



## Our roots...

Nature's Lab School, LLC was founded in 2018 by Silvia Anderson, based on her dream of creating a bilingual preschool that is grounded on the recent research demonstrating that a child learns and develops best when exposed to natural environments and hands-on experiences. Our nature-based, emergent, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) curriculum was established based on this modern research which demonstrates that nature-based programs significantly improve children's cognitive, emotional and motor skills development.

*At Nature's Lab, we aim to create a fun, educational atmosphere where children thrive, foster long-lasting relationships, and engage in a diverse series of dynamic, child-lead learning activities that encourage creative thinking and problem solving.*

The seed of Nature's Lab sprouted in Silvia's heart during her master's thesis work which revealed the benefits of outdoor play. This passion grew as she coached and evaluated child development programs throughout California, noticing that many schools didn't take advantage of what the research tells us works best for children. Through her years as a preschool/toddler teacher, coach/assessor, professor, and manager of Sacramento County's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for Early Learning programs, Silvia has been greatly inspired by her wonderful mentors, teachers, and colleagues that were an integral part of her career, and who eagerly encouraged her to bring her dream to fruition.

Silvia's husband, Dr. Johnathon Anderson, a former artist, utilizes his Ph.D. in molecular genetics as a professor at the UC Davis Medical Center. His research lab focuses on developing stem cell-based therapeutics. His passion for teaching and STEAM education became a strong driver that helped Silvia craft Nature's Lab. Their young son, Luke, provided tons of additional inspiration and personally tested out all of the equipment and activities prior to the school opening.

Nature's Lab is the culmination of the Anderson Family's love and passion for learning, nature, discovery, positive environments, and education. We are so excited our dream has been

embraced by many families. We work hard each day to build a strong community and long-lasting relationships.

*“Every kid starts out as a natural-born scientist.” –Carl Sagan*

## Our Mission

Our mission is to provide a safe, dynamic, child-focused learning environment where children and families develop a sense of wonder and community.

Nature's Lab is a bilingual, experiential play school that encourages children's natural curiosity and love for exploration, learning, research, and creativity. Our program exposes children to outdoor play, STEAM opportunities (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math), and age-appropriate activities to meet each child's personal interests. Our Spanish bilingual program allows for advanced language acquisition opportunities and encourages global citizenship.

## Our School

Nature's Lab is a bilingual school located in Carmichael, California. We offer individualized care for children between the ages of 1 to kindergarten entry and operate Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 4:30pm (***Hours of operation will change to opening 7:30am, and closing at 5:00pm or 5:30pm after we relocate to a center location***). Organic snacks are provided daily, and frequently include ingredients grown in our own garden and eggs produced by our very own chickens and ducks.

Nature's Lab provides children with a balance between dynamic and observation-based activities designed to meet each child's current emotional, social, physical and cognitive developmental stage. Our days are spent mostly in our rich, **outdoor** classroom featuring a mud kitchen, dry creek, sand /water area, organic vegetable garden, dramatic play, music/stage, science, library, loose parts, arts, math, engineering areas, and much more. Children are encouraged to explore all areas based on their personal interests. However, each day there is a structured activity based on the current interests of the group. Participation in this activity is encouraged but not mandatory. We also provide multiple peaceful, quiet areas for children to use when they need a break, want some time away to process what they have been experiencing, spend some time with their own thoughts and emotions, or simply take time to relax.

Our outdoor classroom is full of loose parts to support invention, divergent thinking, problem-solving, and encourage a sense of wonder. Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in

multiple ways. They are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials.

Our program is inspired by the Scandinavian schools, Reggio Emilia in Italy, Waldorf education, Maria Montessori, the Outdoor Classroom Project, Nature Explorer, and the unique experiences of our owner. The program is oriented towards helping children and families develop in a fun, supportive, engaging outdoor environment. We support children's healthy development by using a combination of these philosophies to ensure children engage in meaningful, individualized activities that peak their personal interests. Our staff ensures children are engaged in exploration by emphasizing our child-lead STEAM curriculum (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math), and we do 60% of it in Spanish.

Everyone at Nature's Lab strives to build a strong community within and between our families. We want to model the values of service, support, and cooperation. This includes multiple activities for families to get together (nature walks, mom's night out, family night, etc.), parent participation and volunteering unique skills to help make our school better each and every day.

## **Admission Policies**

Families interested in joining the Nature's Lab community must tour the facility with their children and other caregivers to ensure we are a good fit for one another. Caregivers must read all Nature's Lab policies and procedures, including the parent handbook in its entirety to ensure we are all on the same page. Once all parties have determined that Nature's Lab is a good fit for the new family, all forms, documentation and payment must be submitted prior to a child's first day of attendance. This includes the forms listed below as well as proof of vaccinations.

### **Forms Due Prior to Attending Nature's Lab**

- 1. Identification & Emergency Information.** This form is required each year to ensure we have the most current information on file, in case of an emergency. We encourage you to include an "Out of State Contact" for use in the event of a large-scale natural disaster (i.e. earthquake, etc.). *This form must be updated any time information changes.*
- 2. Child's Preadmission & Health History - Parent's Report.** This form contains personal information about your child's health history and personal habits.
- 3. Identification and Emergency Information (Child Care Centers)(LIC 700)**
- 4. Child's Preadmission Health History - Parent's Report (LIC 702)**
- 5. Consent for Emergency Medical Treatment & Transportation Agreement (LIC 627).** This form must be filled out and signed by the parent or legal guardian. Please

remember to list any medication your child may be allergic to on the top portion of this page.

- 6. Physician's Report - Child Care Centers (LIC 701).** This form is a medical-assessment requirement, including TB skin testing if indicated by the child's physician.
- 7. Notification of Parents' Rights/Caregiver, Background Check Process (LIC 995).** Please read the information on both pages and sign the Notification of Parent's Rights page to acknowledge that you have received this information. These copies are for you to keep for your reference.
- 8. Personal Rights Form (LIC 613A).** Please read the information on this page and sign the Personal Rights page to acknowledge that you have received this information. This copy is for you to keep for your reference.
- 9. Parent Contract/Admission Agreement.** Please review this very carefully. This document outlines contracted days and times, the participation requirements for the upcoming school year and other Nature's Lab policies. The participating parent(s) must sign, date, and return the last page of the contract to use along with the additional signatures.
- 10. Needs and Services Plan (for infants and children with special needs)** [CCR, Title 22, Section 101419.2]
- 11. Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ-3 & ASQ-SE-2).** Completed at enrollment and every 6 months. Your answers will help us get to know your child better and how we can support her/him best as we plan our curriculum.
- 12. Getting to Know Your Child Questionnaire.** Completed to provide us additional information to help us make your child feel as comfortable and welcomed as possible.
- 13. Photo Release Form.** Allows us to know how we may be able to use any pictures we take of your child engaged in fun, educational activities outside of our internal, parent communication app.
- 14. Proof of Vaccinations.** Nature's Lab does NOT accept any exemptions.

## Surveys

Surveys and other emails are sent throughout the year to gather information and make decisions for the school and future social events. Please be sure to be on the lookout for these communications and share your honest feedback.

## Daily Schedule\*

Nature's Lab is currently open 8:00am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday, and serves children ages 1 year to kindergarten entry. *(Ages will change to 6 months to kindergarten entry after we relocate to a center location. Hours will change to opening 7:30am, and closing at 5:00pm or 5:30pm.)*

### ***Available M-W-F or T-Th or 5 days\****

8:00am: Arrival/Breakfast

Structured dynamic play

9:00am: Group time

Yoga

Healthy snack

Child-focused STEAM learning

Literacy-focused

12:00pm: Lunch

12:20pm - 2:30pm: Nap time

Child-lead STEAM learning

Group time

Child-lead STEAM learning

Healthy snack

Literacy-focused

4:30pm: End of the day

*\*The daily schedule is subject to change based on weather and individual interests.*

## Tuition and Fees

### Monthly Tuition

Tuition is due on the first day of the month prior to the start of care. A \$50 late fee will be assessed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the same month if tuition is not paid by the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the month. If payment has not been received, a child will no longer be able to attend care on the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month. A family will be disenrolled by the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month if tuition for the month still has not been received.

Children attending 3-5 days per week are considered full-time. Children attending 2 days per week are considered part-time.

#### Children under 2 years old

M-W-F: \$795

T-Th: \$550

M-T-W-Th-F: \$1300\*

#### Children 2-5 years old

M-W-F: \$735

T-Th: \$495

M-T-W-Th-F: \$1200

*\*Children under 2 can only enroll for 5 days, as less days make transitioning to child care difficult. Other options are only available for existing families.*

### Supplementary Services

None at this time. We may offer dance, gymnastics, and other options for an additional fee for interested families.

### Transportation Services

Nature's Lab does not offer transportation at this time. Families must arrange for transportation of their children to and from Nature's Lab.

### Payment Policy

You are responsible for the full monthly tuition even when your child does not attend Nature's Lab due to vacation, illness, or any other reason. This also applies to school closures for holidays and staff development (*see our annual calendar*).

Annual registration fee is \$100.00. It is non-refundable and due at enrollment, and each April to keep your space for the following year.

Annual materials fee is \$50 (part time students) or \$100 (full time students). It is non-refundable and due at enrollment, and each August for the following year.

There is a non-toilet trained (NTT) weekly fee of \$10 (part time students) or \$15 (full time students). Non-toilet-trained is defined as not being able to use the toilet without any assistance.

There is a returned check fee of \$25.00 for each returned check.

A sibling may receive up to 5% off for the lesser tuition child. Only one discount is available.

### **Late Pick Up Fees**

Due at pick up or the next day:

\$10/instance for the first 5 minutes.

\$15/instance for the first 10 minutes.

\$20/instance for the first 15 minutes.

\$40/instance for the first 30 minutes.

### **Early Drop Off Fees**

With prior approval only:

\$10/instance for the first 15 minutes.

\$20/instance for the first 30 minutes.

## **Supplies List**

The following items are required and will be stored in your child's personal box at Nature's Lab. Please be sure to label **all items**\* with your child's name or initials, and consistently check to ensure enough supplies are available for your child at school.

- 2-3 changes of clothes including socks and shoes
- Reusable water bottle
- Sun hat and sunscreen
- Crib size sheet
- Rain boots, raincoat and rain pants (during winter/spring)
  - Optional Recommended Items:
    - A blanket and pillow, if your child likes to use during nap
    - Your child's comfort object (please do not bring toys)

- A family photo to help them with feelings of separation

***\*We cannot be responsible for anything that is not labeled. Any items that are not labeled will be placed in the lost and found, but may accidentally be placed in a different child's box.***

## **Personal Box and Lost & Found**

Each child has an assigned personal box, also known as a cubbie. Write your **child's name or initials on all** items including water bottle, hat, boots, socks, shoes, rain boots, etc. A lost and found box will be located by the front door. Nature's Lab is not responsible for missing items that are not labeled as children at this age have very similar clothing and personal items. Please note that socks are an item that goes missing frequently as children love to be barefoot at Nature's Lab.

**BE SURE TO LABEL EVERYTHING YOUR CHILD BRINGS IN!**

## **Dirty Clothes**

Here at Nature's Lab your child will be engaged in activities that will very likely get his/her clothes dirty, muddy, wet, and/or stained with paint. There is also potential for clothing to get snagged on stumps and trees during tree climbing and other activities. Do not bring any expensive clothes or items you would be sad to see altered in any way.

Dirty clothes are sent home daily using our blue or green, reusable wet bags. Please be sure to return these reusable bags to Nature's Lab as soon as possible as these belong to us and are one of our many attempts to decrease our use of plastic.

## **Attendance Records**

### **Attendance**

Children must arrive **no later than 9am** each day as this allows them to hear the plans for the day, and become engaged in activities and with peers. We know that at times emergencies and doctor appointments arise so we ask that you call or message us by 8:30am if your child will arrive after 8:45am or will not be attending school on a scheduled day. This is important as we care about our families, and we plan meals, activities, and nap routines with all children in mind.

*Continued late arrival disturbs routines for all children in care and may be basis for disenrollment.*



## Sign In and Out

Caregivers are required to bring their children inside and accompany them to their classroom each day. Children will not be released to anyone under the age of 18, and will only be released to authorized adults. Adults who do not normally pick the child up will be required to show photo identification to staff members and must be listed in the “Authorized to Pick Up” form. We will only release a child to someone in that list with prior notification from the legal guardian. Be sure to give us a call or let us know during the day if someone different will be picking up your child. All persons dropping off and picking up a child are required by Community Care Licensing to sign the child in and out, each day, with a full legal signature and time.

All children must be signed-in/signed-out using our online app. You must bring your cellphone with you and have the app on your phone as attendance records are mandated per licensing and are crucial in case of an emergency. **We use daily attendance records for head counts and the list of children signed in will be used in case we must evacuate the building. Please help us make sure we can do our job to keep your child safe.**

Please use the app to communicate with Nature’s Lab staff as well as, including sharing any last minute notes or information we should know about your child to ensure we can meet their needs and routines daily. For example: lack of sleep, transitions at home, illness, etc. Please inform us of any change in the contact information and include any information necessary for us to best support your child. If the information is personal, please be sure to speak with us before leaving the school.

## Student/Family Roster

Each year we provide you with our current families’ roster. This is a great tool for families to connect with one another outside of school. We encourage you to build connections with other Nature’s Lab families. Families need a support system and can at times rely on one another for extra support with transportation and childcare that all families need. Please do not share this contact information with anyone outside of the Nature’s Lab community.

## Group/Circle Time

Children are encouraged to participate in group/circle time, but it is not mandatory. Generally, as children grow older, they develop a greater interest to participate in group activities and some days this comes easier to some. Please be sure to arrive at Nature’s Lab in time for your child to participate in group time as this sets the stage for the day. We welcome everyone to sing, dance, and talk about the plans for the day. If one day you will arrive after group time, be sure to let us know so we can plan ahead to help your child engage in the activities at arrival.

Please note that this is highly discouraged and should be limited as much as possible. Children thrive on routines and group time is part of it.

## **Meals and Snacks**

We provide breakfast, morning snack, lunch, and afternoon snack. We encourage students to try new foods, but do not insist that they eat. As part of our routines, we ask children to sit down for all meals and support them in learning to clean up after themselves.

*Breakfast: 8:00-8:30am*

*Morning Snack: 10:00am*

*Lunch: 12:00pm*

*Afternoon Snack: 3:30pm*

Children learn best when their tummies are happy. Meals are a crucial part of our routine, so we ask that children arrive in time for breakfast which is served between 8:00 and 8:30. If your child will arrive after 8:30am please be sure he/she has had a healthy, substantial meal at home. Hungry kiddos have a hard time engaging in activities and can seem emotional when in reality are simply hungry and don't know how to express that yet

Please do **not** bring your child to school with food. If you do, please know that we will only serve the food we provide at school and not outside food. Outside food will be discarded.

We do our best to serve foods that appeal to young eaters, and generally have great success! We also try to use foods from our organic garden, chickens, and ducks which the children help to collect and prepare.

## **Birthday Parties and Celebrations**

Feel free to reach out to us if you would like to bring a special treat for your child's birthday or other celebrations. However, keep in mind that this special treat will need to be healthy. Which in our case translates to no added sugars or food coloring, and not prepackaged meals.

Some examples of approved birthday treats include:

- Chocolate covered fruits (bananas, strawberries, etc.)
- Homemade baked goods (such as banana bread)
- Fruit salads

Please be sure to check for any potential allergies prior to bringing any outside food into our school.

## School Calendar

Nature's Lab is open year round with a few closures scheduled throughout the year. The closures include teacher inservice opportunities that support our continuous professional growth, and time off for all to recharge batteries and spend time with our families. Our full time staff give their best to our kiddos on a daily basis, therefore they are paid during all closures. Because of this, tuition is due monthly and does not change regardless of attendance or school closures.

Please see the attached January - December calendar for school closure dates that change yearly. This calendar also includes date for our monthly family get-together opportunities, parenting groups, school clean up, holiday celebrations and more.

Please reach out to Silvia if you would like to help organize any of our events.

## Meetings/Get-Together Opportunities

### Parent/Teacher Meetings

There are two scheduled Parent/Teacher meetings during the year. See the calendar for timing in the Fall and Spring. These are a great opportunity for families and teachers to get to know each other better and talk without distractions. Forms ASQ3, ASQ-SE2, and 10 words describing your child are due at least 7 days prior to your scheduled meeting. These documents allow us to create plans, and have deeper conversations about your child's development and engagement at Nature's Lab.

### Parenting Group

Every three months we provide a parenting group gathering. The goal of these groups is to share parenting tools and strategies to support each family with their child's ever-changing needs. See the calendar for specific dates.

Attendance to this group is **MANDATORY** which means that at least one caregiver per family must attend. There will be a \$40 non-attendance fee charged to any family that is not represented by a caregiver. We understand how busy family life is and strive to make the meetings as convenient as possible. In doing so, our meetings are group meetings in which we will provide important information and discuss topics that may benefit all caregivers. We ask that you please be an active participant during these meetings.

From time to time we will have guest speakers facilitate these meetings. If your schedule cannot accommodate these meetings, please let us know as soon as possible.

### **Other Get-Togethers**

We offer many opportunities for families to get to know one another and for the kids to build strong, long-lasting relationships with their peers. Please look for mom night outs, monthly hikes, and other gatherings that are scheduled throughout the year.

Participation is optional, but we encourage families to participate in as many events as possible.

### **Family Participation Hours**

We require 10 hours of family participation per family, per year. These hours can be fulfilled in a number of ways. If you have a talent or specialized area of interest that you would like to share, please bring that to our attention.

Parent participation hours are listed throughout the year. For example: book cleaning and repair, outdoor classroom maintenance, social committee, classroom, deep cleaning, etc.

If a family is unable to fulfill the 10 hours of family participation, the hours can be purchased at \$25/hour however, this is discouraged.

### **Illness**

At Nature's Lab we take precautions to prevent the spread of major diseases as much as possible in a group care setting. This includes handwashing, and sanitizing and disinfecting of our environment as needed. Because we are a mainly outdoor program, the spread of some diseases such as the common cold and flu tend to be significantly less than in traditional schools that spend more time indoors. We ask that you help us prevent communicable diseases by:

1. Making sure you and your child wash hands as soon as you arrive at Nature's Lab; and
2. Keep your child at home as stated in our Illness policies for children.

## Policies for Children

Your child must be kept at home if any of these symptoms arise:

- Child has a fever of 101 or more.
- Child has thrown up/had diarrhea in the last 24 hours.
- Child has a rash for unknown reasons.
- Child presents a contagious or unidentified skin or eye infection.
- Child has any contagious condition or has been exposed to a contagious condition.
- Feel uncomfortable to a degree where he/she cannot engage in regular activities or require consistent one-on-one attention that cannot be provided in a group setting.
- Child has blisters that have not yet dried out.

Children can return to Nature's Lab after being free of fever, vomiting and diarrhea for at least 24 hours without medication, and if applicable, once blisters have dried out completely.

If your child is diagnosed with a contagious condition, please inform us right away so we can inform the parents of all children that may have been exposed. Information about the child who has the contagious condition is kept confidential. A doctor's note must be provided prior to returning to care.

If a child gets sick while at Nature's Lab, a caregiver will be notified for early pick-up. If a child has a minor injury at school, such as a scratch, parents will be notified during pick up and/or via our app.

We take major precautions to prevent major injuries under our care. Using ongoing supervision and consistent conversations with children about safety and risks, we offer an environment that meets most health and safety standards set by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's Public Playground Safety Handbook. However, a major injury could arise as accidents can happen at any time. If so, we will call 911 if necessary, and notify the parent immediately after.

### ***Here are a few examples of potential illness and how we handle them:***

**Head Lice.** Child may return after first treatment is completed and no live lice (nits) are present. If we see any live lice (nits), a child will be moved to a place away from other children and must be picked up immediately

**Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease.** Child may return when fever is gone and child is well enough to participate in normal activities (lesions or rash may still be present). A doctor's note stating the child is ready to return and no longer contagious is required.

**Whooping Cough.** Child may return 5 days after appropriate antibiotic treatment begins. A doctor's note stating the child is ready to return and no longer contagious is required.

## **Medication**

In general, Nature's Lab staff cannot administer medication for children. Some exceptions may be over the counter medication. These over the counter medications can be administered after a caregiver provides a doctor's note that states the child's name, birthdate, specific doses and instructions. A family must fill out our medication form that explains all the details.

***Any over the counter medication administration requires approval from Nature's Lab director and a medication plan completed by the family and the child's doctor.***

## **Policies for Nature's Lab Staff**

Staff will not be at work anytime they have a contagious illness. We have a few teachers in our substitute teacher list. However, if we are unable to secure substitute teachers we will contact parents as soon as possible to ensure our legal teacher/child ratios are maintained.

## **Incident Reports**

If your child gets a minor injury at Nature's Lab, we will notify you at the end of the day, or via the app. You will receive a written incident report for bigger accidents. In the rare case of an emergency, you will be notified immediately after 911 has been contacted, if needed.

## **Naps**

Sleep has been found to be crucial for healthy cognitive development for children and adults. Therefore, all children are required to lay down and rest daily at Nature's Lab. Naps are provided to meet children's individual needs as follows:

- Infants and toddlers with more than 1 nap will take naps that follow their current, personal schedule.
- Toddlers and preschoolers that take 1 nap only will nap after lunch around 12:30pm to 2pm, or longer as needed. We do NOT wake children up as this can be a violation of children's rights and we believe that if a child is tired they need the sleep. If a child is having difficulties sleeping at night we encourage to schedule a meeting to talk about routines at home and ways we can support healthy sleeping habits. We also provide a *Healthy Sleeping Habits* training once per year. See the calendar for the specific date.

## **Toilet Learning/Diapers**

We provide consistent opportunities for your child to be interested in becoming toilet trained. We have two learning toilets available, in addition to our standard toilet. Please be advised that learning to use the toilet comes at different times for all children and in a different manner for each child. Every family has their own unique approach with their children, and Nature's Lab staff can support you with this process. We believe that learning to use the toilet is like learning to walk. It is a self-motivated process on the part of the child that we, as parents and caregivers, can observe and support from the sidelines. Often, during this time, children take small steps in this process before they make the big leap, and changes in their world can cause them to revert back. We feel this is a very normal development that calls for love and patience from the adults in their lives.

### **Diapers**

Families provide diapers and wipes for their child. Place diapers in your child's cubbie and a teacher will move enough diapers for the day to the diaper station as needed. Please be sure your child has enough diapers for the day, and preferably leave a larger supply in your child's cubbie for a teacher to be able to restock the diaper station.

### **Pull-ups**

Pull-ups can be used AFTER parents have talked about a potty-training plan with Nature's Lab staff and we are all on the same page. Potty training is really exciting for all of us and it requires a lot of attention, trips to the bathroom, reminders, and likely some "accidents." Since pull-ups are less absorbent, they create a higher risk for big blowouts, therefore they will be used only by children who are interested in using the bathroom on a regular basis and are showing all the signs of being ready to become toilet trained.

### **Underwear**

Once you are ready to jump into the toilet training process 100% at home, we will support you 100% at Nature's Lab. However, children who have more than **3 accidents** in one day will be asked to go back to wearing diapers or pull ups depending on the individual needs.

### **Non-Toilet Trained (NTT)**

A non-toilet trained fee is assessed weekly for children who are not yet using the toilet independently. Independently means that they no longer need any assistance with clothing and wiping, as well as reminding them to use the toilet to avoid having accidents. For the specific fees, see the *Tuition and Fees* section of this handbook.

## Approaching Conflict

Health and safety are our number one goal. We ensure that all children, families, and staff feel a sense of belonging and appreciation, and feel healthy, both physically and emotionally. To do this, we have established **four basic expectations for our community**:

- We engage in open communication and modeling of how to voice needs, concerns, and appreciation.
- We are kind to others, including the pets and nature around us.
- We take time for ourselves when any of us feels like we need to regroup and relax.
- We take good care of our community and take pride in being an active member of it. If something is broken, we think of ways to fix it.

When there is a conflict between children, we give full attention to it. Our goal is to support children in finding their own solutions, while standing by to offer suggestions and modeling appropriate ways to communicate individual needs. This gives each child the opportunity to learn how to communicate with others under stress and regulate their feelings in ways that are safe and healthy for everyone.

For children of this age, it is developmentally appropriate to be exploring different ways of expressing themselves. For this reason, it is pivotal for their emotional and social development that all of their feelings are validated, while at the same time learning how to connect with others in positive ways. We consistently provide language to be able to share their emotions (example feelings of frustration, excitement, sadness, etc.), and redirection as needed. At times, we may need to step in and ask the children to sit down, take a deep breath, and once emotions have decreased, go back to finding solutions together.

Children at this age can become overstimulated easily. Because of this, our program creates opportunities to engage in a combination of active and passive activities, and offer areas to play alone or in small groups. We also model deep breathing on a regular basis. These strategies are used even before they are needed so they become a tool in each child's "tool-belt" for life. However, toddlers and preschoolers can be very emotional at times and when those times come, we provide lots of hugs, and tissues. Being a child under 5 comes with fun adventures, but it is also an emotional time as children this age have very little control of their emotions. Please know this is normal and be sure to reach out to us to talk about strategies on how to support your child's social-emotional development during these early years, as well as how to gain strategies to deal with situations that can be challenging and frustrating at times.



## **Discipline Policy**

According to Community Care Licensing, Title 22, Division 12, Personal Rights:

Each child receiving services from a Child Care Center shall have rights which include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. To be accorded dignity in his/her personal relationships with staff and other persons.
2. To be accorded safe, healthful and comfortable accommodations, furnishings and equipment to meet his/her needs.
3. To be free from corporal or unusual punishment, infliction of pain, humiliation, intimidation, ridicule, coercion, threats, mental abuse, or other actions of a punitive nature, including but not limited to: interference with daily living functions, including eating, sleeping, or toileting; or withholding of shelter, clothing, medication or aids to physical functioning.

Nature's Lab ensures a safe, respectful environment for all children to help support their healthy development in all aspects. We will work with children to help them become engaged and learn to be respectful of others' belongings and space. We will meet with families to develop plans as needed.

## **Causes for Termination**

Services provided by Nature's Lab are provided at-will which means services can be terminated by both parties at any time by providing a 3-week period notice in writing. Families are responsible for payment of that 3-week notice even if they choose not to use the services.

Should a situation arise where a child is putting themselves or others in danger, termination of services will be considered. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Running out of the room
- Excessive biting after a plan has been in place (3 instances in a week).
- Excessive hitting after a plan has been in place (3 instances in a week).
- Waking other children during rest times after a plan has been in place (2 instances in a week)

Other reasons for termination included:

- Consistently arriving after 9am.
- Late payment of tuition (three times in 1 year)
- Caregiver being disrespectful to staff, parents, or children. For example, raising your voice or using inappropriate language, or discussing a challenging situation in front of the children.
- Caregiver coming into our location under the influence of any legal or illegal drugs.

## **Communication with Families**

We require our families to engage in open communication with Nature's Lab's staff. We love having you be a part of our community and strive to provide the best program for everyone, so do not hesitate to reach out at any time, especially if you have a concern. It has been our experience that the more respectful, open communication we have with our families the better our program and relationships become.

We are always open to talk about any concerns or issues that might come up. You can email Silvia (S.Anderson@NaturesLabSchool.com) to set up a time to talk after children have gone home for the day. Please allow 24 hours for a response to your inquiry.

## **Nature's Lab Community**

Our multi-age environment allows children to grow together as a "family." As they grow, they use the space in new ways and develop long lasting relationships that serve them in their healthy development. We also create opportunities for activities to take place outside of the Nature's Lab environment such as family nature walks, mom's night out, and other special events. These opportunities are listed in the calendar and are shared via email or our app.

### **There are no "Bad Children"**

It is inevitable that you may be triggered by another person's child or your own child's behavior or individual temperaments. This is normal and to be expected. However, it's important to realize and convey to your child that this is a place for all of us to learn and grow together. If your child expresses issues with another child, try to remain neutral and express to them that their teachers are there to support and help them communicate when their needs aren't met, or help them find some space if that's what is needed. If you have any concerns, please talk to Silvia so we can find ways to support healthy relationships between all children. Their "work" at this age is to play, explore and develop their social and emotional skills. Conflict is a natural

part of this process and we need to model for them and convey to them that they are safe and capable of learning how to be together as a community.

### **Screen Free and Media Free Policy**

Increasingly, outdoor education is being recognized as the ideal setting for children's healthy development and that its benefits can be enhanced by environments that are developed to integrate all of the senses, which in combination with the exposure of some technology can be the perfect balance for children's healthy development. Here at Nature's Lab we offer an intentional and highly considered approach that incorporates the right technology at the right time and follow the APA recommendations for screen time.\* We provide a creative learning environment based on human interaction, and stay away from marketing that can lead to relying on the latest products in the marketplace. Most importantly, we work in partnership with our families to support each of our children developing creative intelligence and flexibility in thinking through life.

### **How does this look at Nature's Lab?**

In the early years, children learn through interactions, imitation, and imagination. Our teachers tell beautiful stories with complex vocabulary and sentence structure, read books, and continually change our environment to support children's learning following our emergent curriculum philosophy. Children develop the capacity to form mental pictures that support future reading comprehension and creative thinking.

While at Nature's Lab children are not engaged by the passive consumption of fixed media images, which scientific research confirms are difficult for children to process and can hinder some learning, language development, and creativity. In our outdoor classroom, young children move, play, create, solve problems, explore nature, and learn about the social-emotional tools that will support their healthy relationships now and in the future.

Because of this, **NO clothing, shoes, bedding, water bottles, toys, etc. with media related logos are allowed at Nature's Lab.** Please take a look at the items in your child's cubbie at school and replace them with items that are 100% media free (no cartoon or movie characters).

We want to create an environment where our children use their own imagination and creativity during their interactions with us and their peers. We offer plenty of loose parts and engaging activities through the day, and screens are not used at Nature's Lab.

## **Media At Home**

We encourage to limit your child's use of TVs, gaming systems and computers. In our experience, it can negatively influence children's natural ability to play. If your child does watch TV and videos, please try to be conscious of the content and messages embedded in the shows and keep in mind the following recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics for media viewing:

### *Birth-18 months*

Avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting. No media use is recommended.

### *18-24 months*

If media is introduced choose high-quality programming and watch it with the children to help them understand what they are seeing. Limit the time to less than 30 minutes per day.

### *2-5 years*

Choose high-quality programs to watch. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them. Limit the time to less than 1 hour per day.

### *6 years and older*

Place consistent limits on the time spent using media and the types of media. At your discretion, make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health.

Nature's Lab recommends that your family shares media-free time together, such as dinner or driving, as well as media-free locations at home, such as bedrooms and to avoid watching commercials and advertisements. We encourage having ongoing communication with children about online citizenship and safety, including treating others with respect online and offline.

## **NO Cellphones in Nature's Lab!**

Although caregivers must bring a cellphone or electronic device to sign children in and out of Nature's Lab daily, we ask that you do not use your cell phone while you are inside the campus for any other reason. This is your child's special place and they will want to share with you about their day, favorite places, art work, collect eggs, or have you observe them playing with their peers. *Be respectful of this time with them and enjoy it.*

You will see teachers carrying cellphones at times as they use them to take pictures and videos, and monitor messages received from parents via our app. Rest assured, the use of

cellphones by our teachers are kept to a minimum while teachers make children interactions their utmost responsibility.

We are very excited to have you join Nature's Lab Community. We look forward to getting to know you and your family better, and to watch our relationship grow through the years to come. Please feel free to reach out with any questions to [s.anderson@natureslabschool.com](mailto:s.anderson@natureslabschool.com).

With much love and appreciation,

*Silvia Anderson*

Director and Founder

## **Parenting Resources**

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>

CSEFEL: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html>

<https://childmind.org/symptomchecker/>

Raising Children in Turbulent Times:

<http://first5association.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Raising-Children-in-Turbulent-Times-Rona-Renner.pdf>

NAEYC: <https://www.naeyc.org>

Sesame Street in Communities: <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org>

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/sep2018/reducing-challenging-behaviors-during-transitions>

Zero to Three: <https://www.zerotothree.org>