregiver.

We understand that late arrival sometimes cannot be avoided and are happy to make accommodations for your child in this event. Please try to contact us should you know that you will be delayed.

In cases of lateness, the Joliet Park District has instituted the following procedures:

- After 10 minutes past dismissal time, we will attempt to contact you via your home, business, or cell number.
- After 15 minutes, if you cannot be reached by phone, we will proceed to call your emergency numbers.

Parents consistently late in picking up their child will be assessed the following fee:

Upon the third occurrence of late pick-up (15 minutes or more after the end of the designated class time), parents will be charged \$5 for every 5 minutes late (or \$1 per minute). This fee will be added to your tuition payment.

Aa Bb Cc



Discipline

When a child's behavior is deemed inappropriate, the Joliet Park District reserves the right to permanently remove a child from the program. These behaviors can include the inability to participate in the group activities, or repeating disruptive behavior within the classroom. When children are having a hard time controlling themselves, adults will intervene in a manner that is educational, rather than punitive. Methods of discipline will include clear rules, redirection, planning ahead to prevent problems, encouragements, and the use of logical and natural consequences. Techniques that are not used include physical punishment, bribery, threats, time-outs, and other methods that would hurt, frighten, or humiliate children.

In the rare event that a child's ongoing disruptive behavior does not improve despite the best efforts of the staff, and has a continuing negative effect on the classroom climate, the instructors may determine that the program cannot meet the child's needs and the child may be removed from the program.



Clothing

Discovery learning requires freedom from restrictive clothing. Tight clothing, fancy dresses, and costumes get in the way during active play. For independence in toileting, children need clothing that is easy to put on and take off. Children need comfortable, protective shoes with gripping soles for running, jumping, and climbing. Sneakers or well-fitting hiking boots are best.

You can expect your child and his/her clothing to get dirty. Please send your child in clothing that can be soiled and that won't discourage your child's active participation.

Clothing Needs - Please label all items

Fall

Rubber boots
Boots
Rain jacket
Rain pants
Light gloves



Winter

Snow pant/boots
Snow jacket
Waterproof mittens
Scarf/neck wear
Hat/ear covers
Second layer
Wool/fleece socks



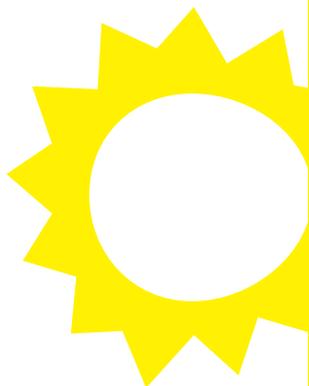
NO UMBRELLAS

Spring

Rubber boots
Rain jacket
Rain pants

Summer

Rain jacket
Rubber boots
Hat



Emergency Clothing Change

Although preschoolers are toilet trained, sometimes accidents do happen! Children may be so involved in playing that they can't make it to the bathroom in time. We're glad to help out and perform a dry emergency change, as long as a change of clothes has been provided by you. This way your child will not be embarrassed or uncomfortable. You will be called to come change your child if he/she has a bowel movement. **Please take your child to the restroom prior to the start of class.** It happens often that many children are just dropped off by parents, and classroom activities need to be stopped because the children need to use the restroom immediately after being dropped off.

Please bring a backpack daily to class and have a change of clothes inside.

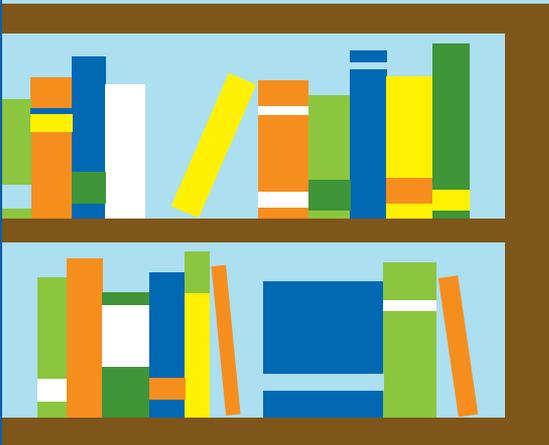


Special Occasions

Holidays tend to be exciting and, at times, over-stimulating for young children. At Little Sprouts, we will downplay the commercial aspects of holidays and avoid duplicating experiences, such as class parties, which children will be more ready to enjoy in elementary school.

Our plan is to acknowledge the holidays and cultural events that are significant to our families through simple experiences. Seasonal experiences, such as gathering pumpkins in October, celebrating the end of the harvest in November, and enjoying snow in winter receive greater programmatic emphasis than religious holidays.

Birthdays are very important for most preschoolers. We are happy to acknowledge children's birthdays with songs, discussions, and stories, rather than with parties. If you wish to bring a special birthday treat as a snack on your child's birthday, please make arrangements with your child's instructor. If your child would like to bring a treat bag to pass out at the end of the day, he/she may do so. If you'd like to give a book to the program in honor of the birthday child, he/she may sign his/her book and we can read it that day.



Family Involvement

Entering a drop-off program is a milestone for youngsters. This marks the expansion of your son or daughter's experiences outside the home. To ease the transition from home to school, it is a great help to 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.

Children derive a keen pleasure and pride when mom or dad come to visit. Assisting is a good way for you to observe the program and share in your child's experiences that day. A parent helper will assist at the various Learning Areas and can read the class story book for that day. Siblings are not allowed to attend when you are a parent helper.

You will have the opportunity to volunteer twice during the year. Sign-up sheets provided in classroom.



Snacks

To help keep costs down, we are asking parents to provide snacks. We will provide water, which is our preferred drink during snack time. Water satisfies thirst without sugar and calories.

Serving healthy snacks to children is important to providing good nutrition, supporting lifelong healthy eating habits, and helping to prevent costly and potentially disabling diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity. Snacks play a major and growing role in children's diets. Between 1977 and 1996, the number of calories that children consumed from snacks increased by 120 calories per day.

While we encourage nutritious snacks, children may occasionally bring a store-bought item to share in the celebration of a birthday or other special event. If your family limits or restricts your child's diet, please let us know.

Children will be encouraged to try foods but never forced to eat anything. It is imperative that you notify us of any food allergies. A list of healthy snacks will be provided to you.

A snack list will be assigned monthly.



Little Sprouts

2017 – 2018 Calendar

August 27	Sunday	Orientation for Parents (No Children, Please) 1:00 – 2:00 pm
August 30	Wednesday	Open House Meet and Greet/ Scavenger Hunt/Drop Off Supplies M/W/F am: 9:30 – 10:30 am M/W pm: 12:30 – 1:30 pm
August 31	Thursday	Open House Meet and Greet/ Scavenger Hunt/Drop Off Supplies T/R am: 9:30 – 10:30 am T/R pm: 12:30 – 1:30 pm
September 5	Tuesday	First day of class T/R am & T/R pm
September 6	Wednesday	First day of class M/W/F am & M/W pm
October 9	Monday	Columbus Day (No Class)
October 11 & 12	Wed/Thurs	Class Pictures (Tentative)
November 10	Friday	Veteran's Day (No Class)
November 22 – 24	Wed-Fri	Thanksgiving Break (No Class)
November 27	Monday	Classes Resume
December 22 – January 7	Fri-Sun	Winter Break (No Class)
January 8	Monday	Classes Resume
January 15	Monday	Martin Luther King Day (No Class)
February 19	Monday	President's Day (No Class)
February 28 (Tentative)	Wednesday	Maple presentation/pancakes with parents (during class time)
March 1 (Tentative)	Thursday	Maple presentation/pancakes with parents (during class time)
March 5	Monday	Pulaski Day (No Class)
March 30 – April 8	Fri-Sun	Spring Break (No Class)
April 9	Monday	Classes Resume
May 9 & 10	Wed/Thurs	Last Day of Class
May 11	Friday	End of Year Picnic/ All Classes here at the Nature Center Time TBA

Contact Information

Pilcher Park Nature Center
2501 Highland Park Drive
Joliet, Illinois 60432
815.741.7277
www.jolietpark.org
Email us: littlesproutsmail@yahoo.com

Hours of Operation

June – August
9 am – 4:30 pm daily

September – May
9 am – 3 pm daily



Please return signed form to instructor.

I have read the Little Sprouts Parent Handbook and understand the policies and procedures it contains. I agree to abide by the rules and regulations for attendance of my child in this program.

Child's Name

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date



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*“Children who do not experience nature
won’t grow up to cherish or protect it.”
— Will Rogers, President, The Trust for Public Land*